

**THE SURVEY OF INCOME AND  
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION**

**THE REGULAR RECEIPT OF CHILD  
SUPPORT: A MULTI-STEP PROCESS**

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**J. Peterson and C. Nord  
Child Trends, Inc.**

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# THE REGULAR RECEIPT OF CHILD SUPPORT: A MULTI-STEP PROCESS

## INTRODUCTION

Children whose parents have separated or divorced or whose parents have never married face numerous difficulties that have the potential for temporary or even permanent harm. Not least among these difficulties is the sudden drop in income often experienced by the child's custodial parent following a separation or divorce, or the persistent low income of many never-married mothers (Bianchi and Spain, 1986; Duncan and Hoffman, 1985; Duncan and Rogers, 1987; Weiss, 1984). Despite recent interest in joint residential custody, about nine of every ten children living with single parents live with their mothers (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1986a). Because women, on average, command considerably less in the market place for their labor than do men, the burden of providing for children usually falls on the parent least able to afford the cost.

The provision of child support payments, made by the non-custodial to the custodial parent on behalf of the child, is one method that has evolved in the U.S. legal system to ameliorate the economic impact of family disruption on children. Yet concern has grown that this method fails to adequately and fairly achieve its goal.

Federal and state governments, through welfare programs, also provide support to children in single-parent families -those with very low income. Many suggest that this support ought to be provided by the absent fathers. Could the number of persons receiving welfare and the average payments be reduced if absent fathers were made to pay their fair share for the support of their children? The answer is almost certainly "yes" (Robins, 1986). The child support enforcement program has been established in part to achieve this result. Yet the issue is complex. In many cases the absent fathers of welfare mothers have little income from which to make support payments. Some maintain a good relationship with their children and provide support in kind, including child care (Furstenberg et al., 1983; Wattenberg, 1984). In some cases attempts to locate and require payments from such fathers may only result in severing these ties.

In this paper, we examine factors that may determine how much child support income a custodial parent receives.<sup>1</sup> Among these are characteristics of the custodial parent, such as her race, marital status, and education; her current economic well-being, as measured by her income, whether she receives AFDC, and whether her family income is below the poverty line; and information about custody arrangements and how the support agreement was reached if she has one.

The seemingly straightforward question of what factors determine how much child

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<sup>1</sup>We focus on mothers in this paper because the data set we are using only asked the detailed child support questions of women.

support is received encompasses several sub-questions, as previous researchers have discovered (O'Neill, 1985; Peterson, 1987; Robins and Dickinson, 1984; Sorenson and McDonald, 1981). Hardly anyone receives support payments without some kind of child support agreement -- whether reached voluntarily or through a court proceeding (Robins and Dickinson, 1984). Therefore the first question we ask is: what factors determine whether there has been a child support award? Because the amount actually paid is highly dependent on the amount that is mandated by the award, the next question is: what factors determine the amount of the award? Then, given an award of a certain size, we go on to ask: how much is actually received? However, non-payment of support is not simply the zero point on a scale that runs from zero to the amount of the award. The distribution of amounts paid is bimodal, a large proportion of mothers receiving no payments at all, and the rest receiving amounts that are somewhat normally distributed around the award amounts, though skewed in the downward direction. For that reason we separately examine the factors that determine whether a woman receives any support and, among women receiving some support, those that determine how much is in fact received. We also examine what factors determine how regularly child support is received among women who receive some child support.

This set of questions shows that to be a regular recipient of child support one must progress through a series of stages that begins with eligibility for child support, moves on to the establishment of a support agreement, then on to the actual receipt of some support, no matter how little. Only then can the process culminate with the regular receipt of the full amount of support. At each stage along the way a certain proportion of women do not progress to the next stage, leaving a minority who, in the end, are regularly receiving child support.

## **DATA**

We use data from the ongoing Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), based on a nationwide household probability sample of the non-institutionalized resident U.S. population. It consists of a series of overlapping panels of approximately 14,000 households each.<sup>2</sup>

All persons 15 years old and older in a household become panel members. Individuals are followed even if they change addresses or move out of the sample household. Individuals who move into a sample household are included in the survey only as long as they reside with panel members. Interviews are conducted in person by personnel from the U.S. Bureau of the Census.<sup>3</sup> Proxy respondents are used for individuals who are not present at the time of the interview.

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<sup>2</sup>The first panel — the 1984 panel — is a little different from subsequent ones. It is larger — approximately 20,000 households were interviewed as opposed to the 14,000 for subsequent panels.

<sup>3</sup>Telephone interviews occur in about 5 percent of the cases to obtain missing information, to interview persons who will not or cannot participate otherwise, or to interview persons who have moved far outside the interviewing area.

To simplify interviewing and data processing, each panel of households is divided into four smaller groups of approximately equal size called rotation groups. These groups are interviewed during four consecutive months, one each month. The four-month period of interviewing that it takes to give the entire panel the same interview schedule is called a wave. Appropriate weights have been developed by Census staff; with these weights panel members are representative of the U.S. non-institutional population.

SIPP regularly collects data on cash and noncash income, assets and liabilities, labor force status, and eligibility and participation in government transfer programs as well as information on family structure, marital history, health care, housing, fertility, and other topics. It is the first survey to do so in such a way as to allow analyses of individual or family change over time (David, 1985; Nelson et al., 1985).

SIPP's structure is flexible, consisting of a core set of questions plus topical modules. The analyses in this report are based on the "Welfare History and Child Support" topical module contained in the wave 5 questionnaire of the 1984 panel. These data were collected in the first four months of 1985. When properly weighted, they represent a cross-section of U.S. households at that time. The child support questions contained in the topical module were asked of mothers living with children under age 21 whose fathers did not live in the household.

The Bureau of the Census generally follows a procedure of imputing missing data values on important variables when such data cannot be obtained in the field. Codes are provided in the data to indicate when imputation has taken place. An inspection of the imputation codes for the child support variables revealed that imputation was usually quite low. Fewer than 6% of the cases needed to be imputed for the item on whether an agreement had ever been made, and fewer than 4% needed to be imputed on the specific characteristics of the agreement. The most troublesome item, based on the proportion of cases imputed, is the variable on the total amount of money that is supposed to be received -7.7% of the cases needed to be imputed. However, fewer than 3% of the cases needed to be imputed on the amount of child support actually received.

## **RESULTS**

The likelihood of progressing in the child support process varies considerably by stage, with further variations introduced by a woman's demographic characteristics. These likelihoods are presented as proportions in the first four columns of Table 1, as follows: (I) the proportion of women who have ever had a child support agreement among all women potentially eligible for such an agreement, (II) the proportion who are still due child support among women who have ever had an agreement, (III) the proportion who actually receive some money among women who are still due child support, and (IV) the proportion who receive support regularly among women who receive some support.

Not even three out of every five women eligible for a child support agreement has ever had one (column I of Table 1). Blacks and Hispanics are much less likely than whites to have

established support agreements: only 33% of black and Hispanic women in our sample eligible for an agreement had ever had one. This finding confirms that of other researchers (Beller and Graham, 1986; O'Neill, 1985; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1987). However, once such agreements are reached, Hispanics are as likely as whites to actually receive money, albeit not as regularly (columns III and IV). Blacks, on the other hand, continue to be at a disadvantage compared to whites, although not as severely as in the first stage of the support process.

Other factors strongly associated with not establishing a child support agreement are being never married, having less than a high school education, and beginning childbearing as a teenager. Being an AFDC recipient and living below the poverty level are also strongly associated with not establishing a child support agreement, but these factors may well be partly attributable to the lack of an agreement.

Most women with children under 21 in their households who have ever had an award are still due to receive support (column II). This may be attributable to the fact that the children are still in an age range for which child support would in most cases still be due. There is very little variation between subgroups, although blacks, the never married, and those with only one child are slightly less likely than others to have agreements still in force.

Differences between subgroups are apparent again in the proportion of women who actually receive support (among those women with an agreement currently in force), though the variation is not as strong as with who has an agreement in the first place. In general, the same groups who were least likely to have an agreement are the ones least likely to receive support even if they do have a current agreement. Thus blacks, those with less education, those with low incomes (on AFDC or in poverty), and those who were teens at the birth of their first child are all less likely to be receiving support

A shortfall between what is due and what is received may occur because of missed payments rather than regular payments made at a reduced level. Such irregularity in payments adds to the financial uncertainty many custodial mothers experience. Of those women receiving some support, 61 percent report that their payments come regularly (column IV). While this is a majority, it still leaves two women out of five who cannot count on their next payment. Again, the same groups fare least well: blacks, the never married, the less educated, those with low incomes, and those who were teens at the time they bore their first child.

The proportions in Table 1 can be viewed as conditional probabilities and thus be multiplied together to provide additional information about the likelihood of reaching different stages in the child support process. For example, in the row for all women the product of the figures in the first three columns ( $.58 \times .87 \times .77 = .39$ ) shows that less than two out of five women with children under 21 in their households from an absent father receive any support for those children. Similarly, by multiplying the figures in columns II through IV ( $.87 \times .77 \times .61 = .41$ ), we find that only about two out of five women with support agreements still in force receive money regularly. And only about one-quarter of all women with children under 21 in their



households from absent fathers receive child support payments regularly (.58 x .87 x .77 x .61 =.26). Among blacks, the equivalent figure is 10 percent.

The last column shows the mean annual amount received by those who receive some support (annualizing the amount received in the four-month survey period). Overall this was \$2,503 in 1984 dollars, which is an increase of 4 percent over the amount reported for 1981, but a decline of 13 percent from the amount reported for 1978, once adjustments for inflation have been made (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1985a, 1985b, 1981). This amount is quite low in comparison with estimates of the cost of rearing children. The average annual cost of rearing a child has been estimated at \$5,229 (Espenshade, 1984).<sup>4</sup> Thus, although the proportion of women receiving child support has remained fairly steady or even risen slightly during the last few years, the overall economic position of single women with children is still below that of 1978.

Variations in mean payments are wide and parallel the differences found in support agreements and receipt of support. The never-married are once again the most disadvantaged. This group received only an average of \$903, compared with \$2856 for the divorced. It is interesting to note that the remarried received substantially less (\$2074) than the separated or divorced. This may be due to a number of factors, which cannot be tested with the data at hand: remarriage may cause a downward adjustment in the agreement; the father may simply reduce his payments; or these women may be those whose marriages ended sometime ago, when awards may have been lower. Remarried women, however, are less likely than separated or divorced women to receive their payments regularly (column IV), so that the irregularity of their payments probably also contributes to the lower amount received.

### **Nature of Custody and Support Agreement**

How support agreements were reached, how support payments are supposed to be made, and custody arrangements may well be important factors in the receipt of child support. A number of arguments have been advanced that a child should fare better under joint custody than under other arrangements. Since 1979, when California made it a state policy to encourage joint custody, many states have followed suit. However, California has recently reversed its policy. Critics have argued that an unintended consequence of joint custody is a reduction in the amount of child support given to mothers. The SIPP data, as shown in Table 2, do not support this contention. The data suggest that joint custody does not dramatically influence payments, although those with joint custody are slightly more likely to receive support (80% versus 76%) and are moderately more likely to receive it regularly (67% versus 59%). However, the mean amount received is considerably higher for those awarded joint custody. It should be noted that this higher amount may not be a direct effect of joint custody but the result of selectivity: only a minority agree to joint custody, and these tend to be those with higher incomes.

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<sup>4</sup>Espenshade's original estimate of \$4,578 has been adjusted by the CPI to 1984 prices yielding the figure \$5,229. His estimate is based on a total estimated cost of \$82,400 in 1981 dollars to raise a child to age 18 for a family with two children, a medium SES, and a wife who works part-time.

For those who have a support agreement, both how the agreement was reached and how the payments are to be made are related to reciprocity. Those whose agreements were reached voluntarily are considerably more likely than others to receive their payments (93 percent versus 72 percent), probably reflecting a more amicable divorce. Perhaps for the same reason, those women whose payments come directly from the father are more likely to receive support (82 percent) than are those whose payments are supposed to come through the courts (75 percent) or through the welfare agency (56 percent). Courts or welfare agencies are most likely to become involved in collections in the more difficult cases. The percentage for those who receive payment through the welfare agency may be low because of a problem with how some respondents understood the question about receipt of support. Some welfare recipients (those whose payments would be made through the welfare agency) never see their child support in that it is used to offset their welfare support. There is no net gain to their income. Consequently they may report that they are receiving no child support, when in fact payments are being made on their behalf.

### **Multivariate Results**

Many of the variables that are associated with not receiving child support payments occur together. Therefore, in the remaining two tables we use a multivariate framework to examine the likelihood of reaching each stage in the child support process and the dollar amounts awarded and actually received. Because most of the child support variables (with the exception of dollar amounts received) are either dichotomous (yes-no) or are measured on a nominal or ordinal scale, standard ordinary least squares regression (OLS) is inappropriate (Hanushek and Jackson, 1977). For this reason, we use logistic regression techniques (Winship and Mare, 1984; McCullagh, 1980; Harrell, 1986) except when we are examining the actual dollar amounts received. The LOGIST procedure in SAS was used for estimating the logistic regression models.

### **Having a Child Support Agreement**

As indicated earlier, the crucial first step in receiving child support is to have some kind of support agreement, whether voluntary or court ordered. Without such a formal agreement, very few custodial mothers receive child support from their former husbands or partners. In Table 1, we saw that minority women,, never-married women, and women with low educations were particularly unlikely to have ever had an agreement. In Table 3, we introduce these factors, as well as several others, to predict the likelihood of ever having a child support agreement (see column I). Although Table 1 indicated that AFDC recipients and women living in poverty were also unlikely to have ever had a child support agreement, we did not enter these factors into the model because they indicate current status and therefore cannot logically predict the likelihood of ever having an agreement. Other variables such as the length of a marriage or relationship prior to disruption, the degree of conflict at disruption, and characteristics of the father, especially his age, education, and income at the time of the disruption may well be important determinants of establishing a support award. However, these variables are not available in SIPP.

The results show that never-married women are significantly less likely than other women to have ever had a child support agreement, even after controlling for race, current age, age at first birth, education, and number of children. Similarly, race and education remain important predictors of ever having an agreement even after controlling for the other factors. In models not shown, race and marital status were introduced in a step-wise fashion. The influence of race was cut in half with the introduction of the marital status variables. Part of the remaining importance of race may be due to income differences. Unfortunately, SIPP does not measure the income of either parent at the time of the disruption in the marriage or the relationship.

Education may reflect both a woman's own resources as well as those of the father. More highly educated women are probably better able to both use the legal system and negotiate personally with the father over a support agreement. In addition, the mother's education is strongly related to the father's education and income. And fathers with higher incomes are more likely to reach an agreement with their former spouses or partners.

Once other factors are controlled, the number of children has only a weak influence on gaining support. The effect is positive, to be sure, but contributes little to the explanation.

Going to a child support office for help in establishing paternity or obtaining an award is positively related to having an award agreement, though the effect is weak ( $R=.06$ ). However, it must be borne in mind that mothers who are having no trouble obtaining an award on their own are unlikely to seek the help of a child support office. The subset of women who are having such difficulties are those most likely to seek help. Unfortunately, we have no way of controlling for the amount of difficulty the woman had in her own efforts to obtain support. In effect, just going to a support office may be an indicator of such difficulty. With this interpretation, one might even expect a negative association between seeking help from OCSE and having an award. That the relationship is positive and that it is significant even after controlling for the other variables is a good indication that the efforts of these offices are effective.

### **Predicting Current Eligibility**

In the second model (Column II) the population is restricted to custodial mothers who report ever having had a support award or agreement. This restriction automatically controls for having had an agreement; it also reduces the range of variation in the independent variables because cases that had characteristics associated with not having an agreement are disproportionately excluded. The explanatory power of the model is weaker than in the first stage because the most powerful predictor -- having an agreement -- is excluded, but a clearer picture of the factors important to being still eligible for child support once an agreement has been reached is obtained.

Once an award is established, a custodial parent usually remains eligible to receive child support until all of the children covered by the award are over age 18 (or age 21 if educational expenses are included in the award). Although a change in the financial situation of either parent

may result in the modification or elimination of an award, this is rare. For this reason, it is not surprising that having a youngest child under age 18 greatly increases the likelihood of having an agreement still in force (see column II of Table 3). Less important, but still significant, are some of the marital status categories. Being currently divorced or separated as opposed to being married increases the chances that an agreement is in force. Black women are significantly less likely than white woman to have an agreement still in force. None of the other variables, including how payments are to be made and whether OCSE was involved in the process, affect the probability that an award is still in force.

### **Predicting the Receipt and Regularity of Support**

Receipt of Support. As shown in Table 1, a large minority of women currently due support receive none. Receiving no support is substantively different than receiving some support, no matter how little. In model III of Table 3, we examine the factors that are associated with receiving any support versus receiving no support at all. In this model we have included those variables suggested by previous research and the bivariate results above as the ones that are likely to predict receipt.

Overall the model explains about one tenth of the variation in the log odds ( $R^2 = .09$ ). This is about half the amount of the variation explained by the first model in the table, yet is still a substantial amount. However, only a few of the variables are strong enough to reach statistical significance. The strongest variable, having reached a support agreement through the offices of a court, is moderately negatively related ( $R = -.15$ ) to the odds of receiving support. This is consistent with the bivariate results, which showed that voluntary agreements were much more likely to result in payment, and with the notion that the courts tend to handle the more difficult cases.

The next most important predictor, as measured by the size of the Rs, is the amount of support due. As we argued earlier, the amount of the award is sensitive not only to the number of children, but to the socioeconomic standing of the absent father. While we had no direct measure of the father's standing, the pattern of results for the mother's education, a correlated characteristic, lent support to this notion. To the extent that this is the case, women who have higher awards have former spouses or partners who are better able to pay. In this manner, the mild positive association between award amount and receipt may be generated.

Use of a child support office to help enforce an order or collect payments is also positively related to receipt. In view of the small number of persons who seek such help, and the likelihood that such mothers are those with the more difficult cases, the strength of this variable is remarkable, and the result indicates that the support enforcement offices are effective in getting additional support channeled to non-AFDC women.

What is perhaps most noteworthy about model III in Table 3 is the long list of variables that bear no relationship to receipt of support. once we confine our attention to women currently

due support, a host of previously powerful predictors drop from sight. Race, mother's education, marital status, number of children, age of youngest child -- all these among others -- bear no relationship to whether or not the mothers receive any of the support that is due them.

Regularity of Support. All things considered, support regularly received is to be preferred to support that comes at unpredictable times, even when the amounts end up being the same over the course of time. An ordered logistic regression procedure was used to predict a four-category dependent variable: support received regularly, occasionally, seldom, or never (see column IV).

The data indicate that for regularity of support, the set of predictors included has little explanatory power. Although some of the variables are significant, none is large, and the whole model explains only 4 percent of the variance in regularity. In a model not shown, we included a measure of the relative amount of support received (amount received divided by the amount awarded). In that model the  $R^2$  increased to .35 and several of the formerly significant variables dropped out of the model altogether. The results in the model not shown suggest that as the amount of support paid approaches or even surpasses the amount due, it is more likely to be paid regularly. indeed, it is reasonable to suppose that missed payments may well account both for irregularity and for payment/award ratios that are less than 1.

### **Amounts Awarded and Actually Received**

Award amount. In Table 4 we examine factors that may be related to the amount of an award. Because the number of children is an explicit criterion in awards handed down by courts, and is presumably an important consideration in voluntary agreements as well, we expect that it will be a strong predictor of award amount.

The income of the absent father is likely to be another critical factor. As already noted, this variable is not available in SIPP. However, it is likely to be highly correlated with the mother's race and education, which are included in Table 4. Thus, at least part of the influence of these variables reflect the absent father's ability to pay child support. Moreover, those having difficulty in obtaining an agreement may well be likely to end up with less favorable awards. Such women are disproportionately likely to be found among those with court awards or those who sought the help of OCSE.

The results in Table 4 are generally consistent with these expectations. The most important factor (as indicated by the relative size of the t statistic) by far is the number of children. The factors thought to be associated with the father's income -- both race and education -- produce strong results in the expected directions. Being never married, while it reduces the amount of the award, is a weak variable. The strong association between this status and race may account for the fact that it has little independent contribution to make to the explanation. Finally, both having a court award and having received help from OCSE are associated with lower amounts, as expected, but only the former is statistically significant.

One other variable is strongly significant: the amount of the award is higher in cases where joint custody was part of the agreement. This finding is consistent with the bivariate results of Table 1. However, other research has shown that joint custody does not necessarily lead to higher awards. In joint custody it may be presumed that more of the burden of child support is borne directly by the father during his periods of custody, so that the need for income transfer may indeed be less. That the data show otherwise in the present analysis may be the result of our lack of a control for the father's income. Joint custody arrangements are more likely as one moves up the income ladder.

Amount Received. We now turn to the question of the amount of support actually received among women who receive some support. Previous research and preliminary analyses of SIPP show that the amounts actually received in child support are overwhelmingly governed by the amount of the award. Simply put, the amount received (providing any is received at all) centers around the amount of the award. The majority who receive anything receive the amount due or something very close to it. Many receive less, some considerably less than is due. But others actually receive more. In this situation, including the amount due in an equation predicting the amount received would explain much of the variation in the dependent variable. Indeed, we estimated equations predicting the amount received, one without including the amount due as a predictor, the other including this variable. Without the amount due included in the equation the amount of variance explained (R<sup>2</sup>) was .19. When the amount due was added to the equation the R-square jumped to .61 (see Model II in Table 4). At the same time the power of almost all the other predictors fell dramatically, indicating that their apparent explanatory powers were due to their associations with the added independent variable -- the amount due.

## **DISCUSSION**

In the presentation of the results we have attempted to answer the specific research questions with which this study began. In the following paragraphs we discuss more general themes and conclusions that may be drawn from the data.

The importance of the award. The receipt of child support is almost totally dependent on the existence of an award or agreement, and the amount received is highly dependent on the amount specified in the agreement. Therefore obtaining an agreement that specifies an adequate payment level is the single most important step that can be taken to obtain adequate child support. This is not to say that enforcement efforts after an agreement is obtained are unnecessary or ineffective. Quite the contrary is true. But such efforts are limited to the agreements in force and to the support levels they specify. Furthermore, there is ample room for improvement in obtaining agreements. As we saw, over 2 out of 5 women who might be eligible for child support have never had an agreement. And of those who do, the payments specified fall far short of the estimated cost of rearing children.

An especially vulnerable population. While the effects of predictor variables vary from one stage in the support process to another, a number of characteristics are almost always

strongly associated with the worst outcomes. These characteristics are: being never married, having less than a high school education, being black, and being poor. Moreover, these characteristics are themselves highly correlated, so that the disadvantage is compounded. Efforts at obtaining support agreements and enforcing them are especially needed for women with these characteristics. However, it should not be supposed that these efforts will return as much in child support as similar efforts spent on other segments of the population. Support comes from fathers, and depends on their ability to pay. Fathers in such cases are more likely to be hard to find and identify, and their incomes are more likely to be low.

The changeable nature of relationships. It is important to emphasize that the relationships found in this analysis could change with changes in the population subject to child support agreements. This can be the result of changes in the composition of the subject population. In particular, if there were a large increase in the number of low-income fathers who are subject to support awards or agreements, the strong relationship between the amount of the award and the amount of support received could be weakened. This would be because a larger proportion of the population is a subgroup in which this relationship is already weaker. Other compositional changes could have the opposite effect. It would be inappropriate, therefore, to use the models in this report to predict the support situation of women with children in circumstances that differ substantially from those prevailing at the time of the study.

Furthermore, changes in enforcement practices could well affect the nature of the relationships among variables. For example, the practice of attaching the tax refunds of delinquent fathers started after the date of the SIPP data collection on which this analysis is based. This practice could further strengthen the relationship between the award amount and the support received, though it would be less likely to affect regularity of payment (though even this might be improved over the longer run). It is important, therefore, to continue the replication of data collection and analysis that has been underway since the late 1970s and has now been expanded to SIPP. In this way a more accurate picture of trends in child support and its determinants can be gained.

An Agenda for Future Research. Existing research on the determinants of child support payments has been handicapped by limitations in the data that are available on this topic. As a consequence, there are several notable gaps in our knowledge of the child support process. In particular, we know little about the role of the father's characteristics or of the relationship between the father and the mother in the determination of whether and how much child support is paid. More research is needed to understand how fathers' characteristics affect the payment of child support. For example, how does the father's age, employment status, and income at the time of separation or divorce affect the likelihood of a support agreement? We may speculate that some women whose partners are often unemployed or who work for low wages do not even bother to seek an agreement, believing that the likelihood of receiving much, if anything, is simply too low. Informal and in-kind support, both from the father and the father's relatives may be more valuable in the view of some of these mothers than the small amount of cash support that might be obtained -- irregularly, and with uncertainty -- as a result of a support agreement.

Another important question is, how is the receipt of support affected by the residential mobility of the father? Support, particularly its continuation for several years, may be strongly affected by the father's residential mobility. In particular, moves out of state make the enforcement of support much more difficult for the mother. In some cases such moves may well be motivated by the father's desire to escape his support obligation; in other cases father's may simply take advantage of moves made for other reasons.

Other questions include, what happens to support when the father's financial situation changes? How often do father's voluntarily increase their support with increases in their income? Alternatively, do some fathers conceal increases in their income from their former partners to avoid increases in support payments? Do fathers seek a downward adjustment in the agreement if their income declines? And to what extent is a fixed support obligation a positive work incentive for fathers?

The never-married comprise a subpopulation that needs separate attention from researchers. These are the women who are far less likely than others to have a support agreement in the first place. Many bore their first child at an early age, and come from impoverished backgrounds, compounding their predicament. Even the identify or the whereabouts of the father may be unknown to many of these women. Research is needed that will determine how the support process works in this subpopulation, and how this process compares with that found in the population of the ever-married. We may suppose, for example, that factors such as poverty and identification of the father may be of overriding importance for this population, whereas they are of considerably less importance among other women.

A final topic that needs research attention, and a difficult one, is the role of violence or threatened violence in the support process. Some fathers have threatened, assaulted, or even killed mothers who succeeded in obtaining court awards for child support. While the numbers that have done so may be small, we have no good data on the exact magnitude of this problem, let alone the characteristics of the cases in which it occurs. That this has occurred at all may dissuade many mothers from seeking child support. This is especially likely in cases where abuse and violence has been part of the marriage or partnership, and has even contributed to the dissolution of the relationship. In such cases, mothers may be so relieved to be out from under the immediate threat of abuse that they do not want to risk a recurrence by seeking to obtain child support. Indeed, the Child Support Enforcement agencies provide for this possibility by granting exemptions from the AFDC eligibility requirement that an attempt be made to establish and enforce a child support agreement. In cases where the agency is convinced that the health or safety of the mother or child(ren) may be endangered by the establishment of an award, the mother may be granted an exemption from this rule.

Policy Issues. Although further research is needed to clarify these and other questions, it is not premature to think about how public and private policies can use these findings to increase the levels of support payments available to children. Clearly the existence of a court award in the first place is of prime importance. Second, any steps that can be taken to increase the resources



available to the custodial parent to elicit payments that are due, and to increase the resources of those non-custodial parents with low incomes should prove helpful. Legislation making it possible or easier to have payments deducted directly from paychecks of absent parents, such as is contained in recent welfare reform legislation, might also be effective.

But to think of child support only in terms of awards and collections is too narrow a perspective. Other measures should also be considered that would work by positive means and thereby reduce dependence on coercion. For example, any visitation or custody arrangement that makes contact between the child and the absent parent more frequent and more ordinary is more likely to maintain commitment and, therefore, support. Additionally, services that help the former couples to mediate and reduce their conflict, especially at the time support and custody agreements are being worked out, bode well for the payment and levels of support over the long run.

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**Table 1. Proportion of Women at Each Stage  
in the Support Process and Mean Amount of Child  
Support Received Among Women Receiving Any Support  
by Selected Demographic Characteristics, Winter 1984**

	I Of Women with Children < 21 From An Absent Father:	II Of Women Ever Having An Agreement:	III Of Women With Support Now Due:	IV Of Women Now Receiving Money:	V Of Women Who Actually Receive Any Money:
	Percent Ever Having A Child Support Agreement Due	Percent with Support Now Money	Percent Actually Receiving Any	Percent Receiving Regularly Support	Mean Amount of received
ALL Women	58	87	77	61	\$2,503
<b>RACE</b>					
Mon-minority White	72	87	78	63	2,711
Black	33	83	71	52	1,417
Hispanic	33	91	81	58	2,088
<b>MARITAL STATUS</b>					
Divorced	72	90	78	65	2,856
Separated	51	92	80	64	2,921
Never married	19	80	76	48	903
Remarried	78	82	75	56	2,074
<b>EDUCATION</b>					
Less than 12 years 42	85	71	53	1,728	
12 Years	60	87	78	62	2,268
More than 12 years 70	87	80	63	3,174	
<b>AGE AT FIRST BIRTH*</b>					
Definitely less than 19	51	86	71	48	1,735
Other	61	87	80	66	2,800
<b>NUMBER OF OWN CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLD</b>					
1	51	82	75	58	1,946
2	66	91	82	66	2,548
3 or more	60	88	73	57	3,305
<b>AFDC STATUS</b>					
Non-recipient	66	87	80	64	2,650
Recipient	34	85	59	45	1,327
<b>POVERTY STATUS</b>					
Above	62	87	79	64	2,639
Below	42	87	66	46	1,647
UNWEIGHTED N	(2,070)	(1,185)	(1,024)	(787)	( 787)

\* Only approximate age at first birth is available because it is not known if the women have other children living elsewhere. Age at first birth was estimated by subtracting the age of the women's oldest child in the household from her current age.

**Table 2. Proportion of Women at Each Stage in the Support Process and Mean Amount of Child Support Received Among Women Receiving Any Support by Selected Characteristics. of the Support Agreement, Winter 1984**

	II Of Women Ever Having An Agreement:	III Of Women With Support Now Due:	IV Of Women Now Receiving Money:	V Of Women Who Actually Receive Any Money:
	----- Percent with Support Now Due	----- Percent Actually Receiving Any Money	----- Percent Receiving Money Regularly	----- Mean Amount of Support received
All Women	87	77	61	\$2,503
WHETHER JOINT CUSTODY WAS AWARDED				
Yes	87	80	67	3,392
No	87	76	59	2,272
HOW AGREEMENT WAS REACHED				
Voluntary	90	93	83	2,868
Court	86	72	55	2,416
HOW PAYMENTS WERE TO BE MADE				
Direct	85	82	70	2,873
Court	89	75	53	2,217
Welfare	83	56	47	1,192
UNWEIGHTED N	(1,185)	(1,024)	(787)	( 787)

**Table 3**  
**Logistic Regression Models Predicting the Likelihood of Reaching Different**  
**Stages in the Child Support Process**

	I Support <u>Ever Due</u>		II Support <u>Now Due</u>		III Any Support <u>Received</u>		IV Support Received <u>Regularly</u>	
Race/Ethnicity(1)								
Black	-0.90	(-.13)***	-0.66	(-.06)*	-0.27	(.00)	-0.39	(-.00)
Hispanic	-1.18	(-.11)***	0.46	(.00)	0.33	(.00)	-0.19	(-.00)
Mother's Age	-0.02	(-.01)	-0.08	(-.05)*	-0.03	(.00)	0.01	(.00)
Approximate Age of Mother at First Birth								
Linear Term	0.05	(.00)	0.34	(.06)*	0.17	(.00)	0.33	(.05)*
Squared Term	-0.01	(.00)	-0.01	(-.04)*	0.00	(.00)	-0.01	(-.05)*
Mother's Education	0.33	(.11)***	0.07	(.00)	0.10	(.00)	0.07	(.00)
Marital Status(1)								
Divorced	-0.03	(.00)	1.50	(.16)**	-0.01	(-.00)	0.22	(.00)
Separated	-0.78	(-.09)***	1.39	(.11)***	0.22	(.00)	0.15	(.00)
Never Married	-2.19	(-.21)**	0.22	(.00)	0.69	(.03)+	-0.17	(-.00)
Number of Children	0.12	(.03)*	0.29	(.05)*	0.01	(.00)	0.19	(.00)
Help from OCSE2	1.11	(.06)***	-0.11	(.00)	1.05	(.10)***	-0.41	(-.02)
How Support Agreement Reached(1)								
Court			-0.50	(-.04)+	-1.51	(-.15)***	-0.66	(-.06)**
Joint Custody Agreement			-0.04	(.00)	-0.04	(-.00)	0.11	(.00)
How Payments to be Made(1)								
Through a Court			0.26	(.00)	-0.25	(-.00)	-0.58	(-.07)**
Through a Welfare Agency			0.21	(-.00)	-0.47	(-.02)	-0.24	(-.00)
Income			0.00	(.00)	-0.00	(-.05)*	-0.00	(-.05)*
AFDC Recipient			-0.45	(.00)	-0.59	(-.05)*	-0.06	(-.00)
Below Poverty Level			0.26	(.00)	-0.43	(-.03)+	-0.69	(-.06)*
Age of Youngest Child(1)								
12-17			3.02	(.26)***	1.12	(.05)*	0.98	(.02)
6-11			3.02	(.20)***	0.57	(.00)	0.62	(.00)
0-5			2.65	(.13)***	0.62	(.00)	-0.09	(-.00)
Mother's Employment Status(1)								
Employed Part-time			0.23	(.00)				
Employed Full-time			0.39	(.00)				
Male Children in Household					-0.05	(.00)	0.27	(.00)
Amount of Support Due					0.00	(.12)***		
Chi Square		609	215	143		90		
Degrees of Freedom		11	23	23		22		
R-Square		.21	.18	.09		.04		
Unweighted N		2,070	1,185	1,024		787		

Intercept terms are not shown. Cells contain parameter estimates followed by partial R in parentheses.

+ P<.10                   \* P<.05                   \*\*P<.01                   \*\*\*P<.001

- (1) Omitted categories are white; married; voluntary agreement, payments received directly from the father; youngest child is 18 or older; and not employed. respectively.
- (2) For columns I and II, a woman is said to have received help from OCSE if she reported that OCSE helped her establish paternity or a support obligation. For columns III and IV, a woman is said to have received help from OCSE if OCSE helped locate the father, obtain collections, or enforce the support obligation.

**Table 4**  
**OLS Regression Models Predicting the Amount of Child Support**

**Due And Actually Received**

	I		II	
	Amount		Amount	
	Now Due(3)		Received (4)	
Race/Ethnicity(1)				
Black	-943.8	(-4.84)***	-448.9	(-2.18)-
Hispanic	97.7	( 0.34)	-374.3	(-1.32)
Mother's Age	-21.2	(-0.90)	1.9	( 0.07)
Approximate Age of Mother at First Birth				
Linear Term	224 .5	( 2.16)*	212.0	( 2.04)*
Squared Term	-3.3	(-1.65)+	-3.8	(-1.90)+
Mother's Education	412.6	( 5.60)***	50.5	( 0.67)
Marital Status(1)				
Divorced	950.9	( 5.77)**-	11.4	( 0.07)
Separated	569.0	( 2.67)**-	435.9	( 2.09)*
Never Married	317.8	( 1.02)	634.4	( 2.02)*
Number of Children	636.7	( 7.24)***	118.4	(1.22)
Help from OCSE2	-329.7	(-1.26)	-287.9	(-1.47)
How Support Agreement Reached(1)				
Court	-345.3	(-2.18)*	174.9	( 1.17)
Joint Custody Agreement	482.4	( 3.07)**	277.7	( 1.78)+
How Payments to be Madel				
Through a Court	-63.0	(-0.45)	-273.4	(-1.90)+
Through a Welfare Agency	-352.7	(-1.32)	-204.2	(-0.64)
Income	.0037	( 0.86)	-.0072	(-1.72)+
AFDC Recipient	-406.7	(-1.80)+	-171.3	(-0.64)
Below Poverty Level	-18.6	(-0.09)	-341.6	(-1.60)
Age of Youngest Childl				
12-17	-213.2	(-0.51)	239.5	( 0.55)
6-11	-2.2	(-0.01)	-118.6	(-0.25)
0-5	-651.7	(-1.26)	-244.6	(-0.46)
Male Children in Household	195.5	( 1.44)	205.5	( 1.51)
Amount of Support Due			0.854	(28.50)***
F statistic (degrees of freedom)	11.92	(22,1001)	54.48	(23,763)
Probability of F	.0001		.0001	
R-Square(adjusted)	.19		.61	
Unweighted N	1024		787	

**Table 4 Con.**



Intercept terms are not shown. Cells contain parameter estimates followed by t-statistic in parentheses.

+ P<.10

P<.05

\*\*P<.01

\*\*\*P<.001

- (1) Omitted categories are white; married; voluntary agreement; payments received directly from the father; and youngest child is 18 or older.
- (2) For both columns. a woman is said to have received help from OCSE if OCSE helped locate the father, obtain collections, or enforce the support obligation.
- (3) U.S. women currently due child support; Winter, 1984
- (4) U.S. women currently receiving some child support; Winter, 1984