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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Shared Placement, Child Support Payments, and Sharing of Child-Related Expenses: Overview and Mothers' Perception of Fairness

2020–2022 Child Support Policy Research Agreement: Task 5

Judith Bartfeld
Trisha Chanda
Lonnie Berger
Quentin Riser

Institute for Research on Poverty
University of Wisconsin–Madison

December 2022

The research reported in this paper was supported by the Child Support Research Agreement between the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and the Institute for Research on Poverty. The views expressed here are those of the authors alone. The authors thank Lisa Klein Vogel for helpful comments, and James Spartz and Dawn Duren for their assistance in preparing this report.

INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have seen extensive policy attention paid to standardizing child support orders as well as routinizing and enforcing the collection of support when ordered. Consistent with this focus, a large body of research has explored the role of child support as an income source when parents live apart from their children. At both the national and state levels, researchers have tracked the extent to which nonresident parents owe formal support and the amounts they pay, as a way of gauging the effectiveness of the system and documenting contributions of nonresident parents. At the same time, there have been profound changes in placement arrangements, most notably the growth of shared placement, that blur the distinction between resident and nonresident parents while making it more challenging to understand the nature and extent of parental contributions to the support of their children.

Shared placement entails not only a change from traditional placement arrangements in the way children's time is shared between parents' homes, but also a change in expectations surrounding how both parents contribute to child-related expenses. In Wisconsin, while sole-placement child support guidelines are based solely on the income of the nonresident parent, shared-placement guidelines formally incorporate incomes of both parents and the specific division of time between homes. They also are intended to involve an explicit division of specific kinds of costs that would otherwise implicitly be subsumed in a primary order. Past work has shown that child support orders are less common and on average lower in the case of shared placement, but that compliance is higher (see, e.g., Bartfeld & Chanda, 2022; Hodges & Cook, 2019). Lower child support notwithstanding, mothers with shared placement report higher satisfaction with the way both parents contribute to child-related expenses than their sole-placement counterparts (Riser et al., 2022), perhaps because these contributions are not limited to

standard child support and/or because less time with children in the home translates into lower need for support.

This report provides a comprehensive look at how parents contribute to the costs of their children in shared and mother-sole placement arrangements, looking beyond the payment of regular child support to encompass sharing of a range of expenses, and focuses as well on mothers' perceptions of the fairness of these contributions. The report examines fairness from the vantage point of shared and sole placement mothers 6–10 years after divorce, and focuses on perceptions of fairness specifically regarding all the ways that both parents have contributed to child-related costs over the past year. This complements other recent Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) work that has focused on procedural fairness in the child support system. For instance, Kim and Meyer (2021) explore whether noncustodial parents believe they were fairly treated in the setting of support orders, finding that enhanced child support services increase perceptions of fair treatment. Vogel and Dennis (2022) explore procedural justice from the standpoint of child support staff, custodial parents, and noncustodial parents in two counties—and consider stakeholders' perceptions of fairness at various steps in the process from entering the system, to setting and modifying orders, to enforcement of orders—finding that perspectives on fairness at different junctures vary considerably across stakeholder groups. The current work examines perceived fairness specifically in the context of divorce, and from the vantage point of mothers; we focus on mothers' perceptions of the fairness of outcomes, namely both parents' overall contribution to child costs, rather than processes. We are not aware of past work that has explored how mothers with different placement arrangements perceive the fairness of the overall contributions of both parents towards child costs. There is, however, a body of work suggesting that a variety of stakeholders perceive income-shares guidelines—which explicitly consider the

incomes of both parents and readily incorporate the way time is divided between homes and which underlie Wisconsin's shared placement guideline—as fairer than percentage-of-income guidelines such as are used in Wisconsin for sole placement (see, e.g., Noyes 2011).

Below, we describe child support policy and practice in Wisconsin as it pertains to shared and sole placement, as context for understanding the various ways parents with different placement arrangements contribute to child costs in the current study.

Child Support in Wisconsin

Wisconsin uses a percentage-of-income guideline to set support orders in sole-placement arrangements.¹ Orders are based on a fixed percentage of the nonresident parent's income linked to the number of children, and orders are in most cases collected through income withholding. In the case of shared placement, defined as the child spending at least 25% of time with each parent, the formula is more complicated; it takes into account the incomes of both parents as well as the relative time in each home. Furthermore, state administrative code explicitly links the use of the shared placement guideline to the formal expectation that each parent provides for the child(ren)'s basic needs—defined as food, shelter, clothing, transportation, personal care, and incidental recreational costs—proportional to the time the parent has placement (DCF 150.035(1)(a)2). The shared placement guidelines additionally state that the court “shall assign responsibility for payment of the child's variable costs in proportion to each parent's share of physical placement, and based upon a detailed list of the variable costs provided by the parties” (150.035(1)(b)6), where variable costs are defined as reasonable child-related costs above basic support costs, including but not limited to child care, tuition, special needs, and other activities

¹Wisconsin's child support guidelines are established in Chapter 150 of Wisconsin's administrative code: https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin_code/def/101_199/150.

that involve substantial cost. These costs, again per state administrative code, are to be paid directly between parents or to a third-party provider, not to DCF. Finally, and independent of the type of placement or existence of a regular child support order, Wisconsin administrative code calls for the courts to explicitly address the payment of health expenses including insurance and other medical expenditures, and provides an option that orders be adjusted up or down to account for who pays health insurance costs (DCF 150.05(1)(b)).

A series of reports from the Institute for Research on Poverty has tracked the existence of formal orders and their adherence to guidelines in Wisconsin, including differences by placement arrangements (see, e.g., Hodges & Cook, 2019; Bartfeld, Cook, & Han, 2015; Brown & Cancian, 2007; Cook, 2002; Cook & Brown, 2013). The most recent report finds that, among those beginning divorce proceedings in 2010 and 2013, 12% of divorced mothers with sole placement and 42% of those with shared placement lacked a support order (Hodges & Cook, 2019). While these reports address regular support orders, they do not track orders for insurance or medical expenses, nor do they attempt to track how variable costs may be handled, other than noting when the written record indicates that a standard order was modified on account of one or the other parent paying certain costs (see, e.g., Hodges & Cook, 2019). As such, they provide an incomplete look at obligations to pay support. One previous report from IRP examined how child care was handled in support orders and found that, in the early 2000s, about 23% of divorcing couples with shared placement and 5% with sole placement had some reference in the court record regarding the payment of childcare costs, but the data did not differentiate between simply acknowledging which parent was paying support and assigning payment as part of an order (Kim & Meyer, 2013). Nonetheless, it does indicate that in the case of shared placement, childcare was more commonly shared by both parents than in the case of mother-sole placement.

Likewise, a wealth of research has examined child support payments in Wisconsin, including examination of payments and compliance as they differ by placement arrangements. That work finds lower child support for mothers with shared as compared to sole placement, consistent with lower prevalence of formal orders (see, e.g., Bartfeld & Chanda, 2022). Of note, national data also find lower child support payments to mothers with shared placement (Meyer, Carlson, & Alam, 2022).

Overall, this body of work paints a picture of fewer orders and lower payments when mothers have shared placement. On the one hand, this is not surprising: support guidelines typically dictate lower formal support, and in some cases no support, for shared placement arrangements. Furthermore, less or no support may be less of a concern to the extent that mothers' direct child costs are lower with shared placement—and indeed, the shared placement guidelines in Wisconsin include the expectation that direct costs are borne by parents proportional to the child's time in the home. It is also the case, however, that most research on child support orders and payments does not capture orders and payments outside of regular dollar-based orders, even when those payments are part of formal obligations. Parents may have formal obligations to pay for health insurance, medical expenses, and/or variable costs with or without a regular support order, and even the sharing of 'basic' costs in proportion to time in the home does not necessarily happen automatically. Research therefore may paint an incomplete picture of the ways parents contribute to child costs when they live apart, and importantly, the potential omissions go beyond issues of informal support that parents pay outside of legal obligations. This is likely a disproportionate omission for shared placement, given the formal expectation that both basic and variable costs are to be shared.

In this report, we describe child-related contributions in terms of child support orders for defined amounts, as well as the sharing of specific kinds of expenses between parents—including expenses for health insurance, medical costs, child care, clothing, school supplies and activities. Using both survey and administrative records, we describe, to the extent possible, what orders specify about child support payments and expense-sharing, as well as what happens in practice, and we examine how these differ for mothers with shared and sole placement. We then describe mothers' perceptions of fairness with the way both parents have contributed to child-related costs over the past year. We use multivariate analyses to formally examine the extent to which mothers with shared and sole placement differ in their perceptions of fairness, net of underlying differences between groups, and we explore the factors that mediate the relationship between placement and perceived fairness. Finally, we summarize the kinds of issues mothers reference in explaining how they characterize the fairness of these contributions.

METHODS

Data

Data are from the Wisconsin Parents Survey, which includes parents in cohorts 30 and 33 of the Wisconsin Court Record Database (CRD), supplemented with administrative data from the Wisconsin Administrative Data Core (WADC). The CRD includes data from the court records of a sample of parents filing for divorce in 21 counties in Wisconsin; in each cohort, the sample is weighted to be representative of all divorcing parents in those counties. The cohorts from which the Wisconsin Parents Survey sample is drawn include divorces that entered the courts during 2009–2010 (cohort 30) and 2013 (cohort 33). The sample was limited to parents with a child aged 6 or under at the time of the divorce petition, such that the youngest child—the 'focal child' for purposes of the survey—would still be under 18 during the survey period. The sample was

also limited to parents with sole-mother placement and shared placement as of the final divorce judgment. Only mothers were included from the mother-sole couples, while both parents were included from the shared-placement couples.

The survey was conducted by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center in conjunction with the Institute for Research on Poverty (for details, see Vogel 2021). Interviews were administered in person during February-March 2020, and by phone April-October 2020, with the change in survey mode due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic; 82% of interviews were conducted during the pandemic. The final sample, based on parents who completed interviews, includes 237 shared placement mothers and 170 sole placement mothers—the starting sample for the current study—as well as 230 shared placement fathers. The survey collected a wide range of information about parents' circumstances, parenting arrangements, child support obligations, sharing of child-related expenses, and other information. Survey data are supplemented with administrative data on child support orders, payments, and receipts from the KIDS data. For selected analyses, we also utilize earnings information from Unemployment Insurance records.

The current study focuses on cost-sharing from mothers' perspectives, because we are comparing cost-sharing in shared and sole placement arrangements, and we only have surveys for fathers in the event of shared placement. We classify mothers according to their legal placement arrangements as of the time of the survey, which in some cases differs from legal placement at the time of divorce. Of the original 407 mothers, we exclude 15 that have neither sole nor shared placement, or a change in legal placement with insufficient information to determine the current arrangement, resulting in a final sample of 392 mothers, 173 with sole and 219 with shared placement.

Research Questions

We address the following research questions:

- How are parents legally obligated to contribute to the costs of their children, how do they contribute in practice, and how does this vary by placement arrangements?
- How do mothers characterize the fairness of both parents' overall contributions to the costs associated with children?
- Do mothers' perceptions of the fairness of financial contributions differ by placement among otherwise similar mothers, and if so, what factors explain this difference? Does perceived fairness differ in accordance with a range of other factors including child support payments, explicit sharing of child-related costs, and the quality of parents' relationship?

Analyses and Measures

We use several related concepts in this report, which we note here and discuss in more detail below:

- *Regular child support* refers to ongoing child support obligations for a specific dollar amount.
- *Expense-sharing* refers to the division of child-related expenses. It is the net result of direct payments by parents of child-related expenses and transfers between parents to compensate each other for payments, as distinct from payments made as part of regular child support.
- *Contributions to the cost of children* encompasses all the ways that both parents provide financial support to their children, both by payment of regular child support as well as by paying (directly or by compensating the other parent) for child-related expenses.

Our initial analyses examine orders and actual practice regarding regular child support obligations as well as sharing of various categories of child expenses. Regarding orders, we differentiate between child support orders for a fixed amount—what we refer to as regular child support orders—and orders that formally allocate certain specific expenses to one or both parents. Importantly, these are not mutually exclusive. Orders may dictate the sharing of certain expenses, with or without the presence of a regular support order; and a regular support order may or may not also dictate sharing of specific expenses. Indeed, as noted earlier, the policy

language around shared placement in Wisconsin specifically indicates that each parent is responsible for the direct costs of the child proportional to the time in her/his care, and that orders should allocate variable costs proportionally as well. According to state policy, however, payment for variable costs, unlike regular child support, are to be paid directly between parents or to a third-party service provider, not to DCF.

First, we describe regular support orders, payments, and compliance around the time of the survey, using a combination of survey and administrative data. Survey data provide mothers' reports of whether there was a support order in the past year, which parent owed support, and whether support that was owed was paid in full, in part, or not at all. Administrative data provide more detailed information about orders and payments from the KIDS data; we calculate order amounts, payment amounts, and the compliance rate (percent of owed amount that was paid) for 2019, the calendar year preceding the survey.

Next, we describe mothers' reports of whether there are legal orders in place specifying how three categories of expenses—health insurance, other medical expenses, and work-related childcare—are supposed to be shared between parents. The survey asks if the expense was supposed to be paid by the respondent, paid by the other parent, or shared by the parents. We also describe mothers' assessment of how the above expenses, as well as expenses for several additional categories (e.g., clothing, school expenses, and activities such as sports and music lessons) were shared in practice over the past year. Here, the response options include: the respondent paid all, the respondent paid most, the expense was shared about evenly between parents, the other parent paid most, the other parent paid all, or there were no expenses in this category. Using these responses, we construct a cost-share score for each expense category ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 means the respondent (here, the mother) paid all and 5 means the

other parent (here, the father) paid all; we also construct a composite score that averages the six categories, and use this as an aggregate measure of expense sharing. Scores are coded as missing when there were no expenses in a category.

We subsequently look at how mothers feel about the way they have shared all child-related costs over the past year. The underlying survey questions, addressing mothers' satisfaction and perception of fairness, are asked after a series of questions about regular support orders and payments, the division of specific expense categories, and any other contributions from the other parent towards mothers' household costs or in the form of food or clothing while the child was staying with them. The questions prompt parents to think about "*all of the expenses of [FOCAL CHILD/your children] and all of the ways you and [OTHER PARENT] have contributed to these expenses*", and to characterize how satisfied they are with the way parents have shared expenses, and how fair they feel this has been. To differentiate our discussion of how mothers feel about the sharing of expenses *considering all the ways both parents have contributed* from discussions of explicit sharing of expense categories outside of regular child support, we refer to these responses as satisfaction with and fairness of **the way both parents have contributed to all child-related expenses over the past year**. We summarize mothers' responses on both satisfaction and fairness, after which we focus in detail on the fairness dimension.

We estimate a series of logit models to explore the relationship between placement and perceived fairness, differentiating between not at all or a little fair, and somewhat, very, or extremely fair. We initially control for mothers' characteristics (i.e., age, education, race, earnings, current partnership status, number of own children in the household), mothers' self-assessed economic well-being compared to the other parent, and time since the divorce. We

subsequently add variables to describe the nature of fathers' contributions to child expenses, including the composite cost-sharing score, the total amount of support paid, and indicators for not having an order and for not complying in full with an order. We also allow for interactions between placement and both the lack of an order and the cost-sharing score. Next, we add indicators for whether the child spent either more time or less time with the mother than specified in the order. Finally, we add controls for mothers' description of the quality of her relationship with the other parent. By adding variables sequentially, we are able to explore the extent to which cost-sharing, orders, payments and compliance, living arrangements that deviate from legal arrangements, and the quality of parents' relationships may mediate the relationship between placement and perceived fairness.

Table 1 summarizes the variables used in the analysis.

Finally, we summarize short open-ended responses (typically consisting of no more than a sentence) to a follow-up question in which respondents were asked why they characterized overall parental contributions as fair or unfair. Here, we focus on a broad overview of the kinds of explanations offered by mothers, rather than a formal thematic analysis or an explicit coding exercise. We examine the open-ended responses separately for mothers with shared and sole placement, and for mothers who described contributions as fair or unfair, but we do not look at these responses in conjunction with broader contextual information in the survey.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

	Mean or Percent
Shared placement	54.89%
Sole placement	45.11%
Mother lives with partner	14.68%
Mother is married	33.60%
Mother's Age	41.41 (5.45)
Mother's education	
High school or less	14.06%
Some college or associate degree	42.98%
4-year college or higher	42.96%
Mother's earnings in 2019	\$49,585.37 (\$30,114.16)
Mother's well-being compared to other parent	
Better	40.87%
Same	15.95%
Worse	33.03%
Missing	10.15%
Years since final judgment	8.22 (1.86)
Number of mother's children in household	1.56
Degree of cost-sharing	2.07 (.95)
Child support owed and paid	
No order	31.70%
Mother owes	2.79%
Mean amount paid	\$4,975.25 (\$2,784.71)
Father pays < 95% of order	21.60%
Father pays >= 95% of order	43.92%
Time with mother compared to legal order	
More	44.16%
Same	44.80%
Less	11.04%
Relationship quality	
Poor/fair	53.86%
Good	21.72%
Very good/excellent	24.42%
N	392

Notes: Standard deviations in parentheses. All results are weighted to account for unequal sampling percentages across counties. Cost-sharing ranges from 1-5, where 1 means mother pays all expenses and 5 means father pays all expenses, based on average cost-share score over 6 expense categories (clothing, school expenses, activities, childcare, health insurance medical costs).

RESULTS

How Are Parents Expected to Contribute to the Costs of Their Children, How Do They Contribute in Practice, and How Does This Vary By Placement Arrangements?

Our initial results examine the extent to which fathers are legally expected to contribute to child-related costs via regular support orders and via the sharing of various expenses, as well as mothers' reports of how various expenses are shared between parents in practice. We show results for the whole sample, as well as comparisons by placement.

Child Support Orders, Payments and Compliance

Table 2 summarizes information on regular child support orders, payments, and compliance, using both administrative and survey data. We begin with administrative data from KIDS, looking at 2019—the year preceding the survey. About 70% of couples had a legal support order, including 66% with support owed by the father, 3% with support owed by the mother, and 1% with some other arrangement. Among the subset of couples for whom there was an order with the father as obligor, the mean annual order was \$7942, the mean payment was \$7077, and the mean compliance ratio was 81%, with two-thirds of fathers paying in full, 23% paying in part, and 10% not paying at all.

Table 2: Child support orders, payments, and compliance 6–10 years after divorce, overall and by current placement.

	Overall	Sole	Shared	
N	392	173	219	
From administrative data				
Support orders:				
No order	30.16%	13.21%	44.08%	***
Father owes	65.52%	84.21%	50.16%	***
Mother owes	2.79%	0.63%	4.56%	**
Other	1.29%	1.40%	1.20%	
Orders and payments when fathers owe:				
Amount owed	\$7,942.21	\$8,678.90	\$6,925.89	**
Amount paid	\$7,076.79	\$7,423.22	\$6,598.86	
Compliance ratio	81%	75%	90%	***
No support paid	10.35%	13.84%	5.53%	***
Partial support paid	22.62%	27.26%	16.23%	***
Full support (>95%) paid	67.03%	58.90%	78.24%	**
From survey				
Support orders:				
No order	26.68%	13.29%	37.68%	***
Father owes	68.25%	86.04%	53.64%	***
Mother owes	3.50%	0.00%	6.38%	***
Other arrangement	1.57%	0.67%	2.31%	
Compliance when fathers owe:				
No support paid	9.93%	14.39%	4.09%	***
Partial support paid	23.90%	31.41%	14.05%	***
Full support paid	66.17%	54.20%	81.86%	***

Notes: Results are weighted to adjust for different sampling rates across counties and cohorts. Asterisks denote significant differences between respondent groups. *p<.1, **p<.05, ***p<.01.

There are notable differences by placement, consistent with prior work. Only 13% of couples with mother-sole placement lack a support order; the share with no orders is more than three times as high (44%) among those with shared placement. Orders and payments were both higher for couples with mother-sole as compared to shared placement (\$8679 as compared to \$6926 for orders, and \$7423 as compared to \$6599 for payments); however, compliance was higher for couples with shared placement, including a difference of 19 percentage points in the likelihood of full payment (78% vs 59%).

Survey results are similar: At the time of the survey, 27% of mothers reported having no order, 68% had an order with the father as obligor, 3.5% with mothers as obligor, and 2% had some other arrangement. Among those mothers who were owed support, two-thirds indicated they had received all the support they were owed, 24% had received some but not all support, and 10% had received none. Looking separately by placement, mothers with sole placement were much more likely to have an order in place, though less likely to receive all the support owed.

Taken together, survey and administrative data tell a consistent story: a substantial minority of mothers with shared placement have no regular support order, compared to a much smaller share in the case of sole placement; orders, when positive, are lower for mothers with shared placement, resulting in lower payments, while compliance rates are higher in the case of shared placement.

Expense-Sharing

Expense-sharing orders

In some cases, orders formally address the sharing of certain expenses. Orders can dictate the sharing of expenses regardless of whether regular support is ordered. Table 3 summarizes

mothers' reports of whether and how legal orders address the sharing of costs spanning health insurance, medical expenses, and childcare—the three order areas specifically addressed in the survey.

Orders addressing health insurance and medical expenses were widespread: 82% of mothers reported having an order covering health insurance, including 39% in which parents were to share the cost, 24% with the father as designated payer, and 19% with mother as payer. Seventy percent had an order covering other medical expenses, almost always involving a sharing of those expenses (64%), with small shares allocating all costs to mothers (4%) or fathers (2%). Orders addressing childcare were much less common (32%), perhaps because many children were old enough to no longer need childcare. When orders addressed childcare, the cost was almost always supposed to be shared (27%), with 3% solely allocated to mothers and 2% to fathers.

In contrast to regular support orders, which were more common among sole-placement mothers, mothers with sole and shared placement were similarly likely to have a health insurance order (81% and 83%, respectively) or an order addressing medical expenses (66% and 73%), while mothers with sole placement were significantly less likely than those with shared placement to have a childcare order (23% vs 38%).

Cost-sharing in practice

Table 3 also summarizes mothers' reports of how expenses were actually shared between parents over the past year, across the above three domains as well as for clothing, school expenses, and activities.

Table 3. Cost-sharing for child expenses 6–10 years after divorce, overall and by current placement.

	Overall	Sole	Shared	
N	392	173	219	
Mothers' reports of cost-sharing orders:				
Health insurance:				
No order	17.92%	19.11%	16.98%	
Order	82.08%	80.89%	83.02%	
Mother owes	19.21%	18.71%	19.61%	
Father owes	23.57%	24.69%	22.69%	
Shared	39.29%	37.49%	40.73%	
Medical expenses:				
No order	30.14%	34.15%	26.92%	
Order	69.86%	65.85%	73.08%	
Mother owes	3.92%	5.46%	2.69%	
Father owes	1.95%	1.69%	2.16%	
Shared	63.98%	58.70%	68.24%	*
Childcare:				
No order	67.83%	75.44%	61.62%	***
Order	32.17%	24.56%	28.38%	
Mother owes	3.27%	4.71%	2.11%	
Father owes	2.03%	3.09%	1.16%	
Shared	26.87%	16.77%	35.12%	***
Mothers' reports of actual cost-sharing in past year:				
Clothes and shoes:				
Mother paid all	41.75%	72.34%	16.62%	***
Mother paid more	27.61%	18.81%	34.85%	***
Shared evenly	25.82%	5.64%	42.41%	***
Father paid more	3.13%	1.06%	4.83%	**
Father paid all	0.75%	0.67%	0.82%	
No expenses in this area	0.93%	1.49%	0.47%	
Mean score:	1.93	1.36	2.38	***
School expenses:				
Mother paid all	48.90%	78.95%	24.20%	***
Mother paid more	11.78%	7.80%	15.05%	**
Shared evenly	32.93%	10.87%	51.07%	***
Father paid more	3.22%	0.85%	5.16%	**
Father paid all	3.17%	1.52%	4.52%	*
No expenses in this area				
Mean score:	2.00	1.38	2.51	***
Music lessons, sports, activities				
Mother paid all	45.05%	74.80%	20.60%	***
Mother paid more	8.87%	7.70%	9.82%	
Shared evenly	31.23%	7.32%	50.88%	***
Father paid more	5.67%	4.18%	6.89%	

	Overall	Sole	Shared	
Father paid all	5.77%	2.45%	8.49%	**
No expenses in this area	3.43%	3.55%	3.32%	
Mean score:	2.15	1.46	2.72	***
Health insurance				
Mother paid all	44.25%	65.55%	26.74%	***
Mother paid more	7.52%	5.22%	9.41%	
Shared evenly	21.88%	8.60%	32.79%	***
Father paid more	2.21%	1.76%	2.59%	
Father paid all	18.41%	12.15%	23.56%	***
No expenses in this area	5.72%	6.72%	4.91%	
Mean score:	2.40	1.82	2.86	***
Medical expenses				
Mother paid all	51.32%	75.31%	31.61%	***
Mother paid more	11.50%	8.02%	14.36%	*
Shared evenly	31.95%	15.18%	45.74%	***
Father paid more	0.63%	0.00%	1.15%	
Father paid all	3.31%	0.67%	5.49%	***
No expenses in this area	1.28%	0.82%	1.66%	
Mean score:	1.92	1.41	2.33	
Childcare				
Mother paid all	27.83%	48.10%	11.18%	***
Mother paid more	1.53%	0.21%	2.61%	*
Shared evenly	12.52%	4.04%	19.48%	***
Father paid more	0.60%	0.67%	0.55%	
Father paid all	0.64%	0.00%	1.17%	
No expenses in this area	56.88%	46.97%	65.01%	***
Mean score:	1.72	1.19	2.37	
Informal support:				
Father contributed to household costs	6.35%	5.72%	6.87%	
Father provided clothing or other items while child is with mother	11.57%	14.04%	9.54%	

Notes: Scores range from 1 to 5 where 1 means mother paid all and 5 means father paid all. Results are weighted to adjust for different sampling rates across counties and cohorts. Asterisks denote significant differences between respondent groups. *p<.1, **p<.05, ***p<.01.

Across all expense categories, there are striking differences by placement. Regardless of category, mothers with sole placement almost always report paying more of, or most commonly all, the expenses, while mothers with shared placement most commonly report an even sharing of expenses. When expenses were not shared evenly in shared placement arrangements, mothers are much more likely to report paying more of or all the expenses themselves, while reports of fathers paying a larger share are uncommon. For instance, 20.6% of shared-placement mothers described themselves as paying all the sports, music, and other activity costs, while 8.5% describe fathers as paying for all those costs. The main exception is health insurance, for which fathers are somewhat more likely than in other categories to pay the full cost. Although mothers report fathers paying more or all only infrequently, this is nonetheless significantly more common in the context of shared versus sole placement. For instance, 8.5% of shared-placement mothers and 2.5% of sole-placement mothers report fathers paying for all sports, music and other activities. Also notable in these results is the similarity in the likelihood of mothers with sole placement reporting paying all the expenses for clothing (72.3%), activities (74.8%), school expenses (78.9%), and medical care (75.3%), even as the administrative code specifically allows for the assignment of medical expenses without reference to whether the shared or sole placement guidelines are used.

Table 3 also indicates the share of mothers reporting that fathers provided informal support, either by contributing to mothers' household costs, or by providing clothing, food, or other items while the child was with the mother. Both forms of informal support were uncommon (6% and 12%, respectively), with no significant or substantive differences by placement.

We also look at the extent to which expense-sharing practice aligns with orders. We do this for the two expense categories—health insurance (Figure 1A) and medical expenses (Figure 1B)—for which we have information from mothers on orders as well as actual practice, and for which enough parents have orders that a comparison is feasible (thus excluding childcare). To facilitate comparisons, we combine all reports of expense-sharing (i.e., mother pays more, shared evenly, father pays more) into a single expense-share category. In the case of health insurance, when mothers are supposed to pay the whole expense, the large majority (79%) report doing so, while almost all the remainder report sharing the expense. When the expense is supposed to be shared, just over half (55%) report doing so in practice, while almost all the remainder report that mothers paid in full. Finally, when fathers are supposed to pay in full, almost two-thirds of mothers report this happening in practice, while the remainder are roughly evenly divided between sharing the expense and mothers paying in full. These patterns are quite similar for other medical expenses. Here, we do not show results for the fathers who are supposed to pay in full because of the very small sample size ($n=7$). Overall, results find general alignment between mothers' reports of orders and actual expense-sharing when mothers are supposed to pay in full, with a sizable minority of mothers covering full costs when costs are supposed to be shared. Small sample sizes preclude looking at this comparison separately for shared and sole-placement mothers.

Figure 1A: Division of payment for child(ren)'s health insurance, by which parent is legally obligated to pay

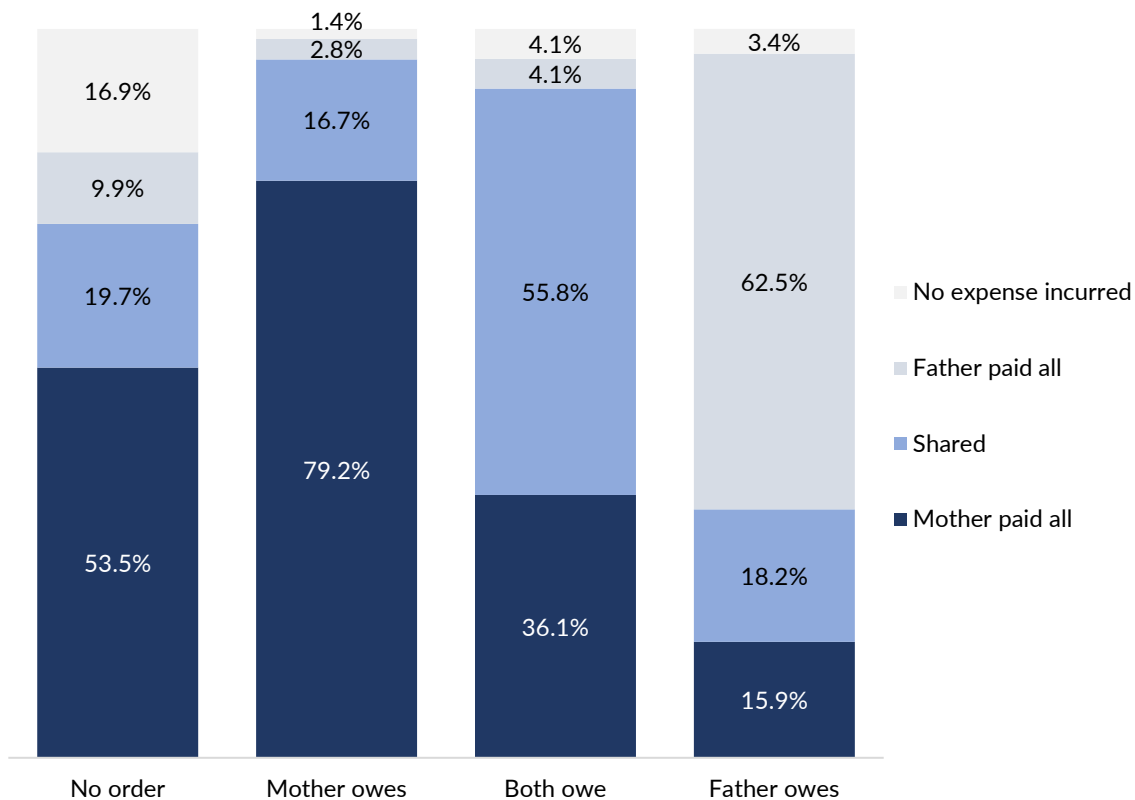
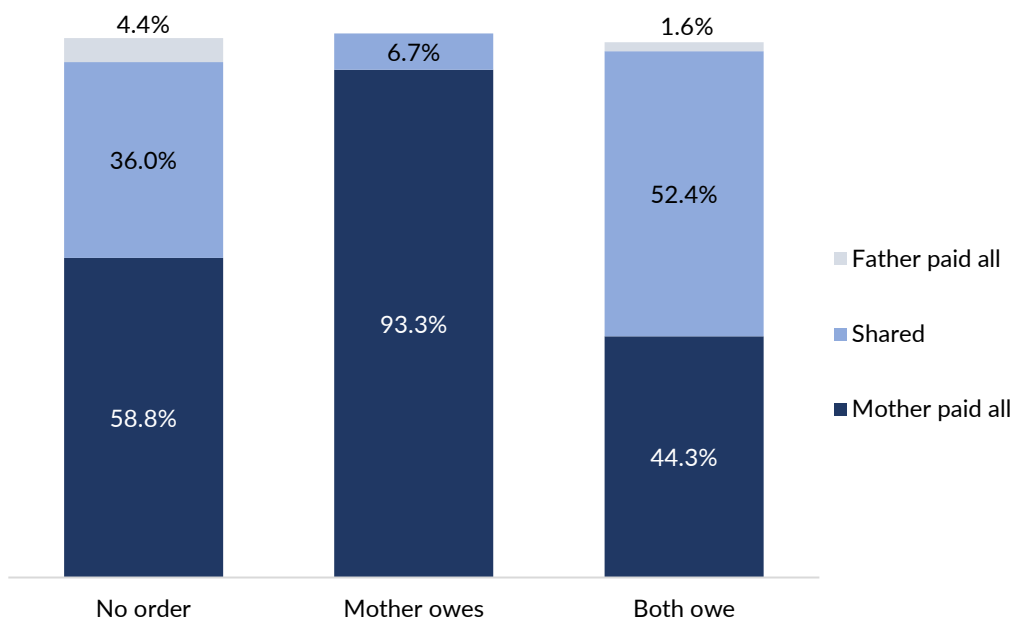


Figure 1B: Division of payment for child(ren)'s medical expenses, by which parent is legally obligated to pay



How Mothers Feel About Parents' Overall Contributions to Child Costs

Our next analyses summarize how mothers characterize their satisfaction with both parents' overall contributions to child costs, as well as their perception of the fairness of those contributions. As shown in Table 4, results are quite similar for satisfaction and perceived fairness. Half of mothers with sole placement were either not at all or only a little satisfied with parents' overall contributions to child costs over the past year, 21% were somewhat satisfied, and only 27% were very or extremely satisfied. Among mothers with shared placement, satisfaction was substantially higher: fewer than one-quarter (23%) were not at all or only a little satisfied, while almost half (46%) were very or extremely satisfied. Results were quite similar with regard to perceived fairness of both parents' overall financial contributions to child costs. Mothers with sole placement were more than twice as likely to feel the overall contribution to costs was not at all or only a little fair (58% vs 27%), and less than half as likely to feel that it was very or extremely fair (20% vs 47%).

Table 4. Mothers' satisfaction with and perceived fairness of parents' overall contributions to child costs.

	Overall	Sole	Shared	
N	392	173	219	
Satisfaction:				
Not at all or a little satisfied	36.16%	52.06%	23.20%	***
Somewhat satisfied	25.98%	20.78%	30.22%	**
Very or extremely satisfied	37.86%	27.16%	46.58%	***
Satisfaction score (mean)	2.91	2.48	3.26	***
Perceived fairness:				
Not at all or a little fair	40.61%	57.84%	26.56%	***
Somewhat fair	24.88%	22.43%	26.88%	
Very or extremely fair	34.51%	19.73%	46.56%	***
Fairness score (mean)	2.75	2.22	3.19	***

Notes: Results are weighted to adjust for different sampling rates across counties and cohorts. Asterisks denote significant differences between groups. *= $p < .1$, **= $p < .05$, ***= $p < .01$.

Perceived Fairness: Multivariate Analysis

We estimate a series of logit models regarding perceived fairness to identify the role of shared placement and other factors (Table 5). Our base model controls for a variety of factors that may differ between mothers with different placement arrangements, including mothers' characteristics (i.e., age, education, race/ethnicity), current circumstances (i.e., earnings, subjective economic well-being compared to ex-partner, number of own children in the household, current partnership status), and time since the divorce. This model shows that mothers with shared placement are substantially more likely than those with sole placement to describe contributions as fair (OR=3.55, $p<.01$). Additionally, mothers who characterize themselves as similarly well off as their ex-partner are more likely to describe parents' contributions as fair than are mothers who characterize themselves as better off or worse off. Perceived fairness also increases with time since the divorce.

We next add a measure summarizing the degree to which fathers contribute to expenses, where higher values indicate that fathers pay a higher average share of child expenses (outside of regular child support). Perceived fairness is much more likely in the context of higher expense-sharing (OR=3.83, $p<.01$), with no difference in this relationship by placement type as captured by an interaction term. With expense-sharing included, there is no longer any substantive or significant difference in perceived fairness for shared-placement mothers, indicating that expense-sharing fully mediates the relationship between placement and perceived fairness.

Model 3 adds several variables describing regular child support orders and payments. We find no overall relationship between presence of an order and perceived fairness, though the absence of an order is associated with higher perceived fairness among the subset of mothers with shared placement (OR=4.97, $p<.05$). Higher amounts of child support are also associated with higher perceptions of fairness (OR=1.064, $p<.05$), while there is no association between

compliance and perceived fairness. Higher cost-sharing continues to be strongly associated with perceived fairness when these additional child support variables are included. Taken together, mothers are more likely to perceive parental contributions as fair when fathers pay more in regular child support, and when fathers contribute a larger share of expenses.

Our fourth model adds indicators for the child spending more or less time with the mother than specified in the placement order. Model 4 finds that spending more time with the mother is marginally significantly associated with lower likelihood of describing contributions as fair (OR=.57, $p<.1$), with no notable impact on other variables. Our fifth and final model adds controls for mothers' self-reported relationship quality with the other parent, finding dramatically higher likelihood of perceived fairness in the context of better relationships, with little change in other coefficients. While relationship quality could be a result as well as a cause of perceived fairness, that its inclusion does not change the other associations in the model suggests that perceptions of fairness are not simply serving as proxies for better relationships.

Reasons for Perceived Fairness and Unfairness...

The previous analyses point to several factors associated with mothers' perceptions of whether parents' overall contributions to child-related costs are fair. For additional insight, we examined mothers' responses to a follow-up question that asked respondents why they answered as they did regarding fairness. Here, we highlight broad issues raised in these short (typically one sentence) responses. As noted earlier, we do not examine these responses in the context of other information in the survey, but instead simply describe the range of issues that arise.

Table 5. Coefficients from logit regressions of mothers' perceived fairness of parents' overall contributions to child costs.

Regression Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Shared placement	3.546*** (4.35)	0.427 (-0.86)	1.679 (1.22)	1.700 (1.26)	1.281 (0.54)
Lives with partner	1.989* (1.88)	2.003* (1.71)	2.079* (1.77)	2.077* (1.72)	2.103 (1.59)
Married	0.855 (-0.51)	0.966 (-0.10)	0.975 (-0.08)	1.026 (0.08)	1.103 (0.26)
Respondent's age	0.986 (-0.58)	0.964 (-1.23)	0.951 (-1.58)	0.957 (-1.37)	0.925** (-2.25)
Education level					
Some college or associate degree	0.965 (-0.09)	1.377 (0.64)	1.417 (0.70)	1.476 (0.77)	1.530 (0.87)
4-year college or higher	1.097 (0.21)	1.789 (1.13)	1.573 (0.89)	1.606 (0.92)	1.796 (1.16)
Race/ethnicity					
Hispanic	1.211 (0.34)	1.447 (0.65)	1.602 (0.71)	1.617 (0.73)	1.641 (0.93)
Non-Hispanic Black	0.785 (-0.43)	0.398 (-1.48)	0.410 (-1.47)	0.425 (-1.44)	0.423 (-1.41)
Respondent's earnings in 1000s	0.997 (-0.61)	0.999 (-0.20)	0.999 (-0.18)	0.998 (-0.26)	0.996 (-0.60)
Well-being compared to other parent					
Same	2.829*** (3.09)	1.927* (1.74)	2.244** (2.11)	2.305** (2.15)	2.270* (1.91)
Worse	1.372 (0.98)	0.560 (-1.58)	0.559 (-1.54)	0.549 (-1.56)	0.613 (-1.20)
Missing	0.805 (-0.42)	0.752 (-0.51)	1.106 (0.18)	1.045 (0.07)	1.384 (0.50)
Years since final judgment	1.200** (2.52)	1.205** (2.36)	1.216** (2.40)	1.213** (2.33)	1.222** (2.22)
Number of own children in household	1.293 (1.38)	1.138 (0.63)	1.148 (0.64)	1.174 (0.73)	1.126 (0.48)
Degree of cost-sharing		3.827*** (4.40)	4.741*** (7.56)	4.558*** (7.38)	4.546*** (7.04)
Shared # degree of cost-sharing		1.446 (0.85)			
CS owed and paid					
No order			1.729 (1.31)	1.740 (1.31)	1.758 (1.17)
Mother owes			0.808 (-0.17)	0.745 (-0.25)	1.926 (0.55)
Father pays <95% of order			1.306 (0.53)	1.357 (0.60)	1.486 (0.73)
Total CS paid by father, in thousands			1.064** (2.12)	1.058* (1.93)	1.063* (1.71)
Shared # no order			4.966** (2.22)	4.220** (1.97)	5.528** (2.23)
More time spent with R than legal order				0.571* (-1.77)	0.569* (-1.69)
Less time spent with R than legal order				0.943 (-0.13)	0.793 (-0.50)

Regression Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Relationship quality					
Good					3.710*** (3.43)
Very good/excellent					6.573*** (4.95)
Constant	0.0525** (-2.27)	0.0153** (-2.51)	0.00588*** (-3.14)	0.00611*** (-3.18)	0.0112*** (-2.63)
Observations	384	384	384	384	384

Notes: Exponentiated coefficients; z statistics in parentheses.

Column shows odds ratios and z statistics from logistic regressions of perceived fairness. Results are weighted to account for different sampling percentages across counties. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

What Makes Contributions Fair?

Shared-placement

When shared-placement mothers described parental contributions as fair, they frequently explained their answer by talking about how they divide expenses. Many explicitly referenced a “50/50 split,” “sharing everything equally,” or “dividing everything down the middle.” In other cases, mothers described having agreed-upon ways of allocating costs. They described arrangements—paying for a child’s insurance, for example—such as, “I pay for her health insurance and he pays her car insurance,” and “He pays for the cell bills and I pay for their hygiene things.” Alternatively, some mothers described a more ad hoc or organically arising arrangement: “He buys her things and I buy her things; it works out.” “Because again we are able to agree upon it mutually by ourselves.” “Out of all the little arguments we had, finances were not part of it. If he had the money, he paid it; if I had the money, I paid it.” Overall, shared-placement mothers who perceived contributions as fair rarely referenced regular child support orders as distinct from division of expenses in their responses.

In addition to describing how costs were divided, shared-placement mothers who described parental contributions as fair often talked about their relationship with the other parent, highlighting good communication, a commitment to fairness, and working well together. Some referenced processes for handling expenses to avoid conflict, such as clearing expenses with each

other in advance. One mother explained, “Because we communicate and we talk about what she needs and what parent is able to do it and how much; we just try to be fair with each other across the board.” Another explained, “I just think that we have been working really well together and paying what needs to be paid and helping each other out.” And another: “We have a good working relationship, we don’t have too many conflicts about who takes care of things. We don’t care about who’s paying more or who’s paying less.” Mothers also talked about both parents prioritizing the interest of the child(ren), with comments such as “I think overall we both have her best interest in heart and we make a game plan to manage her needs; if either of us feel that we need to have a discussion about equity, we have a general conversation about it,” and “We don’t fight over money or the welfare of our child; our child is the number one priority; everything else is secondary.”

Sole placement

Sole-placement mothers who characterized parental contributions as fair also talked about their expense sharing. Like shared-placement mothers, they variously described 50/50 sharing of costs, ad hoc sharing of costs that “just works out,” and tradeoffs in terms of who covers which expenses. However, and different from shared-placement mothers, they also talked about their regular support orders—both the adequacy of the amount and the fact that the other parent paid regularly. One commented, “I think that the child support he provides is adequate. It always comes on time and there is never an issue with that.” Another explains, “Because he on top of the child support that he is mandated to pay me; he takes care of a lot of things.” A third mother explains, “Because the amount of child support that [the other parent] pays has well exceeded what I have had to pay out of pocket for other expenses; I think it worked out well for the kids.”

Like shared-placement mothers, some sole-placement mothers who perceived parental contributions as fair also highlighted parents' working together for the child's benefit. For instance, "Because although [the other parent] and I did not make it as a couple, [the other parent] and I are a good team as a parent and that is our focusing goal." Another explains, "because we both will do whatever we need to do for the kids."

On the other hand, perceived fairness didn't necessarily mean mothers were getting support; some mothers noted that things were fair because the kids lived with her so she didn't mind paying for them. One mother explains, "Well, because she lives with me and I take care of everything, I am okay with being able to take care of everything. If I was struggling and I needed help, I would ask for child support but I do not need it." Another notes, "I don't have those expectations from [the other parent]. Since [the child] is my kid so I take care of him."

Finally, some sole-placement mothers felt the arrangement was fair because it kept the other parent out of their lives. One mother states, "Because if he was paying then he would be in their lives." Another commented, "Because he is out of the picture, so I am fine with all of the expenses if it means not having to deal with him again."

What Makes Contributions Unfair?

Shared placement

When shared-placement mothers describe the overall contribution to child costs as unfair, the large majority of their explanations involved the way child expenses are or are not shared between parents. Sometimes mothers simply described unequal or insufficient sharing: "Because I pay for everything and he pays for nothing," and "We don't split everything down the middle; it's not 50-50." Often mothers described insufficient expense-sharing in general. When they provided details, health care commonly came up—such as orthodontia, health insurance, or other

medical expenses. Other times, mothers described the toll of routine expenses that aren't shared, such as activities, daily transportation, or school meals. Mothers also referred to disagreements about expenses, describing the other parent as not wanting to pay for extracurriculars, for instance. Conversely, a few mothers described being asked to pay for things they found unwarranted. For instance, one mother described, "The period where he doesn't share fairly, he will charge me for bubble gum and bedding at his house, and I haven't come up with a scenario so he will charge me \$5000." Others described frustration about negotiating with the other parent for payment, financial constraints that prevented the other parent paying, and foregoing expense-sharing so as not to rock the boat. For instance, one mother explains, "I make more than [the other parent] and he takes that for granted. And when I ask for money, he conveniently doesn't have it. I usually just let it go because I don't want to risk the relationship we have for [focal child]." Occasionally mothers describe the other parent as not providing necessities at his home, such as clothes or medications.

In many cases, shared-placement mothers who described contributions as unfair explicitly stated that expense sharing practices were not in compliance with orders. They made comments such as "He doesn't abide by the court order to share expenses so I pay for everything;" "Even though it's court ordered, he's still not paying his portion;" and "He is to pay half the expenses and he has not paid me anything in two years."

Less frequently, mothers mention the order itself—that it doesn't reflect current incomes or doesn't reflect actual time-share. Others note that variable expenses have evolved over time and that many current expenses are not listed in the order.

Sole placement

When mothers with sole placement explain why they think the division of expenses is unfair, they most commonly talk, explicitly, about noncompliance—both with regular orders and with mandated expense-sharing. Mothers describe never getting support, or intermittent support, or just enough support to avoid contempt charges. Comments include, “He does not pay his child support unless he gets a warrant and then he will pay enough so that he satisfies the warrant;” and “You go to court to get this stuff in writing and no one enforces it; I don’t have time to get a grown adult to do his thing;” or “The support order specifically states what extras he is responsible for and that has never happened.” In the context of noncompliance with court-ordered cost-sharing, medical and insurance are commonly referenced. For instance, mothers commented “I am still trying to collect on medical expenses that he owes me,” and “I also pay for the children’s health insurance even though it states in the legal order he is to pay.”

Mothers in this group frequently indicated that they get child support, but the father does not also share expenses. In many cases, it is unclear whether these expenses are supposed to be shared, or whether mothers simply wish they were shared. Statements include: “He doesn’t pay for anything. Other than the child support, I pay for everything: school lunch, childcare, braces, health insurance... everything.” and “Because I pretty much provide for everything. I get child support but that goes toward rent, utilities, etc. He doesn’t contribute toward extra expenses not covered by insurance.” Frequently, mothers discuss that expense-sharing is not part of the order even as regular support is insufficient to cover costs. “I have a lot of expenses, especially for orthodontia, and their dad never wanted to pay. He doesn’t want to pay anything that is not in the child support [order].” Likewise, “His idea is that child support is all that’s needed; I feel there is more, above and beyond, that we should be splitting.”

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This report has examined the way divorced parents contribute to the costs of their children, and how mothers characterize the fairness of those contributions, with particular attention to differences by placement arrangements. Using unique survey data from mothers who divorced 6–10 years earlier (Vogel, 2021), we examined mothers' reports of orders and actual practice regarding regular child support as well as the explicit sharing of child-related expenses.

Consistent with past work, we find that regular support orders are much less common in the context of shared versus sole placement. Indeed, around 45% of mothers with shared placement don't have a regular support order in place, a rate three times as high as among mothers with sole placement. This is compounded by lower order and payment amounts. On the other hand, and again consistent with the broader literature, compliance with orders, when orders exist, is higher with shared placement arrangements.

A key contribution of this report is to expand our understanding of the ways parents support their children beyond the payment of regular child support. We do this by looking at orders for a limited set of expense types (e.g., health insurance, medical costs, and childcare) as well as at mothers' reports of actual shared expenses for a larger set of domains (e.g., also including clothing, school expenses, and activity expenses). We find that orders for health insurance and medical expenses are quite common, with no notable differences between mothers with shared and sole-placement cases. More than four of five mothers report having a legal order addressing health insurance, while seven in ten report a legal order that addresses medical expenses. Regarding expense-sharing in practice—that is, how mothers describe the way expenses were actually covered over the past year—mothers with shared placement report significantly higher relative contributions from fathers than do mothers with sole placement, across all six expense categories considered.

This is not surprising, of course, based on both the mechanics of shared placement—where it seems likely both parents would incur at least some direct costs in at least some of the listed areas—as well as the explicit expectations for sharing variable expenses, as reflected in state policy. An important takeaway is that accounting for the ways that both parents directly contribute to child-related expenses, rather than only focusing on child support, is critical to understanding the way parents financially support their children and the extent to which that support is consistent with legal obligations. Orders for regular support provide an incomplete picture of legal obligations; payment of regular support provides an incomplete picture of contributions and pay-to-owe ratios for regular support provide an incomplete picture of compliance with the full range of support obligations.

In addition to describing the scope of parental contributions, an important focus of this report is to explore mothers' perceptions of the fairness of how those contributions are shared between parents, considering the full range of ways parents contribute both via child support transfers and specific expenditures. Descriptively, mothers with shared placement were much more likely to characterize overall contributions as fair than were those with sole placement. We explored this through multivariate models of perceived fairness as well as through an examination of mothers' own responses to open-ended questions regarding their perceptions of fairness.

Multivariate analyses of perceived fairness confirmed that the share of expenses borne by fathers, and the amount of regular child support paid, were both important predictors. Notably, higher levels of perceived fairness on the part of shared-placement mothers was entirely explained by the extent of fathers' relative contributions to expenses across the six domains considered. Other factors mattered to fairness as well. In particular, mothers who reported good

or excellent relationships with the other parent were far more likely to characterize the distribution of child contributions as fair, net of other factors, and including this in the model had no meaningful impact on other coefficients. We can't tell from these models if feeling that child contributions were fair contributed to a good relationship, or a good relationship resulted in a greater sense that things were proceeding fairly. However, that the association between relationship quality and perceived fairness is so robust despite extensive other controls, and that its inclusion has virtually no impact on the role of anything else in the model, suggests an important connection between how mothers characterize their relationships and how they perceive fairness.

The importance of cost-sharing and relationship quality as predictors of fairness was mirrored in the qualitative results: cost-sharing was widely cited by mothers who described overall child support contributions as fair, and absence of or insufficient cost-sharing were widely cited by mothers who described contributions towards the cost of children as unfair. Importantly, a range of issues were described when cost-sharing was raised as a concern, including noncompliance with legal obligations; disagreement over appropriate or necessary expenses such as child activities; and a frustrating or difficult process to negotiate payments with the other parent and a reluctance to contribute to conflict. Regarding noncompliance with cost-sharing orders, health insurance and medical expenses came up frequently; discrepancies between orders and practice were also evident in a comparison of mothers' reports of orders and practice in these domains. Qualitative results also highlighted the interplay between cost-sharing and the nature of parents' relationships, where fairness was often explained not only by the level of cost-sharing but by a constructive and supportive approach to handling the details. Related to this, many mothers, particularly with shared placement, explained their sense of fairness by

describing arrangements that parents sort out themselves; and indeed, our multivariate analyses found that shared-placement mothers who lacked an order for regular support were more likely to perceive overall child support contributions as fair.

Despite these insights, this work does have limitations. Most importantly, we are describing expense-sharing from the vantage point of mothers. Likewise, we are only discussing mothers' perceptions on fairness regarding parental contributions to child expenses. It is possible that fathers would describe a different division of costs than that described by mothers; and it is quite likely that fathers would have different perspectives and insights into the fairness of arrangements. As discussed by Vogel et al. (2022), stakeholders with differing vantage points conceptualize fairness in different ways. In this report, our focus is on differences between mothers with shared and sole placement. However, in future work we hope to compare reports from mothers and fathers with shared placement.

Policy Implications

These findings offer several implications for policy and practice, some of which mirror implications arising in a companion report (Vogel et al., 2022). An overarching theme is the importance of how parents navigate the issues of shared expenses, including how this is enmeshed in underlying patterns of communication, differences in priorities and expectations, and overall quality of co-parenting relationships. Given the continuing trends toward shared placement—indeed, this is now the most common arrangement in Wisconsin following divorce, and is growing among non-marital cases as well—ensuring there are appropriate supports to help parents navigate expense sharing in practice seems critical. Potential supports could involve front-end help, whether through mediation or other approaches, to ensure cost-sharing arrangements are crafted in ways that are likely to work for parents while being fair to all parties.

Supports could also involve ongoing, accessible help in navigating disagreements about appropriate expenses that may emerge over time—though this is obviously a somewhat charged area that may or may not lend itself readily to simple remedies. Finding ways for child support agencies to support these challenges seems in keeping with evolving efforts on the part of CSAs to elevate family-supporting services in addition to more traditional collections-focused activities.

Findings also suggest that CSAs and courts could benefit from additional ways of monitoring and enforcing cost-sharing obligations. This is, of course, a difficult needle to thread. Many mothers emphasized they manage cost-sharing well on their own and, for many families, adding layers of monitoring and enforcement would be unwelcome and unneeded intrusions into arrangements that already work well. At the same time, our results also offer evidence that for some families, cost-sharing—at least from mothers' vantage point—does not proceed as it is supposed to. Since cost-sharing is among the most substantive ways parents support their children in the context of shared placement, exploring appropriate mechanisms to ensure this happens as intended may be warranted, just as concerted attention to formal compliance led to improvements in that regard.

Finding streamlined ways for the system to address this, such as through accessible mediation as well as better and more proactive information on how parents can seek help with conflict resolution, seems a fruitful direction to explore. Likewise, ensuring parents understand the circumstances in which changing their orders to reflect changes in the kinds of costs incurred by children as they grow could help parents in navigating changing needs that may not be reflected in existing orders. Going forward, research could shed light on potential remedies by

systematic efforts to learn from parents about useful strategies for navigating the challenges of expense-sharing in both the short-term and longer-term.

Finally, it seems important to acknowledge that traditional ways of monitoring child support performance, particularly regarding compliance, may increasingly miss the mark when important aspects of child support obligations are not reflected in routinized data on orders and payments. The normative shift toward shared placement—and the concomitant shift towards more informal ways of meeting financial obligations to children—make it more difficult to understand the extent to which systems are working as intended when relying on routinized data collection methods. Integrating research insights centered on these emergent trends—including insights derived from talking with parents directly—will help child support system staff and policymakers make better decisions for the well-being of children statewide.

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