



**Institute for  
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Poverty**

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

**2018–2020 Child Support Policy Research Agreement Task 12:  
Changes in Placement after Divorce and  
Implications for Child Support Policy**

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## **BACKGROUND**

With high levels of divorce and cohabitation dissolution in recent decades, current estimates are that more than half of U.S. children will experience the break-up of their parents' relationship before they reach age 15 (Andersson, Thomson, and Duntava, 2017). When this occurs, the care of and responsibility for children is typically coordinated among both parents either via a cooperative arrangement or a legal agreement. Historically, mothers in the United States have been much more likely than fathers to be awarded sole placement (custody)<sup>1</sup> of children (Buehler and Gerard, 1995), although that appears to be changing, at least in some places. Using detailed court record data, Meyer, Cancian, and Cook (2017) have found that in Wisconsin, the proportion of parents sharing physical placement after divorce increased dramatically between 1988 and 2010, while the proportion of mothers with sole placement declined (and the proportion of fathers with sole placement remained the same).<sup>2</sup> For Wisconsin divorces filed in 2010, they find that fully 50 percent of all cases had a shared-placement arrangement (35 percent unequal-shared and 15 percent equal-shared), compared to only 12 percent of divorces filed in 1989 (7 percent unequal-shared and 5 percent equal-shared). They find that this increase does not appear to be due to changes in the characteristics of those divorcing but rather to changes in the norms and processes that surround placement determination (Cancian, Meyer, Brown, and Cook, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup>In this report we use the term “placement” and refer to placement as either sole or shared. Other terms for shared placement include “joint custody,” “shared custody,” or “shared care.” We use placement because it clearly communicates the decision about the child’s living arrangement, whereas custody can be ambiguous because it can mean either decision-making power (legal custody) or living arrangements (physical custody), and shared care could have many broader meanings beyond living arrangements.

<sup>2</sup>The proportion of paternity cases with shared placement has also increased over time, but at a much lower level (Chen, 2015).

While this rise in shared placement after divorce in Wisconsin is striking, the same level of shared placement has not been documented in national data. Based on the Current Population Survey (CPS), only 25 percent of all custodial parents in 2015 reported court-ordered “physical or legal joint custody” (Grall, 2018). While there has been growth over time—the comparable percentage in 2001 was 23 percent—the change has been relatively small. However, these percentages are not comparable to the Wisconsin percentages for four reasons. First, as we have just noted, they combine physical and legal arrangements. Second, these data are for all custodial parents, whereas the Wisconsin numbers are only for divorcing parents. Third, these numbers are based on parents who separated over many years, while the Wisconsin numbers are from recent divorces.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the unit of analysis in the Wisconsin data is a divorce case (so provides information on both parents), whereas the unit of analysis in the national data is a custodial parent (so no information on the other parent is included).<sup>4</sup>

Based on these national data, we have limited evidence about the extent to which a shared-placement arrangement after divorce has become more prevalent in recent years and how this care arrangement may differ across states. Whether children are likely to live primarily with their mothers or to share time with both parents is an important topic because father involvement

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<sup>3</sup>Some information can be gleaned from the sex of custodial parents in the CPS; parents who have substantial sharing might both claim to be custodial parents. The proportion of custodial parents who are mothers has remained quite similar over the past two decades – declining only slightly from 84 percent in 1993 to 80 percent in 2015 (Grall, 2018). However, these figures are based on responses to questions about children living in the household at the time of the survey interview, so they do not necessarily directly reflect placement arrangements. As a result, in this report we use the more explicit questions about whether a court has ordered joint custody, rather than trying to infer something from the sex of the custodial parent.

<sup>4</sup>Using custodial parents as the unit of analysis means that this approach to studying shared placement differs from the Wisconsin research. The analyses from Wisconsin divorces using the court record has typically considered three outcomes: mother sole, shared, and father sole. When the unit of analysis is the custodial parent, the only outcomes can be sole or shared, since if the other parent has sole placement, that nonresident parent would not be in the data. An additional difficulty in comparing the results is that in a single divorce with shared placement, both parents may report that they are custodial parents, leading to more divorced custodial parents with shared placement than there are shared-placement divorce cases. Thus, the results from the national data could be upwardly biased toward higher levels of shared placement.

after parental separation or divorce has been linked with better child and adolescent outcomes across a host of domains (e.g., Amato, 1994; Carlson, 2006; Jeynes, 2015).

In this report, we aim to provide new analyses about the patterns of shared placement in the United States and to use comparable data to determine whether Wisconsin has consistently higher rates of shared placement than other states and the United States as a whole. To accomplish this objective, we conduct three analyses. First we examine the national data to estimate the proportion of custodial parents that report having shared physical placement; we calculate this percentage for Wisconsin, for the United States as a whole, and for the five states with the highest number of divorce cases. We then examine the trend over time in Wisconsin and the other states, calculating the proportions of custodial parents with shared physical placement whose divorces occurred in various 5-year periods. Second, we explore the characteristics of cases most likely to have shared placement. This will help us examine whether any differences between Wisconsin and the other states are likely due to different characteristics related to divorce, different policies, neither, or both. Third, we examine the likelihood of child support orders and payments for parents reporting shared placement compared to sole placement.

## **DATA AND METHODS**

We use data over time and across individual states from the Child Support Supplement (CSS) of the Current Population Survey (CPS). First fielded in 1979, the CSS is a biennial survey that identifies households with children whose biological mother or father lives outside the household. Individuals are eligible to participate if they are age 15 or older and lived with their own children (under age 21) whose other parent is absent from the household. The CSS is intended to provide information about the characteristics of individuals who could be receiving child support payments to develop and maintain programs that further assist this population.

Information is available on the nature of legal and informal child support arrangements, financial assistance provided by the nonresident parent, the amount of child support due, the amount received, visitation rights, and health insurance coverage. This information complements data collected in the CPS Annual Social and Economic Supplement, fielded in March, which provides information about other income sources.

We use data from the CPS taken in April of survey years 1995 through 2015; this provides information about years 1994 through 2014 (but includes information about divorces that occurred at any time prior to the survey).<sup>5</sup> We examine all parents with a resident child who responded to the survey indicating that at least one of their resident children had a parent who was living outside the household. Because we are primarily interested in living arrangements after divorce, we include only ever-divorced custodial parents; this includes those who are currently divorced, separated, or remarried after having been divorced.<sup>6</sup> We calculate the proportion of these parents who report that they have shared placement, whether this differs by the year of divorce, and whether it differs by state. We sort the data by year of divorce, and given relatively small numbers of cases in any one year of the CPS, we pool divorce years into 5-year cohorts.

We use two main samples from the CPS. First, in our main sample for analyses over time, we include any divorced custodial parent of a minor child in all of the survey years we examine.<sup>7</sup> There were 32,221 ever-divorced custodial parents in these years; the majority of these custodial parents (80 percent) were mothers. Of these, 6,533 (20 percent) reported having

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<sup>5</sup>A major change in the survey occurred in 1994, making it difficult to compare to prior years.

<sup>6</sup>We also include custodial parents who remarried after a divorce and were subsequently widowed.

<sup>7</sup>This sample includes 8,044 ever-divorced custodial parents whose divorce date is missing in the data extract we use.

shared physical placement. Our second sample is recent divorces. We again focus on ever-divorced custodial parents, but limit the sample to those with divorces between 2010 and 2014. By time ordering, these are drawn only from the surveys fielded in April 2011, 2013 and 2015. This sample includes 1,352 ever-divorced custodial parents, of whom 340 (25 percent) reported having shared physical placement.

We use descriptive and multivariate methods to explore our questions of interest. We calculate the proportion of cases that report shared placement for Wisconsin, the nation, and five other states with the highest number of divorce cases. We describe states by two aspects of state policy related to shared placement: First, we use the year that “joint custody” laws were enacted, which we treat as the year in which shared placement was recognized (based on the state categorization in Halla, 2013). Second, we use information about the recent presumption of placement across states (based on determination by Custody X Change, 2018); in our multivariate models we combine this information into three categories for less than 25 percent, and 25–50 percent, or 50 percent. We estimate logistic regression models to assess how Wisconsin differs from the rest of the states (combined) in the likelihood of shared placement. We use a sequential modeling strategy, estimating three models, each of which predicts shared placement. In model 1, we include only an indicator variable for Wisconsin to set the baseline of whether shared placement is more common in Wisconsin compared to all other states. In model 2, we also include a range of variables about individuals and families to see if the likelihood of shared placement is still significantly different in Wisconsin than the other states once these characteristics are controlled. In Model 3 we also include policy variables in each state to explore the extent to which the difference in Wisconsin can be explained by policy, considering whether divorce happened after relative to before the time that shared placement was acknowledged in

policy (Halla, 2013) and the default arrangement for placement among the most recent divorce cohort (Custody X Change, 2018).

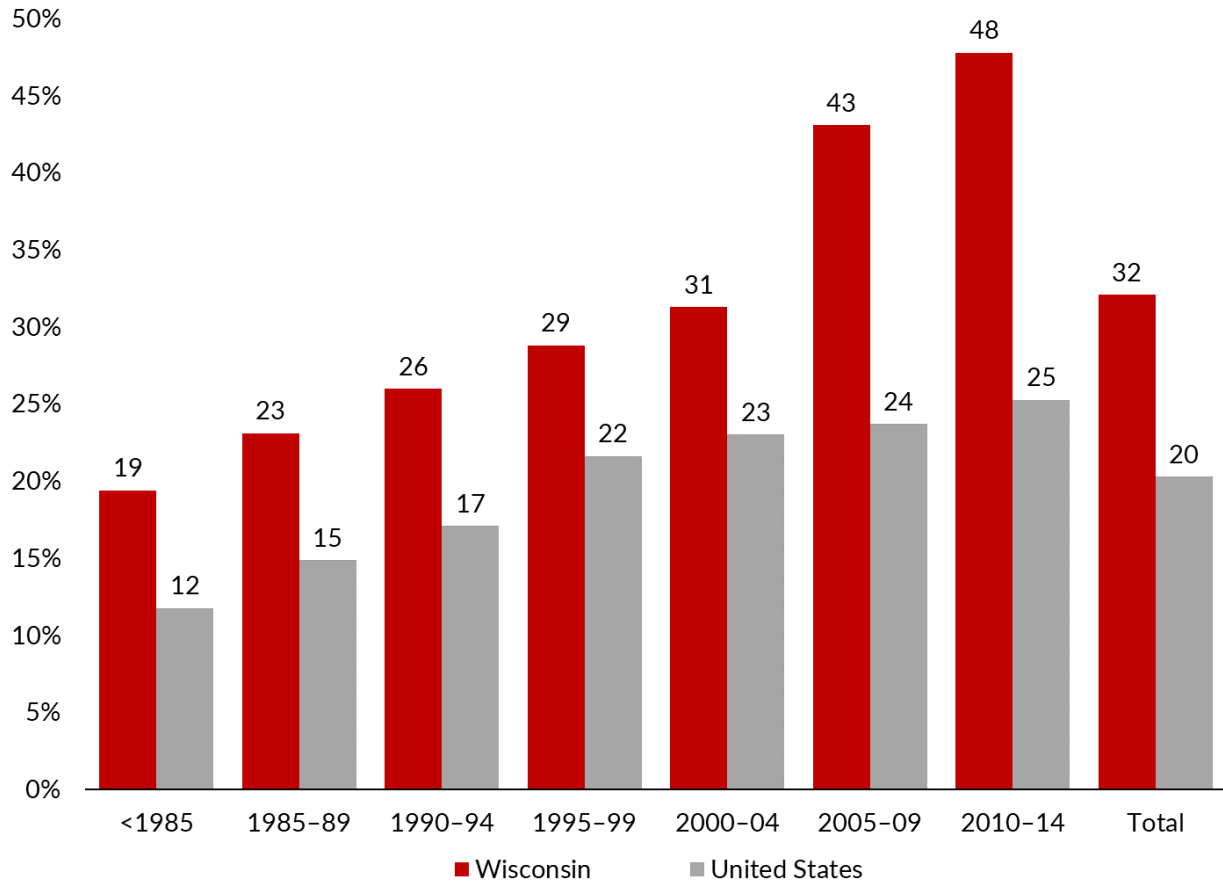
Finally, we conduct chi-square tests to evaluate whether child support outcomes vary by shared placement. These outcomes include whether child support was due, and, among those for whom it was due, whether child support was received, and whether at least 90 percent was received (full compliance).

## **RESULTS**

Our first objective was to evaluate the fraction of cases with shared placement, comparing Wisconsin to the national data and to the five other states with the highest number of divorce cases. We sort cases by divorce year, since legal agreements about child placement are adjudicated at the time of divorce, and few are subsequently updated. Therefore, the year of divorce is the best point at which to assess child placement arrangements.

Figure 1 shows that for the state of Wisconsin, the fraction of cases with shared placement rose from 19 percent for divorces before 1985, to 48 percent for divorces in 2010 through 2014. This corroborates the finding from Wisconsin court record data that about half of recent divorce agreements include shared placement (Meyer et al. 2017). (We note, however, that these data in the most recent period are less precise because they are based on a fairly small sample; while there are 72 Wisconsin couples who divorced in 2005–2009, there are only 23 who divorced between 2010 and 2014). The U.S. data also show a notable increase in shared placement over this period but at a lower level and a slower pace, rising from 12 percent of divorces involving shared placement before 1985 to 25 percent in 2010–2014. For all divorces we observe (based on respondents across the 1995 to 2015 surveys), 32 percent of Wisconsin cases included shared placement compared to 20 percent of national cases.

**Figure 1. Percent of Divorce Agreements that include Shared Placement, by Divorce Cohorts for Wisconsin and the United States**



Next, we evaluate the level and trend in shared placement for the five states with the highest number of ever-divorced custodial parents for the entire CPS sample over the entire time period. These states are: California, Texas, New York, Florida and Ohio. Figure 2 includes these five states plus Wisconsin and the United States as a whole. Wisconsin is a clear outlier when compared with the other five states; for the most recent divorce cohort (2010–2014), the level of shared placement in Wisconsin is at least twice that of any other state. The five states are much closer to the national average over the entire period (although they drop below in the most recent period). Also, the trend in the recent period is quite different between Wisconsin (where shared placement has gone up notably) compared to the five states. In Florida, New York and Ohio,



shared placement has gone down somewhat; in California, it has held steady. Only in Texas has there been an increase in the recent period, which continues their pattern of steady increases but at a lower level than in Wisconsin.

**Figure 2. Percent of Divorce Agreements that Include Shared Placement, by Divorce Cohorts for Five States with Largest Number of Divorces Plus Wisconsin and the United States**

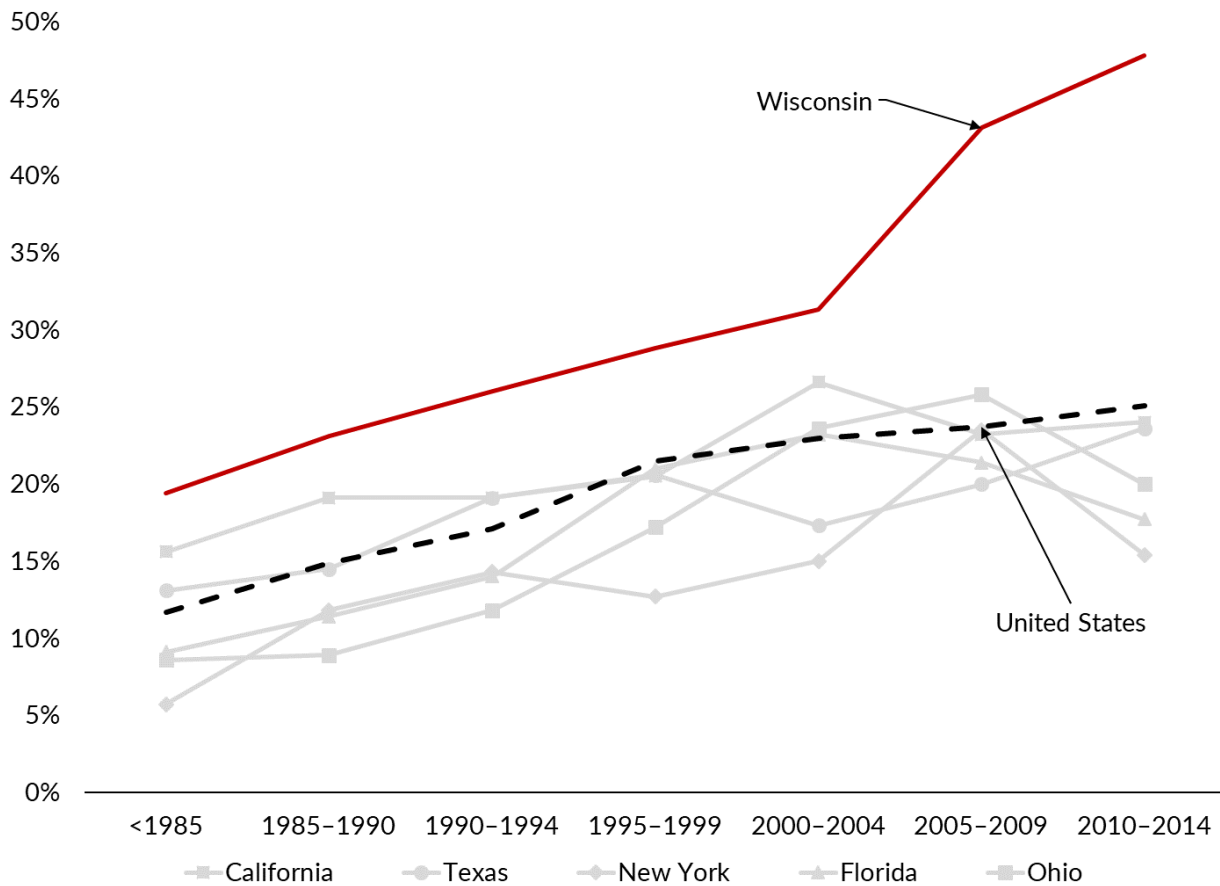


Table 1 shows shared placement policy and levels for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The first two columns show the year that shared placement was recognized and the default presumption of placement. The table also shows the number and percentage of cases that have shared placement (for the full sample and for the most recent divorce cohort), to begin to explore whether the history of shared-placement policy and the default placement arrangement

**Table 1: Shared Placement Policy and Level across States**

State	Year Shared Placement Recognized	Placement Default	Full Sample		Most Recent Divorce Cohort (Divorces 2010–2014)	
			<i>N</i>	Percent Shared	<i>N</i>	Percent Shared
Alabama	1997	33.7%	469	16.6%	15	26.7%
Alaska	1982	50.0%	493	25.2%	21	4.8%
Arizona	1991	50.0%	437	19.9%	21	28.6%
Arkansas	2003	28.1%	526	15.6%	31	22.6%
California	1979	32.8%	2,369	21.8%	104	24.0%
Colorado	1983	50.0%	576	28.3%	33	33.3%
Connecticut	1981	50.0%	454	22.2%	25	36.0%
Delaware	1981	50.0%	377	19.9%	23	13.0%
District of Columbia	1996	50.0%	202	11.9%	16	18.8%
Florida	1979	50.0%	1,407	18.3%	62	17.7%
Georgia	1990	23.5%	561	12.5%	28	14.3%
Hawaii	1980	31.0%	342	23.7%	16	25.0%
Idaho	1982	24.1%	499	30.3%	22	22.7%
Illinois	1986	23.1%	1,023	18.1%	37	27.0%
Indiana	1973	28.8%	528	17.8%	22	31.8%
Iowa	1977	28.3%	529	27.6%	23	34.8%
Kansas	1979	26.4%	531	31.5%	24	37.5%
Kentucky	1979	50.0%	535	19.8%	26	23.1%
Louisiana	1981	25.4%	346	19.4%	16	12.5%
Maine	1981	50.0%	565	32.4%	32	46.9%
Maryland	1984	26.1%	535	20.6%	38	34.2%
Massachusetts	1983	50.0%	533	18.4%	14	42.9%
Michigan	1981	27.1%	958	20.5%	32	37.5%
Minnesota	1981	50.0%	514	26.7%	20	30.0%
Mississippi	1983	23.0%	433	12.9%	12	25.0%
Missouri	1983	50.0%	555	22.5%	30	36.7%
Montana	1981	26.0%	401	23.4%	13	0.0%
Nebraska	1983	32.9%	455	19.6%	19	21.1%
Nevada	1981	50.0%	528	20.1%	24	16.7%
New Hampshire	1974	50.0%	522	27.6%	26	38.5%
New Jersey	1981	50.0%	614	16.1%	17	11.8%
New Mexico	1982	50.0%	419	25.3%	16	37.5%
New York	1981	30.4%	1,474	14.2%	52	15.4%
North Carolina	1979	27.9%	804	14.3%	34	23.5%
North Dakota	1993	50.0%	332	24.1%	9	11.1%
Ohio	1981	23.7%	1,145	16.4%	30	20.0%
Oklahoma	1990	22.4%	503	16.7%	23	26.1%
Oregon	1987	28.7%	467	22.1%	16	43.8%
Pennsylvania	1981	28.8%	953	14.8%	29	17.2%
Rhode Island	1992	24.0%	438	22.1%	17	29.4%
South Carolina	1996	27.8%	407	15.0%	24	12.5%
South Dakota	1989	23.6%	483	22.8%	15	33.3%
Tennessee	1986	21.8%	488	15.8%	18	27.8%
Texas	1987	33.0%	1,897	18.2%	89	23.6%
Utah	1988	26.2%	485	20.8%	19	0.0%
Vermont	1992	50.0%	417	27.1%	18	16.7%
Virginia	1987	50.0%	576	18.8%	30	30.0%
Washington	Not yet recognized	23.8%	601	21.3%	24	25.0%
West Virginia	Not yet recognized	50.0%	484	13.8%	12	8.3%
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>1979</b>	<b>50.0%</b>	<b>548</b>	<b>32.1%</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>47.8%</b>
Wyoming	1993	28.6%	483	23.0%	12	25.0%
Totals			32,221	20.3	1,352	25.1

**Notes:** Year Shared Placement Recognized from Halla (2013). Placement Default from Custody X Change (2018).

are related to the frequency of shared placement. The proportion of shared placement for the full sample ranges from 12 percent in Washington, D.C. to 32 percent in Wisconsin and Maine. For the most recent cohort of divorces (2010–2014), the proportion ranges from 0 percent in Montana and Utah to 48 percent in Wisconsin, although again we caution that the number of recent divorces is small, so these numbers are less reliable. With this caution, Wisconsin is the state with the highest level of shared placement, whether considered over the full period or only the most recent divorces.

Next, we categorize states by the two policy variables related to placement: year of enactment of a law that recognized shared placement (divided into three categories of 1981 or before, 1982–1990, and 1991 and later);<sup>8</sup> and the placement presumption in the recent period. In Table 2, we see that 10 states (Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Maine, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Wisconsin) had both an early statutory recognition of shared placement (1981 or before) and a default presumption of 50 percent placement. However, states with early recognition do not necessarily have 50 percent placement as the default arrangement: Ohio implemented early but has a default rate of less than 25 percent, and West Virginia, which has not yet explicitly recognized shared placement, has a default rate of half time with each parent. Most states fall somewhere in the middle when categorized by these two policy variables.

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<sup>8</sup>Brinig and Buckley (1998) provide the year of enactment of “joint custody” laws and show five states that had not enacted these statutes by 1993. Halla (2013) accepts these data and then updates them, adding the year of enactment for three of the remaining states (Alabama, Arkansas, and South Carolina) but does not report a year of enactment for Washington or West Virginia, presumably because he could not find a mention in the statutes. Thus, we infer from Halla that these states did not enact these laws by 2013, the year of publication of Halla’s paper; moreover, our search as of this writing does not find a mention, so we treat them as not having enacted laws by 2014 (the last year of our data).

**Table 2: States by Year of Recognition of Shared Placement and Default Placement Rate**

Year of Recognition	Default Placement Rate		
	50%	25%–50%	<25%
1981 or before	Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Maine, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Wisconsin	California, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Montana, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania	Ohio
1982–1990	Alaska, Colorado, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Mexico, Virginia	Maryland, Nebraska, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Wyoming	Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Mississippi, Tennessee
1991 onwards	Arizona, District of Columbia, North Dakota, Vermont	Alabama, Arkansas, South Carolina	Rhode Island
Not yet recognized	West Virginia		Washington

Table 3 shows the percentage of cases with shared placement by divorce cohorts for all states, in ascending order of the year that shared placement was recognized in state statutes. In general, the fraction of cases that have shared placement increases across divorce cohorts, but the starting level and pace of increase vary. Looking at the year of recognition of shared placement, periods in which the shared placement rate was at least 40 percent are highlighted. There is no obvious bunching near the top of the table, so there is no clear relationship between the early adopters and the level of shared placement.

Next, we turn to our multivariate estimates of having shared placement in a divorce agreement, shown in Table 4. For the full sample, Model 1 shows that divorce cases in Wisconsin were 10.2 percentage points more likely to have shared placement compared to all of the other states. When we add characteristics of the respondents and families in Model 2, the magnitude of the marginal effect declines slightly (to 8.3 percentage points) but remains highly statistically significant. Characteristics associated with a higher likelihood of having a shared-placement arrangement include parental age, education, income, being white, and being in any

divorce cohort later than pre-1985. Characteristics associated with a lower likelihood of having a shared-placement arrangement include being female, foreign born, and having a greater number of children. Child age does not show a consistent pattern. Model 3 adds a policy categorical variable, the divorce occurred before or after the shared placement recognition occurred. We anticipate that those divorced after a state has recognized shared placement would have a higher likelihood of experiencing shared placement themselves. The positive and statistically significant coefficient on this variable suggests that this is the case: being divorced after recognition of shared placement increases the likelihood of shared placement by 3.0 percentage points. Including this policy variable does not greatly change the coefficient for Wisconsin; divorces in Wisconsin are 8.0 percentage points more likely to have shared placement, even controlling for characteristics of families and policy history.

**Table 3: Percentage of Shared Placement by Year of State Recognition of Shared Placement and Default Placement**

State	Year Shared Placement Recognized	Divorce Year Cohort						
		<1985	1985–1990	1990–1994	1995–1999	2000–2004	2005–2009	2010–2014
Indiana	1973	10.0%	7.1%	18.5%	15.5%	20.6%	15.8%	31.8%
New Hampshire	1974	16.7%	21.9%	28.4%	28.1%	23.1%	38.5%	38.5%
Iowa	1977	9.7%	22.9%	23.3%	33.8%	26.8%	31.9%	34.8%
California	1979	15.6%	19.1%	19.1%	20.5%	26.6%	23.2%	24.0%
Florida	1979	9.1%	11.4%	14.0%	21.0%	23.2%	21.4%	17.7%
Kansas	1979	28.6%	26.7%	25.6%	41.4%	30.7%	38.8%	37.5%
Kentucky	1979	11.5%	13.6%	13.6%	21.0%	23.9%	19.0%	23.1%
North Carolina	1979	9.3%	9.9%	12.8%	12.2%	13.4%	22.7%	23.5%
Wisconsin	1979	19.4%	23.1%	26.0%	28.8%	31.3%	43.1%	47.8%
Hawaii	1980	10.0%	9.4%	21.9%	15.2%	28.8%	23.7%	25.0%
Connecticut	1981	7.1%	6.3%	22.0%	19.7%	20.0%	32.0%	36.0%
Delaware	1981	36.8%	22.6%	20.3%	19.2%	13.3%	17.1%	13.0%
Louisiana	1981	9.5%	22.2%	17.4%	26.7%	22.2%	22.9%	12.5%
Maine	1981	4.8%	21.4%	19.1%	37.2%	36.5%	44.8%	46.9%
Michigan	1981	12.3%	11.7%	15.9%	29.6%	24.4%	26.6%	37.5%
Minnesota	1981	13.6%	26.3%	24.1%	29.2%	22.1%	26.9%	30.0%
Montana	1981	11.1%	19.5%	31.0%	19.2%	29.5%	17.6%	0.0%
Nevada	1981	16.7%	11.6%	21.7%	22.1%	22.1%	23.8%	16.7%
New Jersey	1981	14.3%	9.6%	15.3%	19.3%	16.2%	14.0%	11.8%
New York	1981	5.7%	11.8%	14.3%	12.7%	15.0%	23.5%	15.4%
Ohio	1981	8.6%	8.9%	11.8%	17.2%	23.6%	25.8%	20.0%
Pennsylvania	1981	12.3%	10.0%	14.1%	13.6%	17.5%	16.5%	17.2%
Alaska	1982	13.3%	27.6%	13.4%	27.7%	30.1%	35.8%	4.8%
Idaho	1982	20.0%	32.5%	27.5%	29.8%	32.8%	33.9%	22.7%
New Mexico	1982	10.3%	22.0%	27.1%	25.5%	27.3%	23.1%	37.5%
Colorado	1983	9.1%	23.8%	28.9%	32.1%	30.9%	30.9%	33.3%
Massachusetts	1983	12.5%	10.0%	17.0%	21.5%	27.9%	15.2%	42.9%
Mississippi	1983	8.0%	11.4%	11.7%	7.7%	20.8%	14.3%	25.0%
Missouri	1983	7.1%	8.1%	22.7%	22.4%	18.3%	26.2%	36.7%
Nebraska	1983	6.3%	14.0%	10.4%	30.5%	25.8%	27.1%	21.1%
Maryland	1984	0.0%	11.1%	6.9%	16.4%	25.5%	20.6%	34.2%
Illinois	1986	9.3%	16.7%	10.8%	16.0%	18.9%	18.6%	27.0%
Tennessee	1986	17.6%	11.6%	11.6%	14.3%	13.8%	21.3%	27.8%
Oregon	1987	13.6%	15.4%	15.8%	25.4%	27.1%	27.1%	43.8%
Texas	1987	13.1%	14.5%	19.1%	20.6%	17.3%	20.0%	23.6%
Virginia	1987	14.8%	17.1%	19.8%	9.6%	20.4%	22.0%	30.0%
Utah	1988	14.3%	20.5%	19.4%	27.3%	23.6%	24.6%	0.0%
South Dakota	1989	8.3%	23.2%	27.5%	26.0%	29.6%	21.6%	33.3%
Georgia	1990	0.0%	9.3%	12.6%	13.5%	18.0%	11.8%	14.3%
Oklahoma	1990	9.7%	10.5%	13.2%	11.8%	18.5%	18.6%	26.1%
Arizona	1991	18.8%	12.9%	9.9%	20.5%	23.6%	13.8%	28.6%
Rhode Island	1992	18.2%	11.8%	23.9%	29.0%	14.0%	23.6%	29.4%
Vermont	1992	14.3%	11.1%	16.1%	29.5%	42.9%	33.3%	16.7%
North Dakota	1993	12.5%	25.8%	17.2%	32.6%	23.4%	30.2%	11.1%
Wyoming	1993	4.2%	20.4%	16.7%	37.0%	28.4%	22.9%	25.0%
District of Columbia	1996	0.0%	8.7%	18.5%	4.2%	21.1%	8.7%	18.8%
South Carolina	1996	11.1%	17.9%	5.2%	20.0%	21.7%	12.2%	12.5%
Alabama	1997	11.5%	8.8%	15.2%	17.7%	21.4%	12.5%	26.7%
Arkansas	2003	8.8%	4.1%	12.9%	17.3%	14.9%	18.6%	22.6%
Washington	Not yet recognized	20.0%	13.0%	15.6%	20.6%	30.2%	15.9%	25.0%
West Virginia	Not yet recognized	12.0%	6.7%	7.0%	14.1%	18.8%	23.4%	8.3%
Totals		11.7%	14.9%	17.1%	21.5%	23.0%	23.7%	25.1%

**Notes:** Not shown are divorces in which the year of divorce is missing. Periods in which the shared placement rate was at least 40 percent are highlighted.

**Table 4. Is Shared Placement More Likely in Wisconsin? Logit Regressions (marginal effects)**

	Full Sample			Recent Cohorts (2010–2014)		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Wisconsin (compared to all other states)	0.102*** (0.01)	0.083*** (0.01)	0.080*** (0.01)	0.192** (0.08)	0.142* (0.07)	0.138* (0.07)
Female		-0.091*** (0.01)	-0.092*** (0.01)		-0.049* (0.03)	-0.049* (0.03)
Parent age		0.010*** (0.00)	0.010*** (0.00)		0.026** (0.01)	0.026** (0.01)
Parent age squared		-0.000*** (0.00)	-0.000*** (0.00)		-0.000** (0.00)	-0.000** (0.00)
Compared to parents with less than high school education						
Parent with high school degree or GED		0.060*** (0.01)	0.060*** (0.01)		0.134** (0.06)	0.134** (0.06)
Parent with some college		0.079*** (0.01)	0.079*** (0.01)		0.220*** (0.05)	0.221*** (0.05)
Parent with college degree		0.125*** (0.01)	0.125*** (0.01)		0.246*** (0.06)	0.246*** (0.06)
Compared to parents with <\$15,000 in income						
Parent income \$15,000–\$30,000		0.013* (0.01)	0.013* (0.01)		-0.004 (0.04)	-0.005 (0.04)
Parent income \$30,000–\$60,000		0.038*** (0.01)	0.038*** (0.01)		0.045 (0.03)	0.043 (0.03)
Parent income more than \$60,000		0.060*** (0.01)	0.060*** (0.01)		0.047 (0.04)	0.047 (0.04)
Compared to Non-Hispanic white parent						
Non-Hispanic black parent		-0.132*** (0.01)	-0.133*** (0.01)		-0.221*** (0.05)	-0.221*** (0.05)
Non-Hispanic parent, other race		-0.022 (0.01)	-0.022 (0.01)		0.006 (0.05)	0.005 (0.05)
Hispanic parent		-0.043*** (0.01)	-0.043*** (0.01)		-0.026 (0.04)	-0.027 (0.04)
Foreign born		-0.034*** (0.01)	-0.035*** (0.01)		-0.051 (0.04)	-0.051 (0.04)
Compared to youngest child age 0–4						
Youngest child age 5–9		0.013* (0.01)	0.014** (0.01)		0.006 (0.03)	0.007 (0.03)
Youngest child age 10–19		0.007 (0.01)	0.008 (0.01)		0.029 (0.03)	0.030 (0.03)
Youngest child age 20–21		-0.025** (0.01)	-0.024** (0.01)		-0.090 (0.08)	-0.090 (0.08)
Number of Children		-0.005* (0.00)	-0.005* (0.00)		-0.015 (0.01)	-0.015 (0.01)
Compared to those divorced before 1984						
Divorce 1985–1989		0.033*** (0.01)	0.025** (0.01)			
Divorce 1990–1994		0.062*** (0.01)	0.050*** (0.01)			
Divorce 1995–1999		0.086*** (0.01)	0.072*** (0.01)			
Divorce 2000–2004		0.094*** (0.01)	0.080*** (0.01)			
Divorce 2005–2009		0.109*** (0.01)	0.095*** (0.01)			
Divorce 2010–2014		0.130*** (0.01)	0.114*** (0.02)			
Divorce: Missing		0.101*** (0.01)	0.102*** (0.02)			

(table continues)

**Table 4, continued**

	Full Sample			Recent Cohorts (2010–2014)		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Compared to children both girls and boys						
Children only girls		0.003 (0.01)	0.003 (0.01)		-0.094*** (0.03)	-0.094*** (0.03)
Children only boys		-0.003 (0.01)	-0.003 (0.01)		-0.033 (0.03)	-0.032 (0.03)
Compared to divorced before policy recognition						
Divorced after policy recognition			0.030*** (0.01)			
Divorced relative to policy recognition: Missing			0.015 (0.02)			
Compared to default placement of 50%						
Default placement 25–49%						-0.003 (0.03)
Default placement < 25%						-0.015 (0.03)
<i>N</i>	32,221	32,221	32,221	1,352	1,352	1,352

**Notes:** Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

In the second set of columns in Table 4, we repeat the analysis using only the most recent divorce cohort (2010–2014). Model 1 shows that in the recent period, shared placement is much more likely in Wisconsin than elsewhere (19.2 percentage points). The coefficient for Wisconsin is still large and statistically significant, though a little smaller (14.2 percentage points), once we control for other characteristics of the respondent and family in Model 2. Broadly, other characteristics of cases show similar relationships with shared placement in the most recent divorces as they did in the full sample.<sup>9</sup> In Model 3 we consider the default placement arrangement across states. There is no discernible relationship between the policy and the likelihood of shared placement. Again, the coefficient on Wisconsin stays statistically significant and of essentially the same magnitude (13.8 percentage points). Overall, the analysis is quite consistent with the first columns in this table: divorces in Wisconsin are more likely to have

<sup>9</sup>One difference is that those with higher income are no longer more likely to have shared placement. The most recent court records in Wisconsin show that even though shared placement is more likely for those with higher income, the trends are the same (i.e., shared placement has increased for those with low income as well as for those with higher income).



shared placement, and this cannot be explained by the characteristics of these cases or by policy (at least as we have measured it here).

Finally, the rise in shared placement may have strong implications for child support outcomes. Whether child support should be expected, and how much, in those cases in which the parents have equal time, is a difficult question. Countries and states differ on how child support is handled in the context of shared placement (Brown and Brito, 2007; Hakovirta, Meyer, and Skinner, 2019). Those with shared placement may be less likely to have an order because both parents are already providing substantial support when the child is with them. When there is an order, payments may be lower if obligors feel they are already doing “their share.” Alternatively, payments may be higher if the obligor is more involved with the child and more committed to his or her economic well-being.

In Table 5 we show simple statistics for these outcomes. Here, we show results for Wisconsin and for all states other than Wisconsin, first for the full sample and then for the sample of recent divorces (2010–2014). The results for child support orders are consistent with expectations when we consider the whole period (full sample); child support orders are less likely when there is shared placement, in Wisconsin and in other states. When we consider the more recent divorces, there is no detectable difference in the likelihood of an order between those with shared placement and those with sole placement. We note, however, that the Wisconsin sample is quite small (23 cases divorces in total; 12 with sole placement, and 11 with shared placement).

**Table 5: Do Those with Shared Placement Have Different Child Support Outcomes?**

	Of those with order					
	With child support order		With child support received		With >90% of order received	
	(%)	N	(%)	N	(%)	N
<b>Wisconsin, Full Sample</b>						
Sole placement	58.9	372	82.6	219	53.0	219
Shared placement	40.9	176	86.1	72	66.7	72
Total	53.1	548	83.5	291	56.4	291
	Pearson $\chi^2$ (1) = 15.48 Pr = 0.000		Pearson $\chi^2$ (1) = 0.47 Pr = 0.492		Pearson $\chi^2$ (1) = 4.13 Pr = 0.042	
<b>Other States, Full Sample</b>						
Sole placement	55.3	25,316	76.8	14,002	50.2	14,002
Shared placement	51.8	6,357	81.8	3,294	60.4	3,294
Total	54.6	31,673	77.7	17,296	52.1	17,296
	Pearson $\chi^2$ (1) = 25.00 Pr = 0.000		Pearson $\chi^2$ (1) = 39.73 Pr = 0.000		Pearson $\chi^2$ (1) = 112.745 Pr = 0.000	
<b>Wisconsin, 2010–2014 Divorces</b>						
Sole placement	41.7	12	80.0	5	80.0	5
Shared placement	36.4	11	75.0	4	75.0	4
Total	39.1	23	77.8	9	77.8	9
	Pearson $\chi^2$ (1) = 0.07 Pr = 0.795		Pearson $\chi^2$ (1) = 0.03 Pr = 0.858		Pearson $\chi^2$ (1) = 0.03 Pr = 0.858	
<b>Other States, 2010–2014 Divorces</b>						
Sole placement	42.1	1,000	76.7	421	48.9	421
Shared placement	42.2	329	87.1	139	71.2	139
Total	42.1	1,329	79.3	560	54.5	560
	Pearson $\chi^2$ (1) = 0.002 Pr = 0.962		Pearson $\chi^2$ (1) = 6.79 Pr = 0.009		Pearson $\chi^2$ (1) = 20.94 Pr = 0.000	

Turning to child support receipts among those who have orders, we see that in the full sample, those with shared placement are more likely to receive any support and to receive the full amount, though the difference in any receipt in Wisconsin is not statistically significant. Among recent divorces, the Wisconsin sample of those with orders is quite small, and no differences are statistically significant. In the other states, however, we see that those with shared placement are significantly more likely to have any payments, and are also more likely to have full payments, than those with sole placement. This simple comparison may reflect differences in the kinds of parents who have shared placement (for example, having higher educational attainment) or that shared placement itself helps to promote payments.

## **SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS**

This report has provided new information about the extent of shared placement in the United States, confirming other work showing large increases in shared placement in Wisconsin, and using comparable data to show that the rates of shared placement in Wisconsin exceed those of other states. We have explored various factors to see if the higher rates in Wisconsin are attributable to different characteristics of divorcing parents; our results show that these do not explain the higher rates in Wisconsin. Similarly, our work exploring whether policy matters to placement does not find strong effects of policy at least as we have measured it, nor does policy explain the prevalence of shared placement in Wisconsin. Finally, straightforward comparisons show that in general, cases with shared placement are less likely to have a child support order; but once there is an order, they are more likely to receive something and to receive the full amount.

This report has some limitations. Self-reports of placement status may be less accurate than the court records that have been used in our previous research.<sup>10</sup> We would like to connect placement arrangements to the characteristics of both parents, but the data only have information on the custodial parent. When we explore whether policy affects the placement arrangement, our measures of placement policy are limited. Our first measure, the year in which shared placement appears in statute, may reflect only the explicitness of policy, and not a preference for shared placement. For the other policy measure, we are using published research on the default placement arrangement in a base case, but we do not know how long that default arrangement has been in effect, or whether the default arrangement would be applicable in every case. Finally, in our last analysis exploring whether there are different child support outcomes in shared placement cases, we have only made straightforward comparisons, and multivariate comparisons may yield other insights.

Even with these limitations, this report has some potential implications. First, our finding that shared placement is higher in Wisconsin than elsewhere may mean that policymakers in Wisconsin need to take the lead on figuring out how the various government programs should respond in shared-placement cases. For example, in a shared-placement case, which parent(s) should be eligible for TANF? Should both be eligible, only the one with fewer resources, only the one who applies first, or should a different rule be used? It is not clear to us that these issues have been carefully and systematically considered. Second, if shared placement is thought to be advantageous to children, a more systematic review of how Wisconsin has achieved such high rates may be of interest to other states. Third, increasing shared placement has implications for

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<sup>10</sup>Other limitations with these data include difficulties characterizing parents who have children with different placement arrangements (often because the children are from more than one partner). For custodial parents who have been divorced more than once, we may not be correctly identifying the year of divorce from the children's noncustodial parent.

the child support program. Our initial analysis here suggests that orders are less likely, but payments more likely for shared cases. More research on the lack of orders could be useful, as policymakers may think about this differently if the types of cases without orders are those in which the economic status of both parents is similar, or if one parent has substantially more resources than the other. The increased likelihood of payments, if this holds in more comprehensive research, suggests that shared placement may indeed be associated with more connection between both parents and children and increased cooperation with the child support program.

This report has provided new information about the extent to which shared placement is on the rise nationally— more so in particular states—and the factors associated with shared placement. With high levels of parental separation and divorce, it is important to better understand the patterns and determinants of shared placement, which could be an important mechanism for facilitating involvement by both biological parents in children’s lives over the long term.

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