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Exploring the Connection between Child Support and Child Care Subsidies

2024–2026 Child Support Policy Research Agreement: Task 7

Molly A. Costanzo
Lisa Klein Vogel
Hanna Han
Alexis Dennis
Institute for Research on Poverty
University of Wisconsin–Madison

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INTRODUCTION

Child support and child care subsidies are two disparate yet connected economic supports for low-income single-parent families. The regularity of receipt of both sources of support contributes to overall family economic well-being. Regular receipt of child support can be an important income source for parents and children to help meet the basic needs of children's households. Consistent access to child care, in turn, helps facilitate parents' participation in regular employment, and therefore supports the likelihood of regular wage income coming into children's households. Child care can be especially important for single-parent families who may not have a second parent to provide care while the parent is working or otherwise unavailable.

As important as child support payments and child care subsidies are for families on their own, these two resources also have the potential to impact each other. Parents who receive child care subsidies in Wisconsin are generally required to participate in the child support program if not married to their child's other parent, emphasizing the tie between the two programs. Regular child support payments can help families plan for and afford regular child care for children in combination with support from child care subsidies (given that subsidies may not cover families' full child care costs). Additionally, though monthly child support income below $1,250 is not counted as household income for purposes of determining subsidy eligibility or amount, if child support income exceeds $1,250 in a month, the totality of the child support received becomes part of the family's income calculation. Given that child support can be an irregular source of income, monthly variation in child support receipt could affect subsidy receipt. Currently, there is limited evidence about families who are served by both the child support and child care subsidy programs, and, despite the potential for child support to influence child care subsidies, little is known about the interaction between the two programs. This study aims to better understand the population of families who participate in both programs and the relationship between child support receipt and child care subsidies for mothers in Wisconsin with child support orders. Given the importance of both child care and child support for economic well-being of children in custodial-parent families, findings can provide insights into families served by both programs and the connections—and disconnections—between the two.

BACKGROUND

Child Support

Child support is an important source of income for some families with young children. At the federal level, the IV-D child support system serves one in six families with children (Office of Child Support Services, 2025). In 2017, income from child support comprised 8.8% of custodial parents' personal income (Grall, 2020) and, by one estimate, for families with incomes below poverty it comprised more than 12% of family income (Cancian et al., 2025). Yet, child support can be an inconsistent source of income for many families. Just under 70% of custodial parents who were owed child support in 2017 received any payments, with less than half receiving all of the child support they were owed (Grall, 2020).

Because child support alone (or in combination with employment) may not provide sufficient resources, many families who receive child support also participate in public benefit programs. Approximately 40% of all custodial-parent families received at least one other public benefit, including nearly 28% who received SNAP benefits (Grall, 2020). Considering custodial parents with household income below the poverty threshold, over three-fourths participated in at least one benefit program (Grall, 2020). Importantly, income from child support—when received—can affect other income sources and benefits eligibility. Some work has highlighted the potential for benefits "cliffs" associated with child support receipt (i.e., Anderson et al., 2022). There is also some limited work investigating exempting child support income from overall income eligibility for programs like SNAP (i.e., Heflin et al., 2020).

In addition to the overlap in programmatic participation for families who are owed child support, child support cooperation requirements reinforce programmatic interactions. In all states, families who receive TANF or Medicaid benefits are required to participate in child support (Selekman & Holcomb, 2018). In some states, including Wisconsin, parents who receive child care subsidies, a major source of support for many families with young children, also have a child support cooperation requirement (Selekman & Holcomb, 2018). Indeed, child care subsidies are an important benefit for many families, and one that is interconnected with child support receipt in many domains.

Child Care Subsidies

In 2024, more than two-thirds of single mothers with children under 6 were employed and, for all single mothers, the proportion was nearly 80% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2025, April). In Wisconsin in the same year, all parents (i.e., two parents in two-parent families and one parent in single-parent families) were employed in 73% of all families with children under 6 and nearly 79% of families with children from 6 to 18 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2025). Given the high level of labor market participation for parents, most families in Wisconsin rely on child care. Full-time child care for young children who are not yet in school and wrap-around care for school-age children can be crucial supports, allowing parents to work, attend school, or participate in training activities. In addition, there is substantial evidence that high-quality child care can support healthy child development and school readiness for young children (e.g., Currie, 2001; Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013; etc.), and, though evidence is mixed on after-school programs, the importance of the availability of wrap-around care as an employment support is clear.

Despite its importance, the cost of child care can be prohibitively high. In the United States, the cost of full-time care for families with one child ranges (by state) from 8.9% to 16% of median income, and for infants in full-time center-based care, costs can be up to 26% of median income (U.S. Department of Labor, 2025, January). In Wisconsin, center-based care for an infant is 16% of median household income (DCF, 2025b), averaging just under $12,000 each year. Child Care Aware estimates that center-based child care for an infant is approximately 44% of median income for single-parent households in Wisconsin, and that families with child care costs spend more on child care than most other household expenses, including rent (Child Care Aware, 2026). Though costs drop for wrap-around care for school-age children, families are still spending on average between $6,000 and $9,000 annually for school-age care (Poyatzis & Livingston, 2024).

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) is one of the primary federal policy tools to support access to child care by lowering the cost for eligible families. CCDF is a block grant program; it is federally funded and administered by the states, though states must follow some federal rules. In federal fiscal year 2023, 1.6 million children from 994,000 families received monthly subsidies, with nearly half of these families reporting income below poverty (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2026). While each state determines its specific programmatic rules, eligible families receive monthly funding to help cover some of their child care costs. Broadly, families are eligible if parents are employed or participating in eligible education or training programs and if family income is below 85% of state median income (SMI) or some other lower income threshold determined by the state (Lynch, 2024). States determine how much families receive based on a variety of characteristics, including family size, employment situation, and the local child care market. Most families also are required to pay a copayment (Lynch, 2024). Families apply for subsidies, which can then be used to pay for child care from licensed child care providers. In practice, most of these providers are center based (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2026), though they may also be in-home or family providers. States determine a reauthorization period, after which families must recertify their income and other eligibility information (Lynch, 2024).

Child care subsidies, by design, lower the cost of care for families and help support parental labor market activity. As a result, research suggests a positive impact of consistent subsidy receipt on families' economic well-being both through lower child care costs and higher levels of parental employment (Forry, 2009; Ha & Miller, 2015; Kim & Henly, 2021; Fanin et al., 2024). Evidence of overall family well-being (i.e., non-economic well-being) is mixed, but at least some studies indicate positive associations with a range of outcomes for families and children including, in recent studies, lower levels of family violence (Maguire-Jack et al., 2022), increased child skill development (Moschini, 2023), and increased educational attainment for mothers (Schochet & Johnson, 2019), among other benefits.

Still, the research indicates that not all families who are eligible for subsidies are able to use them (e.g., Henly & Adams, 2018). Further, spells of child care subsidy receipt tend to be short. Factors that account for subsidy instability include: Change in employment status and earnings, particularly loss of employment (Henly et al., 2017; Ha & Meyer, 2010); lack of fit between available providers and child care needs, including job schedules (Henly et al., 2017); and the potential for administrative burden related to reauthorization of benefits. To this last point, several studies find that subsidy spells are linked to the timing of eligibility reauthorization, with many families exiting subsidy eligibility and use around the time of subsidy reauthorization (e.g., Grobe et al., 2016; Weber et al., 2014), and, recent studies have found that a 2014 change requiring all eligibility periods to be set to 12 months lengthened spells (Davis et al., 2017; Hong et al., 2025). Families may also cease using subsidies because they are no longer income eligible. Though this may primarily be due to job loss (and therefore loss of eligibility), Ha and Meyer (2010) found that 20–30% of mothers in their identified cohort exited subsidy use due to “economic successes,” or higher incomes. In these cases, mothers lost eligibility because their incomes were too high. As with other benefits, income from child support can count towards overall family income and affect child care subsidies. We further examine and describe the policy connections between the two programs in the next section.

Wisconsin Policy Context

In Wisconsin, the state-administered federal CCDF subsidy program is called Shares. To be eligible for Shares, families must meet three basic criteria: (1) Have children under 13 (or under 19 with a disability); (2) have monthly gross income that is less than 200% of the federal poverty level; and (3) have parents or guardians who are working, enrolled in school, or participating in other approved training activities through FoodShare or employment services (DCF, 2024). Families can initially apply for subsidies online or in-person or by phone, and this can be followed by an interview and request for verification. Families then select a licensed provider and submit a request for authorization to DCF, which includes the provider information, number of children, and hourly schedule for approved activities. Families receive a benefits card, which is automatically loaded with their approved subsidy amount each month. Most families are required to pay a co-payment, the amount of which is based on their income and hours of care.[1]

Families must renew their application every 12 months. At renewal, if families' income exceeds 200% of FPL but is less than 85% of state median income, they will still be eligible, but income changes can impact their subsidy amount and eligibility. Families must report any changes in income of $250 per month or more, with any change in income impacting subsidies for the following month. For every $5 a family earns above 200% FPL (185% FPL prior to 2024), the copayment is increased by $1. The amount of child care subsidy is determined by several factors, including family size and income. Generally, countable income includes income from employment, Social Security, unemployment insurance, and workers' compensation.

Child support received in an amount less than $1,250 each month does not count towards family income in calculating eligibility or amount of child care subsidy for Shares. However, child support income above $1,250 each month is counted in the full amount. That is, a parent who receives child support payments of $1,200 per month would not have their child support included in their subsidy eligibility calculation; on the other hand, a parent who receives child support payments of $1,300 would have all their child support income included in calculation. Though the difference in child support receipt for these families is $100 in the month, the difference in income calculation is $1,300.

Because child support can be irregularly received, the policy guidance for treatment of "fluctuating income" in determining Shares eligibility is salient. In the Shares handbook (DCF, 2024) Section 6.4.2, fluctuating income is described as follows:

[1] For more detailed information about the Shares program and eligibility, see https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/wishares.

- If income is regularly received, but the amount varies, the amount should be averaged.
- If it is normally obtained but received irregularly, it should also be averaged.
- If neither the amount nor frequency is consistent or predictable, it should be counted only for the month in which it was received.

Therefore, child support may be treated differently depending on the regularity, normality, and consistency of receipt. To the extent that families experience irregular child support payments or variations in amount above the threshold, this policy guidance indicates that the irregularity may influence Shares eligibility calculations. Fluctuations in child support may impact both the amount of child care subsidy and eligibility overall. For example, if a custodial mother has income above 200% of FPL and she experiences a fluctuation in child support resulting in more than $1,250 received in a month, her child care subsidy amount may be reduced or at zero in the following month. It could also result in the loss of eligibility if it causes her income to surpass 85% SMI. We outline some additional potential examples in Table 1.

Table 1: Scenarios of Child Support Receipt Impacting Shares Subsidies

Mechanism	Illustrative Scenario	Subsidy Impact
Payment on arrears via tax intercept pushes income over the 85% SMI cap	Tonya's income is 202% FPL at renewal. She is owed child support of $1,000/month, which she does not regularly receive. After a tax intercept in April and the noncustodial parent taking a second job, she receives over $2,500 for three months in a row, pushing her income over 85% of State Median Income for three months.	**Loses eligibility**
Cooperation requirement at application triggers a new child support order which impacts subsidy amount	Valerie does not have a child support order in place when she applies for Shares. Due to her application and cooperation requirements, her Shares application results in a new child support order for $950/month, which she receives irregularly due to the obligor's truck driving job (i.e., some months she does not receive any payments, and some months she receives more than her order amount). When she has a few months in a row with larger-than-normal payments—after several months with no payments—and a wage increase at work, her subsidy is reduced and her copayment increases.	**Subsidy decreases; copay increases**
Regular child support income pushes countable income above 200% FPL at renewal	Zoe has income from wages just below 200% FPL and then begins regularly receiving two child support orders totaling $1,300/month. This is above the countable threshold and so this added income crosses the 200% FPL threshold at renewal, triggering a transition to the exit phase, making receipt more precarious.	**Enters exit phase**
Fluctuating child support income averaged across months	Ana receives child support in varying amounts across 12 months ($0 to $1,600). Because this is counted as regularly received fluctuating income, it is averaged to $800/month and is not counted towards income for Shares eligibility.	**No impact**

Another key policy context in Wisconsin inextricably linking these two programs for single-parent families is that eligibility for Shares is contingent upon cooperating with the child support program. As described in the Shares handbook, this cooperation requirement mirrors that for other public programs including BadgerCare and W2 and means that parents must "assist" with location efforts, establishing paternity, and setting and enforcing any child support payments which they are legally owed (DCF, 2024, Section 4.7). Parents may claim good cause if the parent has sufficient reasons, often safety concerns, for not cooperating with child support.

CHILD SUPPORT, CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES, AND CURRENT STUDY

Considering child support and child care subsidies separately, it is clear that many families both at the federal level and in Wisconsin interact with each program. Further, the two have the potential to influence one another. The population of parents with child support orders near the designated threshold are especially likely to be influenced by the connection between the two programs. Additionally, though not codified in policy as are the other two pathways (i.e., cooperation requirements and receipt above the prescribed threshold counting towards income), child support can affect child care and child care subsidies through the provision of resources that allow custodial parents to make a range of decisions about child care. If child support is provided regularly, it could make child care options more affordable for the custodial parent by supplementing the large monthly cost. Child support could, for example, allow custodial parents to afford additional wrap-around care or to opt for a preferred, but more costly, child care provider. Child support could alternatively allow a custodial parent to opt out of longer hours or in to a more flexible work schedule, therefore allowing parents to purchase less child care.

Despite these multiple pathways and programmatic connections for families with order amounts near the established threshold, evidence about the interaction between child support and child care is extremely limited. One exception is a 2006 IRP study from Casper and Cook. The authors focused on the potential for a policy change to begin counting child support income in calculating child care subsidy amounts; they found that approximately 4% of subsidy cases would lose eligibility if child support income was counted in family income eligibility. This reinforces the potential connection between the two resources.

In this study, we first aim to estimate the number of mothers[2] in Wisconsin who are owed child support near the policy-relevant threshold of $1,250 per month and receive child care subsidies. We select this threshold given its policy-relevance for families. We provide additional context about these families, drawing from interviews with mothers about their pathways to both programs. We then examine the child support case and child care subsidy measures for mothers in this sample and explore associations between child support receipt and child care subsidy receipt. We expand on these quantitative findings by exploring mothers' perspectives on how and if child support shapes their experiences with child care subsidies.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

We use an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, in which we leverage both quantitative and qualitative data sources and integrate findings to explore patterns across Wisconsin families in combination with in-depth insights into family experiences with these income sources. In an explanatory mixed-methods approach, an initial quantitative phase is conducted which then informs the study's qualitative data collection; qualitative data is intended to provide insight into the initial quantitative data analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009). Our quantitative findings provide a broad understanding of the population of mothers in Wisconsin who may experience a change in child care subsidy eligibility because of their child support receipt, and our qualitative findings build on this analysis by offering important depth, nuance, and context to the experiences of these mothers. We describe both in more detail below. Project activities were approved by the University of Wisconsin–Madison's Institutional Review Board.

[2]We focus on mothers because they represent the vast majority of custodial parents who also participate in Wisconsin Shares. We note that experiences of custodial fathers may be different from those we describe here.

Quantitative Component

The quantitative analysis served two purposes: (1) To define the sampling frame of the qualitative analysis (described in the next section) and (2) to examine descriptively the sample of mothers in Wisconsin whose child care subsidies are at risk of being affected by their child support income. We use the Wisconsin Administrative Data Core (WADC), which links administrative data from multiple Wisconsin state programs using individual-level identifiers. Specifically, we use data from the Kids Information Data System (KIDS), which contains information on child support orders, payments, and case type; CARES, which has child care subsidy receipt and amount; and quarterly wage records from the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program to capture the mothers' employment and wages. The sample period ranges from 2015 to 2024, which is the most recent year of data available.

Sample

To define the sample, we identified a sample of mothers who were the payee on one or more open current child support cases for at least one month between January 2015 to December 2024 (N = 275,910) (see Table 2). We then limit the sample to those who were also receiving child care subsidies during at least one month in which they were owed child support during the observation period. We further narrow the sample to focus on mothers whose eligibility for child care subsidies may be impacted by the child support income threshold, which we operationalize in two different ways. The primary sample is mothers with child support orders of at least $1,000 for at least one month within the sample period (while also receiving subsidies).[3] We also define an alternative sample as mothers who received a child support payment of at least $1,250 for at

[3] For mothers who have multiple open orders, we aggregate order amounts across all cases in which she is the payee.

least one month within the sample period (while also receiving child care subsidies). Additionally, we limit the number of months we observe the mothers in our sample to the 12 months following the first month in the sample period the mother entered the sample.[4] This is done to standardize the time frame of reference as the extended sampling period means mothers can be in the sample for differing lengths of time, ranging from 1 to 120 months; on average, mothers appear in our sample for 33.9 months (2.8 years). We note that results are robust to following mothers for 24 months.

The sample definition follows from the idea that child support order amounts that approach the child support income threshold of $1,250 are more likely to result in child support payments large enough to exceed the threshold. In addition to order amounts, however, we are also interested in understanding the role the regularity of child support income plays in how child support influences the receipt of child care subsidies. To this end, we split our sample into four subgroups based on the regularity of child support payments. The first group are mothers who receive a child support payment that is 90% or more of the amount they are due in current support for all 12 months they are in the sample (Always Receive Full Child Support). The second group are those who also receive at least some child support all 12 months but do not always receive the full amount (defined as 90% or more) (Always Receive Partial Child Support). The third group are mothers who never receive a child support payment for the full 12-month period (Never Receive Child Support). The final group are those who have at least one month in the 12-month sample window there they do not receive any child support payments (Sporadically Receive Child Support); on average this group received payments in 8 months,

[4]For example, if a mother had an order amount greater than $1,000 for the first time in March 2018, we observe her between March 2018 to February 2019.

though half of those months included payments that were less than 90% of what they were owed. Given the policy context and evidence about sporadic receipt of child support generally, this fourth group is the sample for which the experience of child support receipt might be most likely to influence their child care subsidy experience.

Method

The outcomes of interest for the quantitative analysis capture changes in a mother's participation in the child care subsidy program in the 12 months after she first enters the sample. We look at whether the mother experienced any interruptions in child care subsidy receipt, measured as having at least one month in the 12-month period when she did not receive child care subsidies. We also examine changes in the monthly child care subsidy amount.

We examine the relationship between these subsidy outcomes and various child support measures to describe the association between child support measures and patterns of subsidy receipt. The first set of measures are the monthly current child support order (owed) and payment (receipt) amount, aggregated across all cases. We also consider whether the mother received a child support payment greater than the threshold of $1,250 in at least one month or at least three months within the 12-month period. Lastly, we use indicator variables for the four subgroups defined above, which provide a measure of the regularity of mothers' child support income.

Because several other factors are related to both child care subsidy receipt and child support receipt, and because there is little evidence about the population served by both, we also include several other relevant measures. Related to child support, we include: Number of open child support cases; whether mother's open case(s) are all divorce, all non-marital, or a combination; and the age of the mother's youngest child. We also include a measure of mother's race and ethnicity.

We also include measures relevant to Shares receipt, including mother's employment, earnings, and subsidy zone. To qualify for Shares, generally mothers must be employed or engaged in training or education. Therefore, we include measures of mother's employment status, defined as whether she has wages in a given quarter in the state UI wage data. For our multivariate models, we impute monthly employment from the quarterly wage and employment measures. The month-level employment measure is created by assuming that if a mother is employed in a given quarter, she is employed every month of that quarter. For example, if a mother is employed in 2018 Q1, then we impute that she was employed January, February, and March of 2018. Mothers must also meet income eligibility to qualify, so we include an indicator for whether the mother was income-eligible, which is measured using quarterly UI wage data. Similarly, we use quarterly data to create month-level wages, imputed by assuming the mother made the same wages every month of that quarter and dividing the quarterly wage by three. Her earnings are considered income-eligible if her imputed monthly wage is below 200% of the monthly Federal Poverty Limit (FPL) measured by wages. In Wisconsin, the Shares program determines reimbursement rates for care based on subsidy zones, which are intended to reflect differential cost of and availability of providers (DCF, 2025a) and reflect the urbanicity of the county. Zone A is less than 25% urban, Zone B is 25–49% urban, Zone C is 50–74% urban, and Zone D is 75% or more urban (see Appendix A for a Subsidy Rate Zone map). We include measures of these zones as well. To conduct the descriptive analysis, we first examine the characteristics of the sample of mothers who are owed child support at a level near the Shares disregard threshold and receive child care subsidies. We then compare the characteristics of the different child support subtypes in the sample. Finally, we use both a multivariate OLS regression model and an event history model, specifically a discrete time logit, to estimate the association between child care subsidy receipt and child support measures. The multivariate regression model estimates how much a change in the regressor can explain the change in the outcome, controlling for other factors in the model, while the event history model captures how the regressors predict the likelihood that the outcome occurs. We use lagged measures given that changes in child support are likely to influence later months of subsidy use. We note that the child care subsidy amount is a continuous measure in the multivariate model but is a binary measure in the event history model, indicating whether there was a change larger than $50.[5]

Qualitative Component

Our qualitative analysis focused on mothers' views on how child support shapes their experiences obtaining and maintaining child care subsidies. We also were interested in mothers' experiences accessing and maintaining child care and navigating co-parenting relationships. We used our initial quantitative analysis to draw our qualitative interview sample, meeting the overall criteria as previously described and receiving child support and subsidies in 2024 (the most recent year for which our administrative data were available at the time of analysis). Specifically, as described above, we limited the sample to mothers who (1) were owed at least $1,000 in current child support in at least one month of 2024, and (2) received child care subsidies for at least one month in 2024 (n = 1,166 mothers). We initially divided mothers into the two subsamples indicated above by regularity of child support receipt: (1) Mothers who received stable child support payments, defined as mothers who received all of the child support that they were owed in 2024; and (2) mothers who received unstable child support, defined as those who received partial payments, payments in only some months, or no payments.

[5] We use a $50 threshold for the change in the subsidy amount in order to capture a non-negligible and meaningful amount of change.

Working with our data science team and the University of Wisconsin Survey Center, we sent recruitment letters in batches of 250 to mothers in the sample, with each batch sent one week apart. Eligible mothers received the study flyer that explained the purpose of the study, identified IRP as the sponsor, indicated that interviews were expected to last one hour, and shared the incentive amount of $50 upon interview completion. Interested mothers could use a QR code to complete a brief Qualtrics screener which asked for contact information, basic demographic information and information about child support receipt and Shares participation in 2025. This information allowed the study team to validate eligibility and facilitated sample selection.

Study team members monitored screener responses and contacted interested mothers to complete interviews. In total, we interviewed 23 eligible mothers. The study team used recruitment quotas and purposive sampling to ensure that we heard primarily from mothers with different experiences. We weighted our recruitment quotas to ensure that we spoke primarily with mothers who experienced instability in child support receipt (aiming for two-thirds of interview participants in this category) and also with mothers who received stable support across the year (aiming for one-third of interview participants in this category). Our final interview sample reflected these goals, with 15 of 23 interview participants having experienced instability in child support receipt and 8 of 23 having received all of the support owed to them across the year (i.e., stably received). In addition, we selected cases for follow-up purposively to ensure that we heard from mothers:

- Across different Wisconsin counties;
- From urban areas, small towns or cities, and rural areas;
- With different current employment situations (i.e., currently working full-time, working part-time, or not currently working); and

- With children of different ages.

We interviewed all participants by Zoom between January and March 2026. Each interview included two study team members and the participant following a semi-structured interview protocol. The interview process began with informed consent, followed by the interview itself, which was recorded. After the interview was complete, the interviewer gathered the participant's preferred vendor for the $50 incentive, and the study team sent the incentive and a resource sheet to the participant. On average, the interview process lasted about 57 minutes.

Upon completion, all interview recordings were professionally transcribed, stripped of potential identifiers, and uploaded into NVivo software. Discussion topics that included close-ended data (e.g., number of children; number of adults in the household; number and amount of child support orders; child care facility type; year of last subsidy receipt) were coded in Excel. All other interview data was coded in NVivo. We augmented transcript data with detailed notes taken by the second interview team member following a structured template, which highlighted key domains of discussion within each interview. We created an initial set of codes derived from the research questions and interview guides; when all interviews were completed and transcribed, we added additional codes upon initial review of the transcripts and drawing on interview notes. The lead coder performed an initial round of coding using this scheme and added new codes (as separate codes or subcodes), as needed, as analysis continued (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Crabtree & Miller, 2023). The second coder double-coded the first six transcripts. The team discussed areas of discrepancy and additional codes needed until resolution was reached. The lead coder applied the codebook to the remaining transcripts, with the second coder double-coding 20% of remaining transcripts. The team collaborated to review, identify and refine themes during the analysis phase and engaged in peer debriefing—within the qualitative analysis team and with the lead quantitative analyst—throughout the coding, analysis, and writing process (Franklin & Ballan, 2001). Quotes presented related to these themes have been lightly edited for clarity and brevity.

FINDINGS

Research Question 1: *How many Wisconsin mothers both receive Shares and are owed child support near the Shares disregard threshold? What are the pathways that lead mothers who participate in one of these programs to participate in the other?*

Of the 275,910 mothers who were the payee on one or more open current child support cases for at least one month between January 2015 to December 2024, we find that 42,401, or 15.4% of mothers with open current orders, also received Shares subsidies in at least one of the months in which they had an open current child support order. This is notable as, to our knowledge, this is the first look at the crossover in participation between the child support and child care subsidy programs. Table 2 also displays the proportion of mothers who may be most likely to have child support income over the Shares disregard threshold, which we have defined as mothers who are owed $1,000 in at least one month across all orders. This population of mothers (n = 2,988) comprises of 1.1% of all mothers owed child support and 7% of mothers owed child support and concurrently receiving child care subsidies. If we consider mothers who received current support payments greater than $1,250 in at least one month, the proportion is similar, though slightly smaller (0.9% of all mothers owed current support).

Table 2: Quantitative Sample Counts and Proportion

Sample Definition (Study Period: 2015–2024)	Count	% Mothers with Open Order
Mothers with open order	275,910	100.0%
Mothers with open order and received childcare subsidies	42,401	15.4%
... and had a monthly order amount >$1,000	2,988	1.1%
… and received at least one child support payment >$1,250	2,360	0.9%

Our interviews provided insight into how mothers in this sample first came into contact with either program, and how it happened that they became connected to both programs. Mothers in our sample were about evenly split in whether they came into contact with child support services or the Shares program first, with the timing dependent on life circumstances. Those who encountered Shares first were looking for help covering the costs of child care. Many mothers described learning about Shares from friends, family, or other benefits programs such as BadgerCare or FoodShare. This mother's experience was a common one:

> *I went in to apply for BadgerCare and probably WIC and all that stuff. And they said, "Well, you know . . . you should apply for daycare assistance, too."*

Still another common source of information was child care providers, as this mom told us:

> *The daycare, at the time, actually had said, hey, you know, did you know that you could apply? Because it was like, I was a first-time mom. I didn't know any of that.*

Notably, none of the mothers who were receiving child support before child care subsidies reported hearing about Shares from their local child support office. For some of the women we spoke with, the application process for Shares felt straightforward, with many describing it as relatively simple. For others, the required documentation was burdensome, particularly for moms who were self-employed or had irregular sources of income. We also heard from moms that phone wait times for renewals could be long and difficult to fit into busy schedules given all that single working parents juggle.

Some mothers we spoke with, including some who came into contact with the child support program before seeking out Shares, first encountered child support when they sought to establish a child support order. These mothers often described seeking out an order to improve the likelihood of regular financial contributions from their co-parent, either proactively when their relationship ended, or in response to greater irregularity in their co-parent's informal contributions. Described one mother:

> *For my oldest, his dad has never really been a part of the picture, and for a while he was just like sending me money on a weekly basis and he was really good about it. But then just sometimes like, oh, I'll pay you next week or I'll pay twice the amount in two weeks. And so then I was like, well, if I'm his sole caregiver I need like something reliable and like official, I guess.*

Other mothers we talked to were required to participate in child support because they applied for Shares and were referred to child support. Perceptions of this requirement and mothers' experiences with the process varied. As this mother expressed, some accepted and understood the requirement, though, in some cases with some ambivalence:

> *I guess it's all fair because, you know, at the end of the day, if that person is working and they know who the father is, the state's going to have to pay for that child. You get what I'm saying? I get it, at the end of the day, because it's taxpayer's money.*

However, some moms experienced the required cooperation and the resulting process as confusing and unexpected, as with one mom who was surprised to receive several phone calls from child support after applying for Shares, and another who first encountered child support when an agency attorney appeared unexpectedly at her family court proceeding. We heard from some moms that their reasons for seeking out Shares felt disparate and distinct from their wishes to have the child support program involved in their relationships and arrangements with their children's other parent, so the requirement to participate in child support in order to receive child care felt unfair. Once established, a child support order might stay in effect far beyond a mothers' receipt of Shares, which can feel particularly burdensome when a mother did not seek out child support services in the first place. As this mother described:

> *"It's an absolute hassle to get off of once you start… If you ask any other parent who tried to cancel child support, and say you know what, "I don't need it anymore. I don't want it anymore." The court system, and the court date, they*

> *have to forcibly go to give them a reason why, It's insane. So, it's easy to get on, it's a hassle to get off.*

For some, the process felt invasive and depersonalizing; as this mother described:

> *It was horrible even down to the… so, after submitting all the information, the connection to child support where they're saying, you know, in order to be approved for child care subsidies you have to sign the child support order. So, going through that, and the kind of questions is what got me. Asking me how many partners you had? Do you know who the father is? Like that's quite a bit. … for them to ask such intimate and private questions like that to receive assistance. I just think it's very invasive; the kind of questions that they're asking. "Were you a victim of sexual assault?" is actually one of the questions that they ask you to figure out child support for you to receive child care, and if you are not complying with them, you risk your child care.*

In addition to experiences of intrusion, though the cooperation requirement includes exceptions for good cause, we also heard from some mothers that this increased interpersonal conflict with the other parents, and, in some cases, caused mothers to feel concerned for their safety; as one mother described, "…I can put myself in harm by giving the agency and the government this information."

Research Question 2: *What are the characteristics of moms for whom this issue matters? What role do the Shares program and child support play in how these moms make ends meet?*

Table 3 offers descriptive information for our primary sample (see Appendix Table 1 for descriptives for the alternative sample), providing information about the demographic, child support, employment, and child care characteristics for moms whose child care subsidies may be most likely to be impacted by child support receipt. On average, moms were in our sample (i.e., received child care subsidies and were owed at least $1,000 in current child support) for just under 34 months. Most moms in our sample (78%) were identified as White via administrative data, 20% were identified as Black, 15% were identified as Hispanic, and 19% were identified as another race or ethnicity.[6]

Table 3: Quantitative Sample Descriptive Characteristics

Characteristics	Mean (SD)
Demographics	
Months in the sample period (2015–2024)	33.92 (25.74)
Race/Ethnicity	
Black	0.20 (0.40)
White	0.78 (0.41)
Hispanic	0.15 (0.36)
Other	0.19 (0.39)
County Subsidy Zone	
Zone A	0.06
Zone B	0.13
Zone C	0.22
Zone D	0.59
Employment	
Employed at least 1 quarter	0.92 (0.27)
Number of quarters employed	3.37 (1.23)
Number of quarters employed with wages within eligibility range	3.37 (1.24)
Annual wages	$21,859 ($15,344)
Annual wages (excluding 0s)	$23,741 ($14,526)
Child Support Orders	
Number of open orders	1.67
1	0.44
2	0.40
3+	0.16
Mothers with order amount > = $1,250	0.35 (0.48)
Order amount	$1,204 ($420)
Order amount - only mothers with order amount <$1,250	$1,563

[6]Mothers can be identified with multiple races and ethnicities in the administrative data. We include the proportion who were identified as White, Black, Hispanic, and another race or ethnicity.

Characteristics	Mean (SD)
	($415)
Order amount - only mothers with order amount >=$1,250	$1,009
	($223)
Child Support Payments	
Number of months with payment - any	10.40
	(2.97)
Number of months with payment - 90%+ compliance	5.71
	(4.01)
Mothers with 1 order	4.50
	(3.73)
Mothers with 2+ orders	6.95
	(3.93)
Payment amount	$904
	($556)
Payment amount (excluding 0s)	$1,017
	($483)
Child Support Characteristics	
Only has divorce cases	0.26
Only has nonmarital cases	0.41
Has both divorce and nonmarital cases	0.32
Age of youngest child	6.88
	(3.75)
Childcare Subsidy Characteristics	
Number of months of childcare subsidy receipt	8.90
	(3.57)
Subsidy amount	$964
	($985)
Mothers who ever lost subsidy	0.53
	(0.50)
Number of months without receiving subsidy	
1–2 months	0.26
3–5 months	0.30
6+ months	0.44
Number of months between first month in sample and losing childcare subsidy - only mothers who ever lost subsidy	5.03
	(3.04)
N	2,988

Note: The sample contains mothers who had an open child support order amount >=$1,000. The sample period is 12 months following the mother's first inclusion in the sample. There were 536 mothers who had at least one month with an order amount of $0.

The employment and wages of mothers in our sample are consistent with the eligibility requirements of the Wisconsin Shares program. In our sample, 92% of mothers were employed for at least one quarter of the first year (4 quarters) in which they enter the sample and were employed for an average of 3.4 quarters. Given the requirement that subsidy recipients participate in approved activities such as employment and education, this is to be expected.[7] Emphasizing the limited earnings of this sample of working mothers, mothers with employment earned an average annual wage of $23,741. This is below 200% of the Federal Poverty Limit (FPL) in 2024 for all household sizes,[8] which is the income eligibility limit for the Shares program.

Understanding the child support characteristics for this sample may help child support workers better understand the sample of mothers on their caseload for whom this issue may be relevant. As may be expected, given the relatively high order amount required, a majority of mothers in this sample (56%) have multiple open cases, including 16% with three or more open orders. The average monthly amount of child support due to these mothers across all cases is $1,204. The high monthly order does not necessarily translate into larger monthly payments; while mothers received a child support payment on average 10.4 months out of the 12 months after entering the sample, in only half of those months (5.7 months) did mothers receive 90% or more of the current support due, with a slightly higher number of months with 90% compliance for mothers with multiple orders. On average, mothers received just over $900 each month ($1,017 when we exclude mothers who did not receive payments). Considering case type, 73% of mothers in the sample have at least one nonmarital child support case with 41% having only nonmarital child support cases; 58% of mothers in the sample have at least one divorce child

[7]The remaining 8% of mothers who were not employed for at least one quarter may have been attending school or a training activity or may have been employed at a job not covered by UI wage data, including self-employment, or gig work.

[8]In 2024, the annual limit for 200% FPL is $30,120 for a household size of one, $40,880 for a household size of two, and $51,640 for a household size of three. We use the 2024 limit as an illustration as it is the highest of all the years within the sample period.

support case and 26% have only divorce cases. The average age of the mother's youngest child at the time she enters the sample is 6.9 years with a standard deviation of 3.8 years, reflecting the relevant (and eligible) ages for child care costs.

Looking at child care subsidy characteristics, mothers in the sample received the subsidy for 8.9 months out of 12, with an average monthly subsidy amount of $964. Half of the mothers lost their child care subsidy for at least one month in the 12 months following their inclusion in the sample with a quarter of these mothers experiencing a short interruption of 1–2 months, around a third experiencing a longer interruption of 3–5 months, and 44% of mothers losing their child care subsidy for at least 6 months or more. A monthly order amount of $1,000 or more does not immediately result in the loss of child care subsidies; there was an average of 5 months between the mother entering the sample and losing the child care subsidy. In terms of county-level urbanicity zones, 59% of the mothers in our sample lived in an urban county (Zone D) for subsidy purposes, 22% lived in a Zone C county, 13% in Zone B, and 6% in Zone A.

As indicated by the wage and employment characteristics evident in the quantitative data, almost all moms we spoke with were employed and had income from wages and were owed a not insignificant amount in child support. Yet, virtually every mother we spoke with experienced economic hardship—including those who received child support regularly and those who did not. This mother's experience was common:

> *There are literally months . . .where I have to decide, do I give this child care provider the $300 copay or do I use this $300 for groceries to feed my family? Do I break it up and put $200 on groceries and then only give the light bill $100, even though I'm short on the light bill too?*

Nearly every mother we spoke with described weighing tradeoffs like these to make her family's financial situation work. Another mother told us that to make her finances work in a month where she did not receive child support, "I had to cut back on groceries. I had to go donate plasma. I did Instacart, I did DoorDash." Some of these tradeoffs and calculations were prompted by eligibility criteria for different benefits. We heard from moms that they were often trying to figure out what made the most sense for their family, like this mother told us:

> *Would full-time [work] be worth it? Would it make any sense? If it's full-time, I would lose everything. I would lose all my benefits. And half of my pay would go towards the benefits that the government was helping me with . . .. Then I would be getting the money of a part-time working a full-time job not having enough money for a lot of things. And also not having the time for my child and not having time for me.*

Moms consistently described the importance of Shares in allowing them to continue to work and earn for their children. As this mother described:

> *It has like been game changer for me to, like, still somewhat stay on a career baseline and be able to be a mom, you know, and just continue life because I can't [survive] if I don't have money, you know?*

As a quote from the mother below highlights, having child care—as made possible by Shares—plays a crucial role for making many aspects of life possible:

> *[Shares] is literally like the one thing that holds our life together. Like, I couldn't do anything without child care, like, literally.*

Child support also played a key role in buffering precarity for some mothers. Some moms described positive experiences receiving support regularly, and the importance of that for their families. Still, even moms who did receive all their ordered support regularly and in relatively large amounts described some difficulties making ends meet. In some cases, as with the mom below, they also described family court officials and child support workers who helped ease the process:

> *And [the court commissioner] told [the obligor], she goes, "Mr. So-and-so, do you know that the first of the month comes?" She goes, "Rent or mortgage is due." She's like, "Gas and electric is due." She goes, "Water is due. Wi-Fi is due." She goes, "Plus groceries on top of that." She goes, "They don't wait around till you send the money in. So, if you decide to send it on the 17th or the*

> *18th, they're not going to say, "Oh, don't worry. We'll wait till you get your money."*

However, for many moms we spoke with, child support was not a reliable source of income, which led to cascading negative effects for moms and kids. In one case, a mother, whose child support went unpaid in the months following her divorce, described that:

> *Once the divorce was finalized and that child support was then set in motion . . . the property management company automatically calculated that in to my income. And I didn't receive anything for the first like six months. And so I ended up getting evicted because I couldn't afford [rent].*

Another explained that she incurred credit card debt as a result of not receiving child support:

> *Once the child support, I mean, for three months, there was nothing. And [credit cards] covered a lot of our stuff. But long story short, I think I have maybe $400 in my savings account now, because I had to, for three months, pay everything. And I had to use my savings because there was nothing else. And then even when it started to come in, it was like, you know, 20%, maybe 50%, maybe 20% [of what I was owed]. I mean, it was like, it just kept going down, and I kept using just whatever I had to, to make it. And now we're here and to a point of the Lord is getting us through. I'll just say that.*

As a result of this variability in receipt, most of the moms we spoke with who were not regularly receiving the support they were owed learned to view child support as "nice to have" but not available to budget around, which could be stressful for finances and overall family well-being, as this mother describes:

> *And then that's when I started to realize that I needed to operate as if this was not a guaranteed source of income. And so I had to adjust and I was working two jobs. And my mental health kind of took a really hard hit because of, you know, all of the stress of trying to carry, you know, the financial load on my own. And then I would think, "Oh. I have some room to breathe." And the next thing you know, you know, now I don't. And so then I went and did this and did that when I should have been saving, you know, thinking I was going to get this money and then, you know, you don't.*

Another mother described having learned from the stress of the uncertainty that her approach was to view it as bonus income and not to include it in her household budget allocation:

I don't never count child support in my income. It's just one of those—It's like a lottery. That's how I look at child support. You might get it this month, you might not get it this month. So what I do is I do not count it because you'll be disappointed when you count on it and it don't show up. So the best thing to do is add up everything. And when you get that child support, act like you won the lottery because now you got this extra money.

Many moms were frustrated by what they viewed as the large load they were carrying to support their family financially, and provide all the caregiving labor, without help from their co-parent (or active resistance from their co-parent), and without help from organizations to enforce or support them. They felt alone and, in some cases, as though the programs they thought were intended to help them, like child support, were instead helping the obligor.

Yeah. Like, yeah, mom got to do it. You know, we're doing everything, working. You know, anytime our kid is sick, we got to take off and miss it. You know, that's not income that we get. You miss that income when you take off that day And I just feel like when I just hear about, like, my friends and them, like, how dads do get a slap on the wrist, because if they can make a program just to keep him out of jail, he's going to do the program, but he's not getting no money where they're paying us.… If dad only can pay $25, the state will be OK with just taking that $25, when in reality he's ordered to pay you $375. So now you're short $350. But the state will be like, "Well, he at least paid $25." But that's not what he's ordered to pay me. What am I going to do with $25? The way the economy is, $25 is barely a pair—it's only a pair of underwear. You can't even get a pair of socks with that now. So now you got to choose between your kids' socks or underwear. And I just feel like, I just said, I feel like they give dads too much pass when it comes to child support. Like, they just said, "Well, mom, you know, he's trying." Oh, he's trying? But what about me? You know?

Research Question 3*: What is the relationship between child support receipt and stability of child care subsidies? What are mothers' perceptions of how child care receipt can affect their child care subsidies, and how do these relationships affect their child care situations?*

Table 4 provides the same characteristics of mothers in our sample as Table 3 but broken down by subgroups of child support receipt (see Appendix Table 2 for the same using the alternative sample), allowing us to understand broad differences in characteristics by child support receipt pattern, including differences in subsidy experiences, and the prevalence of child support receipt stability for this sample. In that vein, we note that only a small portion of our sample (6%) received the full amount of child support due in the first 12 months after entering the sample, and a smaller proportion received no child support payments at all (2%); a small majority of mothers in our sample (55%) consistently received some child support each month, though not always the full amount, and the remaining 38% of mothers in the sample irregularly received child support payments (i.e., received payment in some months but not others).

Table 4: Quantitative Sample Characteristics by Subtypes of Child Support Receipt

	Mean (SD)				Comparison Against Sporadically Receive CS Group					
					Always Receive Full CS		Always Receive Partial CS		Never Receive CS	
	Always Receive Full CS	Always Receive Partial CS	Never Receive CS	Sporadically Receive CS	Difference	*p*-value	Difference	*p* -value	Difference	*p* -value
Counts	169	1,597	50	1,172						
Proportions	0.06	0.53	0.02	0.39						
Demographics										
Months in the sample period (2015–2024)	25.01	38.27	21.52	28.96	-3.95	0.00	9.31	0.00	-7.44	0.00
	(17.11)	(26.47)	(16.73)	(24.64)						
Race/Ethnicity										
Black	0.11	0.19	0.24	0.23	-0.13	0.00	-0.04	0.00	0.01	0.71
	(0.31)	(0.39)	(0.43)	(0.42)						
White	0.88	0.81	0.70	0.73	0.15	0.00	0.07	0.00	-0.03	0.07
	(0.32)	(0.40)	(0.46)	(0.44)						
Hispanic	0.10	0.15	0.10	0.16	-0.06	0.00	-0.01	0.00	-0.06	0.00
	(0.30)	(0.36)	(0.30)	(0.37)						
Other	0.15	0.19	0.12	0.21	-0.06	0.00	-0.02	0.00	-0.09	0.00
	(0.36)	(0.39)	(0.33)	(0.41)						
County Subsidy Zone										
Zone A	0.08	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.36	0.00	0.83
Zone B	0.18	0.13	0.10	0.12	0.06	0.00	0.01	0.01	-0.02	0.16
Zone C	0.20	0.23	0.24	0.20	0.00	0.95	0.03	0.00	0.04	0.02
Zone D	0.54	0.58	0.60	0.62	-0.07	0.00	-0.04	0.00	-0.02	0.36
Employment										
Employed at least 1 quarter	0.89	0.93	0.92	0.92	-0.03	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.84
	(0.32)	(0.26)	(0.27)	(0.27)						
Number of quarters employed	3.34	3.49	3.20	3.19	0.15	0.00	0.29	0.00	0.01	0.87
	(1.36)	(1.17)	(1.25)	(1.29)						
Number of quarters employed with wages within eligibility range	3.40	3.45	3.28	3.23	0.16	0.00	0.22	0.00	0.05	0.38
	(1.24)	(1.20)	(1.36)	(1.27)						
Annual wages	$19,351	$22,325	$20,490	$21,600	-$2,249.03	0.00	$724	0.00	-$1,111	0.11
	($14,149)	($14,535)	($15,408)	($16,725)						
Annual wages (excluding 0s)	$21,803	$24,106	$22,271	$23,538	-$1,735.39	0.00	$568	0.00	-$1,267	0.07
	($13,118)	($13,609)	($14,776)	($16,100)						

	Mean (SD)				Comparison Against Sporadically Receive CS Group					
					Always Receive Full CS		Always Receive Partial CS		Never Receive CS	
	Always Receive Full CS	Always Receive Partial CS	Never Receive CS	Sporadically Receive CS	Difference	*p*-value	Difference	*p* -value	Difference	*p* -value
Child Support Orders										
Number of open orders	1.24	1.91	0.93	1.38	-0.14	0.00	0.53	0.00	-0.46	0.00
1	0.80	0.29	0.88	0.61	0.19	0.00	-0.32	0.00	0.27	0.00
2	0.15	0.49	0.12	0.31	-0.16	0.00	0.18	0.00	-0.19	0.00
3+	0.05	0.22	0.00	0.09	-0.03	0.00	0.14	0.00	-0.09	0.00
Mothers with order amount >=$1,250	0.34	0.35	0.33	0.36	-0.02	0.07	-0.01	0.04	-0.03	0.16
	(0.47)	(0.48)	(0.47)	(0.48)						
Order amount	$1,258	$1,223	$1,116	$1,166	$91.35	0.00	$56.89	0.00	-$50.76	0.02
	($416)	($350)	($804)	($487)						
Order amount - only mothers with order amount <$1,250	$1,605	$1,537	$1,821	$1,587	$17.85	0.31	-$50.13	0.00	$234	0.00
	($545)	($379)	($850	($406)						
Order amount - only mothers with order amount >=$1,250	$1,080	$1,056	$766	$930	$150	0.00	$126	0.00	-$165	0.00
	($113)	($147)	($441)	($285)						
Child Support Payments										
Number of months with payment - any	12.00	12.00	0.06	8.01	3.99	0.00	3.99	0.00	-7.95	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.42)	(3.08)						
Number of months with payment - 90%+ compliance	12.00	6.38	0.00	3.82	8.18	0.00	2.55	0.00	-3.82	0.00
	(0.00)	(3.64)	(0.00)	(3.40)						
Mothers with 1 order	12.00	5.21	0.00	1.97	10.03	0.00	3.23	0.00	-1.97	0.00
	(0.00)	(3.54)	(0.00)	(2.52)						
Mothers with 2+ orders	12.00	8.88	0.00	4.83	7.17	0.00	4.05	0.00	-4.83	0.00
	(0.00)	(2.35)	(0.00)	(3.38)						
Payment amount	$1,263	$1,023	$1.77	$692	$570.67	0.00	$331	0.00	-$690	0.00
	($439)	($434)	($28)	($642)						
Payment amount (excluding 0s)	$1,263	$1,023	$355	$944	$318.83	0.00	$79.21	0.00	-$589	0.07
	($439)	($434)	($226)	($569)						
Child Support Characteristics										
Only has divorce cases	0.49	0.23	0.50	0.27	0.21	0.00	-0.04	0.00	0.23	0.00
Only has nonmarital cases	0.43	0.49	0.20	0.30	0.13	0.00	0.19	0.00	-0.10	0.00
Has both divorce and nonmarital cases	0.09	0.28	0.30	0.43	-0.34	0.00	-0.15	0.00	-0.13	0.00
Age of youngest child	8.53	7.18	8.06	6.04	2.49	0.00	1.15	0.00	2.02	0.00
	(4.01)	(3.62)	(4.30)	(3.70)	0.43	0.00	0.95	0.00	0.36	0.02

	Mean (SD)				Comparison Against Sporadically Receive CS Group					
					Always Receive Full CS		Always Receive Partial CS		Never Receive CS	
	Always Receive Full CS	Always Receive Partial CS	Never Receive CS	Sporadically Receive CS	Difference	*p*-value	Difference	*p*-value	Difference	*p*-value
Childcare Subsidy Characteristics										
Number of months of childcare subsidy receipt	8.75	9.27	8.68	8.32	0.43	0.00	0.95	0.00	0.36	0.04
	(3.56)	(3.44)	(3.76)	(3.69)						
Subsidy amount	$641	$942	$907	$1,059	-$419	0.00	-$118	0.00	-$152	0.00
	($702)	($962)	($985)	($1,051)						
Mothers who ever lost subsidy	0.60	0.53	0.66	0.52	0.09	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.14	0.00
	(0.49)	(0.50)	(0.47)	(0.50)						
Number of months without receiving subsidy										
1–2 months	0.16	0.28	0.36	0.24	-0.08	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.13	0.00
3–5 months	0.45	0.29	0.18	0.30	0.15	0.00	-0.01	0.39	-0.12	0.00
6+ months	0.39	0.42	0.45	0.46	-0.07	0.00	-0.04	0.00	-0.01	0.76
Number of months between first month in sample and losing childcare subsidy - only mothers who ever lost subsidy	5.01	5.22	5.52	4.67	0.34	0.00	0.55	0.00	0.85	0.00
	(2.97)	(3.10)	(3.56)	(2.89)						

Note: The sample contains mothers who had an open child support order amount > = $1,000. The sample period is 12 months following the mother's first inclusion in the sample. There were 536 mothers who had at least one month with an order amount of $0.

Because the group of sporadic receivers is the group who may be most at risk for losing a subsidy due to irregular child support (and also may have difficulty otherwise budgeting for household expenses), we use this group as our comparison group, and the final panel provides raw differences and p-values between each of the other three groups and sporadic receivers. A higher proportion of the group of mothers who regularly receive a portion, but not all, of the child support they are owed have more than one open child-support order compared with mothers in the other subgroups. Specifically, 71% of mothers who always receive partial child support had more than one order compared to 39% of those who sporadically receive child support, 20% of those who always receive the full amount, and 12% of those who did not receive any payments. This may be expected as having orders spread across multiple partners increases the likelihood of consistently receiving some amount of child support income compared with relying on one partner to make payments. We also note that, while the difference in the average monthly order amount between subgroups is within $125, or around 10% of the average order amount, the spread of monthly order amounts within each subgroup differs more substantially. Mothers who received no child support payments have the largest spread with a standard deviation of $804, which is almost double the spread of the other three subgroups. Although not receiving the full amount, mothers who regularly received some amount of child support still received an average of 84% of the child support owed, or $1,021 per month. Mothers irregularly receiving child support payments received 80% of the child support owed, if only considering the payment amount (average of $943 per month), or 58% of the amount owed when the number of months of zero payment are factored in (average of 4.2 months of no payments). A higher proportion of mothers who received irregular child support had both divorce and nonmarital cases (following their higher likelihood of having multiple cases) compared with all other groups. These mothers also, on average, had younger children than the other groups.

Of all mothers in our sample, those who always received full child support payments were least likely to have been employed and had the lowest annual wages, even when limited to mothers with positive earnings, followed by mothers who never received child support. Mothers who sporadically received child support had higher earnings on average than these two groups, but slightly lower than mothers who always received some of their child support.

Considering subsidy receipt, mothers who always received partial child support received subsidies the longest of any of the groups and, along with mothers who irregularly received child support, were least likely to lose subsidy receipt. This is the opposite of what we had hypothesized. However, mothers in our sample with irregular receipt who did lose their subsidy, did so much sooner than other mothers in the sample.

Table 5 provides estimates of the association between child support receipt patterns and child care subsidies in a multivariate context. Here, we assess patterns while holding constant factors that might be associated with both child support and child care subsidies. The table shows relevant child support coefficients from various operationalizations of child support, each from a different underlying model that varies only in the child support measures. We find that for every increase of $50 in orders and payments, there is an associated decrease of $2 to $3 in subsidy amounts in following months, and a very small increased likelihood of subsidy interruption. Receipt of either at least 1 month or 3 months of payments above the threshold amount are significantly associated with a decrease in subsidy amount; on the other hand, at least 1 month of payment above the threshold is associated with a decreased likelihood of interruption within the

12-month period. Our event history models find no significant associations between receipt and timing of subsidy changes.

Table 5: Multivariate Associations between Child Support and Subsidy Measures

	Multivariate Regression		Event History Model (Discrete Time)	
	Subsidy amount (continuous)	Any interruption in subsidy receipt	Any change in subsidy amount (more than $50)	Any interruption in subsidy receipt
Order amount (per $50)	-2.163***	0.001***	0.000	0.000
	(0.550)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)
Payment amount (per $50)	-3.192***	0.001***	0.000	0.000
	(0.437)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)
1 or more months	-18.460*	-0.010**	-0.008	-0.002
	(10.335)	(0.005)	(0.013)	(0.004)
3 or more months	-39.560***	0.000	0.001	0.004
	(10.025)	(0.005)	(0.013)	(0.004)
Subtype: Always Receive Full CS	-88.621***	-0.004	0.057**	0.002
	(15.201)	(0.010)	(0.029)	(0.007)
Subtype: Always Receive Partial CS	-50.605***	-0.005	-0.024*	-0.005
	(10.630)	(0.005)	(0.014)	(0.004)
Subtype: Never Receive CS	149.135***	-0.014	0.108**	0.007
	(36.491)	(0.018)	(0.055)	(0.012)
Subtype: Sporadically Receive CS	65.285***	0.008	0.005	0.004
	(11.116)	(0.005)	(0.014)	(0.004)
N	33,008	33,241	30,266	28,337
R-squared	0.214	0.030		

Notes: *** *p*<0.01, ** *p*<0.05, * *p*<0.10. Standard errors are in parentheses. The sample contains mothers who had an open child-support order amount > = $1,000. The sample period is 12 months following the mother's first inclusion in the sample. One cell represents results from one regression. We control for the number of cases; whether all cases are nonmarital cases; whether all cases are divorce cases; age of the mother's youngest child; whether the mother is employed; whether the mother's wages fall under 200% FPL; the county childcare subsidy zone; and the mother's race and ethnicity. For the multivariate regression, order and payment amounts are lagged by one month. Appendix Table 3 contains regression coefficients for the regressor "Sporadically Receive CS."

Considering our four subtypes, we find differences in associations with subsidy amount though not subsidy cessation. Moms who always receive all or some of their child support are associated with lower subsidy amounts whereas moms who never receive or irregularly receive are associated with higher subsidy amounts. Our event history models suggest that moms who always and never receive child support (consistent receivers in opposite directions) have a higher risk than other mothers of a change in subsidy amount whereas moms who always receive some of the support they are owed have a lower risk of any change of subsidy amount. Event history models, like OLS models, do not find any significant associations with risk of subsidy interruption. Therefore, we find that child support experiences, as indicated by our subtypes, have different experiences with subsidy receipt though, despite our hypothesis, no significant associations with losing subsidies.

Our interviews provided important context about how mothers experienced the role of child support receipt (or non-receipt) in their abilities to maintain child care subsidies. First, we asked moms about their understanding of how child support might impact their child care subsidy eligibility and the child support information they were required to provide. Most of the mothers we spoke with recalled being provided with some information—generally from Shares program staff—about how child support receipt can affect their Shares subsidy eligibility or copay amounts. Most described that the Shares eligibility determination process could automatically pull in information about their child support receipt, which many found helpful as it saved them the step of needing to track down this information and provide it back to a caseworker. Some moms had a clear understanding of how and when child support income was calculated, including this mom who told us: “What they do is they take three months of your child support and I think they divided by three to get the average.” Similarly, this mom described asking a Shares caseworker for clarification about how child support was counted in their income for Shares, and recalled the response as follows:

> *So, I asked them. I was like, well, okay, this is the situation. He owes me this amount. However, he hasn’t paid it and he owes me this amount. How are you guys factoring that in? And so they said, we pull the last—I think they said 30 days, I don’t know. I can’t remember what the number is, because every government thing pulls a different amount of days. And they said, we go based upon what you actually received from child support. And I said, okay, that makes sense.*

However, other moms described that they were not sure whether or how child support was included in the subsidy eligibility calculation, including this mom who said "I have no idea what the limit [of child support] is" or this mom who said:

> *I don't know how, again, how they do the calculations, but I feel like they just want to know anything coming in. But, I think they take [child support] lightly versus like my income.*

One mother described learning, as she said "the hard way":

> *No, nobody explained it to me. I found out the hard way when benefits were changed, and I had to call and say, "What's going on?" "Oh, well, your child support went up or went down or—" . . .I knew something was different, and I was like, "Well, how come? And my income is this. Why do I not qualify for, like, a particular amount?" And they said, "Well, because we count your income." And I'm like, "But this is my income." "Oh, well, child support's also counted as income." I'm like, "But it's not. I did not work and earn that money. That's child support.*

The sentiment that child support should not be counted as income was also shared among some moms who did understand how child support affected their subsidy, or that it could affect their subsidy. For example, one mother told us:

> *So like in one month, I got $300, but then a month before that I got $400. And a month before that, I might have got $600 or $700 because, you know, they might have got some extra money . . .And then they divide that by three. And then all of a sudden, you show that [I'm] actually getting $300 per kid a month instead of that 150-something. So that's another thing I'd be debating with them about, like, "No, you can't do that. I'm not getting that. You know, that was just extra money." Like, if they file their taxes or, you know, like also they take child support if they've been in an accident or anything. When they get extra money, it messes me up because then they calculate income that I do not have.*

It felt to many that, as one mother said, "You all counting income that's not even coming into my household."

As the quote above illustrates, and as some of the patterns in our quantitative data suggest, volatility in child support receipt impacted some mothers' child care subsidies through Shares for some of the mothers we interviewed. This mother explained that once she started getting additional child support, her income for eligibility purposes increased: “So then my subsidy went from, I think I was getting $700 in subsidy or something like that . . .down to $450 because of that.” Even for mothers whose subsidy had not actually been impacted, many were concerned that it could be, such as this mom who told us:

> *So, if their dad’s income goes up, I think that they look at and pull up the percentage of that for the subsidies that you receive or the child support that you receive and there is a possibility that you can lose your, not only child care, but your other state benefits [. . .] So, specifically for the child care is a concern for me that they may take it away completely, because they are covering a big portion of it . . .*

Other participants with irregular child support receipt, however, reported that their Shares eligibility had not been impacted, as this quote illustrates:

> *So, when the child support isn’t constant like that and there is a change . . . it doesn’t affect me in a way where I have to be like, “Okay, now I have to come up with x amount of dollars to pay for daycare out-of-pocket,” because it’s always been covered, which I’m very thankful for.*

More generally, some moms did not necessarily feel that their child support situation impacted the child care provider that they used directly, even if it caused financial insecurity in other ways. For example, this mom told us:

> *Hopefully, you know, if it was a different amount or if I didn’t have any child support coming in, I truly feel that the Shares adjustment would be enough to cover at least 80 to 90% of the cost.*

Still, volatility in child support receipt meant that for some, their subsidy amount was based on income that they were not actually receiving regularly, or, had decreased in amount since the time of eligibility. This left some mothers with a wide gap in benefits and affordability, as this mom explained:

> *I stopped getting child support for almost a year, and right—literally this happened right at my renewals in like September, he stopped—it came in October, and my copay was—I mean, they were only paying like $400 something dollars, I think it was . . .And daycare is over $1,000, but I was getting $800 less a month,*

> *$800 almost. And they would not increase my child care for the whole year. They would not increase it.*

Another mom explained a similar situation:

> *And then when I lost [child support payments], literally like a month after, they wouldn't increase it back up. They wouldn't increase it back… I was not in a good place for a whole year because of that.*

In addition to the reality or concern of child support affecting subsidy amounts, volatility in child support impacted some moms' abilities to afford child care, as discussed previously with other expenses, even if this volatility did not impact Shares eligibility directly. For example, this mother explained that when she did not receive child support, "That put a loop, you know, a hole in my pocket because that extra money can pay for her to go to daycare."

In contrast, moms whose child support situations were stable—either because they regularly received or regularly did not receive child support—experienced child care differently in that they did not have the element of uncertainty to deal with. When asked whether she ever had thought about child support impacting her Shares, this mother, who never received most of her child support, told us: "No, because I don't even count it. I don't count child support at all. I don't rely on it. So it doesn't affect me anymore. I don't worry about it because I've never really received it." In best case scenarios, regular child support provided income with which moms could pay for child care. As this mom, who was no longer eligible for Shares due to her disability told us, "Well, thankfully, I do receive child support from their father. The majority of the child support that I receive from him is going to my second son's daycare." Without income from child support, particularly because of her ineligibility for Shares, this mother would not have been able to afford child care for her young children. In both of these examples, child support did not inject uncertainty into the moms' child care plans, though in one case it did not come into play at all and in the other it allowed her to afford child care.

Overall, though, moms reported that though child support impacted their financial lives, including child care, and their co-parenting lives, they had generally not selected child care arrangements based on their child support receipt experiences. Generally, other factors played a part in those decisions. Notably, some mothers who were eligible for Shares were unable to use Shares to cover the cost of child care for reasons unrelated to child support. Some moms described barriers to using or keeping Shares, even if they had qualified for the benefit. Often this was because they could not find a provider that accepted Shares that could meet their family's needs, particularly for moms whose kids may have had a disability, moms whose work schedules did not align with prospective child care providers' availability, and moms who lived in areas with few or no readily-accessible child care providers. As this mom told us:

> *It wasn't that I couldn't get access to the Shares this year as much as it was there was no spots available at a place that worked for us.*

Also, some moms were not able to use Shares or lost eligibility based on their life circumstances, such as health issues and job changes. Notably, one mother explained that she lost eligibility when she had to quit working due to her disability:

> *The program was very beneficial when I was able to work, but when I became disabled and had to leave my job, I didn't qualify anymore, so I tried to find other programs and other avenues to keep them both in daycare for as long as I could. I called them and I told them, 'Hey, I quit my job because I have to file for disability. Is there anything that I can do to try to keep my benefits?' And they said, "Unfortunately, we only have benefits for working parents." And then I said, "OK. Is there any other program I can sign for? Because I'm technically disabled now."*

DISCUSSION

The population of mothers in Wisconsin who participate in Shares and are owed child support is a small but important population, and connections between the two programs and how mothers navigate these have largely been overlooked. Our estimates indicate that from 2015 to

2024, 15% of mothers with open child support orders also received Shares subsidies in the same month that they were owed child support for at least one month. The proportion of mothers actually participating in both programs is likely an undercount of those who receive child support and could be eligible for Shares but don't know about or use it. We note that in this report we focus on the subset of mothers most likely to be affected by the disregard threshold in policy, which is a small but meaningful group, comprising 7% of the population of mothers who participate in both programs and a little over 1% of all mothers who are owed child support over the period. These mothers, though, represent only a small portion of the population of mothers who participate in both programs. Overall, we find that though relatively small, this is a unique population of mothers served by multiple DCF programs who are navigating multiple, complex program rules, and who, though seemingly making ends meet, are often economically precarious. For many of these mothers, any income volatility—whether through employment changes or, as we commonly heard, inconsistent child support—had the potential to negatively impact family finances with long-term implications.

In interviews, we heard that many moms did not see Shares and child support as particularly interconnected beyond cooperation requirements. Indeed, though approximately half of our interview sample reported receiving Shares after participating in child support, and though many other benefit programs provided referral information for Shares (including, notably WIC, BadgerCare, and FoodShare), none of the mothers we spoke with cited child support as a source of information about the Shares program. Given the likely crossover in the populations receiving child support and eligible for child care subsidies, this seems like a programmatic connection that has the potential to grow.

Though not the focus of our study, we also heard from mothers about their experiences with the child support cooperation requirement for Shares. For some, the referral to child support was logical and did not raise any issues. For others, though, the process felt demeaning, invasive, unnecessary, and for some, not in the best interest of families and children. In other scenarios, moms described these requirements as contributing to conflict with their co-parent or feeling uncomfortable or even unsafe about having to provide information about former partners. Future work could attend to awareness of—and dynamics around—the good-cause exemption more broadly, as issues of financial control and concerns for safety also came up elsewhere in interviews, especially surrounding asking for order modifications and enforcement.

Receipt of child support and its regularity loom large for this sample of moms, as indicated by the share of mothers in our quantitative sample who irregularly received support or always received only a portion of their ordered support amount (38% and 55% of the sample, respectively). We find some evidence in our quantitative data that this influenced child care subsidy receipt patterns, including differences in subsidy amounts (higher for moms with irregular and no child support receipt, and lower for moms with regular full and regular partial receipt) and length of receipt (shortest for moms with irregular receipt). Our multivariate results indicate that increases in orders and payments are associated with lower subsidy amounts, and increased likelihood of subsidy interruption. Yet, surprisingly, we do not find clear associations with payments above the $1,250 threshold and subsidy receipt, nor do we find an association with subsidy interruption and regularity of child support receipt. This is somewhat unexpected. This may reflect that programmatic policies, including treatment of irregular income and the child support threshold amount, are efficiently smoothing the process for most mothers, as intended. It may also reflect the multiple different eligibility criteria of Shares receipt and difficulty some parents have in using Shares, even if eligible. One other potential factor may be Shares reauthorization timing. We do not account for reauthorization in our analysis, and, previous work and our interviews with moms suggest that may be a key driver of when subsidies end. Our analysis is limited in its ability to determine what might be causing the lack of association, and future work can attend to different pieces of Shares eligibility.

We also did not find that child support played a major role in dictating mothers' child care arrangements or choices. Instead, we find that moms' child care choices were constrained by many other factors, including location, availability of providers' who took Shares, child needs, and mother's working hours. Generally, moms told us that child support either arrived or did not arrive regularly enough that it did not play a role in the household calculus, or, that it arrived too irregularly to be able to factor into the decisions of child care. In this way, important nuance and context from our interviews helps provide some insight into our null quantitative results.

Similarly, despite null quantitative results, interviews with moms suggest this irregularity of child support receipt took a toll on family financial well-being across many domains. Not being able to count on child support meant that moms had to take on additional jobs and credit card debt or otherwise make up the gap between what they were owed and what they received. Irregular support that was counted as income did impact some mother's child care payments; a few mothers described having a subsidy amount determined based on child support income that then stopped coming or declined substantially. This also impacted other benefits, including FoodShare and, for some, housing. Additionally, at least some mothers seemed unaware of how their child support might impact their subsidy, which added to uncertainty and, in some cases, stress. Clear communication about programmatic design could provide some certainty for these moms who are in a very uncertain situation. Notably, volatility took a toll not just financially but emotionally, and some mothers connected this directly to feeling solely responsible for both earning and caregiving. In these cases, many mothers also expressed frustration at the current available systems and services for, in their experiences, often giving fathers a pass while leaving moms trying to cope with limited resources for caregiving and finances.

Some programmatic experiences contributed to mothers' feelings of frustration and carrying the load of caregiving and finances. These included challenges navigating Shares eligibility requirements and maintaining eligibility when life circumstances (such as job changes and health considerations) changed, feelings of frustration for some mothers when it came to getting information from either program, and some mothers' experiences with unsuccessful attempts to enforce their child support orders despite their own financial and caregiving obligations. Mothers described constant budgeting and mental math navigating trade-offs in accounting for earnings, child support income, benefits eligibility limits for child care and FoodShare particularly, and time with children.

Policy and Practice Implications

We note several unique practice and policy issues relevant to this group of moms, all of whom are served by the child support program and are low-income, working parents navigating multiple complex and interconnected program rules. Our quantitative analyses, backed up by our interviews, indicate that this population of mothers is nearly all employed, yet earning well below 200% FPL. They are also parenting young children and are owed relatively large child-support orders, that in most cases are inconsistently or partially paid. Our interviews with mothers, and to some extent our quantitative analyses, suggest that volatility in child support orders and child care subsidies—either tied directly or separately—can impact mother's employment decisions (and therefore child care needs), and, most commonly, could destabilize mothers’ household economic viability.

Given that all of these mothers participate in child support, the child support program can play an important role in supporting mothers and children’s well-being. In addition to providing parents’ information about the Shares program, or referrals to Shares, child support agencies (CSAs) can also provide families’ with more information about when an order modification might be appropriate and the process for modifications, to help facilitate child support orders aligned with parents’ actual financial situations and help decrease variability in payments that may be affected by changes to parents’ financial circumstances. CSAs can also consider how to balance the needs of payees and children when considering enforcement actions for obligors and communication for parents. Finally, understanding the potential difficulties related to cooperation requirements may also help CSA staff in working with parents who are referred to child support.

Mothers could also benefit from additional cross-program coordination with Shares. Regarding coordination across the child support program and Shares, one clear implication is making sure that mothers understand how child support income is counted for Shares eligibility; many of the mothers we spoke to did not have a clear understanding of this, and some thought that child support income was not counted. Practice and program design could also attend to communication about subsidy recalculation. Several mothers described child support income dropping without a subsidy increase, leaving a sustained gap between their subsidy and their actual child care costs. Enhanced communication with parents about the process and eligibility for subsidy changes could provide some additional support to parents who find themselves in this situation. Additionally, more broadly, identifying opportunities to share information about accessing child care providers and Shares for moms with specific circumstances, including moms with disabilities or kids with disabilities, could also help support the needs of these families.

Limitations

We provide important insights into this unique population of parents served by DCF and impacted by complex programmatic rules yet often overlooked in research. Still, our research is not without its limitations. First, our quantitative analyses provide broad patterns of child support case characteristics and child care subsidy receipt for this group of mothers. Given the complexity of program eligibility for child care subsidies and the available data, our analyses are limited in estimating only broad associations and patterns. With more precise data about household composition, monthly income from all sources, and monthly employment history, researchers could better capture changes in subsidy eligibility and receipt specifically linked to changes related to child support receipt. Relatedly, our analysis cannot speak to whether the $1,250 threshold itself, as opposed to other features of program administration, is driving the patterns we observe as we did not test alternative income-smoothing designs. The lack of association we find between threshold-related child support receipt and subsidy outcomes may suggest the threshold itself is not the central issue but general volatility in income; further research is needed to clarify how to best reduce income-related uncertainty for these families. Additionally, though we sampled mothers with a range of different experiences for our qualitative interviews, our sample is not representative of all mothers' experiences with both programs. Finally, we did not speak with or examine the experience of mothers who did not participate in both programs. This limits our understanding of why some parents who receive child support do not participate in Shares, even if they may be eligible. Future research should attend to this population to better understand why they do not participate in Shares, which can inform policy and practice.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, we find that this is an important group of parents who are served by multiple programs yet are often struggling to make ends meet and, in many cases, feel like they have few resources for support. Parents we spoke with are doing their best to support their children financially and through caregiving. As this quote from one mom we spoke to emphasizes, child support and Shares are both important resources for parents in making ends meet:

> *I mean, I've always been stubborn, like I don't like asking for help. But becoming a mom and realizing the financial—you just rearrange your whole life around them, and schedules and appointments and like, I really don't think I would be able to do it without the Shares and child support. That I know I'll be getting that money so that I can, you know, spread money other ways in the meantime.*

Understanding how programmatic interactions can impact their experiences can provide important insight into improving program services and policy design to ensure that parents and children receive the support they need.

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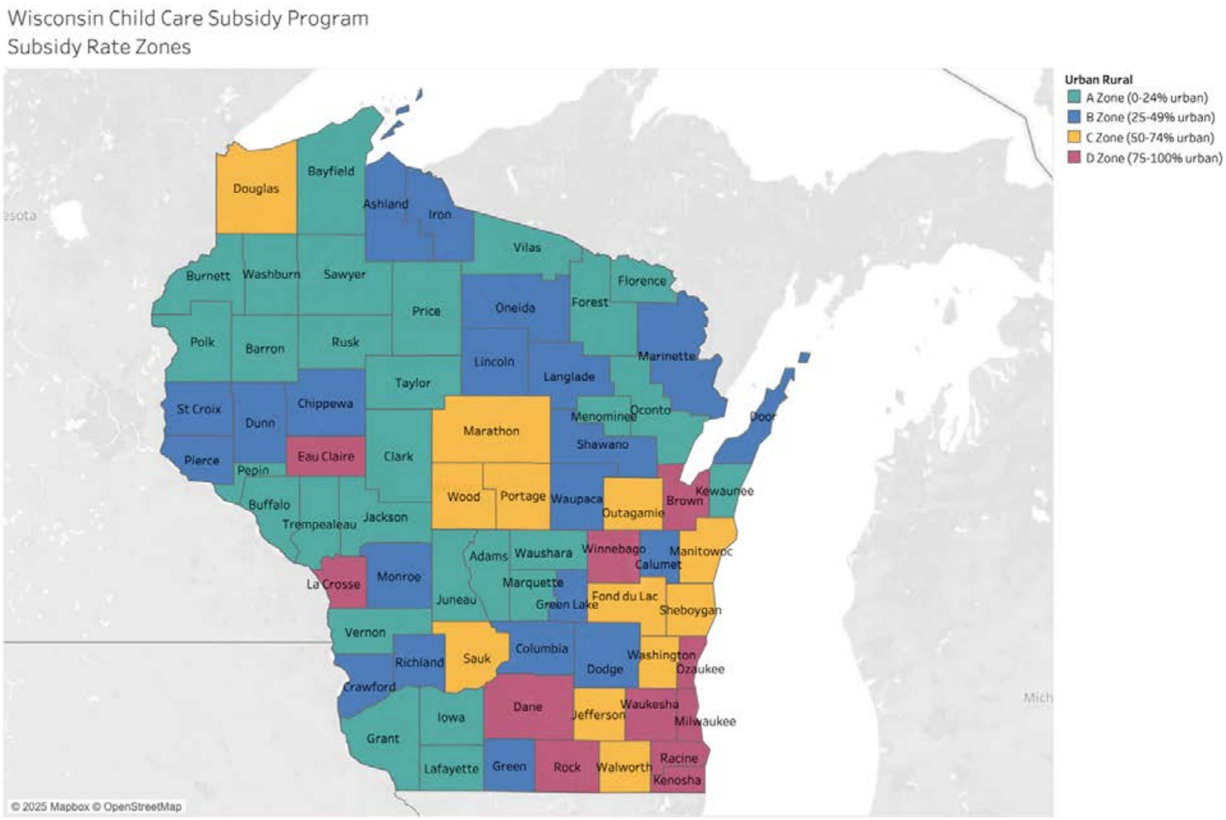
APPENDIX

Appendix Figure 1: DCF Child Care Subsidy Program Rate Zones



Source: Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/wishares/pdf/zonemap.pdf
Note taken directly from source: Map based on Longitude (generated) and Latitude (generated). Color shows details about Urban Rural. The marks are labeled by County Name. Details are shown for State and County.

Appendix Table 1: Alternate Quantitative Sample Descriptives

Characteristics	Mean (SD)
Demographics	
Months in the sample period (2015–2024)	35.47
	(25.05)
Race/ethnicity	
Black	0.17
	(0.37)
White	0.82
	(0.39)
Hispanic	0.13
	(0.34)
Other	0.17
	(0.38)
County Subsidy Zone	
Zone A	0.07
Zone B	0.14
Zone C	0.23
Zone D	0.56
Employment	
Employed at least 1 quarter	0.92
	(0.28)
Number of quarters employed	3.37
	(1.25)
Number of quarters employed with wages within eligibility range	3.29
	(1.30)
Annual wages	$22,597
	($15,906)
Annual wages (excluding 0s)	$24,664
	($15,006)
Child Support Orders	
Number of open orders	1.53
1	0.53
2	0.37
3+	0.11
Mothers with order amount >=$1,250	0.37
	(0.48)
Order amount	$1,185
	($440)
Order amount - only mothers with order amount <$1,250	$1,583
	($401)
Order amount - only mothers with order amount >=$1,250	$953
	($231)

Characteristics	Mean (SD)
Child Support Payments	
Number of months with payment - any	10.97
	(2.17)
Number of months with payment - 90%+ compliance	7.61
	(3.24)
Mothers with 1 order	6.54
	(3.23)
Mothers with 2+ orders	8.39
	(3.04)
Payment amount	$1,063
	($527)
Payment amount (excluding 0s)	$1,130
	($468)
Child Support Characteristics	
Only has divorce cases	0.31
Only has nonmarital cases	0.40
Has both divorce and nonmarital cases	0.29
Age of youngest child	7.03
	(3.61)
Childcare Subsidy Characteristics	
Number of months of childcare subsidy receipt	8.93
	(3.54)
Subsidy amount	$919
	($950)
Mothers who ever lost subsidy	0.53
	(0.50)
Number of months without receiving subsidy	
1–2 months	0.27
3–5 months	0.31
6+ months	0.41
Number of months between first month in sample and losing childcare subsidy - only mothers who ever lost subsidy	5.29
	(3.03)
N	2,360

Note: The sample contains mothers who received a child support payment > = $1,250. The sample period is 12 months following the mother's first inclusion in the sample.

Appendix Table 2: Alternate Quantitative Sample Characteristics by Subtypes of Child Support Receipt

	Mothers who Received a Child Support Payment >=$1,250			
	Always Receive Full CS	**Always Receive Partial CS**	**Never Receive CS**	**Sporadically Receive CS**
Counts (N)	195	1,356	0	809
Proportions	0.08	0.57	0	0.34
Demographics				
Months in the sample period (2015–2024)	29.29	38.72		30.48
	(18.75)	(25.84)		(23.83)
Race/ethnicity				
Black	0.10	0.16		0.19
	(0.30)	(0.37)		(0.40)
White	0.86	0.83		0.77
	(0.35)	(0.38)		(0.42)
Hispanic	0.10	0.13		0.15
	(0.30)	(0.34)		(0.35)
Other	0.14	0.17		0.18
	(0.35)	(0.38)		(0.39)
County Subsidy Zone				
Zone A	0.10	0.07		0.07
Zone B	0.15	0.14		0.13
Zone C	0.21	0.24		0.21
Zone D	0.54	0.55		0.58
Employment				
Employed at least 1 quarter	0.91	0.92		0.91
	(0.29)	(0.27)		(0.29)
Number of quarters employed	3.43	3.47		3.12
	(1.26)	(1.19)		(1.33)
Number of quarters employed with wages within eligibility range	3.38	3.38		3.07
	(1.25)	(1.26)		(1.37)
Annual wages	$20,549	$23,410		$21,504
	($13,876)	($16,252)		($15,624)
Annual wages (excluding 0s)	$22,638	$25,395		$23,712
	($12,837)	($15,366)		($14,725)
Child Support Orders				
Number of open orders	1.24	1.72		1.22
1	0.75	0.40		0.73
2	0.20	0.45		0.24
3+	0.05	0.15		0.03
Mothers with order amount >=$1,250	0.39	0.38		0.34
	(0.49)	(0.48)		(0.47)
Order amount	$1,226	$1,218		$1,103
	($461)	($396)		($506)
Order amount - only mothers with order amount <$1,250	$1,592	$1,570		$1,612
	($485)	($396)		($377)
Order amount - only mothers with order amount >=$1,250	$987	$1,005		$840
	($223)	($171)		($290)

	Mothers who Received a Child Support Payment >=$1,250			
	Always Receive Full CS	**Always Receive Partial CS**	**Never Receive CS**	**Sporadically Receive CS**
Child Support Payments				
Number of months with payment - any	12.00	12.00		8.48
	(0.00)	(0.00)		(2.69)
Number of months with payment - 90%+ compliance	12.00	7.93		5.61
	(0.00)	(2.81)		(3.01)
Mothers with 1 order	12.00	6.84		4.05
	(0.00)	(2.93)		(2.72)
Mothers with 2+ orders	12.00	9.37		6.07
	(0.00)	(1.81)		(2.94)
Payment amount	$1,291	$1,120		$874
	($458)	($429)		($661)
Payment amount (excluding 0s)	$1,291	$1,120		$1,094
	($458)	($429)		($553)
Child Support Characteristics				
Only has divorce cases	0.48	0.30		0.27
Only has nonmarital cases	0.38	0.46		0.27
Has both divorce and nonmarital cases	0.14	0.24		0.45
Age of youngest child	8.19	7.30		6.11
	(3.76)	(3.52)		(3.58)
Childcare Subsidy Characteristics				
Number of months of childcare subsidy receipt	9.10	9.21		8.29
	(3.43)	(3.49)		(3.59)
Subsidy amount	$745	$900		$1,013
	($825)	($934)		($1,008)
Mothers who ever lost subsidy	0.57	0.55		0.49
	(0.49)	(0.50)		(0.50)
Number of months without receiving subsidy				
1–2 months	0.24	0.29		0.23
3–5 months	0.38	0.30		0.33
6+ months	0.38	0.41		0.43
Number of months between first month in sample and losing childcare subsidy - only mothers who ever lost subsidy	5.61	5.31		5.04
	(3.01)	(3.11)		(2.76)
N	195	1,356	0	809

Note: The sample contains mothers who received a child support payment > = $1,250. The sample period is 12 months following the mother's first inclusion in the sample.

Appendix Table 3: Covariate Coefficients from Multivariate Models

	Multivariate Regression		Event History Model (Discrete Time)	
	Subsidy amount (continuous)	Any interruption in subsidy receipt	Any change in subsidy amount (more than $50)	Any interruption in subsidy receipt
Subtype: Sporadically Receive CS	65.285***	0.008	0.005	0.004
	(11.116)	(0.005)	(0.014)	(0.004)
Number of child support orders	121.224***	-0.035***	0.020**	-0.007***
	(8.114)	(0.003)	(0.009)	(0.003)
Only has divorce cases	81.350***	-0.028***	0.041**	-0.009*
	(13.068)	(0.007)	(0.018)	(0.005)
Only has nonmarital cases	89.480***	-0.019***	0.003	-0.008*
	(12.079)	(0.005)	(0.015)	(0.004)
Age of youngest child	-94.266***	0.017***	0.005***	0.005***
	(1.334)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.000)
Employed (quarterly)	204.931***	-0.207***	0.001	-0.035***
	(15.928)	(0.008)	(0.022)	(0.006)
Number of quarters with wages<=200% FPL	104.655***	0.058***	0.032	0.025***
	(14.211)	(0.008)	(0.021)	(0.006)
Childcare subsidy zone A	0.000***	0.000***	0.000	0.000
Childcare subsidy zone B	77.279***	-0.006	0.064**	-0.005
	(16.931)	(0.012)	(0.029)	(0.009)
Childcare subsidy zone C	120.318***	-0.025**	0.012	-0.010
	(15.600)	(0.011)	(0.027)	(0.008)
Childcare subsidy zone D	402.903***	-0.045***	0.045*	-0.012
	(15.400)	(0.010)	(0.025)	(0.008)
Black	315.095***	0.014**	0.031*	-0.002
	(16.716)	(0.006)	(0.018)	(0.005)
Hispanic	160.777***	0.005	0.018	-0.000
	(20.944)	(0.009)	(0.025)	(0.007)
American Indian	155.708***	-0.027**	0.048	-0.008
	(30.438)	(0.013)	(0.037)	(0.010)
Asian	4.722	0.049***	0.042	0.008
	(29.252)	(0.015)	(0.041)	(0.011)
Pacific Islander	11.595	-0.109***	0.066	-0.018
	(49.326)	(0.025)	(0.083)	(0.020)
Multiple race/ethnicity	-125.970***	0.027***	-0.008	0.011
	(22.062)	(0.009)	(0.025)	(0.007)
N	33,008	33,241	30,266	28,337
R-squared	0.214	0.030		

Notes: *** *p*<0.01, ** *p*<0.05, * *p*<0.10. Standard errors are in parentheses. The sample contains mothers who had an open child-support order amount > = $1,000. The sample period is 12 months following the mother's first inclusion in the sample. One cell represents results from one regression. We control for the number of cases; whether all the cases are nonmarital cases; whether all the cases are divorce cases; age of the mother's youngest child; whether the mother is employed; whether the mother's wages fall under 200% FPL; the county childcare subsidy zone; and the mother's race and ethnicity. For the multivariate regression, order and payment amounts are lagged by one month.