Chapter 3
Data, Sample, and Methods for Evaluating the Child Support Reform

In this section we discuss the primary data sources used for the CSDE and describe the research population and the samples used in our analysis. We also outline our basic approach in evaluating the impacts of the CSDE. This section largely summarizes material presented in greater detail in the Technical Reports in Volume III of this report (see text box).

Contents of Volume III

- The CSDE Experimental Design
- Implementation of the CSDE
- Administrative Data Sources
- Samples and Weighting
- Design and Content of the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families
- Nonresponse in the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families

The CSDE experimental evaluation draws on two primary data sources, administrative records and a survey. Section 1 of this chapter discusses the administrative data, which were constructed by merging three different databases and include information on all W-2 families. The second primary source is the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families, which includes a random sample of mothers who were W-2 participants and the father of one of their children. We discuss the survey in Section 2 of the chapter.

I.3.1 Administrative Data and Samples

Administrative Data Sources

The main administrative database used for the CSDE is CARES (Client Assistance for Re-employment and Economic Support), which contains information on W-2 applicants and participants and the code for their random assignment to either the experimental group or the control group. It also includes information on other programs for low-income families, including Food Stamps, Medicaid, and child care subsidies. CARES data include not only whether participants received payments or services, but also such demographic information as birth dates, number of children, family composition, marital status, educational background, and residential location. We used CARES to identify a research sample, to monitor and measure the use of W-2 and other programs, and to provide background information. CARES contains updated information on those continuing to participate in W-2 and, in addition, those who receive other services even if they no longer receive W-2.[13]

The second administrative database is KIDS (Kids Information Data System), the administrative database for child support. KIDS contains information on child support orders, payments, past-due amounts (arrearages), the method of payment (wage withholding, tax intercepts), the distribution of the payment (resident parent, state), and demographic information about the parents and children in the case (birth dates, residential location of both parents). It can include information on dates of marriage and divorce and usually contains the date of paternity establishment for nonmarital children. All W-2 cases in

[13]Data are entered into CARES at application, and updated when eligibility is redetermined. This happens monthly for W-2, every 3 months for Food Stamps, and every 6 months for Medicaid. Under BadgerCare, eligibility will be redetermined every 12 months. Additionally, under all programs, participants are to report changes in income and family situation as they occur.

which there is child support potential (i.e., a living nonresident parent) are included in KIDS.[14] KIDS does include many cases without child support orders, but with child support potential: nonmarital cases in which the paternity adjudication process has begun, cohabiting nonmarital cases, and cases in which no child support order has been made owing to extenuating circumstances, such as problems in locating the nonresident parent, exemptions for good cause (e.g., domestic violence), the economic situation of the nonresident parent, or cases in which the parents agree that there will be no order.

Although KIDS has valuable information on child support, there are limitations. Some types of information are often missing in KIDS, particularly in older cases that were loaded onto the data system in 1996 when KIDS began. This includes information on income, information about the child's living arrangements (physical custody/placement awards), and dates of paternity establishment. In addition, some information of interest is not included in any administrative data, such as informal payments of child support (in cash or in kind), the actual residence of children, and contact between the nonresident parent and children.

The third administrative database we use is the Unemployment Insurance Wage Record Files. Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage file data provide quarterly earnings for individual covered workers, by employer. "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. There is a lag of about six months between the end of a quarter and the time at which the information is complete. The wage file contains information only on individuals working in Wisconsin. It does not contain information on occupations, the hourly wage, or the number of hours worked per quarter.

Records from these three data sources were linked to each other by use of Social Security numbers, or, lacking Social Security numbers in the data, by CARES case numbers and KIDS identification numbers. Data used in this report are based on CARES, KIDS, and UI data extracted in July and August 2000.

Administrative Data Sample

The basic research sample used in our analyses of administrative data includes cases that received a random assignment code, had entered W-2 by July 8, 1998, were demographically eligible for child support (there was a living nonresident parent),[15] met other sample criteria primarily associated with timely progression in the intake process,[16] and in which the mother was the resident parent. The sample includes cases that actually entered W-2 rather than all cases that received an assignment. In the state as a whole, about three-fifths of both the experimental group and the control group entered W-2. A multivariate analysis (detailed in Volume III, Technical Report 1) confirms that the rate of entry onto W-2 is the same for the experimental and control groups.[17]

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[14]In less than one percent of W-2 families, the CARES record shows them as referred to child support, but there is no record of the family in the KIDS data system. Our investigation into these cases showed that most are appropriately included in our sample as having no child support activity. Although a small number of these cases are errors and should be excluded from the sample, it is not always possible to distinguish these cases from those that really had no child support activity to date. Since most of the nonmatching cases should be included, we have included all of them.

[15]In other words, we exclude cases in which records indicate that the fathers of all children are dead and cases in which all children lived with both parents.

[16]See Volume III, Technical Report 3 for details.

[17]We limit our primary analysis to those who entered W-2 because the information available on those who did not enter is often very limited and because we want to be able to discuss the circumstances of W-2 participants.

The original design called for a sample of 8,000, half of them drawn from the stock of AFDC cases active in August 1997, the remainder from the flow of cases applying for assistance after the implementation of W-2 in September 1997. Because the rate of new entrants to W-2 was slower than anticipated, the assignment rates for new cases changed over time.[18] We report results weighted to account for these different assignment rates.

The final main research population includes 15,977 resident mothers, 73 percent of all W-2 cases headed by a single mother that had entered W-2 by July 8, 1998.[19] Outcomes for this sample are tracked for both those women who stay on W-2 and those who leave.[20] We include only cases with child support potential, because only those cases are potentially affected by the reform. Thus we exclude two-parent families, cases in which the nonresident parent is known to have died, and cases in which the mother has a "good cause" exemption from pursuing child support for any of her children (typically because of domestic violence). We have also excluded a limited number of cases that do not fit the typical pattern of program participation. These include cases in which the family was inadvertently assigned to AFDC after W-2 had begun, a few cases that had no minor children listed on the case, some types of cases that include children with a disability[21] and some cases in which there was an extended delay before the family entered W-2. Finally, our primary analyses include only cases in which the W-2 recipient (and thus the resident parent) is the mother. Cases in which the W-2 recipient is the father (and thus the mother is the nonresident parent) are relatively rare and are systematically different from mother-custody cases.[22] Volume III, Technical Report 1 discusses these exclusions and the characteristics of the included and excluded cases in detail.

Figure I.3.1 shows the relationships among the three main samples from the administrative data: (1) resident mothers, (2) nonresident fathers with legally established paternity when the mother entered W-2 ("legal fathers"), and (3) children—some with and some without legally established paternity at entry. The 15,977 mothers included in the first sample can be divided into those with only marital children when they entered W-2 (Box 1A, 7.3 percent of mothers), those with both marital and nonmarital children at entry (Box 1B, 7.6 percent of mothers), and those with only nonmarital children at entry (Box 1C, the vast majority of mothers, 84.1 percent). About 1 percent of mothers were pregnant when they entered W-2 and had no other children (Box 1D).

The derivation of the sample of legal nonresident fathers (and couples) can also be seen on the figure. Mothers with only marital children (Box 1A) are each associated with a nonresident father, and a few are associated with more than one. Mothers with both marital and nonmarital children (Box 1B) are each associated with at least one legal father (from the marital children); the nonmarital children may or may not have a legal father at the time of W-2 entry. Finally, mothers with only nonmarital children (Box 1C) may be associated with no legal father, one legal father, or more. The figure shows a total sample of fathers (and couples) of 14,343, primarily fathers of nonmarital children.

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[18]Among the initial AFDC cases in August 1997, and from September 1997 through March 16, 1998, 20 percent of cases were assigned to the control group, 20 percent to the experimental group, and the remainder received the experimental-group treatment but were not eligible for the survey (a "nonexperimental" group). From March 17 to May 8, 1998, 30 percent of new applicants were assigned to the experimental group, 30 percent to the control group, and 40 percent to the experimental-group treatment, but without survey eligibility. Beginning May 11, 1998, 50 percent of new applicants were assigned to the experimental group and 50 percent to the control group.

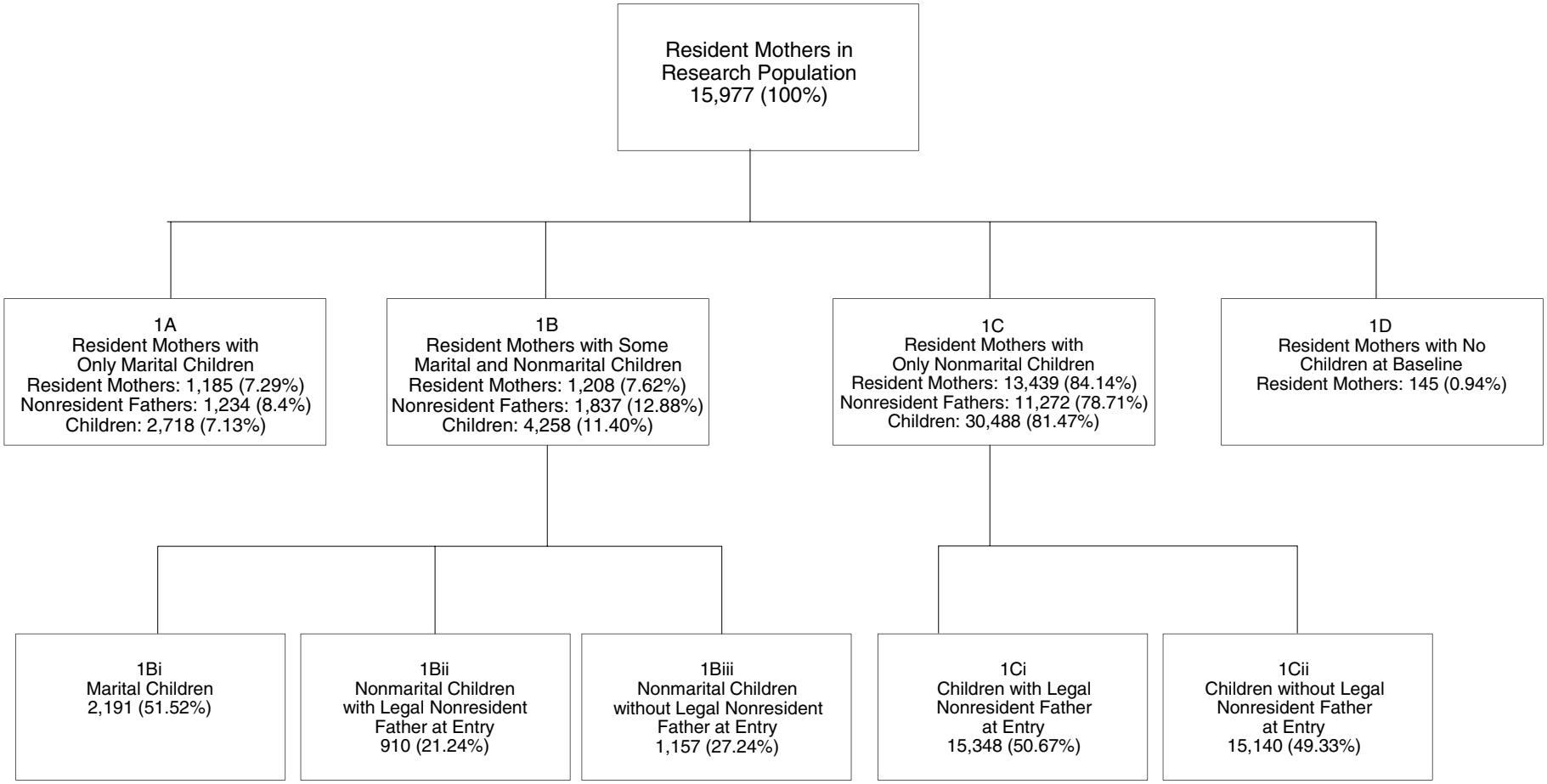
[19]The derivation of the research population is described in detail in Volume III, Technical Report 1.

[20]Since both leavers and stayers are analyzed, the results are not directly comparable with other studies of leavers (State of Wisconsin, DWD, 2000; Cancian et al., 1999; Loprest, 1999).

[21]Federal law does not allow the state to retain a portion of the child support paid on behalf of children receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, so these families were excluded from our research sample.

[22]We provide limited information on resident fathers for selected outcomes.

Figure I.3.1
Research Population, Phase 1



Note: Percentages are weighted to reflect differential assignment rates over time.

Finally, the sample of children needing paternity establishment comes from the mothers with nonmarital births (Box 1B and 1C). About half of the nonmarital children did not have legal fathers when their mothers entered W-2, for a total sample of 16,297 (1,157 from Box 1B and 15,140 from Box 1C).

Our analysis of outcomes for resident mothers and nonresident fathers includes all couples. Thus, when a mother is associated with more than one father, each father is included in our analysis of fathers' outcomes—so that a single mother may be implicitly counted more than once when we examine fathers (and couples). In the less common case, when a father is associated with more than one mother in our sample, we count a single father as many times as he is part of a couple.[23] About 30 percent of the 15,977 mothers in our sample have only nonmarital children who have not had paternity established, so no 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. Of the 13,339 fathers, 6.6 percent are associated with more than one mother in our sample, and thus are counted more than once, bringing the total to 14,343 couples.[24]

Table I.3.1 shows the initial characteristics of the resident mothers included in the research sample and some key subsamples. Column 1 shows that 70 percent of mothers transitioned to W-2 from AFDC, and the remaining 30 percent entered W-2 directly. In the full sample, 13 percent had no history of welfare receipt in Wisconsin in the two years prior to entry, and over half had received AFDC for at least 19 months in the previous two years. Most entered W-2 in a Community Service Job; about 10 percent each entered in W-2 Transitions or in the Caretaker of Newborns program. The remaining 31 percent entered in an upper tier, in which they received no cash payments. The remaining panels of the table show that most mothers entering W-2 resided in Milwaukee County (74 percent), were young (67 percent were 30 years old or younger), African-American (60 percent), had less than a high school degree (53 percent), had one or two children (62 percent), and had at least one child of preschool age or younger (76 percent).

Columns 2–5 in Table I.3.1 show the characteristics of four subgroups of mothers whom we expect to be particularly affected by the CSDE. We noted above that when control-group mothers participate in the lower tiers of W-2, they receive a partial pass-through, but when they participate in the upper tiers or are nonparticipants, they receive the full amount. If cases that enter W-2 in an upper tier are unlikely ever to participate in a lower tier, then experimental status is largely irrelevant to these women. On the other hand, if those initially assigned to the upper tiers later enter lower tiers and are subject to the reduced pass-through, or if experimental/control status affects initial assignment,[25] then all cases should be considered in the evaluation of experimental impacts. Given these competing concerns, our main research analysis sample includes W-2 entries in any tier (n=15,977). However, we also show separate results for the 9,634 mothers in our research sample who entered lower tiers, the group for whom the experiment is most relevant.

Column 2 in Table I.3.1 shows the characteristics of mothers who entered W-2 in a lower tier, in which they received cash assistance (W-2 Transitions or Community Service Jobs). Because the lower tiers of W-2 are generally reserved for those less able to move directly to work, we would expect this subsample to include women more likely to face barriers to employment. In most cases the differences in initial characteristics are consistent with this expectation, though in some cases they are modest. Lower-

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[23]Random assignment was based explicitly on resident parents (mothers in the samples we consider). Thus each mother is in only one group (experimental or control), but an individual father could be in more than one if he has children with more than one mother who enter W-2.

[24]See Volume III, Technical Report 1 for a discussion of the implications of this approach.

[25]Volume III, Technical Report 1 shows limited evidence that control-group members who received higher amounts of child support in the past are somewhat more likely to be placed in the upper tiers than comparable experimental-group members.

Table I.3.1
Initial Characteristics of Resident Mothers in Research Sample

	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)	
	Total		Lower-Tier Mothers		Mothers with No Recent AFDC Experience		Mothers with Order at Entry		Mothers with Higher Child Support History	
Characteristics	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Number of Mothers	15,977		9,634		2,005		8,924		2,744	
Case Type										
AFDC	11,333	70.0	7,170	73.5			6,899	76.5	1,950	69.9
W-2	4,644	30.0	2,464	26.5	2,005	100.0	2,025	23.5	794	30.1
AFDC Receipt before Entry										
None	2,005	12.8	897	9.6	2,005	100.0	406	4.7	227	8.8
1–18 months	5,332	33.3	3,124	32.3	76	8.2	2,545	28.0	783	28.4
19–24 months	8,640	53.9	5,613	58.1			5,973	67.3	1,734	62.8
Initial W-2 Assignment										
W-2 Transition	1,540	9.6	1,540	16.0	248	12.5	852	9.5	387	14.1
Community Service Job	8,094	50.6	8,094	84.0	649	32.7	4,596	51.5	1,186	41.5
Caretaker of Newborn	1,392	8.9			653	32.8	466	5.3	162	6.3
Upper tier	4,951	30.9			455	22.0	3,010	33.8	1,009	38.1
Quarter of Entry										
September–December 1997	8,754	54.7	4,913	51.0	596	29.0	5,040	56.6	1,582	57.8
January–March 1998	5,702	35.7	3,812	39.6	725	37.1	3,260	36.4	916	33.0
April–June 1998	1,521	9.6	909	9.4	684	34.0	624	7.0	246	9.3
Location of Resident Parent										
Milwaukee County	11,856	74.1	7,906	82.3	1,014	51.1	6,877	77.2	1,763	64.0
Other urban counties	2,746	17.2	1,149	11.9	564	27.5	1,367	15.0	583	21.3
Rural counties and tribes	1,375	8.7	579	5.8	427	21.5	680	7.8	398	14.8
Age of Resident Parent										
16–17	6	0.0	2	0.0	5	0.2	1	0.0		
18–25	7,507	47.4	4,304	45.1	1,246	62.2	3,832	43.3	744	27.3
26–30	3,276	20.6	1,915	19.9	275	13.2	2,156	24.5	742	28.0
31–40	4,225	26.0	2,690	27.5	391	19.7	2,508	27.6	1,059	38.0
41+	961	6.0	721	7.6	87	4.6	427	4.6	199	6.7
Missing	2	0.0	2	0.0	1	0.1				

Table I.3.1, continued

Characteristics	(1) Total		(2) Lower-Tier Mothers		(3) Mothers with No Recent AFDC Experience		(4) Mothers with Order at Entry		(5) Mothers with Higher Child Support History	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Race of Resident Parent										
White	4,001	25.4	1,842	18.9	917	45.5	2,143	24.4	1,071	39.9
African American	9,640	60.0	6,425	66.9	835	41.8	5,774	64.5	1,361	49.0
Hispanic	1,200	7.4	694	7.0	98	5.0	519	5.6	166	6.0
Native American	365	2.3	190	2.0	40	1.7	212	2.4	75	2.8
Asian	274	1.6	183	1.9	16	1.0	54	0.6	23	0.8
Other	16	0.1	8	0.1	5	0.2	5	0.1		
Unknown	481	3.2	292	3.2	94	4.9	217	2.5	48	1.5
Education of Resident Parent										
Less than high school	8,605	53.4	5,748	59.2	928	45.1	4,702	52.5	1,227	43.6
High school diploma	5,829	36.9	3,097	32.5	813	41.7	3,331	37.5	1,150	42.7
Some beyond high school	1,543	9.7	789	8.3	264	13.2	891	10.0	367	13.6
Language of Resident Parent										
English	15,498	97.1	9,298	96.6	1,977	98.5	8,824	98.9	2,715	99.1
Non-English	479	2.9	336	3.4	28	1.5	100	1.1	29	0.9
Number of Children										
None	145	0.9	25	0.3	117	5.9	7	0.1	3	0.1
One	5,169	32.0	3,104	31.8	1,184	58.4	1,938	21.4	503	17.9
Two	4,677	29.6	2,793	29.2	416	20.5	2,917	33.0	853	32.4
Three or more	5,986	37.4	3,712	38.7	288	15.3	4,062	45.6	1,385	49.6
Age of Youngest Child										
Unborn Child at Entry	1,599	10.0	1,094	11.5	299	15.2	842	9.4	217	7.7
0–2	7,685	48.2	4,169	43.1	1,230	61.1	3,955	43.9	1,063	38.2
3–5	2,872	18.0	1,783	18.5	141	7.1	1,984	22.6	609	23.3
6–12	3,106	19.6	2,051	21.6	257	12.9	1,819	20.8	713	25.8
12–18	695	4.2	523	5.3	71	3.4	319	3.3	140	4.9
Missing birth date	20	0.1	14	0.2	7	0.3	5	0.1	2	0.1

Note: Percentages are weighted.

tier cases are somewhat more likely to have transitioned to W-2 from AFDC, to have more substantial AFDC histories prior to W-2 entry, to live in Milwaukee, to be African-American, and to have less than a high school education.

We expect those who had no recent AFDC receipt to be most responsive to the child support policy change. Long-term AFDC recipients are likely to have adapted to the old, partial-pass-through regime—for example, they may have long-standing patterns of informal child support arrangements with the fathers of their children. Moreover, they may not understand the implications of their experimental-group status. New W-2 recipients, in contrast, may focus more attention on the child support policies and may not have to change long-standing patterns. Column 3 shows the characteristics of the 2,005 new W-2 recipients. In general these mothers have fewer barriers to unemployment than those with longer AFDC histories.

The third group we expect to be more responsive to the policy change consists of those with child support orders when they entered W-2. These mothers are poised to press fathers to pay more support and so may quickly benefit from the policy change. In contrast, the policy change may have less effect on those without orders, because formal payments could not begin until the parents went through a potentially lengthy process of establishing an order (and maybe also of establishing paternity). Column 4 shows characteristics of the 8,924 mothers with orders. These mothers are generally similar to the whole research sample, but they have longer AFDC histories.

Finally, we expect larger effects among those with former partners who have a history of paying a substantial amount of child support. Many experimental-group mothers in this subgroup will see an immediate increase in the amount of child support they receive; this income could then have a variety of secondary effects that would be less likely among those who receive smaller amounts. Column 5 shows characteristics of the 2,744 mothers who received at least $1,000 of child support in the year prior to September 1997. These mothers are more likely to live in rural areas, to be older, to be white, and to have higher levels of education.

Random assignment to the experimental or control group is based on the resident parent, almost always the mother. However, resident mothers are not the only individuals whose behavior is expected to respond to the policy change. Supporters of a full pass-through have suggested, for example, that nonresident fathers may begin to pay child support if that support directly benefits their children. Thus our second main research sample drawn from the administrative data consists of couples—the parents of the children who are part of the mother's research sample. In these couples, we include only "legal" fathers (those with marital children or those who have had paternity legally established).[26] In addition, in our main analyses, we include only those who were legal fathers when the children entered W-2, showing separate analyses of couples in which the fathers were named as legal fathers after their children entered the program. This results in a sample of 14,343 nonresident couples, which we refer to as the "legal father" sample.

Most of the information provided in Table I.3.2 refers to the characteristics of the mothers associated with each father. These figures differ from the parallel panels in Table I.3.1 because mothers with no legal paternity established are not represented in the table. Moreover, as discussed above in reference to Figure I.3.1, a resident mother (or nonresident father) may be part of more than one couple. Not surprisingly, the characteristics of mothers in a legal couple are similar to the characteristics of mothers in the previous table. One difference is that the mothers associated with legal fathers are less likely to have entered in the Caretaker of Newborn tier; this is as expected, in that women in this tier are unlikely to have legal paternity established for their youngest child at the time that they enter this

[26]We could include "potential" fathers as well, because these are represented in the KIDS data; we do not because the child's father could be later found to be someone else, and, in fact, some cases have multiple potential fathers of the same child.

Table I.3.2
Initial Characteristics of Nonresident Legal Fathers and Their Associated Resident Mothers

	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)	
	All		Associated with Lower-Tier Mothers		Associated with Mothers with No Recent AFDC Experience		With a Child Support Order		With Higher Child Support History	
Characteristics	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
All Nonresident Fathers	14,343		8,767		850		10,569		2,694	
Mother's Case Type										
AFDC	10,835	74.7	6,780	76.6			8,256	77.2	1,919	70.18
W-2	3,508	25.4	1,987	23.4	850	100.0	2,313	22.8	775	29.8
Mother's AFDC Receipt Before Entry										
None	850	6.0	465	5.6	850	100.0	402	3.9	211	8.2
1–18 months	4,065	28.0	2,281	25.7			2,779	25.8	763	28.1
19–24 months	9,428	65.9	6,021	68.8			7,388	70.3	1,720	63.7
Mother's Initial W-2 Assignment										
W-2 Transition	1,396	9.6	1,396	15.7	195	22.8	957	8.9	385	14.1
Community Service Job	7,371	51.6	7,371	84.3	270	33.8	5,468	51.8	1,148	40.8
Caretaker of Newborn	719	5.2			109	12.6	513	4.9	156	6.3
Upper tier	4,857	33.7			276	30.8	3,631	34.4	1,005	38.8
Mother's Quarter of Entry										
September–December 1997	7,922	55.2	4,431	50.3	263	31.4	5,920	56.1	1,571	58.3
January–March 1998	5,319	37.1	3,602	41.3	313	36.7	3,937	37.1	885	32.7
April–June 1998	1,102	7.7	734	8.4	274	32.0	712	6.8	238	9.0
Location of Resident Parent										
Milwaukee County	10,865	75.9	7,180	82.5	356	44.0	8,225	78.0	1,717	63.8
Other urban counties	2,238	15.4	1,033	11.4	241	26.5	1,570	14.6	580	21.5
Rural counties and tribes	1,240	8.7	554	6.1	253	29.5	774	7.4	397	14.7

Table I.3.2, continued

Characteristics	(1) All N	(1) All %	(2) Associated with Lower-Tier Mothers N	(2) Associated with Lower-Tier Mothers %	(3) Associated with Mothers with No Recent AFDC Experience N	(3) Associated with Mothers with No Recent AFDC Experience %	(4) With a Child Support Order N	(4) With a Child Support Order %	(5) With Higher Child Support History N	(5) With Higher Child Support History %
Age of Nonresident Parent										
16–17	1	0.0	1	0.0	1	0.1	1	0.0		
18–25	5,721	40.3	3,412	39.6	282	34.8	4,443	42.4	743	27.7
26–30	3,789	26.6	2,276	25.9	182	19.8	2,834	27.2	775	29.7
31–40	4,147	28.3	2,575	28.7	318	36.9	2,874	26.5	999	36.4
41+	685	4.8	503	5.8	67	8.5	417	3.9	177	6.1
Race of Nonresident Parent										
White	1,814	12.6	856	9.5	296	34.4	1,232	11.5	596	22.2
African American	5,911	41.7	3,838	44.1	180	21.6	4,500	42.9	646	24.3
Hispanic	600	4.0	319	3.3	27	3.0	393	3.5	106	3.9
Native American	234	1.7	122	1.5	16	1.7	161	1.6	32	1.1
Asian	85	0.6	60	0.7	2	0.4	34	0.4	13	0.5
Unknown	5,699	39.5	3,572	40.8	329	39.0	4,249	40.1	1,301	48.0
Education of Resident Parent										
Less than high school	7,632	53.1	5,128	58.1	282	33.7	5,618	52.9	1,193	43.6
High school diploma	5,320	37.1	2,917	33.4	398	45.5	3,930	37.4	1,148	43.2
Some beyond high school	1,391	9.8	722	8.5	170	20.8	1,021	9.7	353	13.2
Language of Resident Parent										
English	14,091	98.3	8,586	98.0	842	99.0	10,467	99.0	2,667	99.1
Non-English	252	1.7	181	2.0	8	1.0	102	1.0	27	0.9
Number of Children										
One	9,690	67.8	5,994	68.5	566	66.6	7,223	68.7	1,756	65.1
Two	3,044	21.1	1,819	20.7	210	23.0	2,237	21.0	588	22.6
Three or more	1,609	11.1	954	10.8	74	10.4	1,109	10.3	350	12.3

Table I.3.2, continued

Characteristics	(1) All N	(1) All %	(2) Associated with Lower-Tier Mothers N	(2) Associated with Lower-Tier Mothers %	(3) Associated with Mothers with No Recent AFDC Experience N	(3) Associated with Mothers with No Recent AFDC Experience %	(4) With a Child Support Order N	(4) With a Child Support Order %	(5) With Higher Child Support History N	(5) With Higher Child Support History %
Age of Youngest Child										
Unborn child at entry	193	1.3	144	1.6	19	2.3	115	1.0	14	0.4
0–2	3,592	24.9	2,053	23.1	251	29.9	2,438	22.9	467	17.7
3–5	4,028	28.2	2,424	27.8	171	21.2	3,272	31.3	770	29.6
6–12	5,382	37.8	3,358	38.6	314	36.2	3,991	38.1	1,166	42.7
12–18	1,103	7.6	757	8.6	94	10.4	720	6.5	270	9.5
Missing birth date	45	0.3	31	0.3	1	0.1	33	0.3	7	0.2
Pre-Entry Quarters of Employment of Nonresident Parent										
None	4,119	28.8	2,625	30.1	239	28.5	2,819	27.0	334	12.5
1–4 Quarters	3,414	24.0	2,118	24.7	121	14.8	2,568	24.6	196	7.1
5–7 Quarters	2,927	20.7	1,677	19.4	160	17.7	2,246	21.4	579	21.8
8 Quarters	3,213	21.9	1,898	20.9	281	33.1	2,574	23.6	1,560	57.8
Missing, no SSN	670	4.6	449	4.9	49	5.9	362	3.4	25	0.8
Pre-Entry Annualized Earnings of Nonresident Parent										
None	4,119	28.8	2,625	30.1	239	28.5	2,819	27.0	334	12.5
$1–$5,000	5,248	37.1	3,179	37.1	199	23.6	3,957	38.1	349	14.4
$5,000–$15,000	2,836	19.4	1,616	17.7	191	22.3	2,293	20.9	1,046	37.1
$15,000–$25,000	1,010	7.0	620	7.1	106	12.7	786	7.4	610	22.9
$25,000 or more	460	3.1	278	3.2	66	7.0	352	3.3	330	12.3
Missing, no SSN	670	4.6	449	4.9	49	5.9	362	3.4	25	0.8

Note: Percentages are weighted.

program. Table I.3.2 also includes information on some characteristics of the fathers themselves. These fathers have low levels of reported employment: only about 20 percent of nonresident fathers have some earnings in every quarter of the two years prior to entry, and 29 percent have no earnings in any quarter. Most fathers have very low annual earnings: of those with some earnings, most averaged less than $5,000 per year in the two years before entry, and only 3 percent averaged more than $25,000 per year. Considering basic demographic characteristics shown in the table, nonresident fathers are somewhat older than resident mothers, reflecting both the tendency for men to be older than their partners and the delay associated with paternity establishment. Their children also tend to be older (again in part reflecting the delay in paternity establishment).[27]

The remaining columns show the key subgroups for fathers. For reasons described above, we conduct separate analyses on the 8,767 fathers of children whose mothers entered in lower tiers, the 850 fathers of children whose mothers had no recent AFDC history, the 10,569 fathers who had been ordered to pay child support when their children entered W-2, and the 2,694 fathers who had paid over $1,000 in child support in the year prior to their children's W-2 entry. In most respects the patterns shown for these subsamples are consistent with those shown for resident mothers' subsamples in Table I.3.1. As expected, fathers paying substantial amounts of child support have more quarters of prior employment and higher previous earnings.

The experiment could affect *children* as well as parents. The administrative data contain few outcomes for children; we focus on only one outcome—whether a nonmarital child has had paternity established.[28] Our third base sample from the administrative data consists of children who did not have paternity established when they entered W-2; we examine whether these children had paternity established at several points in time after they entered W-2.

The administrative data discussed here allow us to define the samples of interest, and provide substantial information on *all resident mothers*, and more limited information on *all legal nonresident fathers*. Although the administrative data provide these full samples, and the available information on them is quite complete, many areas of interest in the CSDE cannot be adequately addressed using these data alone. For this reason, the administrative data were used to define a target sample of cases for a companion survey, as discussed in the next section.

I.3.2 Survey Data and Samples

The *Survey of Wisconsin Works Families* is a panel study of mothers who participated in W-2 and of the legal fathers of a randomly selected focal child. We collected data in two waves; the first period of data collection measures families' experiences during 1998—the first year that the Wisconsin Works program was in place—and the second period focuses on 1999. We briefly describe the design and content of the survey along with completion rates and procedures for weighting the data. Volume III, Technical Reports 4 and 5 provide more detail on these topics.

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[27]Information on the number of each nonresident father's children should be interpreted with caution. It shows that over two-thirds of the legal fathers in our sample have only one child. Some, however, have other children with mothers not included in our sample. These children are not reflected here.

[28]It would be possible to analyze other outcomes from the perspective of children; for example, one could look at family income, counting each child once. Instead, we generally examine family-based outcomes from the perspective of the resident parent, counting each family once, instead of from the child's perspective, in which case we would count some families more times than others, based on the number of children.

Sample Design

The survey sample is a representative subset of the research population of resident mothers. A random subset of early W-2 entrants was first excluded from the survey population.[29] After this exclusion, we drew a probability sample of 3,000 cases. The sample was stratified by W-2 status ("transitioned from AFDC to W-2" and "new W-2") and by initial W-2 tier location (upper and lower). For each case, we randomly selected a focal child from among the children who were listed on the W-2 case at entry and who would be under age 18 on December 31, 1999. The designated focal child remained the same throughout the panel study.[30]

The legal fathers of the randomly selected focal child make up the survey sample of fathers.[31] Cases were excluded from the fathers' sample if paternity was not established by December 31, 1998, or if a "good cause" exemption from pursuing paternity or child support had been established or was pending against the father. These definitions generated an original sample of 2,028 fathers. At Time 2, we fielded samples of 2,950 mothers and 2,225 fathers. The mother and the father became ineligible if the focal child had died since Time 1 or when we identified errors or changes in the sample frame. Fathers became ineligible at Time 2 if a "good cause" exemption had been established since Time 1. Newly identified legal fathers for whom paternity was established between January 1, 1999, and December 31, 1999, were added at Time 2. If a father or mother had died since Time 1, the surviving parent remained eligible for a follow-up interview.[32]

Survey Content and Design

The content of the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families was guided by the objectives outlined in the evaluation plan, but with special emphasis on areas that were not represented in administrative databases or for which administrative records were incomplete. The Survey provides information on participants' experiences with and attitudes about W-2, their knowledge of W-2 rules and of child support policy, child well-being, and family relationships as well as employment, economic resources, and individual and household characteristics. Each sample member was asked about the demographic characteristics, employment, and earnings of the other parent to maximize the number of couples about which basic information was available even if both parents could not be interviewed. The Time 1 survey, which was fielded from February to July 1999, focused on events and experiences during 1998; the Time 2 survey was fielded from February to July 2000 and asked about events during 1999.

We conducted interviews by telephone and face to face, using computer-assisted instruments. Although both modes of data collection were employed simultaneously throughout the field periods, we attempted to interview as many respondents as possible by telephone.[33] We conducted telephone

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[29]This group was initially called the "nonexperimental" group. Because they received treatment identical to that of the experimental group, we include them with the experimental group in all administrative data analyses; the survey population, however, excludes these cases.

[30]We later identified five cases in which a different focal child was inadvertently selected and became the focus of the interview at Time 2. These cases are excluded from analysis.

[31]Detail of sample selection is included in Volume III, Technical Report 5.

[32]Survey sample design excludes cases in which father is the resident parent, but physical placement of the focal child may have changed since sample selection, or between Time 1 and Time 2. Analyses of survey data exclude mothers who were not the resident parent during the reference period, as well as fathers who were the resident parent.

[33]Telephone interviews were less expensive, expedited data processing, and could be more easily monitored and supervised to ensure data quality since they were conducted at a central facility. Nonetheless, we anticipated that a significant proportion of sample members could not be easily interviewed by telephone. Among a low-income population such as that represented by the survey sample, rates of households without telephones are higher,

interviews with persons regardless of their state or country of residence at the time of the survey.[34] However, efforts to interview respondents face to face were restricted to particular localities in Wisconsin because it was not cost efficient to pursue small numbers of cases in sparsely populated counties or in other states.[35]

All mothers in the sample were potentially eligible for in-person interviews, but only a random subsample of fathers was subject to this effort. Tracing efforts prior to the first wave of data collection indicated that fathers were much more difficult to locate than mothers. Location information in the administrative records (address, telephone number) was less often available for fathers and, when present, was more likely to be incorrect. Contact information gleaned from other sources more frequently yielded bad addresses and nonworking or nonexistent telephone numbers for fathers. Given the relatively large number of fathers who could not be reached by telephone and our goal of maximizing the response rate among a representative sample of fathers, we divided the fathers' sample into two groups. A random subsample of fathers (approximately one-third of the sample) was eligible for "full effort" and could be interviewed by telephone or in person; the remaining two-thirds could be interviewed only by telephone.

Response Rates and Weighting Procedures

The original survey sample was generally representative of the research population, as discussed in more detail in Technical Report 5 of Volume III (see especially Tables TR5.1–3). We completed interviews with 82 percent of mothers who were in the survey sample at Time 1 and 82 percent of mothers who were in the survey sample at Time 2. Among all fathers in the sample, we completed interviews with 33 percent at both Time 1 and Time 2. Completion rates for fathers in the random subsample eligible for telephone and in-person interviews were higher—43 and 46 percent at Time 1 and Time 2, respectively. Among pairs of eligible mothers and fathers, the survey data represent 30 and 29 percent at Time 1 and Time 2, respectively.[36]

Although the response rates for the fathers' surveys are lower than those generally reported by surveys of the general population, they compare favorably with other studies of separated families.[37]

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telephone service is interrupted more often, and residential mobility occurs more frequently. Therefore, we also deployed a staff of personal interviewers to assist in locating sample members and to conduct face-to-face interviews with persons for whom we could not obtain a telephone number or who could not be reached by telephone.

[34]By definition, mothers in the study, as participants in W-2, were residents of Wisconsin at some time during the period of the evaluation. The overwhelming majority were living in the state when interviewed, but some mothers had left the state and a slightly larger number of fathers who responded lived outside Wisconsin. At Time 1, less than 5 percent of mothers and 8 percent of fathers were living outside Wisconsin. Among nonrespondents it is likely that these percentages are higher.

[35]Specifically, we fielded personal interviewers in Wisconsin cities and metropolitan areas where there were at least 10 cases (mothers and fathers combined) that could not be reached by telephone. In practice, the application of this rule meant that in-person efforts were heavily concentrated in the central and southeastern corridors of the state, especially the Milwaukee metropolitan area (Milwaukee, Racine, and Kenosha counties), with another cluster of cases in and around Madison (Dane County). A few additional communities became eligible for in-person effort later in the field period after telephone contacts proved unsuccessful.

[36]Completion rates are computed as the number of completed interviews divided by the total number of eligible (in-scope) cases. Partial interviews are not included in the numerator and are not included in any data analysis in this report. The final number of in-scope cases was smaller than the original sample sizes because of errors or changes in the sample frame (mothers: 2,876 and 2,871 at T1 and T2, respectively; fathers: 1,926 and 2,123).

[37]The Child Development Supplement of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics completed interviews with 19.8 percent of the fathers who lived apart from the children in its sample. The Parents' Fair Share (PFS) Study achieved much higher response rates (ranging from 74 to 82 percent across different sites and intake periods) but the sample and study design differ significantly from the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families and contribute, in ways

Data from the survey are weighted to adjust for the stratification of the sample by W-2 status ("transitioned" and "new" cases) and by assignment to upper/lower W-2 tier. Weighting also adjusts for the differential rate of assignment to control and experimental status over the period during which the research population was developed (September 1, 1997, to July 8, 1998). The survey weights also include adjustments for nonresponse bias; respondents and nonrespondents differ systematically, such that analyses of respondents alone will produce biased parameter estimates. The high response rate among mothers presents less serious concern about nonresponse bias than exists for fathers, but the data underrepresent some subgroups of the mothers' population. The nonresponse analysis is discussed in more detail in Volume III, Technical Report 6. Weighting procedures are discussed in Volume III, Technical Reports 4 and 6.

I.3.3 Methods of Analysis

The random assignment of cases to an experimental and a control group provides a powerful tool to evaluate the effects of a policy. In theory, given random assignment, simple comparisons between the experimental and control groups should provide unbiased measures of the impact of the policy. This comparison is appropriate if the groups are comparable, differing only in the pass-through policy they face. The implementation analysis, summarized above in Section 2, found that the initial random assignment worked appropriately. The analysis of diversion—i.e. the tendency for cases that have been assigned not to actually enter the program—suggests there are no overall significant differences in the proportion of cases in the experimental and control groups that enter W-2 (and our research sample). As discussed in Volume III, Technical Report 1, an analysis of the

Regression Control Variables

For the regression analyses, the following standard ("basic") list of control variables was used (at minimum) in all regressions. All variables are defined at sample entry:

- Assignment rate
- Higher child support history
- Mother's age 31 or greater
- Mother is African-American

In addition to the basic list, the following control variables were used in some analyses (this is referred to as the "extended" list):

- Assignment rate
- Mother's child support history
- Mother's age
- Mother's race/ethnicity
- Mother's AFDC history
- Region
- Initial W-2 tier
- Child's age
- Mother's education
- Father's earning history
- Mother's employment history (not included in analyses of fathers' sample)
- Divorce or paternity case
- Number of legal fathers associated with mother
- Whether a child support order existed at entry
- Number of children

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that cannot easily be quantified, to their success (Abt Associates, 1997). For example, PFS focused its sample selection specifically on fathers—recruiting them after their participation in a court hearing about child support—and the program under evaluation involved services provided directly to fathers (e.g.,job search, skills training, peer support). These characteristics of the design and program intervention likely increased contact with fathers over the study period and made it easier to locate and interview sample members. In contrast, we sampled fathers indirectly through their attachment to a resident mother and focal child, and the pass-through policy itself does not directly benefit fathers.

initial characteristics of the experimental and control groups largely confirms our expectation that they are equivalent.

Although the experimental and control groups are not significantly different in most respects, we present regression-adjusted means, rather than simple means, in the analysis that follows. This procedure allows us to adjust for any observed differences in initial characteristics of the experimental and control groups that may exist. This approach has a number of advantages. First, even if random assignment worked perfectly, there will be some chance differences in the initial characteristics of the experimental and control groups. Regression-adjusted means adjust for chance variation in characteristics included in the regression. The regression-adjusted difference reflects the estimated effect of experimental status (i.e., the coefficient on the indicator for experimental or control status) after accounting for differences in baseline characteristics. This approach will also adjust for any nonrandom differential assignment based on observable characteristics included among the control variables. Finally, to the extent that control variables account for the variance in the outcome of interest, we are more likely to be able to discern the effect of the experiment.

The analyses of experimental effects in the next chapter generally use one of the two standard sets of control variables shown in the text box on page 29. The first set of control variables was generally used in the analysis of survey data because of the limited sample size. The more extensive list was used in most analyses of administrative data. The details of the procedure for estimating regression-adjusted means and differences are discussed in Volume III, Technical Report 1.