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POVERTY

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

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# Trends in Wisconsin Placement Arrangements

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# Background in Wisconsin

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- Increasing legislative shift away from placement with mother.
- Current Law (as of May 2000)

*"The court shall set a placement schedule that allows the child to have regularly occurring, meaningful periods of physical placement with each parent and that maximizes the amount of time the child may spend with each parent, taking into account geographic separation and accommodations for different households."*

# Previous IRP Findings

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- IRP has been following Wisconsin child placement trends since the 1980s. Most recent report covered through 2001.
- Divorce cases have shown a continuing decline in sole mother placement and a growth in equal-shared placement.
- Paternity cases have retained a near exclusive use of sole mother placement

# Data

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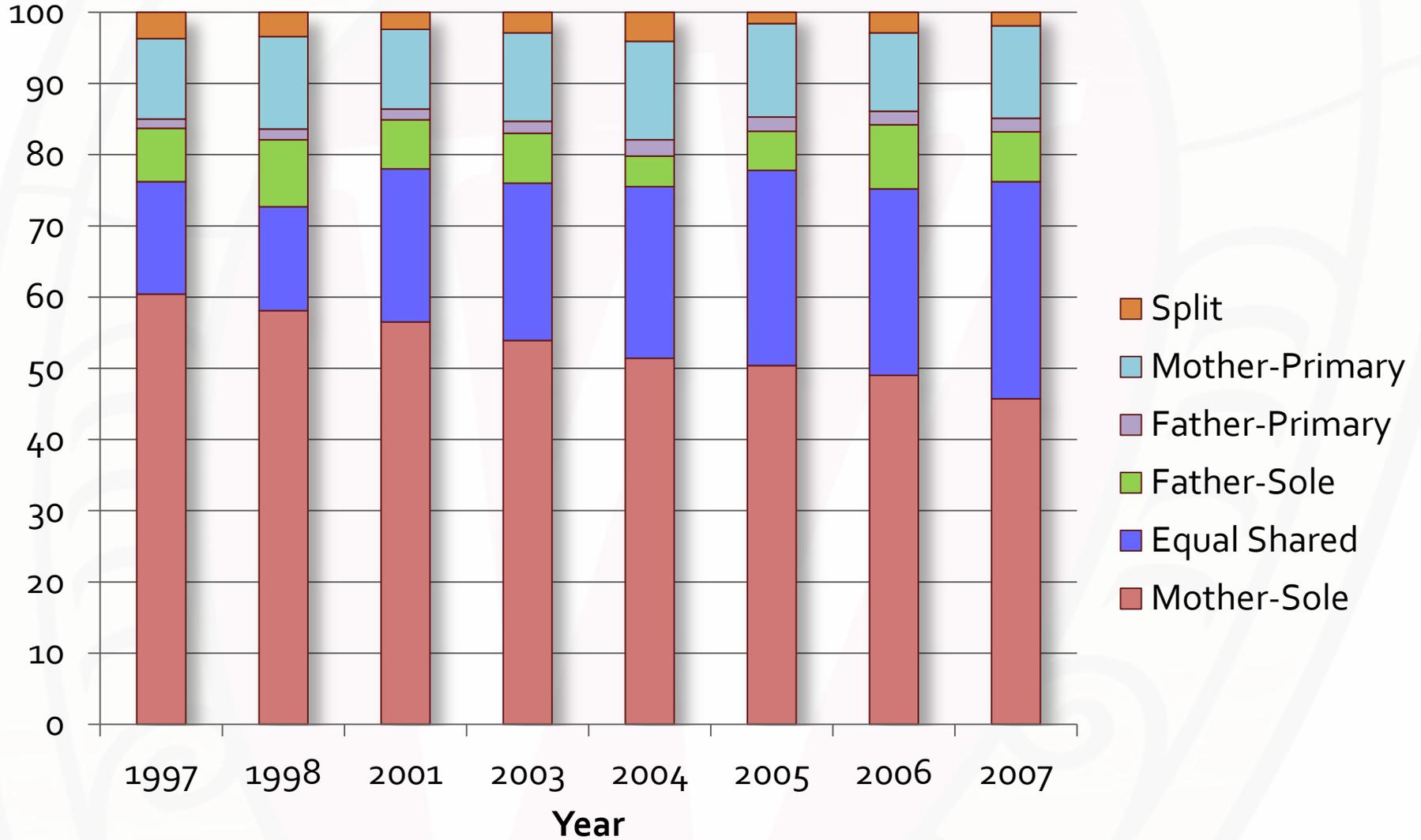
- Placement Arrangements not recorded in KIDS
- Wisconsin Court Record Data
  - Unique set of records from child support relevant court cases collected by IRP
  - Probabilistic sample from 21 Wisconsin counties
  - Includes placement arrangements, case characteristics, parental and child demographics, matched to other administrative data

# Determining Placement

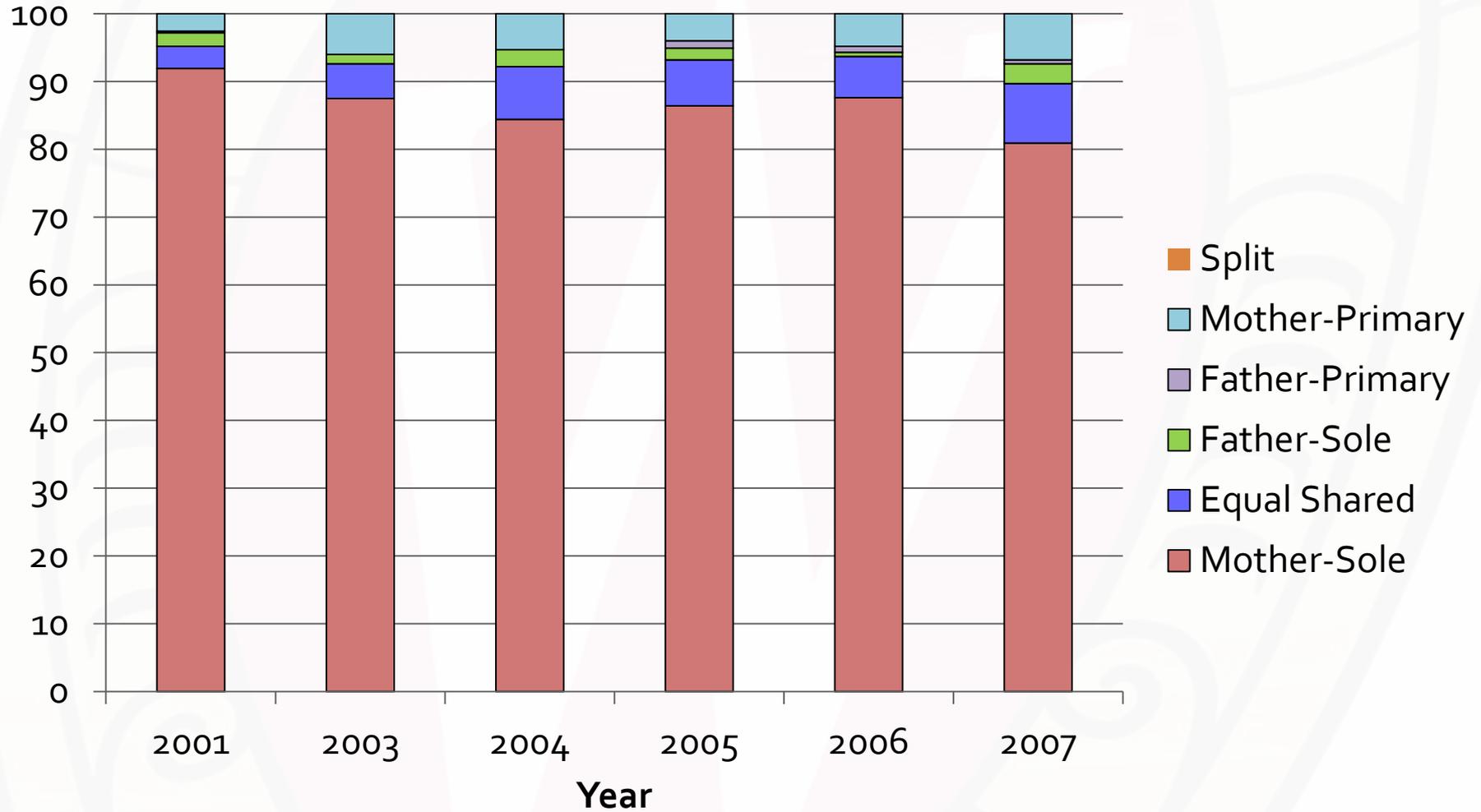
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- Placement arrangements at final divorce decree, paternity establishment, or first action (voluntary paternity cases)
- Categories relevant to child support guidelines
  - Sole placement: over 75% of time with parent
  - Shared primary placement: 51%-75% with parent
  - Equal shared placement: 50% with each parent
  - Split placement: children placed differently

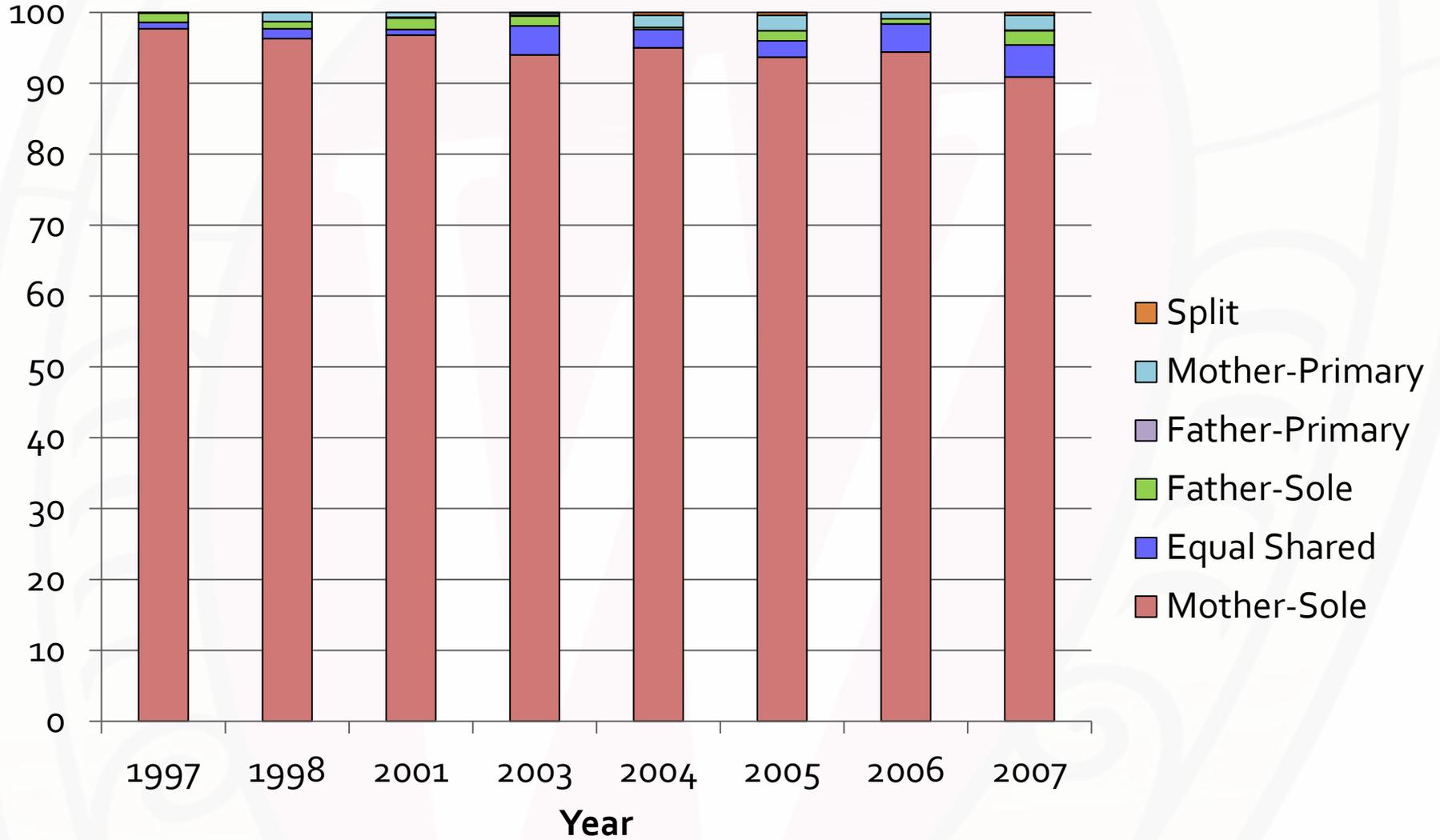
# Placement in Divorce Cases



# Placement in Voluntary Paternity Cases



# Placement in Adjudicated Paternity Cases



# Characteristics Associated with Placement Arrangements

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- In divorce cases:
  - Equal shared placement is more likely for
    - Overall higher income parents
    - Income of parents are more similar
    - Parents are living close together
  - Mother sole placement more likely when
    - All children are girls
    - Only mother is represented by a lawyer
  - Some associations shift over time
    - In the late 1990s, older (teen) children were less likely to be placed with mother alone, but no longer
    - Older parents/longer marriages were also associated with some father placement.
    - Milwaukee and some other urban counties have not seen the same shift to equal-shared placement seen in the rest of the state

# Characteristics Associated with Placement Arrangements

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- In paternity cases:
  - Shared placement is growing but still small percentage so associations are less notable, but quite similar to divorce cases:
    - Higher and similar incomes associated with shared placement
    - Parents living close together associated with shared placement
  - County differences with slower shifts to shared placement in Milwaukee, and some other urban counties.

# Conclusions

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- Previous observed trends in divorce cases continue:
  - Growth in equal shared placement (up to 31%)
  - Decline in mother sole placement (down to 46%)
  - Little overall change in other categories.
- Mother sole placement still predominant but used somewhat less frequently in paternity cases
  - Down to 91% in Adjudicated, 81% in VPA
- Shared placement associated with parental and case characteristics
- Slower shift to shared placement in some counties

# Policy Implications

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- Placement arrangements important determinant of child support order
  - Shared placement provisions in guidelines
  - Differences in use of guidelines by placement
- Role in overall declines in child support orders
- Affects on resources available to mothers
- Questions on how shared placement works in practice