

**A Decade of Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgment
in Wisconsin: 1997–2007**

Patricia R. Brown
Steven T. Cook

Institute for Research on Poverty
University of Wisconsin–Madison

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OVERVIEW

Starting in the mid-1990s, Wisconsin implemented policies to encourage the use of voluntary paternity acknowledgment (VPA) in cases of nonmarital births. These policies encourage the fathers of nonmarital children to acknowledge their paternity by signing and filing a form, instead of going through a judicial hearing. The motivation for these policies was the hope that reducing obstacles to establishing paternity would encourage fathers to increase financial and nonfinancial participation in their children's lives.

Our earlier report on the results of these policies (Brown, Cook, and Wimer, 2004) found that this method of paternity establishment was heavily used: 48 percent of nonmarital IV-D children born in 2001 had their paternity determined through the VPA process within 6 months after birth. We also found that, although fathers established by VPA were less likely than fathers established through adjudication to have a child support order for their children, they were more likely to pay child support when they did have an order. In addition, VPA fathers were more likely to have a shared physical placement order for their children than were adjudicated fathers. These differences persisted even after controlling for other observable dissimilarities between VPA and adjudicated fathers.

This report expands upon the previous report in several ways:

1. The previous report was limited to cases that had reached the child support enforcement system, but not all voluntary paternity acknowledgment cases are subject to such enforcement. Data received for this report from the Wisconsin Bureau of Vital Records on all nonmarital births in the state allow us to determine the proportion of VPA cases that enter the child support system and assess how those cases are different from VPA cases that do not.

2. The previous report considered only births that occurred in 2001. This report considers children from three different birth cohorts (1997, 2000, and 2005) to enable us to determine how the use of voluntary paternity acknowledgment and the associated child support outcomes have changed over time.

3. The earlier report tracked child support outcomes for a period of about two years after birth. This report tracks outcomes over a longer timeframe, providing the opportunity for additional children to have paternity established through either the VPA or adjudication process, and for child support outcomes to be observed for a longer period of time.

BACKGROUND

Through the 1980s and 1990s the federal government passed legislation that imposed increasing requirements on states to provide and encourage nonjudicial methods of establishing paternity for nonmarital children.¹ The State of Wisconsin addressed these requirements with a trial in-hospital paternity establishment program starting in 1993 (PATH—Paternity Acknowledgment through Hospitals), and then with a more expansive program approved in May 1998. A 2005 revision of state law, which took effect at the beginning of 2007, retrenched a bit, prohibiting mothers or fathers under the age of 18 from using the voluntary paternity acknowledgment option for establishing paternity.²

Under the program that began in 1998, trained staff members at birthing hospitals and other authorized agencies³ approach new parents and explain the rights and responsibilities associated with

¹The 1984 Section IV-D amendments to the Social Security Act required states to allow nonjudicial paternity establishment; the 1993 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act required the creation of in-hospital paternity acknowledgment programs; and the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act expanded both programs.

²The Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgment program is governed by Wisconsin Statutes, Chapters 49, 69, and 767 (see <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/stats.html>).

³Under Wisconsin law, authorized agencies are: child support agencies; VPA-trained workers at state, county, and city vital records offices and tribal enrollment offices; and VPA-trained midwives.

signing and submitting a voluntary paternity acknowledgment form. The VPA form can be filed at any point during the child's life, and has the same legal standing as a court finding of paternity.⁴

As outlined in the materials given to new parents, the benefits of voluntary paternity acknowledgment for the child are: 1) the child's birth certificate will show the names of both parents; 2) the child will know the identity of both the mother and father; 3) the child will be entitled to financial support from both parents until reaching adulthood; 4) the child will be able to know both maternal and paternal medical histories for such conditions as sickle cell anemia, cancer, and diabetes; and 5) the child will be able to benefit from both parents' health insurance, Social Security benefits, pensions, and inheritance. Additional benefits listed for the father are: "a greater chance to be a part of your child's life," and "your parental rights have to be considered before your baby can be placed for adoption." Assurances to the mother include: "This [VPA] form does **not** give the father legal custody (the legal right to make decisions for the baby) or physical placement (visitation). Under Wisconsin law, the unmarried mother has sole legal custody until a court orders otherwise." The instructions also state: "**Please do not use** the Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgment form if you think it is not in the best interest of your child to establish paternity."⁵

To the state, the VPA program offers two potential benefits. First, VPA could stimulate an overall increase in paternity establishment. Fathers may be more amenable to acknowledging paternity at the time of their child's birth than later in the child's life, whether because of the natural pride fathers may feel at the birth of their offspring, the closer connection they may have with the mother at that time, or the apparent disconnection of the hospital surroundings from the child support system. Second, by promoting a less confrontational method for fathers to assert their paternity than is available through court

⁴A VPA form that is signed by both parents, notarized, and filed, has the same force and effect as paternity judgments ordered by the courts, but can be rescinded by either parent within 60 days. After 60 days the child's paternity can only be vacated through an action by the court.

⁵From "To new Moms and Dads . . . help your baby get a step ahead in life!" Publication DWSC-870-P, revised 10/2006. (Available from http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dwd/publications/dws/child_support/pdf/dwsc_870_p.pdf.)

adjudication, the VPA process might increase paternal willingness to cooperate in the parenting process, either through taking a direct role in parenting or through fulfilling child support obligations.

Voluntary paternity acknowledgment quickly became commonly used, both in Wisconsin and other states. Other research has come to conclusions similar to our findings in our last report, which showed that about 48 percent of nonmarital IV-D births in 2001 in Wisconsin had paternity established through voluntary acknowledgment within the first six months after birth. Turner (2001) found that from 1994 to 1998, nationwide in-hospital paternity establishment increased from 6.6 percent to 42 percent of nonmarital births. Results from the national Fragile Families project also show high in-hospital VPA rates: 56 percent of nonmarital births from 1998–2000, based on parents' reports (Mincy, Garfinkel, and Nepomnyaschy, 2005).

Given the level of utilization of this program, it is natural to ask how well VPA programs have done in meeting their goals of increasing paternity establishment and paternal cooperation in parenting. Outside research on these questions is fairly limited, but Sorenson and Halpern (1999) found that mothers who lived in states with voluntary paternity programs were more likely to receive child support, after controlling for state-level and personal characteristics. Mincy, Garfinkel, and Nepomnyaschy (2005) also found that in-hospital paternity establishment was associated with higher rates of child support payment and child contact.

Our own previous report (Brown, Cook, and Wimer, 2004) on children born in Wisconsin in 2000 and 2001 found that fathers in VPA cases paid less child support than fathers in adjudicated cases, but the reason for this was that a much larger percentage of VPA cases did not have a child support order. We speculated that the reason that VPA cases were less likely to have a court order was that VPA parents were more likely to be married or cohabiting or to have shared placement of the child. VPA fathers with an order were 10 percentage points more likely to make payments on their child support orders and paid about \$250 more a year. We also found considerable differences between fathers who chose VPA and those whose paternity was adjudicated. Voluntary paternity acknowledgment was more likely when the

child was an only child whose parents had been living together at birth. VPA parents were also more likely to be white, to live outside Milwaukee County, and to have higher earnings.

We used multivariate models to control for these differences in background characteristics. With the controls, VPA cases were confirmed to be less likely than adjudicated cases to have a child support order, but the father was more likely to pay when an order existed, with no difference in the amounts of payment when any payment was made. In addition, the parents in VPA cases were more likely to have a shared placement order for the child.

The present report follows on this earlier research by attempting to address some of the limitations of our previous report. First, the sample in that report was limited to cases in the state's child support enforcement system, but many cases are never subject to child support enforcement. Cases not subject to child support enforcement are likely to be different from cases that are found in KIDS—the state's child support accounting database. To address these limitations we use data from the state vital records office on all nonmarital births in the state to examine the effects of differential rates of entry into the child support system.

Second, the previous paper examined only children born in the years 2000 and 2001. In the present report we compare three birth cohorts (1997, 2000, and 2005) to see how characteristics of VPA cases' child support outcomes related to the type of paternity establishment have changed over time. These three cohorts allow us to compare a period when the VPA program was in its beginning stages (in 1997), with a cohort that allows us to replicate the previous paper (2000), and with a more recent cohort when the program had been in existence for quite a while (2005).

Finally, in the previous paper we were limited to observing child support outcomes through 2002, at most two years after the child was born. This paper follows cases for a longer time, which allows us to observe more children having paternity established and to see if the association between VPA status and child support outcomes persists.

DATA

The analyses reported in this paper use data from three primary Wisconsin sources. The first is information from nonmarital birth records furnished by the Wisconsin Bureau of Vital Records for three birth cohort years: 1997, 2000, and 2005. The second data source is KIDS (Kids Information Data System), the Wisconsin administrative database used to manage the state's child support system. The third is Cohort 21 of the Wisconsin Court Record Database (WCRD), information from a random selection of paternity and child support cases filed in the courts of 21 Wisconsin counties between July 2000 and June 2001, collected by the Institute for Research on Poverty.

With each of the three primary datasets we examine the relationship between the type of paternity establishment and various demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the children and the parents. These analyses allow us to assess whether the use of voluntary paternity acknowledgment is more common among certain types of cases than others. We next examine the relationship between different types of paternity and child support and child placement outcomes. We use models to predict the relationship between paternity type and outcomes, while controlling for any demographic or socioeconomic factors we found to be related to paternity type. While these models allow us to control for observable differences between cases that utilize different types of paternity, other differences that we cannot observe with the available data may partially explain the outcomes.

Birth Records

Our analysis begins with the full population of nonmarital birth records for the State of Wisconsin in calendar years 1997, 2000, and 2005. The 1997 cohort was born before the 1998 state policy initiative to encourage and facilitate voluntary paternity acknowledgment at the time of birth. The 1997 cohort also allows us to observe child support outcomes for 9 years after birth.

The 2000 cohort was born several years after the voluntary paternity acknowledgment initiative began, by which time the VPA process, staff, and informational materials should have been well in place.

The 2000 cohort allows us to observe child support outcomes for 6 years after birth and to replicate the findings from the previous paper, which observed IV-D children born in years 2000 and 2001. Finally, the 2005 cohort provides the most recent birth year that allows at least one year of observation, permitting us to determine whether additional growth in voluntary paternity acknowledgment rates has occurred.

The birth record data for nonmarital children were extracted from the Wisconsin Vital Records data system on December 12, 2007. The data provided were child's and parent's names (the name of the child was the most current name, not necessarily the name given at birth if the child's name had changed); child sex; parents' dates of birth; mother's education; mother's race; mother's residential location; name of birth hospital; nonmarital status (unmarried, unmarried with father added by mutual affidavit, unmarried with father added by judgment, and unmarried birth with subsequent marriage of the parents and then an "acknowledgment of marital child"⁶); and the date on which the most current marital status was recorded⁷ (which could have changed, for example, from unmarried, to VPA, to acknowledgment of marital child).

KIDS Data

From the KIDS data system we extracted records for all of the children born in the three selected birth cohort years (1997, 2000, and 2005). We identified the parents of these children, and then additionally selected records for all siblings and half-siblings found in the KIDS system for these children. All nonmarital and marital children were included in the data extract, which was done on July 15, 2007. After receiving the vital records extract, we matched the two datasets on names, sex, and dates of birth of children and mothers, and of the fathers, if named.

⁶Previous terminology was "legitimization."

⁷Because the nonmarital status of the child can change over time, the date of data extraction is relevant for the analysis of the information provided: the 1997 birth cohort had 10 years during which changes in status could be recorded, the 2000 birth cohort had 7 years, and the 2005 birth cohort only 2 years of recorded changes.

Additional information extracted from the KIDS system included race/ethnic group, Social Security number (SSN) of parents (for purposes of further matching), details and dates of paternity adjudication or voluntary paternity acknowledgment, child support orders and payments for the child, and identity of child support payee and payor.

Wisconsin Court Record Database

The cases in Cohort 21 of the WCRD are a random sample of adjudicated and voluntary acknowledgment paternity cases filed in 21 counties in the state. These cases were selected from court cases with petition dates from July 2000 through June 2001. The selection criterion limits them to cases with at least 12 months of eligibility for child support. Cohort 21 contained 873 paternity cases: 302 voluntary and 571 adjudicated paternities.

After weighting to account for the stratified sampling collection procedure, 13.5 percent of nonmarital cases entering the court system in the 21 counties during this time period were VPA (compared to roughly 45 percent of all nonmarital births). Because the voluntary paternity cases in the WCRD were chosen from cases that actually went to court for a support or child placement order, the sample is a select group within the full population of voluntary paternity families. Although this limits the applicability of our findings for the larger population of voluntary paternity cases, the WCRD has the advantage of collecting information on child placement outcomes that are not available in the KIDS data. The WCRD data was updated in 2007 to provide 6 to 7 years of court history and to allow us to determine if there had been returns to court over the 7 years for changes in child physical placement.

Other Data

In addition to these three sources of primary data, we used wage record information from the State of Wisconsin Unemployment Insurance database, and we extracted W-2 cash benefit (TANF), FoodShares (Food Stamps), and BadgerCare (Medicaid) participation for parents of the birth cohort children from CARES. For these data matches we used the SSN of the parents from the KIDS data

system. The information from Vital Records did not include parents' SSNs, and therefore we do not have wage record or CARES data for all families of the full birth cohort children from Vital Records. This is a limiting factor in some of our analyses.

METHODOLOGY

We first compare the incidence of different types of paternity establishment across the three birth cohorts in the vital records data, looking specifically at the timing of paternity establishment and exploring how the process may differ in different settings. We then examine the differences in the types of cases within each type of paternity establishment. Previous research has shown that the nature of paternity establishment is a highly selective process. Only in some cases will fathers be in the hospital at the time of their child's birth to receive information about voluntary paternity acknowledgment, and of these cases, only some fathers and mothers will both agree to submit the necessary forms. In those cases that do not have paternity voluntarily acknowledged, only some will have paternity established by the court. In both of these groups, only some cases will be subject to the child support enforcement system.

Different sorts of cases are more likely to proceed to each of these steps, so it is important in comparing outcomes that we understand these differences, attempt to control appropriately for observable differences, and consider the potential for additional unobserved (that is, unobserved in our data) differences. Using information from vital records, we can compare VPA cases to those with adjudicated paternitys and those with no paternity establishment. We can also see which cases become involved with the child support system and examine case characteristics that may be associated with that process.

Next we compare child support outcomes (having a child support order, and making a payment on that order) for cases with the different types of paternity establishment, and then use multivariate models to control for differences among the cases with each type of paternity establishment. Finally, we use selection models to account for the differential entry of VPA cases into the child support enforcement system. These examinations of child support outcomes will take advantage of the long timeframe of

available data to determine if any associations between voluntary paternity acknowledgment and child support outcomes persist over time.

The final section of our report revisits CRD Cohort 21, for parents who entered the Wisconsin court system in 2000–2001. In following the court history of these families we can detect legal changes in child physical placement, which might show a difference in child outcome for children with VPA fathers.

RESULTS

Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgments Shown in Birth Records: 1997, 2000, and 2005.

A full set of birth records for nonmarital children born in the years 1997, 2000, and 2005 were obtained from the Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS), Bureau of Vital Records.⁸ Nonmarital children were categorized into one of four paternity types, depending on their legal relationship with their father as recorded at the date of the extract: 1) father by mutual affidavit, or VPA; 2) father by judgment, or adjudicated; 3) acknowledgment of marital child, following the parents' marriage after the birth of the child; and 4) no legal father identified.

The distribution of births in each of the three cohorts is shown in Table 1, which shows several notable trends. First, the number of nonmarital births has increased substantially in Wisconsin over this time period, from 18,884 in 1997 to 23,244 in 2005—a 23.1 percent increase. Nonmarital births as a percentage of all births in Wisconsin also increased over this period: from 28.4 percent of all births in 1997, to 29.6 percent in 2000, and to 32.8 percent in 2005. In contrast, the number of marital births remained rather steady over this period: 47,606 marital births in 1997, and 47,690 marital births in 2005.

The second trend concerns the percentage of children who are “acknowledged as marital children” after the marriage of their parents following their birth. The number is small in each of the birth

⁸Some classes of birth records could not be shared by Vital Records: foundlings or relinquished babies, adopted children, or babies born in other states to Wisconsin mothers. For this reason, the official number of reported nonmarital Wisconsin births is actually slightly higher than the number of records received in the extract of birth record data, upon which our analyses are based.

Table 1
Statistics from Birth Records of Wisconsin Nonmarital Children

	Birth Year		
	1997	2000	2005
All Wisconsin Births	66,490	69,289	70,934
Marital Births	47,606	48,746	47,690
Nonmarital Births	18,884	20,543	23,244
Percent Nonmarital, of all Births	28.4%	29.6%	32.8%
Nonmarital Births*:	N=17,446	N=19,295	N=22,476
Children with Legal Fathers**			
VPA	29.2%	45.0%	46.5%
Adjudicated	49.2%	38.9%	34.4%
Acknow. as Marital Child	3.0%	1.7%	0.6%
Children with No Legal Father	18.7%	14.4%	18.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Age of child at time of data extract:	10–11 years	7–8 years	2–3 years

Source of nonmarital data: State of Wisconsin birth record data, extracted 12/12/2007.

*Based on data provided by Wisconsin Vital Records, with birth records of the following children not provided: foundlings or relinquished babies, adopted children, and babies born in other states to Wisconsin mothers.

**As of the date of the data extract.

cohorts (514 children born in 1997, 334 children born in 2000, and 126 children born in 2005), but is smallest in the 2005 cohort (less than 1 percent of all nonmarital births). The small number in 2005 may be mechanical: over the course of a child's life, the chance that the child's parents will marry increases, and therefore children born in 1997 have a greater time period in which they could have been acknowledged after their parents' marriage, compared to younger children. The decline from the 1997 to the 2005 birth cohort could also have resulted from a decline in the practice of parents' marrying after a birth has taken place. It is not possible to distinguish these two phenomena with these data, since we do not know the date of the parents' marriage. Finally, the fact of the parents' marriage does not automatically result in a change in the child's birth record. Changing the birth record to a status of "marital child acknowledged" requires the parents to file paperwork with Vital Records. It could be that parents in the later cohorts feel less of a need to change the birth record of the child since filing a VPA form may have supplanted the need for an "acknowledgment of marital child" change to their child's birth record.

Table 1 also shows that voluntary paternity acknowledgment (VPA) children increased from 29 percent of all nonmarital births in the 1997 birth cohort to 45 percent in the 2000 birth cohort, only 3 years later. The percentage grew only slightly in 2005 (at 46.5 percent). The sharp increase between 1997 and 2000 coincided with the 1998 legislation that implemented the statewide system encouraging in-hospital paternity establishment. The more modest growth between 2000 and 2005 could suggest that the initial surge around 1998 has subsided, although the 2000 birth cohort has had more years for VPA forms to be filed, and the 2005 cohort will likely experience some increase in VPAs in future years.

The increase in VPA establishment helped lead to a decrease in the number of children without a legal father (down from 18.7 percent of birth cohort 1997, to 14.4 percent of birth cohort 2000). The percentage of children without a legal father appears to have rebounded to over 18 percent in the 2005 birth cohort, but this apparent rebound owes to the young age of the children in that birth cohort (less than three years at the time of the data extract), and some of these children will have paternity adjudicated in

future years. As we show later, the 2005 birth cohort has a lower percentage of no-legal-father children at two years after birth than either of the earlier cohorts.

We focus much of our report on the 2000 cohort. Because the practice of obtaining VPAs at hospitals was clearly different in 2000 than it was in 1997, the 1997 cohort has little relevance to current practice. The 2005 cohort is obviously closer to the current policy environment, but VPA practice may not have changed a great deal between 2000 and 2005, given the much flatter growth rate in VPAs in those years. Analysis of the 2000 cohort thus offers the advantages of (a) a 7-year history in the KIDS system in which we can observe child support and child placement behavior, and (b) an apparently similar VPA practice to that which existed for the 2005 cohort, for whom we have only 2 years of subsequent data.

The Timing of Paternity Establishment

Table 2 shows the timing of paternity establishment for children who acquired a legal father in the first two years of life. The paternity type is information extracted from Vital Records. The date of paternity establishment is information extracted from both Vital Records and from the KIDS data system, compared, and the earlier date was recorded. (See Appendix 1 for a discussion of dates associated with paternity establishment in both Vital Records and KIDS.)

All three birth cohorts show that a large percentage of VPA papers are filed within the first month of the child's life. In the two most recent cohorts, over half of all VPA papers were filed within a month of the child's birth. In the 1997 cohort the first month accounted for about 40 percent of all eventual VPAs (data not shown). VPA filings decline after the first month of the child's life but are not uncommon over the next 5 months. An additional 30 percent of eventual VPAs registered in months 2 through 6 for all three birth cohorts. Although VPA filings were higher in 2000 and 2005 than in 1997 across all durations, the primary gains over the 1997 cohort occurred within the first month.

The process for determining paternity through a court finding is considerably slower. It is not until the 6-month mark that a considerable proportion of the adjudicated cases have been decided. The

Table 2
Cumulative VPA and Paternity Adjudication Rates Over Time

	Birth Cohort					
	1997		2000		2005*	
	VPA	Adjud.	VPA	Adjud.	VPA	Adjud.
Within 2 years (cumulative percent):						
Age of Child:						
by end of 1st week	1.8%	0.0%	4.0%	0.0%	5.0%	0.0%
by end of 2nd week	6.0	0.1	14.4	0.0	15.2	0.1
by end of 3rd week	8.2	0.2	19.5	0.1	20.5	0.1
by end of 4th week	9.9	0.5	22.9	0.2	25.5	0.2
by end of 2nd month	12.5%	2.0%	28.1%	1.1%	32.0%	1.5%
by end of 4th month	14.6	6.7	33.6	4.9	38.7	6.4
by end of 6th month	16.3	12.0	36.2	10.6	41.3	13.7
by end of 12 months	19.9%	23.8%	40.0%	21.1%	44.6%	26.9%
by end of 18 months	22.0	29.3	41.5	26.6	45.5	31.2
by end of 24 months*	23.5	32.8	42.5	30.0	46.1	33.4
Acknowl. of marital child within 2 years		1.0%		0.8%		0.5%
No legal father within 2 years		42.7		26.7		20.0
Total Percentage		100.0		100.0		100.0
Total N		17,446		19,295		22,476
Mean age at paternity establishment (if established within 2 years):		227 days		172 days		146 days
Within 7 years:						
No legal father within 7 years		21.2%		14.6%		N/A
Mean age at paternity establishment (if established within 7 years):		546 days		331 days		N/A
Within 10 years:						
(No legal father within 10 years)		18.9%		N/A		N/A
Mean age at paternity establishment (if established within 10 years):		616 days		N/A		N/A

Source: VPA dates are from Vital Records; the adjudication dates are from KIDS.

*For those children born in the first 2 weeks of January 2005, we have a very slight undercount of paternity establishments in the 24th month, as the vital records data extract was done in mid-December 2007, rather than at the end of that month.

majority of adjudicated paternities have been determined by the time the child is 2 years old, and this pattern in the timing of adjudicated paternities did not change between 1997 and 2005.

This increase in voluntary paternity acknowledgment, without any corresponding decrease in court adjudication rates, has resulted in a significant increase in the overall paternity establishment rate. In 1997, 43 percent of nonmarital children did not have paternity established at the age of 2, but by 2005, this had dropped to 20 percent of nonmarital children. In addition, among all children with paternity established in their first 2 years, paternity was established, on average, nearly 3 months earlier in the child's life for the 2005 cohort than for the 1997 cohort.

These changes suggest that the emphasis placed by the state and federal governments on voluntary paternity acknowledgment have had notable results. Voluntary paternity acknowledgment has become the most commonly used method of paternity establishment, and this growth has happened without any appreciable reduction in court adjudications. Overall paternity establishment has thus grown sharply, and paternity is being established earlier in the life of the child. Earlier identification of a child's legal father has potential implications for earlier bonding between father and child and a longer history of emotional, physical, and financial support for that child.

Of course, the paternity establishment process does not stop at age 2. For the 1997 and 2000 birth cohorts, about half of the children whose paternity had not been established by age 2 had paternity established by age 7, usually through a court finding. About 21 percent of the 1997 cohort and 15 percent of the 2000 cohort remained without a legal father at the age of 7. Court adjudications after age 2 reduced the differences in overall paternity establishment rates between the 1997 and 2000 cohorts, suggesting that at least some of the cases that currently choose VPA would eventually have had paternity established through adjudication. The total level of paternity establishment at age 7, however, is still larger in the 2000 birth cohort than in the 1997 birth cohort, and the difference is statistically significant. It appears that the introduction of in-hospital programs and other forms of voluntary paternity acknowledgment are associated with dramatic shifts in the timing and overall levels of paternity establishment.

Characteristics Associated with Different Paternity Types

In assessing differences in child support outcomes across paternity types, we need to determine if differences in the parents who use the different types of paternity establishment might explain the outcomes. This section discusses various characteristics of nonmarital birth parents and their association with different paternity types, focusing primarily on maternal characteristics because more information is available on mothers than on fathers. Table 3 shows the distribution of paternity types by various characteristics, using data from the 2000 birth cohort.⁹ The first panel shows mother's education and age. There is a direct correlation between increasing education and the use of VPA, with college-educated mothers having VPA rates nearly twice those of mothers with no high school degree (63 percent, compared to 33 percent). The use of adjudicated paternity follows the opposite trend (18 percent, compared to 49 percent). But there are no large differences by mother's education in the percentage of cases that have no legal father established within the first 7 years of the child's life (13 percent to 16 percent of all education categories). There may be several reasons for this trend. More educated mothers may know more about the VPA process or may better understand the long-term benefits for their child. Also, being likely paired with more educated fathers, more educated mothers may benefit more from any resulting child support order. More educated mothers may also be more desirable partners, with whom fathers might more willingly link themselves through acknowledging paternity of the child. In addition, more educated mothers may experience childbirth in better-staffed hospitals and receive more information about the VPA process from the hospital staff. Finally, Turner (2001) found that "unwed mothers with greater educational attainment are more likely to be approached [by hospital staff] about [voluntary] paternity establishment than less educated mothers, everything else being equal."¹⁰

Age and race are also associated with VPA use. Older parents may have better incomes, owing to greater education and job experience, and may favor the VPA process for the same reasons that better

⁹Associations between demographic characteristics and paternity types are similar in the other cohorts, although overall levels of VPA are lower and levels of no paternity are higher in the 1997 birth cohort.

¹⁰Turner (2001), p. 571.

Table 3
Paternity Types by Demographics of Parents and Children in the 2000 Birth Cohort

	Percent of Demographic Category With:			
	VPA's	Adjudicated Paternity	Acknowledged as Marital Child	No Legal Father
Mother's Education:				
Less than High School	33.0%	49.4%	1.2%	16.4%
High School	48.8	36.6	1.7	12.9
Some College	56.1	28.3	2.5	13.1
4 or more Years of College	63.2	18.0	3.0	15.8
Mother's Age:				
12-17	25.5%	54.4%	1.3%	18.7%
18-20	44.2	42.5	1.5	11.9
21-24	44.6	40.1	1.8	13.4
25-29	48.9	33.5	1.8	15.8
30-34	51.5	30.8	2.1	15.5
35 and older	53.7	25.4	1.9	19.1
Father's Age*:				
12-17	24.5%	74.3%	1.2%	N/A
18-20	45.7	52.8	1.6	N/A
21-24	51.7	46.4	2.0	N/A
25-29	55.9	41.6	2.5	N/A
30-34	57.0	40.9	2.1	N/A
35 and older	59.6	38.4	2.0	N/A
Mother's Racial/Ethnic Group:				
Native American	43.7%	40.2%	1.6%	14.5%
Hispanic	45.1	29.4	2.4	23.0
African American	20.4	61.3	0.5	17.8
White	55.1	30.4	2.1	12.3
Hmong	44.2	29.5	5.3	21.1
Other Asian	51.3	20.6	2.5	25.6
Mother's Residential Location:				
Milwaukee County	28.9%	51.7%	1.3%	18.1%
Other Large Urban County	52.4	33.9	1.5	12.3
Small Urban County	35.6	45.9	1.7	16.8
Rural County	57.2	30.3	2.1	10.4
Out of State	49.8	9.4	2.0	38.9**
Child Sex:				
Boy	46.5%	37.9%	1.6%	14.0%
Girl	43.5	39.8	1.9	14.7
Hospital Size: ***				
Very Small (1-60 births)	60.9%	27.1%	1.9%	10.1%
Small (60-150 births)	53.4	33.2	2.0	11.4
Medium (150-300 births)	55.0	31.7	2.6	10.8
Medium Large (300-700)	44.1	38.2	1.7	16.0
Large (700-1500 births)	40.3	42.3	1.5	16.0
Very Large (over 1500)	22.5	58.7	0.5	18.3
Overall	45.0	38.9	1.7	14.4

Source: Demographics of parents and children recorded on birth certificates of nonmarital children born in 2000.

Notes: Row percentages may not sum to 100.0% due to rounding.

*Percentages based on the fathers in the first three categories only, since information is necessarily missing in cases where no father has been identified.

**No legal father recorded in the State of Wisconsin; paternity may have been established elsewhere.

***Size of Hospital is based on the number of non-marital births in 2000.

educated mothers do. Also, there may be more of a committed relationship between older couples, or a greater desire for a committed relationship with a child on the part of the father with increasing age, and therefore a greater willingness to voluntarily acknowledge paternity in the early days of the child's life. Concerning race, white mothers are more likely to have VPAs filed for their children (55 percent), and African American mothers are less likely (only 20 percent). The rate of VPAs in the African American group actually fell slightly between 2000 and 2005 (data not shown).

The low usage of VPA among African American mothers is likely related to economic disparities between whites and African Americans and the resulting lower expectations for child support benefits that establishing paternity might generate. Previous research (Pate, 2005) has also shown a sense of frustration and a lack of trust among low-income African American fathers towards the child support enforcement system. The concentration of the African American population in large urban areas serviced by larger hospitals may mean that they receive less information from hospital staff about the VPA process. And finally, high incarceration rates for African American men may lower the perceived benefits of establishing paternity, as well as reduce the likelihood of fathers being present at the time of birth (Oliver, 2001).

Although VPA usage is lowest among African Americans, the low rates are counterbalanced by much higher rates of adjudicated paternity establishment. As a result, the percentage of cases with no legal father after 7 years is greater among some other racial/ethnic groups than among African Americans.¹¹

County differences are also associated with VPA rates. VPA utilization rates are lower in Milwaukee County than in other areas of the state, and rural mothers are most likely to choose VPAs. The geographical differences in types of paternity utilization are likely related to the differing demographics of the populations of those areas and to hospital size and staff dedicated to educating, distributing, and

¹¹Printed versions of VPA materials and the VPA form are currently available in English, Spanish and Hmong. See: "Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgment," Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, updated April 3, 2008 (<http://dwd.Wisconsin.gov/bcs/path.htm>).

processing VPA materials. The final panel of the table shows that the smallest hospitals tend to have VPA utilization rates three times as high as the very largest hospitals.¹²

Given the interrelationships among characteristics examined in Table 4, we use a multivariate model to estimate the relationship between each demographic characteristic and VPA usage, controlling for other differences. Results are presented separately for the 1997 and 2000 birth cohorts in Table 4. Overall, the results in Table 4 indicate that many of the associations described above remain significant even when other differences in the populations are held constant. In both cohorts, for example, the lower usage of VPA among African American mothers remains strong and significant, even after accounting for the county, mother's education, and hospital size. Mother's education and residential location also remain strong predictors of VPA status in a multivariate framework that controls for other factors.

In the 1997 cohort we see that the very smallest hospitals had significantly higher rates of VPA and the largest hospitals had lower rates of VPA. But hospital size is not significantly associated with VPA usage in the 2000 birth cohort, after controlling for other factors. It may be that the level of staff attention to informing parents of VPA may have been uneven before the implementation of the PATH program in 1998, but is less so now.¹³

Some relationships that appeared significant when considered separately are no longer significant when other factors are controlled. The relationship between mother's age and VPA status is largely insignificant in the 2000 birth cohort, suggesting that it is the greater education of older mothers that may account for their higher usage of VPA. The exception is for minor mothers, who do show significantly lower rates of VPA. This may reflect an institutional decision not to encourage voluntary paternity acknowledgment among minor teen parents—a possible preference that was addressed in administrative code changes in 2007.

¹²The VPA rates for hospitals are not official rates, since we also count VPAs established in months and years beyond the "60 days" that hospitals are given to claim VPA establishments.

¹³Birthing hospitals in Wisconsin currently receive a \$20 incentive payment for each VPA form that is correctly filled out and filed within 60 days after the child's birth.

Table 4
Logistic Model Predicting VPA Paternities

	1997 Birth Cohort			2000 Birth Cohort		
	B	Std. Error	P-value	B	Std. Error	P-value
Mother's Age (18–20 omitted)						
under 15	-1.109	0.606	0.0673	-2.037	0.739	0.0058
15–17	0.067	0.079	0.3978	-0.459	0.074	<.0001
21–25	-0.034	0.048	0.4787	-0.077	0.040	0.0542
26–30	0.222	0.056	<.0001	0.025	0.050	0.6143
31–35	0.275	0.071	0.0001	0.054	0.065	0.4078
36 or older	0.308	0.089	0.0005	0.154	0.081	0.058
Mother's Race (white omitted)						
American Indian	-0.467	0.102	<.0001	-0.382	0.089	<.0001
Hispanic	-0.486	0.149	0.0011	0.027	0.086	0.7526
African American	-1.407	0.062	<.0001	-1.226	0.049	<.0001
Hmong	-0.142	0.210	0.4972	-0.127	0.213	0.5513
Other Asian	-0.224	0.228	0.3263	0.025	0.165	0.8774
Race Missing	-9.158	112.800	0.9353	9.474	100.500	0.9249
Mother's Education (High School omitted)						
Less Than High School	-0.482	0.047	<.0001	-0.433	0.039	<.0001
1–3 years college	0.259	0.048	<.0001	0.312	0.044	<.0001
4 or more yrs. College	0.505	0.085	<.0001	0.529	0.081	<.0001
Education Missing	-2.617	1.024	0.0106	-0.840	0.317	0.0081
Mother's Location (Small Urban County omitted)						
Milwaukee resident	-0.239	0.075	0.0014	-0.327	0.068	<.0001
Large Urban area	-0.074	0.068	0.2729	0.184	0.061	0.0023
Rural resident	-0.059	0.064	0.3554	0.178	0.057	0.0018
Out-of-State resident	0.233	0.159	0.1419	0.050	0.159	0.7532
WI border county resident	0.164	0.050	0.0011	0.199	0.050	<.0001
Hospital Size (Medium omitted)						
Home birth	0.395	0.265	0.1353	0.203	0.294	0.4904
Very small hospital birth	0.228	0.072	0.0015	0.120	0.074	0.1035
Small hospital birth	-0.014	0.063	0.8223	-0.114	0.059	0.0541
Medium large hospital birth	0.009	0.059	0.8818	-0.095	0.058	0.1026
Large hospital birth	-0.055	0.073	0.4563	0.129	0.067	0.0528
Very large hospital birth	-0.505	0.098	<.0001	0.041	0.086	0.6336
Twin/Triplet Birth	-0.227	0.127	0.0748	-0.088	0.100	0.3788
Male child	0.036	0.036	0.3113	0.108	0.031	0.0005
Intercept	-0.449	0.063	<.0001	0.167	0.057	0.0035

The large difference in VPA rates between African Americans and other racial/ethnic groups, and between Milwaukee County and other counties, suggests the possibility that aggressive targeting and education might increase overall VPA rates. Further research on potential strategies would probably require in-depth interviews and surveys. In earlier research using survey responses of a small sample of randomly chosen mothers of nonmarital children from WCRD Cohort 21, a larger percentage of Milwaukee County mothers reported that the father had visited the mother and newborn child at the birthing hospital (67 percent of 34 respondents), compared to mothers in other urban counties (62 percent of 84 respondents), or rural counties (61 percent of 40 respondents).¹⁴ Further research might investigate whether hospital visits by African American fathers are as high as other populations. And if so, what are the differences in attitudes toward the VPA process by different groups of parents? Developing strategies for addressing specific concerns of identifiable groups of reluctant parents might be a productive method of improving VPA rates for these children.

Nonmarital-Birth-Child Entry into the KIDS System

Our previous paper could observe only cases that had entered the child support enforcement system and were recorded in the state's KIDS system. Any differences in child support outcomes that we found for VPA and adjudicated cases might thus have resulted from differences in the likelihood of entry into KIDS rather than from the VPA process itself. We expect that most court-adjudicated paternitys would appear in KIDS, but voluntary paternity cases would not come to the attention of the child support enforcement system unless there is a reason to pursue a child support obligation against one of the parents, or to recoup birthing costs paid for by the state. Parents who stay together, or even those who separate but do not pursue child support and are never on public assistance, would not necessarily be entered in KIDS. The Vital Records data we now have on all nonmarital births in the state allows us to

¹⁴Parent Survey 5 was conducted with sample members selected from adjudicated paternity and VPA cases appearing in the Wisconsin court system in 2000 and 2001, and reported in Brown (2006). Because of the small sample sizes, these differences are only suggestive, not statistically significant.

match these against the KIDS system and, for the first time, to account for children who do not appear in the child support and public assistance administrative databases.

Table 5 shows the match between nonmarital births registered in Vital Records and the Wisconsin KIDS system. Adjudicated cases appear in KIDS at rates over 99 percent for all three birth cohorts. This high percentage is as expected, since paternity adjudication information is forwarded by the courts to both the Bureau of Child Support and the Bureau of Vital Records.

Some 73 percent to 79 percent of VPA cases appear in KIDS in the three birth cohorts. The highest percentage of VPA cases appears in KIDS for the 2000 birth cohort. This makes sense: KIDS was still a new system in 1997, and in 1997, the flow of information between KIDS and Vital Records was still being perfected. The higher rate in the 2000 cohort than in the 2005 cohort may be related to the passage of time. Parents who agree on voluntary paternity acknowledgment shortly after the birth of the child may maintain a close relationship, live together, or marry. But after some time this relationship fails for many couples and the parties enter the court system for the provision of child support. Older children could, therefore, be expected to appear in KIDS at higher rates.

A striking finding in Table 5, however, is that, after seven years, 20 percent of the 2000 birth cohort VPA children still have not appeared in the KIDS system. It may well be that a large proportion of the parents of these children have married and have not filed the paperwork with Vital Records to have the child acknowledged as a marital child. It is also possible that some of these children have moved out of state and child support has been ordered through another state's court system, or that the parents live together or remain close and the father provides for the child informally. Even in cases where the parents have separated, it may be that the resident parent does not participate in public assistance programs that would require IV-D participation, or does not want a child support order from the nonresident parent.

The cases where no legal father was established appear in the KIDS system at similar rates to the VPA cases. Both the 1997 and 2000 birth cohorts show a rate of 74 percent in KIDS, leaving 26 percent outside of the state's administrative databases. The 2005 birth cohort appears in KIDS at a higher rate, about 79 percent. This reduction over time of children who remain out of the KIDS system probably

Table 5
Entry of Nonmarital Birth Children into the KIDS System

	Percent of Nonmarital Birth Children in KIDS		
	1997	2000	2005
Nonmarital Birth Type*:			
No Father Identified	73.7%	74.7%	78.7%
VPA	73.3	79.2	73.1
Adjudicated	99.5	99.5	99.6
Acknow. as Marital Child	66.3	69.8	76.2
All Case Types	86.0%	86.3%	83.3%
	Percent of Nonmarital Birth Children Identified as Marital Children in KIDS		
	1997	2000	2005
Nonmarital Birth Type*:			
No Father Identified	4.8%	2.5%	0.1%
VPA	9.3	8.2	2.5
Adjudicated	0.1	0.1	0.0
Acknow. as Marital Child	14.2	7.8	0.0
All Case Types	4.1%	4.2%	1.2%

*Vital Records was the source of non-marital birth type.

reflects the general expansion of paternity establishment to a greater percentage of the state's nonmarital children. Some of the children without fathers who do not appear in KIDS are possibly cases in which the mother doesn't perceive a need for child support, and/or wants no involvement with the father of the child (including domestic violence cases, and an unknown percentage of mothers who are impregnated by artificial insemination). Also, in a very small number of cases, the child, the mother, or the father may have died, precluding the need or the ability to establish paternity. And finally, in some of these cases, the parents may have married in the weeks or months following the birth of the child.

Although we cannot know the total number or percentage of parents who were unmarried at the birth of their child and subsequently marry after their child's birth without examining and matching marriage records, the second panel in Table 5 offers a bit of insight into this possibility. The panel shows the percentage of Vital Record nonmarital birth children who appear in KIDS at a later date as "marital" children. In these cases, the parents married after the birth of the child but later separated, and many were divorced. The 1997 birth cohort is the most relevant, as the greatest amount of time has passed for these events to have occurred. After 10 years, 9 percent of the VPA births and about 5 percent of children with no legal father identified on the birth record appear in KIDS as marital children. Nationwide in the mid-1990s, approximately one-half of first marriages with a child at marriage dissolve within 10 years (Bramlett and Mosher, 2002, p. 55). If a similar fraction of VPA parents who marry also divorce within 10 years, then this might indicate that another 9 percent of 1997 VPA parents married and remain married, and that around 5 percent of the 1997 children with no legal father identified on the birth records may be living with still-married parents. These numbers would be in addition to the parents (3 percent of the 1997 birth cohort) who married and then filed the paperwork to alter their child's birth record to read "acknowledged as a marital child." This totals to a rough estimate of about 13 percent of non-marital parents who married after the 1997 birth of their child.¹⁵

¹⁵This estimated percentage is roughly consistent with work from the Fragile Families project, which shows that, overall, about 10 percent of the new parents in that sample married within the child's first year. Parents who

To further analyze cases in which the child does not appear in the KIDS system, we focus on the 2000 birth cohort. In that cohort, 21 percent of the VPAs and 25.3 percent of children with no legal father have not appeared in KIDS after 7 years. Table 6 further describes these two sets of cases by demographics of the mother as recorded by Vital Records at the time of the child's birth. Education is the most telling characteristic: at each increase in educational level, the percentage of cases not appearing in the KIDS system increases. Only 11 percent of VPA mothers with less than a high school education remained out of the KIDS system, whereas over 48 percent of those with 4 or more years of college remained out of KIDS. For children who have no legal father identified, about 17 percent of mothers with less than a high school education remained out of KIDS, compared to nearly 53 percent of mothers with 4 or more years of college. The higher the educational level of the mother, the more likely she is to earn a higher wage. These findings are consistent with the idea that mothers with relatively high incomes may be able to afford to raise their children without formal child support payments from the father and may want to remain independent of the father by not seeking financial help through the state's child support system. These may also be more "marriageable" mothers, some of whom have married the father of their child, and thereby remain out of the KIDS system.

The data on maternal age shown in Table 6 are consistent with these hypotheses. Older mothers might be more likely to marry and, because of increased opportunity for prior education and work experience, earn higher wages. (Also, older mothers are more likely paired with older fathers, who might provide more informal child support than younger fathers.) As was true for education, age of mothers and fathers is correlated with lack of entry into the KIDS system: the older the parents, the less likely the child is to appear in KIDS.

Racial and ethnic groups also show some difference in their rates of entry into the KIDS system, and these groups are roughly consistent with what we might expect about education and income and the

were cohabiting (about 63 percent of the parents) were more likely to marry—at the rate of 15 percent to 17 percent. (See Carlson, McLanahan, and England, 2004; Osborne, 2005; Waller and McLanahan, 2005.)

Table 6
Demographics of Parents of Children Not in the KIDS System by 2007

	2000 Birth Cohort Percent Not in KIDS	
	VPA's	No Legal Father
Mother's Education:		
Less than High School	11.2%	16.7%
High School	19.0%	26.5%
Some College	28.5%	35.9%
4 or more Years of College	48.4%	52.7%
Mother's Age:		
12-17	7.8%	13.4%
18-20	10.2%	19.4%
21-24	19.3%	25.1%
25-29	27.7%	29.1%
30-34	33.3%	36.3%
35 and older	38.6%	35.8%
Father's Age:		
12-17	4.7%	N/A
18-20	9.7%	N/A
21-24	15.7%	N/A
25-29	23.0%	N/A
30-34	30.4%	N/A
35 and older	32.4%	N/A
Mother's Racial/Ethnic Group:		
Native American	13.8%	5.9%
Hispanic	22.0%	21.9%
African-American	5.4%	11.5%
White	23.4%	34.2%
Hmong	9.5%	N/C
Other Asian	26.8%	24.4%
Mother's Residential Location:		
Milwaukee County	16.5%	17.3%
Other Large Urban County	21.2%	26.1%
Small Urban County	18.3%	20.6%
Rural County	21.5%	32.1%
Out of State	82.2%	77.2%
Overall	20.8%	25.3%

Source: Demographics of parents recorded on birth certificate of child born in 2000.

N/A: Not available since legal father has not been established.

N/C: Not calculated due to small cell size.

ability to care for a child without economic assistance from the father or the state: white mothers, and non-Hmong Asian mothers are less likely to appear in the KIDS system than Native American or African American mothers.

Geographic differences also appear. Among children with no legal father, a larger percentage of mothers with rural addresses fail to appear in KIDS (32 percent). This may have less to do with education, age, or income than with a personal, cultural, or religious-based desire to remain independent and outside the state's legal and welfare systems, or perhaps with a greater tendency to marry the father of the child. Mothers who listed an out-of-state address at the time of the birth are, as expected, much less likely to be found in the Wisconsin KIDS system.

Child Support Outcomes

With this understanding of differences in the background characteristics of paternity types and between cases that do and do not become part of the child support enforcement system, we now turn to the relationship between paternity types and child support outcomes. Table 7 shows the likelihood of a child support order, the likelihood of payment, and the average amount of payment for fathers in the child support enforcement system, with no controls for observable demographic differences.

Confirming findings from our previous paper, the top panel of Table 7 shows that, in all cohorts, fathers with adjudicated paternity are 2 to 3 times more likely to have a child support order than VPA fathers. This is probably because VPA fathers are less likely to be subject to child support enforcement—either because they are married to or living with the mother, or because VPA mothers have better economic standing and are therefore less likely to be using public assistance programs that would subject them to IV-D enforcement.

Given the lower likelihood of an order for VPA fathers, the next two panels show child support payments among fathers who had an order. The VPA fathers with an order are 10 to 15 percentage points more likely to make a payment on their order within each year, and the amount they pay is anywhere from 50 percent to 75 percent more than adjudicated fathers pay. In addition, the higher levels of child support

Table 7
Child Support Outcomes, by Birth Cohort and Paternity Type

	1997 Cohort		2000 Cohort		2005 Cohort	
	VPA	Adjudicated	VPA	Adjudicated	VPA	Adjudicated
Proportion with Child Support Order Anytime in Year:						
Year 1	0.11	0.31	0.16	0.36	0.16	0.45
Year 2	0.19	0.46	0.25	0.56		
Year 3	0.24	0.54	0.31	0.64		
Year 4	0.27	0.59	0.34	0.68		
Year 5	0.30	0.64	0.36	0.69		
Year 6	0.33	0.68	0.37	0.69		
Year 7	0.34	0.68				
Year 8	0.35	0.68				
Year 9	0.36	0.68				
Probability of any Child Support Payment for those with an Order:						
Year 1	0.75	0.64	0.81	0.66	0.84	0.67
Year 2	0.87	0.75	0.86	0.71		
Year 3	0.90	0.78	0.86	0.70		
Year 4	0.90	0.76	0.87	0.69		
Year 5	0.88	0.73	0.88	0.72		
Year 6	0.89	0.72	0.88	0.72		
Year 7	0.88	0.72				
Year 8	0.88	0.73				
Year 9	0.89	0.74				
Average Amount of Child Support Payments for those with an Order (\$ 2005):						
Year 1	\$1,098	\$759	\$1,248	\$816	\$1,158	\$708
Year 2	2,147	1,647	1,996	1,432		
Year 3	2,526	1,798	2,197	1,455		
Year 4	2,793	1,756	2,355	1,432		
Year 5	2,819	1,772	2,429	1,512		
Year 6	2,926	1,765	2,500	1,555		
Year 7	3,038	1,767				
Year 8	3,112	1,799				
Year 9	3,160	1,833				

Note: All differences between VPA and adjudicated cases significant at $p < .01$

payment that are associated with VPA fathers are persistent over time, and appear to increase as the child ages. The economic benefits for the VPA mothers and children are substantial from the beginning, and long-lasting.

However, it is possible that the differences in child support payments stem from the economic and demographic differences between VPA and adjudicated fathers, not from the VPA process. We next use a multivariate model to control for differences that can be observed in our data—economic and demographic differences.

Multivariate Models

Tables 8a to 8c indicate the results of multivariate models that show the relationship between paternity types and the three child support outcomes: having a child support order (Table 8a), making a payment on the order (Table 8b), and the dollar amount paid (Table 8c). As in the previous table, these outcomes are shown only for cases subject to child support enforcement and therefore appearing in the KIDS system. We exclude cases in which no father of the nonmarital child has been determined.

Full model results are shown for the 2000 birth cohort cases at the 1st and 5th years after the child's birth.¹⁶ The models control for observable demographic and economic differences among cases, and allow us to assess whether the relationship between voluntary paternity status and the child support outcomes remains significant when demographic and economic differences are held constant. As we have noted, voluntary and adjudicated paternity cases differ in a number of ways, and the variables in the model control for as many of the differences as possible. In addition to the characteristics of the case that are available from the vital records data (parent's age and mother's education, race, and location), we also are able to use information from the KIDS, CARES, and UI data to control for other potential differences. Therefore we add measures of whether the child had siblings (including whether the child was a twin), along with measures of the father's wages (as reported to the UI system) in the year before the child's

¹⁶Full model results were run for all 3 birth cohorts across all available years of outcomes, and generally found similar relationships between background characteristics and outcomes, so we present the year 2000 cohort results for 1 year and 5 years after birth as representative.

Table 8a
Logistic Regression on Having a Child Support Order, Year 2000 Birth Cohort

	Child Support Order, Logistic					
	First Year After Birth			Fifth Year After Birth		
	B	S.E.	P-Value	B	S.E.	P-Value
Paternity Type (Adjudicated omitted)						
VPA	-1.030	0.044	<.0001	-0.858	0.039	<.0001
Acknow. of marital child	-1.212	0.193	<.0001	-1.977	0.175	<.0001
Mother's Age (18–20 omitted)						
Under 15	-0.256	0.464	0.5802	-0.409	0.421	0.3320
15–17	-0.341	0.088	0.0001	0.374	0.081	<.0001
21–25	-0.150	0.049	0.0024	-0.160	0.046	0.0005
26–30	-0.368	0.068	<.0001	-0.232	0.061	0.0001
31–35	-0.283	0.091	0.0018	-0.182	0.081	0.0241
36 or older	-0.314	0.122	0.0098	-0.069	0.106	0.5135
Mother's Race (White omitted)						
American Indian	-0.357	0.116	0.0021	0.057	0.106	0.5886
Hispanic	-0.267	0.146	0.0684	-0.147	0.114	0.1972
Black	-0.117	0.064	0.0683	0.371	0.058	<.0001
Hmong	-0.865	0.343	0.0116	-0.939	0.268	0.0005
Other Asian	-0.556	0.296	0.0599	-0.139	0.218	0.5259
Race missing	-7.649	114.300	0.9466	9.902	167.000	0.9527
Mother's Education (HS Deg. Omitted)						
It High School	-0.162	0.048	0.0008	-0.121	0.045	0.0068
Some College	0.073	0.058	0.2080	0.141	0.053	0.0078
4 or more Years of College	-0.061	0.128	0.6362	-0.108	0.109	0.3225
Education missing	-0.910	0.560	0.1045	-0.312	0.418	0.4553
Location (Small Urban Counties omitted)						
Milwaukee resident	-0.760	0.093	<.0001	-0.056	0.083	0.4984
Large Urban area	0.330	0.079	<.0001	0.221	0.073	0.0026
Rural area	0.208	0.073	0.0041	-0.020	0.068	0.7638
Out-of-State	-2.513	1.031	0.0148	-0.223	0.426	0.6000
WI border county resident	-0.124	0.064	0.0504	0.057	0.059	0.3350

(table continues)

Table 8a, continued

	Child Support Order, Logistic					
	First Year After Birth			Fifth Year After Birth		
	B	S.E.	P-Value	B	S.E.	P-Value
Hospital Size/Type (Medium omitted)						
Home birth	-1.625	0.615	0.0082	-0.653	0.366	0.0748
Very small hospital	-0.190	0.092	0.0382	-0.163	0.087	0.0607
Small hospital	-0.148	0.074	0.0461	-0.034	0.071	0.6282
Medium large hospital	-0.415	0.076	<.0001	-0.235	0.071	0.0009
Large hospital	-0.087	0.085	0.3086	-0.209	0.080	0.0087
Very large hospital	-0.291	0.107	0.0068	-0.360	0.096	0.0002
Male child	0.027	0.039	0.4887	-0.066	0.036	0.0653
Twin/triplet birth	0.001	0.126	0.9918	0.078	0.116	0.5036
Siblings at birth (No Older Siblings omitted)						
Full siblings	-0.066	0.026	0.0102	0.011	0.023	0.6450
Half siblings, with mother	0.000	0.055	0.9981	0.186	0.052	0.0003
Half siblings, with father	0.286	0.053	<.0001	0.614	0.055	<.0001
Father's Earnings in Year Before Birth (\$10–\$20K omitted)						
Missing - No SSN	-1.823	0.170	<.0001	-1.878	0.114	<.0001
\$0	-0.461	0.069	<.0001	-0.371	0.062	<.0001
\$1–\$5000	-0.092	0.060	0.1271	-0.067	0.057	0.2369
\$5–\$10K	0.002	0.067	0.9710	0.099	0.065	0.1240
\$20–\$50K	-0.120	0.062	0.0504	-0.098	0.057	0.0850
\$50K plus	0.079	0.163	0.6293	-0.104	0.147	0.4784
Mother Received Food Stamps Prior	0.015	0.002	<.0001	0.006	0.002	0.0097
Mother Received W-2 Prior	-0.001	0.002	0.4978	-0.002	0.002	0.2723
Intercept	0.212	0.084	0.0114	0.967	0.080	<.0001

Table 8b
Logistic Regression on Father Making a Child Support Payment, Year 2000 Birth Cohort

	Child Support Payment if Order, Logistic					
	First Year After Birth			Fifth Year After Birth		
	B	S.E.	P-Value	B	S.E.	P-Value
Paternity Type (Adjudicated omitted)						
VPA	0.255	0.092	0.0056	0.404	0.071	<.0001
Acknow. of marital child	0.266	0.463	0.5658	0.034	0.427	0.9358
Mother's Age (18–20 omitted)						
Under 15	-0.720	0.834	0.3884	-1.200	0.576	0.0372
15–17	0.089	0.165	0.5899	0.149	0.109	0.1706
21–25	0.173	0.097	0.0741	-0.030	0.076	0.6894
26–30	0.116	0.145	0.4238	0.006	0.106	0.9580
31–35	0.400	0.201	0.0463	0.030	0.148	0.8377
36 or older	0.514	0.278	0.0647	-0.039	0.197	0.8429
Mother's Race (White omitted)						
American Indian	-0.417	0.217	0.0548	-0.246	0.173	0.1539
Hispanic	-0.403	0.283	0.1542	-0.168	0.195	0.3895
Black	-0.532	0.120	<.0001	-0.635	0.085	<.0001
Hmong	-0.459	0.779	0.5557	-0.801	0.534	0.1334
Other Asian	0.944	0.834	0.2575	-0.179	0.404	0.6580
Race missing				7.781	206.300	0.9699
Mother's Education (HS Deg. Omitted)						
lt High School	-0.191	0.093	0.0408	-0.189	0.071	0.0077
Some College	0.137	0.123	0.2656	0.083	0.098	0.3949
4 or more Years of College	0.846	0.367	0.0210	0.368	0.260	0.1570
Education missing	-0.774	1.164	0.5061	-1.030	0.597	0.0848
Location (Small Urban Counties omitted)						
Milwaukee resident	-0.289	0.188	0.1233	-0.627	0.155	<.0001
Large Urban area	0.448	0.165	0.0066	0.021	0.145	0.8862
Rural area	0.287	0.148	0.0520	0.031	0.143	0.8306
Out-of-State	9.781	308.000	0.9747	-0.319	0.638	0.6164
WI border county resident	-0.466	0.125	0.0002	-0.024	0.115	0.8345

(table continues)

Table 8b, continued

	Child Support Payment if Order, Logistic					
	First Year After Birth			Fifth Year After Birth		
	B	S.E.	P-Value	B	S.E.	P-Value
Hospital Size/Type (Medium omitted)						
Home birth	-1.494	1.266	0.2379	-0.489	0.649	0.4510
Very small hospital	0.305	0.198	0.1243	0.204	0.193	0.2905
Small hospital	-0.121	0.151	0.4234	0.066	0.145	0.6503
Medium large hospital	0.002	0.159	0.9902	0.028	0.139	0.8410
Large hospital	-0.215	0.174	0.2147	0.024	0.147	0.8691
Very large hospital	-0.454	0.216	0.0354	-0.149	0.160	0.3529
Male child	-0.010	0.078	0.8974	-0.037	0.059	0.5318
Twin/triplet birth	-0.436	0.239	0.0681	0.453	0.192	0.0186
Siblings at birth (No Older Siblings omitted)						
Full siblings	0.009	0.051	0.8562	-0.127	0.034	0.0002
Half siblings, with mother	-0.186	0.102	0.0669	-0.180	0.074	0.0145
Half siblings, with father	-0.170	0.096	0.0766	-0.118	0.069	0.0887
Father's Earnings in Year Before Birth (\$10–\$20K omitted)						
Missing - No SSN	-1.622	0.347	<.0001	-2.136	0.215	<.0001
\$0	-1.644	0.136	<.0001	-1.313	0.100	<.0001
\$1–\$5000	-1.322	0.120	<.0001	-1.007	0.094	<.0001
\$5–\$10K	-0.652	0.137	<.0001	-0.291	0.113	0.0101
\$20–\$50K	0.228	0.152	0.1329	0.682	0.136	<.0001
\$50K plus	1.037	0.611	0.0895	1.202	0.522	0.0212
Mother Received Food Stamps Prior	0.000	0.005	0.9253	0.001	0.003	0.7203
Mother Received W-2 Prior	-0.001	0.004	0.6920	-0.001	0.002	0.7154
Intercept	1.807	0.171	<.0001	2.509	0.153	<.0001

Table 8c
OLS Regression on Amount of Father's Child Support Payments, Year 2000 Birth Cohort

	Amount Paid if Order, OLS					
	First Year After Birth			Fifth Year After Birth		
	B	S.E.	P-Value	B	S.E.	P-Value
Paternity Type (Adjudicated omitted)						
VPA	131.21	41.59	0.0016	240.47	45.17	<.0001
Acknow. of marital child	130.89	199.82	0.5125	99.17	281.21	0.7244
Mother's Age (18–20 omitted)						
Under 15	44.54	445.81	0.9204	-21.03	466.04	0.9640
15–17	118.36	85.39	0.1658	62.49	82.49	0.4487
21–25	73.06	46.29	0.1146	-64.47	52.48	0.2193
26–30	266.09	66.09	<.0001	117.58	71.40	0.0997
31–35	181.59	86.66	0.0362	155.73	95.34	0.1024
36 or older	277.59	117.21	0.0179	415.72	124.44	0.0008
Mother's Race (White omitted)						
American Indian	-206.41	109.76	0.0601	-521.13	119.06	<.0001
Hispanic	-147.32	147.10	0.3167	-340.55	145.07	0.0189
Black	-292.27	61.29	<.0001	-668.50	63.07	<.0001
Hmong	1155.65	365.11	0.0016	606.76	381.12	0.1114
Other Asian	218.33	305.67	0.4751	-153.98	284.67	0.5886
Mother's Education (HS Deg. Omitted)						
lt High School	-141.77	45.54	0.0019	-235.22	50.85	<.0001
Some College	183.00	54.07	0.0007	289.49	60.93	<.0001
4 or more Years of College	514.45	125.54	<.0001	646.07	137.44	<.0001
Education missing	-858.53	594.05	0.1485	119.97	479.69	0.8025
Location (Small Urban Counties omitted)						
Milwaukee resident	-283.94	89.60	0.0015	-268.25	96.27	0.0053
Large Urban area	28.72	75.22	0.7026	41.30	85.58	0.6294
Rural area	62.38	67.11	0.3527	-141.33	80.80	0.0803
Out-of-State	671.82	1170.69	0.5661	614.34	501.79	0.2209
WI border county resident	-220.75	59.21	0.0002	83.20	69.37	0.2304

(table continues)

Table 8c, continued

	Amount Paid if Order, OLS					
	First Year After Birth			Fifth Year After Birth		
	B	S.E.	P-Value	B	S.E.	P-Value
Hospital Size/Type (Medium omitted)						
Home birth	-848.24	675.46	0.2093	617.52	498.30	0.2153
Very small hospital	83.94	84.09	0.3182	417.72	104.50	<.0001
Small hospital	-52.73	67.74	0.4364	59.19	82.63	0.4738
Medium large hospital	-97.74	71.92	0.1742	-118.35	82.92	0.1535
Large hospital	-98.65	80.29	0.2193	-3.84	91.42	0.9665
Very large hospital	-92.62	106.02	0.3824	-205.93	108.01	0.0566
Male child	-22.45	36.58	0.5393	-1.51	40.51	0.9703
Twin/triplet birth	-52.58	118.20	0.6565	379.74	126.49	0.0027
Siblings at birth (No Older Siblings omitted)						
Full siblings	161.07	24.56	<.0001	139.58	25.96	<.0001
Half siblings, with mother	-43.33	50.37	0.3898	-186.07	54.75	0.0007
Half siblings, with father	-105.15	47.51	0.0269	-378.40	51.83	<.0001
Father's Earnings in Year Before Birth (\$10–\$20K omitted)						
Missing - No SSN	-607.39	189.09	0.0013	-1004.49	183.01	<.0001
\$0	-364.57	65.34	<.0001	-508.18	69.92	<.0001
\$1–\$5000	-512.67	55.07	<.0001	-725.90	62.53	<.0001
\$5–\$10K	-391.83	61.36	<.0001	-403.94	70.39	<.0001
\$20–\$50K	628.72	57.46	<.0001	967.28	66.22	<.0001
\$50K plus	2579.43	154.51	<.0001	3017.90	179.12	<.0001
Mother Received Food Stamps Prior	-4.18	2.27	0.0661	-4.51	2.32	0.0519
Mother Received W-2 Prior	1.10	1.93	0.5678	-0.01	1.92	0.9945
Intercept	1114.39	75.85	<.0001	2346.95	90.99	<.0001

birth and mother's receipt of public assistance from the Food Stamp and W-2 programs in the year preceding the birth.

The primary focus of these results is to determine if the VPA status is still associated with child support outcomes after controlling for other observable characteristics. The top line of Table 8a shows that, in this model, VPA cases have a lower likelihood of a child support order than adjudicated paternities, in both the 1st and 5th years, with only a small diminishment in the relationship in the 5th year. Among cases with an order, VPA status is associated with higher likelihoods of payment in both outcome years, and this association almost doubles by the 5th year. Similarly, the amount paid on orders is on average \$131 more for voluntary paternity cases in the 1st year and \$240 more in the 5th year, even when differences in demographic and background characteristics are held constant.

These results show that the differences in child support outcomes shown in Table 7 are not wholly the result of observable demographic and economic differences in the type of cases that utilize voluntary or adjudicated paternity. These observable differences reduce the estimated relationship between VPA status and any payment by approximately two-thirds, and between VPA status and amount of payment by about one-half. Although the variables in the model do not cover all possible ways in which these types of paternities may differ (and we are especially lacking measures of relationship quality), controlling for a wide array of demographic and economic characteristics provides greater confidence that the voluntary paternity method has a real effect on important child support outcomes, although there may still be unobserved differences that account for some of this relationship.¹⁷ These VPA associations do, however, remain persistent over time. The positive association between voluntary

¹⁷In particular, Mincy, Garfinkel, and Nepomnyaschy (2005) find from the Fragile Families surveys that the closeness of the parents' relationship at the time of the birth (cohabiting, romantically involved, just friends, or no relationship) is correlated with in-hospital voluntary paternity acknowledgment. They find that VPAs are, in turn, correlated with both increases in father involvement with the child, and the provision of child support, within the child's 1st year of life. They acknowledge, however, that this measure of "father commitment" may be driving both the type of paternity establishment and later father involvement. In our research for this paper, using administrative data sources, we, of course, do not have measures of "father commitment" or "parents' relationship" at the time of the child's birth. The only hint of the parent's relationship in the data that we have available is whether the parents have other children together. In these cases, the fathers do pay significantly higher amounts of child support.

paternity acknowledgment and having a child support order declines slightly by the 5th year after the child's birth, and the positive associations with making a payment and the amount paid actually grows stronger by the 5th year. This persistence may mean that the VPA process itself has long-lasting effects on the nonresident father's behavior, or it may suggest that there are intrinsic unmeasured differences between the cases using each type of paternity establishment that continue to affect the father's child support performance.

The models shown in Tables 8a to 8c also include cases in which a later acknowledgment of a marital child (marrying after the birth of nonmarital child) occurred. Although these cases have even lower rates of child support orders than do VPA cases, there is no significant relationship between later marital acknowledgment cases and child support payments. This partly stems from the small number of cases that establish a child's paternity in this manner.

The purpose of this report is not to examine all of the associations between the background characteristics in the model and the child support outcomes. Still, the associations shown in Tables 8a to 8c generally fit expectations: child support outcomes are worse for most mothers without a high school degree, for minorities, and for those living in Milwaukee County; having prior half-siblings increases the chances of having an order but reduces the chances and amounts of payments, as do low levels of father's earnings.

Table 9 presents the associations between VPA status and child support outcomes for all of the cohorts and across all observed time frames, controlling for these demographic characteristics. The association between VPA status and having an order is negative and significant regardless of cohort or year of observation. This association declines slowly over the first 6 years, in both the 1997 and 2000 cohorts (although somewhat more slowly in the 2000 cohort) but drops more steeply in the 7th through 9th years of the 1997 cohort.

The positive relationship between VPA status and making a payment (among those cases with an order) increases across the cohorts and over time. This relationship is not significant in the first few years for the 1997 birth cohort, probably because the VPA process tended to happen later for this cohort and

Table 9
Multivariate Model Results - Coefficient of VPA Status by Birth Cohort and Years since Birth

	1997 Birth Cohort			2000 Birth Cohort			2005 Birth Cohort		
	B	S.E.	P-Value	B	S.E.	P-Value	B	S.E.	P-Value
Logit Model of Having a Child Support Order									
Year 1	-1.110	0.055	<.0001	-1.030	0.044	<.0001	-1.154	0.0408	<.0001
Year 2	-0.995	0.048	<.0001	-1.082	0.040	<.0001			
Year 3	-0.890	0.046	<.0001	-0.948	0.039	<.0001			
Year 4	-0.855	0.045	<.0001	-0.910	0.039	<.0001			
Year 5	-0.811	0.045	<.0001	-0.858	0.039	<.0001			
Year 6	-0.761	0.045	<.0001	-0.803	0.039	<.0001			
Year 7	-0.695	0.045	<.0001						
Year 8	-0.610	0.045	<.0001						
Year 9	-0.549	0.045	<.0001						
Logit Model of Making A Child Support Payment for those with an Order:									
Year 1	0.076	0.119	0.5229	0.255	0.092	0.0056	0.447	0.0852	<.0001
Year 2	0.210	0.115	0.0687	0.258	0.083	0.0019			
Year 3	0.237	0.110	0.0320	0.316	0.073	<.0001			
Year 4	0.326	0.106	0.0021	0.456	0.072	<.0001			
Year 5	0.286	0.096	0.0029	0.404	0.071	<.0001			
Year 6	0.321	0.093	0.0005	0.426	0.072	<.0001			
Year 7	0.265	0.091	0.0036						
Year 8	0.226	0.090	0.0119						
Year 9	0.308	0.092	0.0008						
OLS Model of Child Support Payment Amount for those with an Order (\$ 2005):									
Year 1	95.38	57.41	0.0967	131.21	41.59	0.0016	162.66	33.18	<.0001
Year 2	-68.25	72.32	0.3453	-31.50	48.42	0.5154			
Year 3	19.13	68.66	0.7806	137.13	46.39	0.0031			
Year 4	228.18	63.16	0.0003	278.96	44.40	<.0001			
Year 5	187.56	62.01	0.0025	240.47	45.17	<.0001			
Year 6	286.51	61.19	<.0001	243.99	45.42	<.0001			
Year 7	374.55	68.89	<.0001						
Year 8	415.46	64.81	<.0001						
Year 9	408.61	65.95	<.0001						

Note: Models include all explanatory variables shown in Tables 8a–8c.

left less time in the 1st year for an order to be in place. But the relationship with making a payment increases in years 3 and 4 and then generally remains steady and significant after that. Similarly for the 2000 cohort, the association with payment rates increases until the 4th year and then remains higher. For the 2005 cohort, the association with payment starts as high as is ever achieved in the other cohorts.

Payment amounts show the same trend as payment probabilities, with the difference in the amounts paid increasing over time for both the 1997 and 2000 cohorts. A comparison of the 1st year of each of the 3 cohorts shows that initial differences in payment amounts have increased in each successive cohort.

These trends seem to show that the positive relationships between VPA status and child support payments have been getting stronger across time and are persistent over the life of the child. While this type of analysis does not allow us to say that the expansion of the VPA program has directly caused all of the improved child support outcomes, the relationship between the two appears strong and continuing.

Voluntary Paternity Establishment and Child Placement

Voluntary paternity establishment appears, then, to have a robust and long-lasting association, which may or may not be causal, with the financial resources that a father provides to his nonmarital child. It is also important to understand whether there may be a relationship between paternity types and fathers' participation in childrearing. The finding that voluntary paternity cases may be less likely to enter the child support enforcement system provides some indirect evidence suggesting that some VPA fathers are more likely to be married to or cohabiting with their child's mother, and therefore less subject to child support. Presumably, fathers who are living with the mother would have more involvement in their children's lives. However, marriage and cohabitation may not be the only reasons that VPA cases are less likely to appear in the child support system. For more explicit evidence on father involvement, we examine whether fathers of voluntary paternity children are more likely to have a shared physical placement order for the child.

Because data on child placement are not available in either the vital records or KIDS data systems, we turn to the Wisconsin Court Record Data (WCRD)—specifically paternity cases coming to court in 2000 and 2001 (Cohort 21). Brown, Cook and Wimer (2004) compared the placement outcomes for these voluntary paternity and adjudicated paternity cases at the time of the initial court order. The study found that a vast majority of cases in both groups had the child placed with the mother alone (88 percent for VPA cases and 93 percent for adjudicated). This confirms other research that has found that shared placement is predominantly used in divorce cases in Wisconsin and seldom in paternity cases. Still, Brown, Cook, and Wimer (2004) reported that the incidence of shared physical placement was significantly higher for the voluntary paternity cases (7.6 percent) than for adjudicated paternity cases (2.3 percent). This statistically significant difference remained even when controls for differences in background characteristics between the two types of paternity were utilized.

An important question is whether the increased likelihood of shared placement at initial placement for voluntary paternity cases persists as the children age. Table 10, therefore, examines placement of these children 6 years after the initial judgment. One relevant outcome is the proportion of cases that are placed with the father, either as a shared placement or through father-sole placement by the end of the 6th year after the initial order in 2000 or 2001. Table 10 indicates that the VPA children are significantly more likely to be placed at least part of the time with their father; in fact, the differences between VPA and adjudicated children increased over time, with almost 17 percent of VPA children in a shared or father-sole arrangement after 6 years, while only 8.6 percent of adjudicated paternities have one of these arrangements. A second relevant outcome is the percentage of children whose placement percentage with the father has increased. This includes children who moved from mother sole-custody to shared or father sole-custody, and also includes cases in which the parents have reconciled and are living together. Table 10 indicates that the VPA cases were more likely to increase placement time with the father, but the difference is not significant.

As with previous outcomes, any significant differences in child placement between voluntary and adjudicated paternities may result from differences in the background characteristics of the paternity

Table 10
Long-Term Placement Outcomes, Means by Paternity Type

	Shared or Father Placement, Six Years After Initial Placement	Increased Time With Father Since Initial Placement
VPA	0.1695	0.0960
Adjudicated Paternity	0.0863	0.0444
Difference	0.0830*	0.0520

Data: WCRD Cohort 21

* $p < .05$

types. Table 11 thus examines the relationship between paternity type and longer-term placement outcomes in a multivariate context. The estimated relationship between VPA status and placement with father remains positive and marginally significant ($p=0.077$). There is not a discernable relationship between VPA status and increased time with father once observable background characteristics are accounted for.

CONCLUSIONS

Federal and state policies promoting voluntary paternity acknowledgment programs have proceeded on the belief that less confrontational methods for claiming paternity and approaches to fathers at the very beginning of their children's lives will increase the number of paternity establishments and persuade more fathers to be involved in the upbringing of their children. Our previous research had found that voluntary paternity acknowledgment was associated with short-term improvements in the father's likelihood of paying child support and with father's assuming responsibility for at least some of the children's living arrangements, although we also found that the couples that use the voluntary paternity process were quite different from those that had their child's paternity determined by a court.

This report uses data from the vital records system to better examine how couples select into different types of paternity, and to see how the process has changed over time. We find large increases in the use of voluntary paternity between 1997 and 2000 and a shift towards voluntary paternity acknowledgment occurring earlier in children's lives, often within the 1st month. It appears that these gains have slowed, however; the VPA rates for the 2005 birth cohort are only slightly greater than those in the 2000 birth cohort.

We also find that approximately one-quarter of VPA cases are never referred to the state child support system (in contrast, nearly all adjudicated fathers are referred), possibly because VPA parents are more likely to marry or cohabit than those with adjudicated paternitys, and possibly because the better economic situation of VPA parents may mean that they are not subject to IV-D support enforcement.

Table 11
Long-Term Placement Outcomes, Logistics Regression

	Shared or Father Placement, Six Years After Initial Placement			Increased Time With Father Since Initial Placement		
	B	S.E.	P-Value	B	S.E.	P-Value
Intercept	-0.606	0.837	0.4694	-1.925	1.136	0.0901
VPA	0.597	0.337	0.0765	0.331	0.436	0.4470
Male Child	0.024	0.245	0.9227	0.365	0.338	0.2795
Siblings at birth (No Older Siblings omitted)						
Full Siblings	-0.262	0.425	0.5378	-0.109	0.650	0.8667
Half Siblings with Father	0.276	0.336	0.4112	0.095	0.443	0.8301
Half Siblings with Mother	-0.939	0.367	0.0106	-0.281	0.535	0.5992
Child's Age At Initial Placement (7–10 omitted)						
Under 7 years of Age	-0.750	0.288	0.0093	-0.168	0.371	0.6501
Over 10 years of Age	0.301	0.365	0.4099	-0.826	0.649	0.2027
Mother's Age (25 and under omitted)						
26–30	-0.639	0.474	0.1779	-1.152	0.561	0.0399
31–35	-1.462	0.616	0.0177	-1.717	0.783	0.0284
36 plus	-1.020	0.658	0.1210	-1.418	0.862	0.0998
Age missing	-1.619	0.753	0.0315	-2.059	1.052	0.0504
Father's Age (25 and under omitted)						
26–30	0.412	0.620	0.5065	0.761	0.810	0.3477
31–35	-0.030	0.680	0.9654	0.481	0.894	0.5909
36 plus	0.154	0.704	0.8268	0.691	0.933	0.4593
Age missing	1.359	1.263	0.2818	1.551	1.671	0.3536
Mother's Earnings Before Initial Placement (\$5–\$10K omitted)						
\$0–\$5K	-0.010	0.374	0.9782	0.123	0.485	0.8006
\$10–\$15K	1.018	0.323	0.0016	0.313	0.469	0.5045
\$15K or higher	1.273	0.451	0.0047	1.501	0.598	0.0121
Father's Earnings Before Initial Placement (\$5–\$10K omitted)						
\$0–\$5K	-0.955	0.337	0.0046	-1.130	0.492	0.0215
\$10–\$15K	-0.729	0.358	0.0417	-0.390	0.483	0.4191
\$15K or higher	-0.807	0.401	0.0439	-0.515	0.535	0.3356
Mother Received Food Stamps 1998	0.598	0.373	0.1088	0.142	0.527	0.7872
Mother On Medicaid 1998	0.728	0.356	0.0411	0.912	0.489	0.0622
Mother - African American	-0.406	0.433	0.3481	0.394	0.684	0.5649
Father - African American	-0.149	0.413	0.7194	-1.157	0.654	0.0768
Location (Urban Counties omitted)						
Milwaukee County	-1.000	0.350	0.0043	-0.561	0.457	0.2200
Rural county	0.027	0.456	0.9528	0.085	0.549	0.8774

Data: WCRD Cohort 21

Once brought to the attention of the child support system, VPA fathers are less likely to have a child support order imposed.

When cases do have a child support order, VPA parents are about 10 percent to 15 percent more likely to make payments, and they pay anywhere from 30 percent to 50 percent more. These differences persist and even increase as their children grow older. Even when the better economic situations and other differences in characteristics of the VPA couples are controlled for, the relationship with child support outcomes remains significant, albeit reduced in size to approximately a 5 percent increased likelihood of a payment and 15 percent to 25 percent increase in the amount paid.

Our previous research showed a statistically significant positive association between voluntary paternity acknowledgment and placement of the child at initial judgment. This report finds that the association holds over the first 6 years of the child's life but is only marginally significant in a model that controls for background characteristics.

Without a randomized experimental study, it is impossible to say with certainty that the increases in overall levels of paternity establishment, child support payments, and placements with fathers associated with VPA, are directly caused by the voluntary paternity acknowledgment program. However, the evidence presented in this report shows that the positive outcomes associated with voluntary paternity are significant, long-lasting and increasing over time, and that the outcomes remain even when we use statistical methods to account for other observable differences between cases.

Appendix 1

On Appendix Table 1 we present the dates associated with paternity establishment in the Vital Records birth data, and in the KIDS case record. This table is based upon the paternity type recorded by Vital Records, either VPA or adjudicated paternity, and the “event date” associated with that paternity type. The data presented is for children of the 2000 birth cohort who appear in both data systems.

The first column shows dates associated with VPAs. The hospital-based VPA process instructs parents to send the signed VPA form directly to Vital Records, where it is recorded and dated. This information is later accessed by the Bureau of Child Support. In many cases (45 percent) the date recorded in the KIDS system is the same date as that recorded by Vital Records. In a substantial number of cases, however (about 10 percent), the date recorded in Vital Records is up to a month earlier than the date recorded in KIDS, and in another 14 percent, the Vital Records date is more than a month prior to the KIDS date. And for some children there are several years difference between these dates. Many of the dates associated with VPAs in KIDS, therefore, are dates when the information was accessed by, or recorded in, KIDS, and cannot be considered an accurate date on which the parents signed or filed in the VPA form.¹⁸

There is another set of cases, about 11 percent, in which the VPA date is up to a month after the KIDS date. Another 3 percent of VPAs are dated more than a month later in Vital Records than in KIDS.

¹⁸Dates chosen from KIDS are one of four variables: DT_EVT_EFF from the TEVENT table, DT_PAR_DISPTN_

PF and DT_RLTN_EFF from the TPART_CASE table, and DT_PAR from the TCASE_EXT table. DT_EVT_EFF is only used when the CD_DISPTN_EVT is PENF, PHIO, PSAB, PSAC, PSCB, PSUP, PANC, PACC, PBRT, PCOS, DEFT, PAEJ, PCAB, PLEG, POJJ, or when CD_EVT_TYPE is PEST, PE01-PE29, or PATH, and paternity has clearly been established. DT_PAR_DISPTN_PF is used when CD_PAR_DISPTN_PF is PENF, PHIO, PSAB, PSAC, PSCB, PSUP, CPAT, PANC, PACC, PBRT, PCOS, DEFT, PAEJ, PCAB, PLEG, or POJJ. DT_RLTN_EFF uses the NCP’s value and is considered only when NCP is the father and paternity has clearly been established, and any of the above is not present.

If a child has information for more than one of the above fields, either within the context of one case or across multiple cases, then the fields are prioritized and the earliest date is selected. The fields are prioritized in the following manner: DT_EVT_EFF with CDDSPEV value, DT_PAR, DT_PAR_DISPTN_PF, and DT_EVT_EFF with CDEVTTY value.

Appendix Table 1
Paternity Type, and Dates in Vital Records, Compared to KIDS Paternity Dates

	2000 Birth Cohort	
	Vital Records Paternity Type	
	VPA	Adjudicated
Comparison of Dates (Children in VR and KIDS):		
VR date earlier than KIDS date:		
3–8 years prior	2.8%	0.6%
1–2 years prior	2.0	0.3
7–12 months prior	2.1	0.3
1–6 months prior	7.1	0.3
7–30 days prior	4.6	0.2
1–6 days prior	5.5	0.1
VR and KIDS same date	45.1	0.0
VR date is after KIDS date:		
1–6 days after	4.1%	0.7%
7–30 days after	7.1	25.1
1 month after	1.7	32.4
2 months after	0.6	19.4
3–6 months after	0.5	11.2
7–12 months after	0.3	3.6
1–2 years after	0.3	2.2
3–6 years after	0.4	2.5
Date Missing in KIDS		
Marital Child in KIDS	10.3%	
VPA not recorded in KIDS	4.3	
VPA recorded in KIDS, date missing	1.2	
VPA vacated in KIDS due to negative blood test	0.04	
Adjudication not recorded in KIDS		0.6%
Adjudication recorded in KIDS, date missing		0.5
Total Percentage	100.0%	100.0%
Total N	6,875	7,461
VPA recorded in KIDS, but not in Vital Records	(N=27)	
Adjudication recorded in KIDS, but not in Vital Records		(N=400)

Since the VPA process also authorizes child support agencies to collect signed VPA forms by the parents, the Bureau of Child Support records these VPAs in KIDS before sending the information to Vital Records for processing in that system.

Another set of children appear in both data systems, but the date of VPA is missing in KIDS. This usually occurs when the child is classified as a “marital” child, and a paternity date is therefore not relevant. Over 10 percent of the vital record-identified VPA children appear, in fact, in the KIDS data system as “marital” children. This situation can happen if the parents sign and file a VPA form with Vital Records, then marry, but do not fill out the paperwork necessary to record their children as “acknowledged as a marital child.” It is when these parents later separate and begin divorce proceedings that the child appears in KIDS, but is recorded there as a “marital” child. This suggests that a substantial number of children who do not appear in the KIDS system may be living with parents who married after the child’s birth, but who have not filed acknowledgment-as-marital-child paperwork. Without access to marriage records, we do not know the number or percentage of these cases.

Turning to the children who are recorded as “adjudicated” in the Vital Records data, we find that the vast majority of cases are dated later in Vital Records than in KIDS. This is to be expected, as KIDS records the information pertinent to paternity and child support from court records, but the date recorded in Vital Records is a later date on which the birth record was updated.

In summary, the event dates found in Vital Records are dates on which the child’s birth record was changed, and not the actual date of VPA filing, or of paternity adjudication. Dates extracted from KIDS appear to be a mix of record-keeping events, and actual adjudication dates. Our best estimates, therefore, of dates on which a legal father was identified must take into account the fact that the two data systems have different purposes, and that the flow of information between the two data systems differs, based on case type and circumstance. We believe, therefore, that the best estimate of when a father acknowledged or was determined to be the father of the child is the earlier of the two dates recorded in either KIDS or Vital Records.

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