

Non-Custodial Parents' Participation in Their Children's Lives: Evidence from the Survey of Income and Program Participation

Volume II

Synthesis of Literature

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Divorce and non-marital childbearing have become commonplace and have dramatically altered children's lives. It can no longer be assumed that most children will spend their entire childhoods living with both parents. To the contrary, approximately half will live in single parent homes at some point before they turn age 18. Unfortunately, a common pattern is for the non-residential parent to become increasingly detached over time, paying minimal or no child support and visiting infrequently if at all. The costs to the children involved and to society at large of this disengagement are far from trivial. Many non-custodial parents do not pay all the child support they owe. Many others have no obligation to

pay support. Nonpayment of support forces some families below the poverty level and onto government welfare programs. For others, it means a reduced standard of living and an uncertain future. The costs to children are seen in an increased likelihood of dropping out of school and increased, social, emotional, psychological, and behavioral problems. Not all children are affected and some that are overcome their difficulties in a few years, but others experience long-term setbacks.

The connections between custody arrangements, payment of child support, parental involvement, and child well-being are still not well-understood. Many of the studies on which policy is being made are based on small, unrepresentative samples or on the experiences of divorcing couples in particular states. These studies may not reflect the experience of most custodial parents and their children. If the assumptions about the positive influence of joint custody, for example, or links between payment of child support and visitation are wrong, then the outcomes for families and children may not be to their benefit after all. Although not based on experimental designs, national survey data can be used to cast more light on the issues surrounding visitation, custody, child support, and child well-being and provide policymakers with a more solid base from which to proceed.

The aim of this project was to improve understanding of the relationship between non-custodial parent involvement, children's well-being, child support, and custody arrangements. Two approaches were used. Analyses of data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) were used to provide national estimates of persons living in different custody arrangements, and to examine the connections between custody arrangements, child support payments, parental involvement, and children's well-being in both the divorced and never-married populations. In addition, a review of recent literature was conducted and gaps in the research were noted. The findings of the review were used to guide the SIPP analyses. Also, as part of the project, a limited set of articles was annotated and a bibliography of selected papers on custody, visitation, and child well-being was created. The analyses of SIPP are contained in Volume I of this report. The literature review, selected annotated articles, and the extended bibliography are contained in Volume II. In addition, supplementary tables based on the SIPP were produced. These tables show the demographic characteristics, economic status, and living conditions of custodial parents, and selected measures of children's well-being by the existence of a child support award and whether child support was received, whether the agreement was voluntary or court-ordered, and the type of arrangement. Information on demographic background, the economic status, and the living conditions of the custodial parent and selected measures of child well-being are also shown by the amount of visitation with the non-resident parent. These tables were prepared for all custodial parents, for female custodial parents, for male custodial parents, and for divorced female custodial parents. The sample size for male custodial parents is small in some cells of the tables, so caution should be used in drawing inferences from these tables.

VOLUME I: SUMMARY OF SIPP ANALYSES

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is based on a national probability sample of the U.S. civilian, non-institutionalized population. It is funded and conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The SIPP is a major source of information about the demographic and economic situation of persons and families in the United States. The SIPP is one of two national surveys containing extensive

amounts of child support information. The other survey is the Current Population Survey.

There are three reasons why SIPP was uniquely suited to examine the relationship of child support, child custody, and child well-being: (1) detailed programmatic information; (2) longitudinal nature of the data, and (3) a child support module with questions on award, payment, custody, visitation, and child well-being. There are a variety of questions that can be used to assess the economic well-being of such children and, to a lesser extent, their social well-being. SIPP also contains topical modules which ask about consumer durables owned by each household, the living conditions of households, and the ability of households to meet basic needs. These modules were used to characterize the circumstances in which children are growing up. In addition, the SIPP contains information about the health of persons aged 15 and older.

The analyses relied on a variety of methods. Frequencies and crosstabulations were used to develop profiles of custodial parents with different child support characteristics, such as the number of persons with joint physical and legal custody arrangements, and information about the extent of non-cash support received from non-residential parents. In addition, ordinary least squares regression and logistic regression were used to examine in more detail the predictors of child support and visitation. Multivariate models were also estimated to examine the link between child support awards, custody arrangements, visitation, and payment of child support on children's health and on the receipt of AFDC in the previous year.

Highlights of Descriptive Findings

- Twenty-one percent or 1.3 million custodial parents with formal written child support agreements report that they have a joint custody arrangement. Of these, over 1 million (80%) have a joint legal only arrangement. The remaining 262 thousand report that they have a joint legal and physical custody arrangement.
- A large minority of custodial parents (45%) have never had a child support agreement of any type. About 14 percent of custodial parents without a written award report that the non-resident parent provided child support or non-cash assistance in the previous year.
- Court-ordered agreements are the most common type of written agreement. Seventy-three percent of custodial parents with written agreement report that they had court-ordered agreements. Twenty-three percent report that the agreements were voluntary ones ratified by the court. Three percent report that they had some other type of written agreement, such as one not ratified by the court.
- Nearly two-thirds (64.6%) or almost 4 million custodial parents with written agreements report that their agreements contain visitation provisions.
- According to the reports of custodial mothers with written agreements, nearly one-third (32%) of non-resident fathers have not spent time with their children in the previous 12 months. However, nearly one-quarter (24%) of non-resident fathers see their children at least once a week.
- Non-resident mothers are more likely to visit their children and to see them more often than non-resident fathers. Sixteen percent of non-resident mothers had not visited their children in the past year compared to 32 percent of non-resident fathers. Thirty-five percent of non-resident mothers

saw their children once a week or more compared to 24 percent of non-resident fathers.

- Custodial parents with written child support agreements who were owed child support, received about 65 percent of what they were due. Parents with voluntary agreements received 73 percent of what they were due, while those with court-ordered agreements received 62 percent of what they were due. Parents living in the same city or county as the non-resident parent received 70 percent of what was due compared to 58 percent if the non-resident parent lived in a different state.

Multivariate Results and Policy Implications

This study is not a randomized policy experiment or even a non-randomized study of specific policy initiatives. Thus, we must be circumspect about how far we go in drawing policy-related conclusions about the findings. A correlational panel study such as the present one cannot prove that a given policy will work as its advocates content it should. An observed relationship may be due to the operation of other, unmeasured factors. However, the *failure* to find an expected correlation can provide firmer grounds for believing that a specific policy will *not* work as anticipated. These results apply to couples who have a written child support agreement. Information on contact and payment of child support was not asked of persons without a written agreement. With these warnings in mind, the SIPP analyses provide support for the following types of activities:

- **Encouraging parents to establish child support agreements through a process of bargaining and mutual agreement, whenever feasible, rather than through litigation and court mandate, and providing services, if needed, to assist in the process.** Multivariate models indicated that even after controlling for background characteristics, fathers who had a voluntary written agreement ratified by the court maintained more contact with their children, were more likely to pay some child support, complied more fully with the child support orders, and paid greater amounts of child support than fathers who had court-ordered child support agreements.
- **Encouraging couples to specify visitation provisions in their agreements.** Nonresidential fathers had significantly more contact with their children when the child support agreement had an explicit provision specifying the frequency and schedule of visitation than when such a provision was not present in the agreement. The existence of a visitation provision, however, had no direct effect on the payment of child support.
- **Encouraging and facilitating contact between non-resident fathers and their children, when feasible.** The SIPP analyses suggest that continued contact with the non-resident father has a beneficial influence on older teens and young adults. Moreover contact had a positive association with both the payment of child support and with compliance with child support orders. Although this relationship diminished with the addition of past child support behavior to the model, the positive sign remained suggesting that contact is not hindering the payment of child support and is actually exerting pressure towards the payment of child support.
- **Promoting joint custody arrangements.** The results of the analyses were broadly supportive of arguments for joint custody, though the influence of joint custody differed somewhat depending upon whether it was joint legal or joint legal and physical. Nonresidential fathers with joint legal and physical custody were more likely to have paid some child support in the current year (significant at .10 level) and to have complied more fully with their support obligations than

fathers in other arrangements. There was no difference in the probability of paying support or in the degree of compliance with the child support orders between fathers with joint legal only custody arrangements and other fathers. However, fathers with joint legal only arrangements paid larger amounts of support than other fathers, even after controlling for the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the custodial parent and other possible mediating factors.

VOLUME II: SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE

The literature review contains three components: a synthesis of the literature on child development, custody, visitation, and child well-being; an annotated bibliography; and a selected bibliography. The synthesis briefly summarizes recent perspectives on children's development and on the role of the father in families. These two perspectives are important in understanding how and why marital disruption may affect children. The fact that children change over time, developing new skills and capacities and having different needs means that their response to the breakup of their families may differ depending upon their age at the time. Moreover, since the majority of non-custodial parents are fathers, it is important to understand the role that fathers play in children's lives and how that role changes as children grow older. The review then discusses several possible ways in which family disruption may affect children's lives. These are the loss of a parent (usually the father), the adjustment of the custodial parent, parental conflict, economic hardship stemming from the disruption, stressful life changes, including the loss of social supports and other resources. Gaps in existing research are noted. Key findings that helped guide the SIPP analysis are:

- All persons who are involved in working with single parent families and with divorcing families need to be made more aware of the developmental needs of children, the potential difficulties that they will face from family disruption or turmoil, and steps that could ease those difficulties.
- Given that conflict if inappropriately handled can be harmful to children and can alienate the two adults so that they cannot cooperate over matters concerning the child's well-being, it is important to provide services to reduce conflict or to express it in a healthier manner.
- Several studies showed that all the parties in a divorce experience stress. The stress can adversely affect the custodial parent's ability to function effectively; it can serve to inhibit the non-custodial parent from remaining involved in the child's life; and it may affect how the child adjusts to family disruption and turmoil. More research and training on how to reduce stress is needed.
- Given that most children desire the continuing presence of a father in their lives and that fathers may disengage from their parental responsibilities in part because they feel no sense of control over the new arrangements, steps should be taken to enable fathers when it is at all feasible to have a more active post-divorce role.
- There is a scarcity of research that has examined couples who never establish awards and couples who never married each other. Such couples are particularly vulnerable economically and the children face risks as well.

PART A: CUSTODY, VISITATION, AND CHILD WELL-BEING

A SYNTHESIS OF THE LITERATURE

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Introduction

The family situations in which American children are cared for and raised have changed dramatically in the last 30 years. The number of children who live with only one parent, with a birth parent and a stepparent, or with neither of their parents has increased substantially. In 1981, 33 percent of all children under 18 in the United States did not live in a traditional two-parent family, i.e., with both of their biological parents. By 1992, that figure had risen to 43 percent of children. Estimates are that at least half of all children today will spend some time in a single-parent family before they reach age 18 (Bumpass and Raley, 1993; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Furstenberg et al., 1983).

Currently, more than 40 percent of all first marriages end in divorce (Norton & Miller, 1992). The U.S. divorce rate doubled between the late 1960s and the late 1970s. The rate has stabilized and even declined slightly since then, but remains at very high levels (National Center for Health Statistics, 1994). Each year, more than 1.5 million children -- nearly 2.5 percent of all U.S. children -- undergo the painful experience of having their parents separate or become divorced (Bianchi & McArthur, 1991; Zill & Nord, 1994). Following separation or divorce, a sizable proportion of children lose regular contact with the non-custodial parent (Seltzer, 1991a; Furstenberg et al., 1983; Furstenberg and Nord, 1985; Seltzer and Bianchi, 1988). In the National Survey of Families and Households, nearly a third of the children had seen their non-resident parent only once or not at all in the preceding year, and only one in four averaged weekly contact or better (Seltzer, 1991a).

In addition to divorce, the number of children born to unmarried mothers has grown in recent years. In 1993, the nationwide count of such births amounted to 1.2 million, or 31 percent of all births. This was nearly triple the percentage of births that occurred outside of marriage in 1970. Among births to white women, the percentage that occurred outside marriage quadrupled between 1970 and 1993, going from 5.5 percent to 24 percent. Among births to black women, the unmarried percentage rose from 38 percent in 1970 to 69 percent in 1993. There are signs that unmarried birth rates are starting to level off; birth rates to unmarried women have remained stable for the past three years at 45.3 births per 1,000 unmarried women (Ventura et al., 1995). If the proportion of unmarried women in the population does not increase, the number of births to unmarried mothers should soon level off, as well. Many children born to an unmarried mother have little regular contact with their fathers (Seltzer, 1991a; Furstenberg et al., 1983). In the National Survey of Families and Households, nearly half the children born to an unmarried mother had seen their father only once or not at all in the last year (Seltzer, 1991a).

These trends in marriage and divorce have had negative consequences for the overall well-being of young people who grow up in single-parent families, stepfamilies, or other non-traditional family types.

Over the last decade and a half, social scientists have generated a considerable body of solid research on family disruption and children's well-being. This rich literature has been reviewed and synthesized by a number of researchers (e.g., Hetherington, 1979, 1981; Longfellow, 1979; Emery 1982, 1988; Chase-Lansdale and Hetherington, 1990; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Wallerstein, 1991, Amato and Keith 1991a, 199b, Amato, 1993, 1994; Kelly, 1993; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). There is widespread agreement that, on average, children are better off financially, psychologically, and emotionally when they are raised by two parents. Children who grow up in single-parent families are much more likely than children living in two-parent families to develop an array of problems, including behavior problems in school, emotional problems, and academic difficulties (Zill and Schoenborn, 1990). Children raised in step-families are not immune to these problems. They, too, show an elevated risk of maladjustment and school failure (Zill, 1988).

It is also widely agreed, however, that the effects of divorce should not be overstated. Although they are real, they are not inevitable nor are they necessarily long-lasting. The majority of children whose families are disrupted by divorce show no adverse signs several years later, though they may go through a crisis period in the two-year period following the divorce (Morrison and Cherlin, 1995; Hetherington, 1979). During the crisis period the children may exhibit behavioral problems and difficulties in social and psychological functioning. Generally, however, these difficulties diminish and disappear for most children within two or three years of the divorce. At the same time, it is important not to understate the effects of divorce: researchers have found effects of marital disruption 12 to 22 years later in such outcomes as poor relationships with parents, increased levels of problem behavior, increased likelihood of dropping out of school and receiving psychological help, lower likelihood of attending college, an increased likelihood among young men of being idle (i.e., not enrolled in school or employed), and an increased risk of teenage childbearing among young women (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Zill et al., 1993). Although the overall likelihood of these outcomes was relatively small, for some outcomes, such as dropping out of school, the risk was doubled, which could have considerable impact on the particular individuals affected. As Zill and his colleagues also note, the fact that divorce is associated with a poorer relationship with one's parents in young adulthood is a cause for societal concern. These young people will be more susceptible to negative influences around them than they would be if they had strong relationships with their parents. It should be pointed out that most of this research pertains to children of divorce. Relatively little research has been conducted that examines the psychological and social development of children born to women who were not married at the time of the birth. Although there is a rich literature about the economic insecurity experienced by single mothers and their children and its effects on their development and well-being, there is a scarcity of research that has tried to separate out the effects of single parenthood from the effects of poverty.

In spite of the extensive research conducted thus far, much remains to be learned, especially about why so many non-custodial parents become disengaged from their children's lives or take little or no responsibility and the effects of different custody arrangements on the continued involvement of the non-residential parent and on the well-being of children. More research is also needed on the consequences for children if their parents never marry. Because many good syntheses of the research on divorce and children's well-being already exist, this paper focusses on the connections between custody arrangements, child support payments, parental involvement, and children's well-being in both the

divorced and never-married populations. The literature on these topics is less extensive and the results more mixed (Kelly, 1993).

To understand how parental involvement, custody arrangements, and child support interact to affect child well-being, it would be useful to have a theoretical model that suggested the specific pathways of influence. Unfortunately, very little theoretical work has been done in this area (Kurdek, 1993). Researchers, however, have offered a variety of explanations for why divorce may affect children's lives. At least some of the reasons given may also apply to children whose parents never married. Among the explanations are loss of a parent (decrease in quantity and quality of contact with the noncustodial parent or feelings of loss, abandonment, and worthlessness stemming from the decreased interaction with the parent), poor adjustment and decrease in parenting skills of the parents (particularly the custodial parent), parental conflict, economic hardship, stressful life changes, and the loss of other resources such as social supports (Amato, 1993, 1994; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Kelly, 1993). Child custody and child support influences on child well-being are likely to transmit any effects that they have through one or more of the above forces.

Also important in understanding the potential effects of custody arrangements and child support payments on parental involvement and on children's well-being is an understanding of child development. The research on divorce indicates that effects may differ depending upon the age and sex of the child, with preschool children and boys more likely to exhibit short-term effects and older children and boys more likely to exhibit long-term effects. More consistent results have been found by age of the child than by sex of the child (Amato, 1994; Allison and Furstenberg, 1989; Zaslow, 1988, 1989; Zill et al, 1993). Both age and sex are proxies for the developmental pathways and needs of the children. It may well be the case that the optimal custody arrangements for a child change with the developmental stage of the child.

We adopt a child development perspective in examining the research results. Although fathers are increasingly being awarded custody of their minor children in divorce cases, it is still far more common for children to live with their mothers (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995). In instances where the parents never married, children are much more likely to reside with their mothers or perhaps with grandparents. Because the majority of non-custodial parents are fathers, it is important to understand the role that fathers play in children's lives and how that role changes as children grow older. We begin the discussion with an overview of children's development and of the role of the father. We then discuss the different reasons that have been offered to explain why family disruption may affect children's lives. To highlight that some family problems are not unique to disrupted families, we discuss how children's well-being can be affected by these forces even in intact families. As part of this discussion, we discuss what the research reveals about the relationship between child custody arrangements, child support payments, these forces, and children's well-being. We conclude this paper with a discussion of the policy implications of the synthesis.

Children's Development

As children grow older they change in many ways: physically, socially, cognitively, and emotionally (Hetherington and Parke, 1993). Developmentalists often identify four broad stages of development: infancy (from birth to age 2), early childhood (ages 3 to 5), middle childhood (ages 6 to 11) and adolescence (ages 12 to 17). Although the ages in parentheses should not be taken as fixed transition points, children's physical capacities, cognitive abilities, moral reasoning abilities, and social and emotional development undergo distinct transformations within each of these periods. There may be critical or sensitive periods in which children are more susceptible to certain stresses. For example, research on adoption suggests that children who are adopted prior to age two develop normally and exhibit few problems regardless of the conditions they lived in prior to age two, whereas children adopted after age two exhibit more behavior problems and other difficulties (Clarke and Clarke, 1976; Zill, 1995). It has been suggested that preschoolers (ages 3 to 5) may be especially vulnerable to the stresses of familial divorce because of their cognitive and social immaturity (Hetherington, 1981).

According to the ecological systems theory of child development, children's development is the result of a complex interplay between the child's own natural endowment and characteristics and a variety of social systems and environmental influences that move from immediate influences such as the child's home to more distal influences such as the child's community (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Those factors closest to the child will have the most direct and powerful influence on the child, especially when the child is young. The mother, in particular, because she is usually the one who has the most intimate and direct contact with the child, is a central figure in understanding children's development and has been the focus of much study. In general, internal family processes, the psychological and physical health of the parents, and the relationship of the parents with each other and with the young child are more important than influences from outside the household, though factors external to the household will exert some influence through the effects they have on the household and on the dynamics among persons within the household. As children grow older and establish contacts outside the household, influences external to the household will gain in importance.

This theory recognizes that children's development is molded in part by characteristics of the child such as the child's sex, age, temperament, and psychological adjustment. Fussy infants can contribute to parent irritability which can lead to poorer parenting, setting up a cycle that is not conducive to a healthy parent-child relationship or to healthy child development. Research on resiliency suggests that individual characteristics including age, sex, genetic factors, temperament, intelligence, and other problem-solving skills are also important determinants of how an individual responds to stressful events (Rutter, 1979, 1983, 1987; Garmezy, 1985).

At a minimum, children need to be protected from disease and other hazards in their environment, and to receive proper nutrition and rest. Beyond these basics, research on *attachment* indicates that children also need to have a continuous, warm, and loving relationship with at least one parent and preferably with two. Attachment theory has most frequently been studied in infants and referred to the child's attachment to the mother. Recently, however, the theory has been expanded to include children of older ages and to look at the child's relationship with the father, as well (Hetherington and Parke, 1993). Research in a variety of fields indicates that parental involvement increases children's well-being on an array of measures from academic achievement to being less prone to participate in delinquent activities.

Research also suggests that children benefit, cognitively at least, when they have two highly involved parents instead of just one (Lamb, 1986). One reason for this may be that mothers and fathers tend to have very different styles of interacting with their children. Children may be stimulated by the diversity of the parenting styles (Lamb, 1986). It may also be that each parent can respond better to particular aspects of the child's personality than the other.

Children's development can be enhanced or impeded by others in the child's life and by the child's general environment. Researchers studying resiliency in children have found that having close social networks, close personal relationships, and close relationships with larger groups and institutions help protect children from the ill effects of stressful life events (Rutter, 1983). Thus, having a close relationship with others may compensate to some extent for a poor relationship with one or both parents.

Ecological systems theory, however, explicitly acknowledges that children are influenced not only by direct interactions with others, but also by the interactions that the others have with each other. The child benefits, for example, if the two parents have a harmonious relationship or if the parents have a strong connection to the child's school and teachers (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Research supports this view: children thrive when their parents love one another as well as the child. One reason for this is that the climate of the household is more harmonious and the two parents can provide emotional and physical support to each other (Hetherington and Parke, 1993). Coleman's concept of *social capital* complements this perspective (Coleman, 1990). Social capital is embedded in the relations that exist among persons. The more connections that there are within a family and between members of the family and persons and institutions in a community, the greater the social capital, and the greater the ability to transfer human, financial, and other types of resources to individuals within the family.

Children also seem to benefit from continuity in their environment, predictable schedules, and consistent, firm (but not harsh) discipline (Miller, 1970; Crockenberg and Litman, 1990; Patterson, Reid, and Dishion, 1989). Structuring home routines, for example, is associated with higher achievement and reading scores in school (Miller, 1970). Reasonable and consistent discipline is associated with children who are more cooperative and who are more likely to internalize the standards of their parents and are less likely to exhibit behavior problems (Crockenberg and Litman, 1990; Patterson, Reid, and Dishion, 1989). All of these activities are more difficult in single parent households. Psychological research also suggests that children's sex-role development is enhanced by the presence of the same sex parent. Of particular concern are preschool boys who lose their fathers at a time when they are beginning the process of same sex identification.

Children's development is in many ways a cumulative process. Experiences that a child has had earlier can continue to influence the child later. Rutter in his research on resiliency found that chronic stresses, such as chronic poverty, may itself be a factor in how a child responds to an acute stressful event, such as the divorce of one's parents. A single stress may have no undue consequences, but two or more stresses may greatly increase the chances of adverse outcomes (Rutter, 1979).

These perspectives on child development carry implications for research on the consequences of marital

disruption for children's lives. Factors that this research indicate should be important are age of the child at the time of disruption, other characteristics of the child including his or her experiences prior to the disruption, the psychological well-being of the primary caretaker, the dynamics between the two parents and between each parent and the child, and the extent to which continuity in the child's day-to-day routines and surroundings are maintained following the disruption.

First, child development theory would lead one to expect young children whose lives are more narrowly focussed within the household to be more affected than older children. Infants, however, may escape some of the negative effects. On the other hand, to the extent that younger children are more dependent on a single primary caregiver, they may feel the loss of the second parent less than older children, particularly if that single parent can continue to function well. Although many studies on divorce have detected differences by age of child at the time of disruption, systematic studies that attempt to disentangle age at disruption from duration since disruption are still needed. Moreover, relatively large age groups have been used so that the potentially distinctive effects on infants, toddlers, school-aged children, and adolescents, and young adults cannot be readily assessed (Kurdek, 1993). The way in which other characteristics of the child affect their response to divorce has not been adequately addressed in the research. Second, the psychological well-being of the primary caretaker can directly influence children's lives. Research should examine more carefully factors that increase the psychological health of the caretaking parent and those that cause it to deteriorate. Third, to the extent that routines and familiar surroundings can be maintained, children should fare better. None of the studies which we examined documented the extent to which children's routines are disrupted and whether such disruptions do influence the children's response to divorce. John Guidubaldi and his colleagues in one study did find that children in disrupted families who had more consistent home routines were better adjusted two years later compared to similar children with less consistent routines (Guidubaldi et al., 1986). Fourth, attempts should be made to minimize the number and types of stresses that each child experiences due to the marital disruption. Again, however, to date we do not have a good sense of whether consequences for children vary by the number and types of stresses present.

In determining appropriate custody arrangements, parents and the courts need to be more sensitive to children's developmental needs. In a family with several children, it is quite possible to have children in different developmental stages. Regardless, the parties involved in determining custody should try to consider the different needs of each of the children. It appears rare, however, for judges who preside over family court cases to receive specific training that would allow them to be sensitive to the developmental needs of the children in making their decisions (Kelly, 1994).

The Role of the Father

To understand how the role of the father changes in divorced families or in families in which the father was never a member of the child's household, it is important to understand the role of father in intact families first. Only then can changes in his role be truly assessed.

Fathers are an important source of financial support for their families, but they also provide

psychological and emotional support to the mothers, and can provide physical support to them as well by sharing in the housework and other duties associated with running a household. They also serve as models for their children and affect their children's lives directly through their interaction with them whether it be through play, helping with homework, or acting as their confidants. Fathers also, like mothers, serve as interpreters of community and family norms, teaching children which behaviors are acceptable and which are not. They also serve as a disciplinary backup to the mother. In some circumstances, particularly for older children, the physical strength of the father may make a difference when it comes to enforcing rules. In addition, fathers may be able to understand and respond to certain aspects of the child better than the mother in that the child is a genetic combination of both parents. The same, of course, is also true of mothers. Fathers also directly influence their children through the quality of the relationship that they have together. Children's well-being as measured by sex-role adjustment, achievement, and psychosocial adjustment is enhanced when they have a close, warm, and loving relationship with their fathers (Lamb, 1986). As noted earlier, children with such relationships with both parents benefit even more (Lamb, 1986).

Lamb identified three components of parental involvement (applicable to mothers as well as fathers): direct *interaction* in which parent is actively engaged in activity with child; *accessible* in which parent is not directly involved with child, but is in the same room or nearby and is, therefore, readily accessible; and *responsibility* in which parent ensures that the needs of child are met such as scheduling pediatric visits, making sure meals are ready, and that child has clothes to wear. Mothers overwhelmingly take responsibility for their children's well-being (Lamb, 1986). This is true even if the mother works full-time. The reason for this is not clear. Some suggest that mothers strongly desire to assume this responsibility role and to some extent actively discourage fathers from trying to assume the role (Lamb, 1986). On the other hand, a substantial proportion of fathers do not appear to strongly desire the role and are generally willing not to assume it (Lamb, 1986).

The nature of the interaction that fathers and mothers have with their children is quite different. Fathers spend proportionately more of their time playing with their children, while mothers spend a greater proportion of their total time with their children in caretaking activities (Lamb, 1986). Because mothers spend a greater amount of time overall with their children, they may actually spend more time playing with them than the fathers do, yet caretaking still is what best characterizes the overall time, while play characterizes the fathers overall time with his children. The type of play that fathers engage in is also different than that of the mothers, being much more likely to be rough and tumble (Hetherington and Parke, 1993).

The extent of fathers' involvement with their children changes as the children grow older and also varies by whether the child is a boy or a girl. Regardless of the child's age, fathers are more likely to be involved with their sons than with their daughters (Lamb, 1986; Marsiglio, 1991). Fathers (and mothers) spend less time with their children as the children grow older, in part because children themselves desire to spend more time with friends and peers. However, in spite of spending less time as children grow older, the importance of fathers to children's development increases as children grow older, especially for sons (Thompson, 1986).

Ways in Which Family Structure May Affect Children's Lives

Loss of a Parent

As the previous discussion on the role of the father revealed, fathers play an important role in intact households. Their absence in a household potentially has multiple effects. Their contribution to the family income is reduced, their role as caretaker and role model to their children is sharply reduced, their role as psychological, emotional, and physical supporter to the mother is reduced (though in divorcing families this role may have diminished well before the divorce), their role as parent is reduced, and the quality and nature of their relationship with their children may be changed. In this section, we discuss what research reveals about their changed role, the quality and nature of relationship that they have with their children, and what effects their absence has on children's lives. We then go on to discuss what factors are associated with a father remaining involved, what factors explain why fathers are absent from their children's lives, whether other adults can substitute for the non-residential father, and the interconnections between paternal involvement, child support, and custody arrangements. In this discussion we are assuming that the fathers have not been abusive or have a history of substance abuse or psychological difficulties that could be harmful to their children or former spouse. When such conditions are present, paternal loss may well improve the quality of life for children and for the former spouse. Such cases, however, are not typical.

Role as Parents

Studies have shown that the amount of contact non-residential fathers have with their children diminishes over time (Furstenberg et al, 1983; Furstenberg and Nord, 1985; Seltzer and Bianchi, 1988). 1981 data indicate that approximately half of all children with a father living elsewhere see that father less than once a month or had not seen him at all in the past year (Seltzer and Bianchi, 1988). There is some evidence, however, that the amount of contact, though it still is low, may have increased in recent years (Kelly, 1993; Furstenberg and Harris, 1992). Some have also noted that the rate at which contact decreases may be smaller, the older the child is at disruption (Furstenberg and Harris, 1992). Such a pattern would make sense in that fathers of older children have had a longer period of time to develop strong relationships and to have made substantial emotional and economic investments in their children and thus would be more reluctant to sever the relationship (or to have it ??severed by others). It should also be noted that some studies have shown that noncustodial parents report more visits with their children than do custodial parents (Seltzer and Brandreth, 1994; Braver et al., 1991). Even so, the proportion of children with little or no contact with their non-residential parent is quite large.

Most studies examining father contact have focussed on divorced fathers. A few studies, however, have also examined parental contact in families formed by adolescent mothers (Furstenberg and Harris, 1993; Mott, 1990). These studies document movement of fathers into and out of the child's household. Furstenberg and Harris found that just under half the fathers of children born to adolescent mothers had lived with the child at some point while the child was 18 or younger, but only 9 percent of these fathers had lived with the child until the child turned 18. Most of the non-residential fathers did not maintain

regular contact during the child's entire childhood (Furstenberg and Harris, 1993). Others have found that fathers who had not married a child's mother were less likely to pay child support, visit the child, or be involved in decision-making concerning the child compared to divorced fathers (Seltzer, 1991; Peterson and Nord, 1990).

Even when contact is regular, the role that non-residential fathers play in their children's lives is often quite limited (Furstenberg and Nord, 1985). This statement applies to divorced and never married fathers. Non-residential fathers may engage in social activities with the child such as occasionally taking them out to dinner, on a trip, or playing with them, but they rarely help them with school work or carry out some project together (Furstenberg and Nord, 1985). Using Lamb's terminology, fathers may *interact* with or be *available* to their children, but rarely take (or have the opportunity to take) *responsibility* for their children. As noted earlier, this is true of fathers in intact families as well. Fathers are also less likely to impose rules on their children (Furstenberg and Nord, 1985). Some have argued that there are no clear social rules about how non-resident fathers should behave and therefore fathers are uncertain about their responsibilities after divorce or if they never married the child's mother (Seltzer, 1991).

Quality and Nature of their Relationships with their Children

Children seem to desire a continuing relationship with their fathers. Studies consistently find that loss of regular contact is the main complaint about divorce voiced by children (Kelly, 1993). Children also seem to apply a different standard in defining their relationship to a non-resident parent, particularly their non-resident mothers. Perhaps because they expect less, they are more positive about the little that they receive (Furstenberg and Nord, 1985). There is some evidence that the perceived emotional bond that children feel for their parents is more predictive of well-being than actual contact (Amato, 1994b). For these reasons, even if studies show no positive benefit of paternal participation on children's well-being, the children's expressed wishes to see their fathers should not be taken lightly.

Consequences for Children's Lives

Although in theory the loss of the continuing presence of the father should be detrimental to children's development, research results are decidedly mixed in this regard (King, 1994; Kelly, 1993; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991). Several large-scale survey studies have found no association between the amount of contact a non-custodial father has with his children and an assortment of measures of child well-being (King, 1994; Furstenberg, Morgan, and Allison, 1987). Other studies have found continued contact to be related to improved psychological scores, fewer behavioral problems, and better peer relationships (Peterson and Zill, 1986; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). Some studies have found differences by sex and by the mother's attitude toward the father's contact with the child (Kelly, 1993).

What might explain the inconsistent and generally weak or non-existent links between paternal participation and children's well-being. Furstenberg and Harris (1992) posit three possibilities: contact is too low even among those with regular contact for there to be any measurable effect; (2) the positive

benefits of higher contact may be offset by more conflict with the mother or other changes in family dynamics that adversely affect the child; and (3) fathers are not so important to children's lives as theory would lead one to expect, as long as there is a good relationship with the mother or other adult. Another possibility is that contact, itself, is a mixed blessing. Although contact allows the relationship of the father and his children to continue, it also forces the children (and the father) to endure repeated separations. Studies have shown that the artificial nature of visitation is a major source of stress for fathers. Of the literature we reviewed, none examined the stress that it places on children. Over ten years ago, this same gap in the literature was noted (Clingempeel and Reppucci, 1982). It seems conceivable that children who feel closest to their father would also be the ones who feel the most pain at having to repeatedly leave him. To truly understand the role of parental involvement in mediating children's adjustment to divorce, studies need to include measures of parental involvement, information on the quality of the father-child relationship both before and after divorce, the extent of conflict with the custodial parent, and measures of stress felt by fathers and children in the same model. The relative importance of each of these factors on children's adjustment could also be ascertained by including them in one model.

Why Some Fathers are Absent from Their Children's Lives

The reasons why fathers lose contact with their children over time and "drop out" of their lives are not well understood (Furstenberg and Harris, 1992). Factors that research suggests play a role include geographic mobility, remarriage of either parent, inability to establish a workable childrearing arrangement with the former spouse, lack of access due to actions of the former spouse, psychological pain at not being able to see their children in the same manner as before which causes fathers to remove themselves entirely to reduce the pain, and inadequate financial resources (Furstenberg and Harris, 1992; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Umberson and Williams, 1993; Seltzer and Bianchi, 1988).

In a focus group study of young black men who fathered children born to adolescent girls, the men gave several reasons for not remaining involved in the children's lives. These were that the children were not theirs, the mothers had another partner who had replaced them, their support wasn't going for the children, they didn't have the money, and the mother prevented them from remaining involved (Furstenberg, 1992). These young black fathers gave very similar responses to those given in more representative samples of fathers.

Predictors of Remaining Involved

The quality of the relationship between fathers and their ex-spouses is one of the strongest predictors of remaining involved: the better the relationship the more likely the fathers are to remain involved (Chase-Lansdale and Hetherington, 1990; King, 1994). This appears to be true of ever-married couples, as well as low income, black, never-married couples. One reason for this association is that mothers under such circumstances would have fewer reasons to limit the fathers' access. Another factor is how well the fathers, themselves, are able to adjust to divorce. Fathers who are better able to cope with the stresses and changes are more likely to remain involved (Chase-Lansdale and Hetherington, 1990).

In a study of 289 single, teen-mother families on AFDC in Wisconsin, the father's work experience was the strongest predictor of the father remaining involved in the child's life. Fathers who had worked in the last year were significantly more likely to help out in a variety of childrearing tasks including dressing and playing with the child, to talk with the mother about the child, and to have a good quality relationship with the child as described by the mother (Danziger and Radin, 1990). The authors speculate that the association may be due to the fact that both mothers and fathers may hold the belief that a sign of a good father is one that can provide for his family. Thus, fathers who are employed may have a greater sense of pride in their ability to be a father and thus perform other expected duties, as well. Second, the mother and her extended family may be more willing to let an employed father remain involved in the child's life (Danziger and Radin, 1990).

Although it appears logical to assume that fathers who were more highly involved with their children prior to separation would remain more highly involved than other fathers after separation, the evidence for this supposition is weak at best (Chase-Lansdale and Hetherington, 1990). Again, however, it is precisely these fathers who are most likely to feel the pain of the artificial nature of visitation. Policy makers may want to consider ways in which they could reduce the psychological stress that non-resident fathers feel. Steps that try to involve the fathers in truly meaningful ways in their children's lives and that award them a sense of control may ease their stress and reduce the tendency for them to remove themselves.

In a study of two-parent families, Marsiglio found that the best predictors of father involvement in minor children's lives were characteristics of the children, themselves. Spouse/partner attitudes, occupational prestige, and work hours were not important. However, fathers were more likely to do things with their children as their children got older, if they had all boys, and if the children were their biological children (Marsiglio, 1991). Although it is clear that custodial mothers can act as "gatekeepers" in permitting or preventing non-residential fathers access to their children (Price et al., 1994), the role of the children themselves in the amount of contact, particularly as they get older, needs more examination.

Can Other Adults Substitute for Biological Fathers?

From a policy perspective, it is useful to know whether other adults can substitute for biological fathers. In a study of children four years of age or younger born to young mothers, Mott (1990) documented considerable movement of fathers into and out of the children's households and also the presence of other adults who could serve as father-figures in the children's lives, particularly in black female-headed families. Thus, at least in the early years, the potential for children to form relationships with fathers or father-substitutes is greater than survey results on family living arrangements would lead one to believe. However, as noted above, other studies have found that over time, most of these young fathers, like their older ever-married counterparts, lose contact with their children (Furstenberg and Harris, 1992)

Research on stepfamilies has shown that stepfathers do contribute income to their families, but in many other respects children in stepfamilies do not fare better than children who remain in single-parent families. There are age and sex differences in children's reactions to their mother's remarriage. Yet the

stepfather appears to compete for the mother's time with her children, brings yet one more adjustment that the child must make, and may not have the same level of commitment to the child that a biological father would have (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994).

Elder and his colleagues (1995) in a study of inner-city families did not find that the presence of other adults in black single-parent families buffered the parents or children. Hawkins and Eggebeen (1991) using a more representative sample of young children also found no positive benefit of having other adults present in the household. In fact, among white children the presence of a grandfather and mother was associated with greater psychosocial problems compared to children living in intact families (Hawkins and Eggebeen, 1991).

Although grandparents are biologically linked to the child and, therefore, presumably would exhibit greater commitment to the child, studies of three-generation black families have also shown that children in these families are similar to children in step-families and to children in single-parent families (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). They suggest that there may be differences in parenting styles, diffusion of parental responsibility, and a weakening of the quality of parenting in both the mother and grandparent. Furstenberg and Cherlin, however, found that the psychological well-being of children raised by a mother and grandmother was the same as for children raised in two parent families (Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1986).

Custody Arrangements, Child Support, and Parental Involvement

The most common custody arrangement is for the mother to obtain sole legal and physical custody. However, the proportion of joint custody arrangements in which both mother and father retain legal control over their children is growing. In 1991, nearly 17 percent of custodial parents reported that they had a joint custody arrangement with the non-residential parent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995). There are two types of joint custody arrangements: joint legal custody in which both parents have legal control over decisions that affect the child, but the child resides with one parent, generally the mother and joint physical arrangements in which both parents have legal control over the child and the child actually spends time (typically similar amounts of time) in both households (Arditti, 1992). Given that these types of arrangements are still not widespread, little research has examined the consequences for children of joint-legal, joint-physical, and sole custody arrangements (Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991).

Part of the impetus behind the movement to encourage joint custody arrangements was the presumption that such arrangements would keep fathers more involved in their children's lives and would increase their financial contributions to the child's upbringing (Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991). These presumptions were based on research studies that had observed a higher level of contact and more regular payment of child support among fathers who had joint custody arrangements (Peterson and Nord, 1990; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991). Results from more recent studies are mixed. Some researchers have found that joint custody arrangements are associated with greater payment of child support, greater paternal involvement, and with greater paternal satisfaction with the custody arrangements (Arditti and Keith, 1993; Pearson and Thoennes, 1988). Others, however, after controlling

for family background, find the type of custody arrangement does not influence levels of payment, father involvement, or the relationship between children and parents (Veum, 1993; Donnelly and Fineklhor, 1992; Seltzer, 1990).

There is an association between the amount of contact a father has with his children and his likelihood of paying child support. Fathers with more contact tend to pay more child support (Arditti and Keith, 1993; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Seltzer, et al., 1989; Furstenberg et al., 1983). The reason for this association, however, is not necessarily that increased contact leads to more payment. Veum (1993) using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and simultaneous equations found that there was no causal relationship between visitation and child support payment. It is possible that a third variable, commitment to the child, may explain both the level of visitation and the level of payment (Veum, 1993; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991). Another possible variable that could affect both level of child support payment and visitation is the quality of the relationship between the residential and non-residential parents (Veum, 1993).

Some have suggested that one reason parents do not pay child support is that they cannot monitor or control how the money is spent (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). Other studies support this view in that fathers who feel a sense of control over their children after divorce are more likely to visit and to pay child support (Price et al., 1994). Similarly, others have found that the feeling of loss of control is a major source of stress among non-residential fathers, particularly when it comes to knowing how the child support monies that they pay are spent (Umberson and Williams, 1993). Compounding fathers' inability to monitor or control the funds they pay is the fact that at least some of the money goes towards supporting their former spouse or partner and others in the household (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Umberson and Williams, 1993). Becker and others have suggested that when fathers leave a household, they lose commitment to their children over time and as they establish new relationships (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Becker, 1981; Furstenberg and Nord, 1985). Fathers who had high levels of involvement prior to the divorce are more likely to make the specified child support payments (Peters et al., 1993).

The relationship between custody arrangement, paternal involvement, and child support needs more study using larger, more representative data and incorporating potentially confounding variables such as the quality of the relationship between the two parents and whether the arrangement was voluntarily agreed to or was mandated by the courts. Moreover, few measures exist for potentially important concepts, such as paternal commitment. It might be worthwhile to spend time developing such measures that could be included in future studies. It would then be possible to more directly study factors that predict paternal commitment and the effect of paternal commitment on child support payments and on paternal involvement.

Adjustment of Custodial Parent and Parenting Skills

Divorces are usually very stressful for all the people involved, though the person who initiated the divorce may also feel a sense of relief. To varying degrees, though, all members of a divorcing family

are vulnerable to feelings of depression, loneliness, regret, anger, and helplessness (Maccoby and Mnookin, 1992; Menaghan and Lieberman, 1986). The adults can become so preoccupied with their own emotional and financial difficulties that they may not be able to meet the emotional and psychological needs of their children. The custodial parent may find it very difficult to gather the energy to monitor his or her children and to enforce consistent expectations and demands on them. Research has shown that children in single parent families receive less adult supervision and attention than children living with two parents (Seltzer, 1991). One of the strongest predictors of children's adjustment following divorce is the overall well-being of the custodial parent (Kelly, 1993).

It is not only the custodial parent's adjustment to divorce that is important for children's well-being, however. There is good evidence in the psychological literature that having a mother with mental health problems, whether it be depression, anxiety, or other types, is bad for children (McLoyd and Wilson, 1991). Even if fathers in these families do not assume a large role in taking care of the children, they can offset some of the negative effects on children by providing adult companionship to the mother and by other types of support. There may be a higher rate of depression and anxiety among single parents because there is no adult companionship or support readily at hand.

Single parents also face a balancing act between meeting their own needs and meeting those of their children. In married couple families, both parents need to balance their needs of love and affection and time to be together with demands that their children make upon their time. In most cases, both parents also have strong ties to their children and work out satisfactory arrangements. In single parent families, however, the parent may be dating or actively looking for a suitor. The suitor has fewer incentives to be concerned with the needs of the children than a parent would and may be less understanding of demands that children make. Thus, there may be a conflict between being in role of dating or looking for a suitor and being a parent, particularly as children grow older. Few studies have examined how these other demands on a single mother affect her parenting behavior or her relationship with her children.

Custody Arrangements, Child Support, and Adjustment of the Custodial Parent

There has been virtually no research that examines the interrelationship between custody arrangements, child support, and the adjustment of the custodial parent following divorce. One study found that parents who are able to emotionally disengage from each other following a divorce show better psychological adjustment two years later compared to those who still are preoccupied with the divorce or have residual anger towards the ex-spouse (Tschann et al., 1989). Custody and child support issues are often emotionally charged issues that may well make it difficult for either parent to emotionally disengage from the other. As noted above, research has yielded mixed findings about the effects of custody arrangements and child support on children's well-being. A fruitful area to examine is the extent to which custody arrangements and regularity of child support payment affect the custodial parents well-being and, in turn, her children.

Parental Conflict

Numerous studies have revealed that children do not fare well when there is substantial conflict or hostility in the family (Hetherington and Parke, 1993; Peterson and Zill, 1986; Rutter, 1979). Studies have also shown that children whose parents continue to have high conflict after divorce also do not fare as well as children whose parents have a better relationship (Kelly, 1993). However, it appears that the influence of conflict is indirect, through its effect on parenting behavior (Kline et al., 1991; Tschann et al, 1989). Moreover, the extent of adverse consequences due to conflict appears to be mediated by the strategies that parents use to resolve their conflicts and by whether children feel "caught in the middle of" parental conflict (Kelly, 1993; Camara and Resnick, 1988).

Custody Arrangements, Child Support, and Parental Conflict

None of the research we reviewed directly examined the link between custody arrangements, child support payments, and parental conflict. There is evidence that when parents can cooperate, joint custody arrangements are beneficial for children, but when there is a high level of dispute between the parents, such arrangements can be bad for children (Kelly, 1993). We do not know, however, the extent to which custody arrangements or irregularity in child support payment creates or exacerbates existing conflict.

Economic Hardship

Single parent families are more likely to be poor than two-parent families, especially if the lone parent is the mother. The poverty rate for single-parent, female-headed families in 1992 (46 percent) was nearly six times higher than the poverty rate for married-couple families with children (8 percent). The poverty rate for single-parent, male-headed families (22 percent) was nearly three times higher than the married-couple rate, but only half as high as the female-headed, single-parent rate (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993). Such families also have lower median income levels. In 1993, the median income level for a U.S. child in a two-parent family was about \$43,600 whereas the median income for a child in a mother-only family was about \$12,100 (Zill and Nord, 1994). There is no doubt that family disruption and single-parenthood are associated with lower income levels and that family income is one of the determinants of a child's life chances and future success (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Bianchi and McArthur, 1991).

There are three primary reasons why low income can adversely affect children's lives. First, if resources are sufficiently low, children do not receive the nutrition and medical care that they need for healthy development. Many of our government programs, including AFDC and WIC, are to ensure that children are protected from these serious consequences of low income.

Second, economic pressures can adversely affect maternal emotional well-being and maternal parenting practices. Elder and his colleagues in a study of 429 inner-city Philadelphia families found that low income and unstable work/income patterns increased the risk of emotional distress which adversely affected parental beliefs about their own efficacy and their parenting strategies (Elder et al, 1995). Among blacks, the researchers found that economic pressures affected parental efficacy both directly and indirectly through depressed feelings. Among whites, economic pressures affected parental efficacy

indirectly through depressed feelings (Elder et al., 1995). The authors speculate that the direct effects observed among blacks are due to the fact that blacks tended to have fewer economic resources and therefore losses in economic resources could have a very acute affect on them and their children. Among blacks, having a strong marriage protected them so that economic pressures did not affect their emotional well-being or sense of parental efficacy. However, among single-parents the presence of other adults in the household did not provide the same emotional protection (Elder et al., 1995). There were an insufficient number of single-white families to repeat the analyses among whites.

Third, low income can adversely affect children's lives through the neighborhoods in which they reside. Low income families are often forced to live in neighborhoods that are beset by problems. Elder and his colleagues in the study noted above, found that whites described their neighborhoods more favorably than did blacks and had access to more services (Elder et al., 1995).

A distinction needs to be drawn, however, between children who have experienced chronic poverty and those who have experienced an income loss (McLoyd, 1990). Children who have always lived in poverty are more likely to live in the most problematic neighborhoods and to have lived in them for a longer period of time. Moreover children who have experienced an economic loss have some reason to expect that their new situation is not permanent. As Vonnie McLoyd notes, "Poverty among black children is marked by its persistence and geographic concentration, whereas it is primarily a transitory, geographically diffuse phenomenon among white children" (McLoyd, 1990, p. 335). In a similar vein, children of divorce are more likely than children of never married parents to have experienced economic loss, whereas children of never married parents are more likely than children of divorce to have experienced chronic income deprivation or outright poverty.

Child Support, Economic Hardship, and Children's Well-Being

Child support offsets, to some extent, the loss of the father's income. However, many fathers pay no child support or less than was agreed upon. Several studies have demonstrated that divorced women are more likely than never married women to have child support awards and, therefore, are more likely to receive at least some child support (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995; Peterson and Nord, 1990). Although studies may overstate the amount of underpayment because some couples may have informally renegotiated their agreements, the reduction in income is substantial (Peters et al., 1995; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995).

Child support can certainly reduce the economic hardship in a family. The connection between payment of child support and non-financial aspects of children's well-being is less clear. Several researchers have shown a link between receipt of child support and educational attainment and academic achievement (Knox and Bane, 1994; Graham et al., 1994; Baydar and Brooks-Gunn, 1994). Payment of child support also appears to be associated with a lower level of school behavior problems (McLanahan et al., 1994). However receipt of child support seems to be less strongly related to other aspects of children's well-being (Marsiglio, 1993). Reasons for this may be that the amounts paid are insufficient to reduce the economic pressures on the custodial parent and associated psychological stress experienced. The typical

amount paid, which is usually lower than what is owed, is below the actual costs of raising a child. One study found that state child support guidelines generally fall within the range of estimates of raising children (Lewin/ICF, 1990), which suggests that the economic pressures would be reduced if the non-resident parent paid the full amount owed. There may also be accompanying conflict over the child support payments so that potential benefits for children's well-being are masked by the adverse effects of parental conflict.

Stressful Life Changes and the Loss of Social Supports and Other Resources

When divorces occur, many other changes also tend to occur. At a minimum, one parent must find a new place to live. Often, because of financial difficulties, both parents end up moving. Thus, at a time when the members of the family are at an increased need for emotional support, they are uprooted from familiar surroundings and from friends and family. Thus, the risk for social isolation is greatly increased. In time, many children must cope with their parents dating behavior and, for a substantial proportion, the remarriage of one or both parents. It is, therefore, not uncommon for children of divorce to be faced with the challenges of adjusting to their parents' boy friends or girl friends, a step-parent and step-siblings, or to the birth of a half-sibling. Children whose parents never married face similar challenges. How children cope when facing these major life changes had not been well-studied, although there is ample evidence that life in step-families is not equivalent to life with both of one's own parents. As noted earlier, children in step-families also experience a higher incidence of behavioral problems and emotional difficulties. No study that we reviewed adequately examined the extent to which children of divorce are exposed to multiple stressful life changes and the relationship of number of stressors or type of stressors to their adjustment. Amato (1993) suggests that this is a fruitful direction for research.

Custody Arrangements, Child Support, and Stressful Life Changes

Theoretically, joint custody arrangements and adequate child support levels should reduce the number of stressful changes that children must experience. Under ideal circumstances, joint custody arrangements would keep the father actively involved in the child's life and the child support would ensure that acute changes in income did not force the child to drastically change his or her lifestyle. Research, however, has not examined the extent to which children's lives change by the type of custody arrangement or due to differences in regularity of child support payments. Joint physical custody arrangements force the child to adapt to two homes and potentially to two different sets of standards and rules. We have no sense, however, of how often this is the case or what consequences it has for children of different ages.

Weaknesses and Gaps in Literature

Much of the existing research has been based on middle-class samples of divorcing couples and on clinical samples or samples of convenience. This is a major weakness because we do not know the extent to which current findings are generalizable to the broader U.S. population and to non-middle class and minority populations. There also is only limited information on children whose parents never married. Much attention has been paid to their poor economic prospects, but less attention has been

devoted to other aspects of their lives. From a data perspective, more longitudinal, large-scale studies are needed that can test some of the findings that have been based on small-scale, clinical, or other non-representative samples. These studies should include measures about family processes and changes in potentially mediating factors over time such as remarriage, entry into adolescence, changes in family relationships. They would also be able to sort out age at disruption and duration effects. Prospective studies would be ideal. A new National Survey of Children or National Longitudinal Survey of Youth that followed a representative sample of young people over a five to ten year period could provide a wealth of information about the consequences of non-marriage and divorce on children's lives. Such a survey should interview both parents (regardless of whether they live in the household) and at least two children in the household. Moreover, attempts should be made to locate and interview at later points in time any parent that leaves the household.

Aside from weaknesses in our knowledge base due to limitations of the samples that have been used to study these questions, there are also several major gaps in our knowledge. A major gap in the literature is the lack of theoretical work that links what psychologists have learned about the development of children and those factors that foster healthy development with what family sociologists and economists have learned in studies of marital disruption and divorce. To truly understand the consequences of different custody arrangements, visitation, and child support on children's lives, these perspectives need to be brought together into one model.

There is also a need for studies that can determine the relative influence of different variables that predict to parental involvement and to child well-being. To accomplish this, the models need to incorporate measures of the various forces that can affect parental involvement or children's adjustment to a single-parent family, such as those discussed earlier: the loss of a parent and the psychological pain that may accompany it; poor adjustment of the custodial parent and a deterioration in his or her parenting skills; parental conflict; economic hardship; and other stressful life changes. Until measures from each of these domains is included in a single model, it will remain difficult to understand children's adjustment to family disruption.

Another major gap in the literature is research on how children in non-middle-class families react to marital disruption or the lack of marital formation, in the first place.

Researchers have attempted to examine the association between child support or child custody and children's well-being, but they have not attempted to theorize why there should be an association or disentangle the pathways by which either should affect children's well-being. As noted above, there is virtually no research that examines the connections between custody arrangement, child support and maternal adjustment or parental conflict. More research needs to be done in this area because it is quite likely that effects on children of different custody arrangements or child support payment patterns will be mediated in large part by how the mother adapts and by the extent of parental conflict and the manner in which it is expressed.

There is a need for more research on non-custodial fathers -- the stresses they face, how they cope, their

emotional adjustment, how they feel about changes in their parenting role, and factors that alleviate stresses. It is commonly believed that men, because they are generally not the primary caretaker, are less reliable respondents than mothers with respect to providing factual information about their children. However, fathers would be the best source of information about their own adjustment and reactions to divorce and about having children through a non-marital relationship. Such information could be obtained through the survey described above or through a series of selected focus group or small-scale studies with fathers who represent distinct groups of interest such as low-income blacks in the inner city (Furstenberg and others are currently pursuing such studies), non-middle-class whites, non-middle-class minority fathers, and middle-class black and other minority men.

There is need for more research that devotes attention to the developmental needs of children. Such research would address questions such as the following: do optimal custody arrangements vary by the age of the child? Does the influence of any given force change with the developmental stage of the child? For example, is parental absence or parental conflict more damaging when children are toddlers, when they are school-aged, or when they are adolescents? Similarly, does the influence of the various forces vary with the child's temperament or other characteristics? For example, do children who are outgoing and those who are shy react differently to parental conflict or to adjustment problems in the custodial parent?

From a policy perspective, an important question is, does the influence of custody arrangements and child support payments on children's well-being differ according to the particular configuration of forces at work in any given situation? For example, if conflict between the parents is the primary reason for difficulties for children in one family, then a joint custody arrangement may exacerbate the conflict, which could lead to poorer outcomes for the children. However, if maternal adjustment factors are the prime difficulty, then joint custody arrangements, where the father shares the child-rearing responsibilities and buffers his children, may benefit the children. Similarly, in a family experiencing financial stress, child support payments may be very important, but in a family not experiencing such difficulties, child support payments may not matter as much. One reason for the inconsistent findings in the literature may be that the effects have been masked by not controlling for the type of forces involved.

Policy Ramifications

The above review has several implications for policy makers.

All persons who are involved in working with single parent families and with divorcing families need to be made more aware of the developmental needs of children, the potential difficulties that they will face from family disruption or turmoil, and steps that could ease those difficulties.

- Educate fathers, mothers, and service providers of the importance of fathers in the lives of children.
- Educate parents as to the consequences of divorce for children;
- Ensure that judges who preside over family courts receive training in the developmental needs of

children.

- Reduce, to extent possible, changes in the children's lives, at least in the immediate post-divorce/separation period -- children may be better able to cope with changes in routines later. If possible, allow children to remain in same house or neighborhood with the non-residential parent living nearby in the first year or two;

Given that conflict if inappropriately handled can be harmful to children and can alienate the two adults so that they cannot cooperate over matters concerning the child's well-being, it is important to provide services to reduce conflict or to express it in a healthier manner.

- Encourage mediation and conflict reduction during the divorce process;
- Inform parents about the potentially harmful effects of conflict for their children;
- Teach parents about the different ways of handling conflict and how some forms of handling conflict are particularly detrimental to children.

Several studies showed that all the parties in a divorce experience stress. The stress can adversely affect the custodial parent's ability to function effectively; it can serve to inhibit the non-custodial parent from remaining involved in the child's life; and it may affect how the child adjusts to family disruption and turmoil.

- Support research which studies ways to reduce stress of custodial parent, the non-custodial parent, and the children during the divorce period;
- Support research which can provide more information about how to reduce stress of the parents and children in never married families;
- Ensure that service providers and social workers are attuned to the potentially high levels of stress that single parents feel and that they seek ways to alleviate those stresses.

Given that most children desire the continuing presence of a father in their lives and that fathers may disengage from their parental responsibilities in part because they feel no sense of control over the new arrangements, steps should be taken to enable fathers to have a more active post-divorce role. There will, of course, be cases where this will be impossible because of the inability of the two parents to cooperate, because the father has no interest in remaining involved, or because of a history of past abuse. But, when it is at all feasible, policy should encourage paternal involvement.

- Allow paternal role to continue, to the extent possible;
- Find ways to allow fathers to have a meaningful role in their children's lives where they can shoulder some of the *responsibility* of raising the child;
- Find ways to enable non-custodial parents to have some control over child's life.

There is a scarcity of research that has examined couples who never establish awards and couples who never married each other. Such couples are particularly vulnerable economically and the children also face risks as well.

- Support research which looks at low income fathers and their children.
- Support experimental interventions aimed at increasing the establishment of awards among couples who have not been married and among low income couples.

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PART B. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY: SELECTED CHILD SUPPORT ARTICLES

Christine Winquist Nord and Laura Spencer Loomis

Westat, Inc.

Ahrons, Constance R. and Richard B. Miller. 1993. "The effect of the Postdivorce Relationship on Paternal Involvement: A Longitudinal Analysis." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 63(3): 441-450.

This study examines factors influencing noncustodial fathers' involvement with their children after divorce, and focuses specifically on the quality of the mother-father relationship. Two hypotheses guide this study. First, the effect of the mother-father relationship on fathers' contact with their children will diminish over the years following divorce. Second, the relationship between the former spouses will have greater influence on fathers' involvement in parental responsibilities than on actual father-child contact. The data are from a longitudinal study called the Binuclear Family Research Project and were derived from a sample of divorced couples drawn in 1979 from public divorce-court records in Dane County, Wisconsin. Interviews were conducted at three time points after the divorce, with the Time 3 interviews at 5 years post-divorce. The sample included 64 parent pairs. The dependent variables include a measure of parental involvement on eight parental activities and a measure of the frequency and duration of father-child contacts. Each of these dependent variables were measured according to both the mothers' and fathers' reports and scores from each report were averaged together to form couples' scores. The measure of the quality of the mother-father relationship was a ten-item scale that tapped conflict. Control variables included the age of the youngest child, parent education level, the remarriage of either parent, proximity of fathers to their children, and the presence of boys in the family. Analyses were performed separately for mothers and fathers. The results indicate that, for both mothers and fathers, the quality of the parents' relationships was positively related to fathers' involvement in parenting activities at time 1, but the strength of this relationship diminished thereafter. Similar results were observed regarding mothers' perceptions of the quality of their relationship with the fathers and its effect on father-child contacts. However, the results for fathers indicated that the mother-father relationship as they perceived it had no effect on the frequency of father-child contacts at time 1 or thereafter. Also, both the mother and father data indicated that the effect of the quality of parents' relationships was stronger for the extent of fathers' involvement in parenting activities than on father-child contacts. The authors deduce from their results that the amount of conflict between former spouses has an important influence on father's involvement after divorce, particularly during the time shortly after divorce. As far as contact between noncustodial fathers and their children, mothers' perceptions about the mother-father relationship were shown to have a greater influence than the fathers' perceptions, suggesting that mothers are regulating the amount of father-child contact.

Amato, Paul R. 1993. "Children's Adjustment to Divorce: Theories, Hypotheses, and Empirical Support." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 55(1): 23-38.

The author compared five perspectives on children's adjustment to divorce: "the absence of the noncustodial parent, the adjustment of the custodial parent, interparental conflict, economic hardship, and stressful life changes" (p. 23). He assessed the importance of each by developing hypotheses to test them and then examining the results of over 180 existing studies to locate evidence that would support or fail to support the hypotheses. He notes that "many hypotheses have not been tested as often as one would like, and methodological problems plague many of these studies" (p. 35). He concludes that "available data indicate that ... the strongest and most consistent support is obtained for the interparental conflict model however, this perspective does not tell the entire story.... No single model ... can account fully for the pattern of findings reported.... These qualifications suggest the necessity of a larger model that incorporates elements from all perspectives" (p. 35). He suggests that "A general model of

children's outcomes following divorce can be developed around the concepts of *resources* and *stressors*. Children's development can be viewed as being facilitated by the possession of certain classes of resources. Major resources for children include parental support (emotional support, practical help, guidance, supervision, and role models) as well as parental socioeconomic resources" (p. 35). Marital disruption affects children's lives because it places multiple stresses on them and it "can interfere with children's ability to utilize parental resources" (p. 35). Important factors are interparental conflict, loss of contact with non-custodial parent, lower quality relationship with custodial parent, disrupted ties with other supports due to geographic mobility, and loss of income. "The total configuration of resources and stressors, rather than the presence or absence of a particular factor, needs to be considered. Implicit in the above model is the notion that one resource might compensate for the lack of another. For example, economic hardship may not be problematic for children who have a close relationship with a warm and competent custodial parent....future research on children of divorce needs to model interactions between stressors and resources; studying particular factors out of context, rather than trying to grasp the larger pattern, will probably only generate more findings that are inconsistent and contradictory" (p. 35-36).

Arditti, J.A. 1995. "Noncustodial Parents: Emergent Issues of Diversity and Process." *Marriage and Family Review* 20(1): 283-304.

This article reviews literature regarding noncustodial parents, focusing on that which examines factors that influence outcomes for parent-child relations after divorce and also on some methodological problems seen in the research reviewed. The article begins by discussing research on visitation and payment of child support. Most research on these issues relies on data provided from custodial mothers, who tend to underestimate noncustodial fathers' involvement and payment of support. Also discussed is that the findings of research on the frequency with which noncustodial fathers visit their children, on the amount of support that fathers pay, and on the financial situations of custodial mothers are not consistent. Evidence regarding the relationship between father-child contact and payment of child support is also inconclusive. Also discussed is how parents' relationships after divorce affect the level of fathers' involvement with their children and how mothers function as "gatekeepers" of fathers' involvement. Arditti also points out that qualitative aspects of the father-child relationship after divorce have not been addressed in much research, citing the few examples of research considering such issues. Research on noncustodial mothers is also reviewed and discussed, noting some differences between findings regarding noncustodial mothers and fathers. Arditti concludes by outlining a framework for integrating the research reviewed and suggesting directions for future research.

Arditti, Joyce A. and Timothy Z. Keith. 1993. "Visitation Frequency, Child Support Payment, and the Father-Child Relationship Postdivorce." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 55(3): 699-712.

This study was based on a sample of public divorce court records in two counties in southwestern Virginia. Eligible subjects consisted of men who had received a divorce between 1986 and 1990 and who had children. Fathers with sole custody were excluded from the sample. In all, 212 divorced fathers completed the questionnaires (a cooperation rate of 47 percent). The authors used LISREL 7 to examine factors that affect father-child contact and to examine the influence of frequency of visitation on the quality of the visitation and on child support payment. The article never sufficiently defined the

variables that were used in the analysis. For example, it is not clear what items constituted visitation quality. It appears that it was combination of problems encountered during visitation and an assessment of how well the visits go. Nevertheless, the article does try to examine relationships that merit more attention. Authors found the following. One, fathers who lived nearby, reported having higher levels of closeness to the child prior to divorce, and those who had joint custody arrangements had more contact with their children than other fathers. Socioeconomic status also had a strong direct and indirect effect on level of contact with higher SES fathers more likely to see their children more often. Two, visitation quantity had a strong direct influence on visitation quality, but nonrecursive tests of the model indicated that quality of visits does not affect quantity of visits. Given the lack of clarity with respect to how quality is measured, this result may not hold for other studies that use other definitions of quality. Three, neither visitation quantity nor quality influenced child support payments. The authors infer from their results that joint custody may promote more contact between fathers and children and that more contact can promote better parent-child relations.

Baydar, N. and J. Brooks-Gunn. 1994. "The Dynamics of Child Support and Its Consequences for Children." In *Child Support and Child Well-Being*, I. Garfinkel, S.S. McLanahan, and P.K. Robins (Eds.) pp. 257-284.

Using data from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth (NLSY), this study examines the process of becoming eligible for and receiving child support and also whether child support payments have beneficial effects on children's well-being. The data pertain to one randomly selected child from each mother in the NLSY sample. The authors point out that one disadvantage of these data is that NLSY mothers are relatively young. Two subsamples of children were used. The first was a group of children less than 12 months old at the time of the 1984 mother interview; it was used to describe those eligible for and receiving child support. The second was used in multivariate analyses to study the effects of child support on children's reading achievement and consisted of a group of children younger than 6 at the time of the 1986 interview with mothers. Using information on father's presence in the home, age-specific life tables were constructed to describe children's likelihood of becoming eligible for child support (i.e., living separately from their biological fathers) between the ages of 0 and 4. The following characteristics were found to be associated with having a higher probability of becoming eligible for child support: being black, born to mothers less than 25 years old, having a mother with low education, having a family with low income, and being born to parents who were not married. The probability of receiving child support once eligible was found to be higher among children in families with high incomes, whose fathers were living with them at the time of their birth, and whose parents were married at their birth. The study also examined the effect of child support on children's reading achievement between 1986 and 1988, controlling for children's 1986 reading ability. This included exploring whether any beneficial effects of child support were operating through fathers' contact and/or an increase in mothers' incomes which in turn could allow her to decrease her work hours and to enhance the home environment. The results suggested that girls whose parents separated experienced a decline in achievement, regardless of child support receipt. Boys were not affected by the parent separation. The results also suggested that mother's work hours and the quality of the home environment had no effect on reading achievement. Frequency of contact with the absent father was also found to not affect reading achievement.

Brien, M.J. and R.J. Willis. 1995. "The Costs and Consequences of Early Fatherhood: The Impact on Young Men, Young Women, and Their Children." Working Paper Series 95-2, The Irving B. Harris Graduate School of Public Policy Studies, The University of Chicago.

The focus of this study is an examination of the extent to which fatherhood as a teenager (or with a teenage partner) and related decisions concerning marriage and child support affect public tax burdens. The theoretical framework for the study posits that if young men are able to time marriage and fatherhood optimally, those with higher economic potential will delay marriage and fatherhood to a later age because the cost to them of taking on these responsibilities at an early age is greater. Thus, whether or not young men father a child and whether or not they marry the mother in the event of a pregnancy each have implications for the father's future earnings, the mother's ability to support her child, and the cost to society in terms of the father's income taxes and public support of the child. The data used in this study are from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), a nationally representative sample of young men and women aged 14-21 in 1979. The data used pertained to 4,231 male respondents. As a caution, the authors note that males in the NLSY data set have been shown to have underreported births they fathered by about 15 percent for all males, and 23 percent for black males. Nevertheless, the results suggested that the lower the age at fatherhood, the fewer years of education completed and the lower income and hours worked in the labor market. Controlling for factors that could be associated with age at fatherhood (e.g., parents' education level, race) diminished the effect of age at fatherhood on the economic outcomes. Because the NLSY does not have data on all mothers of the male respondents' children, data from birth certificates and the 1988 Maternal and Infant Health Survey were used in a statistical matching procedure to enable the estimation of some aspects of the costs of teenage childbearing to the child and to society. The results suggested that for each year that childbearing is delayed, the predicted income of the father and value of child support is higher. Congruently, the study also provided some evidence that when fathers' incomes and child support payments are higher, the amount of public support paid to mothers is partially offset and the amount of income tax generated increases.

Buchanan, Christy M., Eleanor E. Maccoby, and Sanford M. Dornbusch. 1991. "Caught Between Parents: Adolescents' Experience in Divorced Homes." *Child Development* 62(5): 1008-1029.

This study examined whether adolescents' feelings of being caught between parents helped to explain their postdivorce adjustment. It also identified postdivorce factors that predicted to feelings of being caught. Finally, it examined whether feelings of being caught explained or refined previously documented relationships between other characteristics of the postdivorce family (such as parental conflict) or the child (such as age or sex) and adolescent outcomes. The data were from the Stanford Adolescent Custody Study, which consisted of adolescents between the ages of 10 and 18 as of June 1989 whose families had taken part in the earlier Stanford Child Custody Study. In all 522 adolescents from 365 families were interviewed by telephone approximately four-and-one-half years after their parents' separation. All the families had originally filed for divorce in two northern California counties between September 1984 and March 1985. The study found that feelings of being caught between parents affected the adolescents' postdivorce adjustment. Adolescents who felt caught between their

parents had higher levels of depression/anxiety and exhibited more deviant behavior than adolescents who did not feel caught. Although the strongest predictor of feeling caught was the relationship between the two parents, not all adolescents whose parents had a poor relationship felt caught and some adolescents whose parents had a good relationship did feel caught between their parents. Older adolescents were more likely to feel caught than younger adolescents; girls were more likely to feel caught than boys; and adolescents who were close to only one parent or to neither parent were more likely to feel caught than adolescents who were close to both parents. Amount of contact with the non-custodial parent and type of residence (dual versus sole) were not associated with feelings of being caught. However, adolescents in dual residence arrangements whose parents had high conflict were particularly likely to feel caught. Conversely, adolescents in dual residence arrangements whose parents had good interparental cooperation were least likely to feel caught, even less so than adolescents in sole custody arrangements whose parents had good interparental cooperation. Their results also indicate that the effects of the relationship between the two parents on adolescent outcomes is entirely explained by the adolescents' feelings of being caught. The authors also note that feelings of being caught and feelings of closeness to their parents were related to adolescent outcomes. How the two constructs combined to affect adolescent outcomes, however, was not clear. The authors recommend that future research should try to disentangle the relationship between closeness to parents, feelings of being caught, and adolescent adjustment after divorce.

Danziger, Sandra K. and Norma Radin. 1990. "Absent Does Not Equal Uninvolved: Predictors of Fathering in Teen Mother Families." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52(3): 636-642.

This study examined several predictors of involvement of nonresidential fathers with their children in teen mother families. Three hypotheses were examined. First, it was hypothesized that absent fathers' involvement would be lower when the teen mothers lived with their parents because the grandfathers would assume the fathering role. Second, father involvement would be higher the younger the children. And third, fathers with relatively more economic resources would be more likely to be involved. Measures of the father's involvement included the mother's rating of the quality of the father-child relationship, the number of different types of child-related chores in which the father participated, the mother's reports of how often she discussed the child with the father, and a composite of these three measures representing a mean score for fathering behavior. The data used in this study came from telephone interviews with 289 mothers who had participated in a state of Wisconsin study. The mothers in this study all had received AFDC benefits in 1985 and/or 1986, had a child before age 20, and had a child the previous two years. These teen mothers also either lived alone with their children or with one or both of their parents; there were no other father figures in these homes besides the maternal grandfather. The findings of the study suggest that (1) for each measure of fathers' involvement, whether or not the teen mothers lived alone or with their parents had no effect on the fathers' involvement; (2) higher levels of involvement were observed among fathers with relatively young children; and (3) involvement was also higher among fathers who were relatively young in age and who were employed in the last year. The work experience of fathers had the strongest effect of all the predictors tested. These results were also observed in separate models for white and minority mothers. The authors conclude that among teen mother families on welfare, the father's work behavior plays an important role in his involvement with the children or in the mother's permission for his involvement.

Donnelly, Denise and David Finkelhor. 1992. "Does Equality in Custody Arrangement Improve the Parent-Child Relationship?" *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 54(4): 837-845.

The purpose of this study was to examine whether parent-child relations are differentially affected by sole and joint custody arrangements. It was hypothesized that children in joint custody arrangements would have better relationships with their parents than those in sole custody arrangements (controlling for level of parental conflict), and that children whose parents have frequent disagreements will have poorer relationships with their parents than other children. The data for this study came from the National Incidence Study of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMAART) which consisted of telephone interviews from a random-digit-dialing sample. The data used for this study were gathered from a random subsample of total NISMAART sample; the data were restricted to children from the subsample over age 5 whose parents were divorced or never married and who had some type of custody arrangement (n=160). The dependent variables used in the analyses included measures of parent-to-child support and affection, child-to-parent support and affection, and parent-child disagreements that were based upon reports of parent survey respondents. Contrary to the researchers' hypotheses, the study results indicate that children in joint custody arrangements exhibit less support and affection toward their parents than children in sole custody. Also, custody type had no significant effect on parent-to-child support and affection. Consistent with the researchers' hypotheses, the results also suggested that when parents have frequent disagreements, the parent-child relationship also experiences high levels of disagreement. The authors discuss the unexpected findings and conclude that more research is needed before joint custody arrangements are definitively deemed beneficial for children.

Edin, Kathryn. 1994. "Single Mothers and Absent Fathers: The Possibilities and Limits of Child Support Policy." Working Paper No. 68, Center for Urban Policy Research, Rutgers State University of New Jersey.

Using data from intensive interviews with 214 welfare mothers living in Chicago, Cambridge, San Antonio, or Charleston, this study examines why child support enforcement efforts by states are ineffective in enforcing payments to welfare mothers. Supplementary data from focus group interviews with 71 non-custodial fathers are also used. The four cities were chosen to represent a range of state welfare systems nationally; Chicago provided AFDC benefits at about the national average, Cambridge's benefits were one of the most generous in the nation, and the benefits in Charleston and San Antonio were substantially below the average. Interviews with mothers focused on how they supplemented their AFDC benefits with unreported work or with contributions from family, boyfriends, or absent fathers. The most important finding was that mothers reported greater financial support from fathers than official statistics indicate. About one-third of mothers reported receiving cash assistance from fathers, only about half of whom received the money through official channels. Another one-third reported receiving in-kind contributions such as clothing or gifts. Also, about half of the mothers studied reported lying about or hiding information about the father of at least one of their children from the child support enforcement agency. This is against federal welfare rules regarding the disclosure of information about fathers to child support enforcement officials. African-American mothers were more likely to engage in this "covert non-compliance" than white or Latina mothers. Of all the mothers not complying with

welfare rules, about 40 percent reported receiving covert financial support from the fathers of their children, and the average amount of support received was more than twice the amount they would have received through the official system of enforcement. The author points out that, while these practices are against the rules, it is a rational approach for many welfare mothers. In addition to the potential for receiving more money than the child support system would allow, other reasons for not complying with the welfare rules were reported by the mothers. For instance, while economic situation of some fathers were not stable enough for paying support on a regular basis, mothers said they would rather receive sporadic payments than risk losing them by subjecting the father to harassment by authorities or getting him put in jail. Some mothers also reported that the covert payments enhanced the father-child relationship. Some mothers also indicated using the formal system as a negotiating tool, threatening to report the father to the enforcement agency if he did not honor the informal payments. The findings also indicated that some mothers pursue neither formal nor informal child support from fathers. The mothers primarily reported four reasons for this: (1) fear of losing the father-child emotional support if financial support was sought; (2) concern about losing some authority for the right to parent their children exclusively; (3) fears of physical abuse or other retaliation; or (4) they felt they had no right to demand support since they had no long-term or meaningful relationship with the father. Based on these findings, the author concludes that several factors must be considered as contributors to the cause of poor fathers' nonpayment of (official) child support, besides lax enforcement. She makes several recommendations for improving the child support system for welfare-reliant children: (1) set and collect child support payments adjusting for drops and increases in fathers' earnings; (2) impose a more progressive child support "tax" on earnings so that fathers who are very low earners will be required to pay realistic amounts; (3) guarantee single mothers whose ex-partners are paying through the system a minimum monthly benefit; (4) improve the wages of unskilled and semi-skilled men and women.

Furstenberg, F.F. and K.M. Harris. 1993. "When and Why Fathers Matter: Impacts of Father Involvement on the Children of Adolescent Mothers." in *Young Unwed Fathers: Changing Roles and Emerging Policies*, R.I. Lerman and T.J. Ooms (Eds.) pp. 117-138.

This study examines the effect of father involvement on the well-being of children born to teenage mothers, a population of children at risk of long-term disadvantage. The data come from a study of 400 mostly black and poor teenage parents in Baltimore that began in the mid-1960s to evaluate a comprehensive care program for teenage mothers. These mothers were followed from pregnancy until their children were preschoolers in 1972; subsequent follow-up interviews were also conducted to collect data from the children in 1984 and 1987 when they were between the ages of 15 and 17, and 18 to 21, respectively. About half of the youth studied had lived with their biological father by age 18, on average for about one-third of their childhood years and at younger ages. Among those never living with their father, about three out of five lived with a stepfather or father surrogate by age 18. On average, the youth spent about half of their childhood years living with some type of father. Contact with and support from fathers decreased between the preschool and adolescent years. As preschoolers, about half of the youth were either living with or saw their father on a weekly basis; by the end of their teens, about one-third of youth had that much contact with fathers. The percentages of youth receiving child support from nonresidential fathers decreased from about 80 percent at age 1, to about 30 percent at age 5, and about 15 percent at mid-adolescence. Over the study period, fathers who had been married to the mothers were

more likely than never-married fathers to continue to pay child support.

In 1984 when the youth were 15 to 17, a minority of them reported close attachments to father figures, whether the fathers were biological or some other type. Also examined was whether the history of father involvement up to 1984 had any effect on youths' well-being in 1987. Indicators of well-being include measures of educational and employment attainment, whether or not the adolescent had a child before age 19, whether the adolescent had spent time in jail, and signs of depression. The presence of fathers at home and regular contact with fathers was found to have little to no effect on these well-being outcome measures in the bivariate analyses. However, youth who reported having close relationships with their fathers were faring better on each outcome measure and this was most true for those with residential biological fathers and long-term residential stepfathers. Multivariate analyses confirmed these results for the most part. The authors conclude by discussing the implications of their findings for public policy that may encourage close father-child relationships. They also end with a reminder that their findings apply to blacks who were born to teenage mothers and thus are not generalizable to other youth.

Graham, J.W., A.H. Beller, and P.M. Hernandez. 1994. "The Effects of Child Support on Educational Attainment." In *Child Support and Child Well-Being*, I. Garfinkel, S.S. McLanahan, and P.K. Robins (Eds.) pp. 317-354.

This study examines whether receipt of child support moderates the negative effects of living in a single-mother family on children's educational attainment. Using a sample of over 5,000 mothers and their 16- to 20-year-old children from the 1988 Current Population Survey, the authors compare five different educational outcomes of children in mother-only families to those of children in two-parent (intact) families, specifically, "(1) the total number of years of schooling completed, (2) whether or not a child has fallen behind his or her age cohort in high school, whether or not a child is (3) a high school dropout or (4) a high school graduate, and (5) whether or not a child has entered college, given graduation from high school." The results indicated that, controlling for several related socioeconomic variables, children eligible for child support had lower educational attainment on all five measures than did children in intact families. These differentials in attainment were larger for eligible children who received no support than for eligible children who received support, suggesting that receipt of child support does to some extent mitigate the negative effects of living in a mother-only family. These beneficial effects of child support were most apparent for attainment at the high school level, specifically, for the probability of dropping out of high school and for falling behind in grade-level. Looking at only those children eligible for child support, it was also found that the amount of support received was positively related to the educational attainment measures studied, and that this effect was stronger than that for other types of income sources. To investigate why child support appeared to have beneficial effects on children's educational attainment, the authors examine whether the effect is due to failure to control for contact with absent fathers or failure to control for unobservable characteristics of mothers receiving support or of fathers who pay support. The results suggested that the positive effect of child support could not be attributed to contact with absent fathers. In contrast, there was some evidence that unobserved variables may have been influencing the child support effect. The authors conclude by encouraging further research to examine whether the potential beneficial effects of child support are beyond those of income and instead reflect characteristics of the payers or recipients.

Greif, G. 1995. "When Divorced Fathers Want No Contact with Their Children: A Preliminary Analysis." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 23 (1/2): 75-84.

The purpose of this article is to describe a group of noncustodial fathers who have had no contact with their children and are content with this situation. The data for this study come from a 1992 survey of members of Parents Without Partners (PWP) that was included in the PWP membership magazine. PWP is "the largest self-help group for single parents in the United States." Members of PWP who had little or no contact with their children were asked to complete the survey and mail it to the survey author. There were 14 fathers responding to the questionnaire who indicated that they were not interested in having more contact with their children. In contrast, there were 89 fathers who indicated that they wanted more contact. Almost all of the father respondents were white (96 percent), their average age was 45, and the average duration of their separation was nine years. Among the fathers not wanting more contact with their children, half indicated that "their own issues" were reasons for the lack of contact with their children. Responses to open-ended questions described the reasons in more detail. This study also compared the fathers who did not want more contact their children to those who did. There was some indication that a history of domestic violence was more common among fathers not wanting more contact than among the fathers wanting more contact (this difference was not statistically significant, however). Fathers who did not want more contact with their children were also found to have been less involved in their children's care before the marital separation, to feel "indifferent" about their children, to think their children also felt indifferent about them, and to not have kept informed about their children's well-being. The author concludes by hypothesizing that some fathers may withdraw from their children's lives because they feel rejected and feel they are unimportant to their children. This may be a result of factors that originated during the marriage (e.g., domestic violence, lack of involvement in child care) rather than, or in addition to, factors associated with the marital separation itself. The author suggests that therapeutic efforts to involve fathers with their children "be geared toward keeping the father open to changes in his relationship with his child as well as in his own feelings about himself."

Hawkins, Alan J. and David J. Eggebeen. 1991. "Are Fathers Fungible? Patterns of Coresident Adult Men in Maritally Disrupted Families and Young Children's Well-being." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 53(4): 958-972.

This study concerns children in maritally-disrupted families and explores how variations in children's experiences with coresident adult men (i.e., stepfathers, cohabiting partners, grandfathers, returning biological fathers) are related to their verbal-intellectual functioning and psychosocial disfunctioning. It compares children in intact families to children who have experienced five different longitudinal patterns of coresidence with adult men: the "no male" pattern in which no coresident male is present in the child's household; the "reunited father" pattern in which fathers leave the home for a brief time but return; the "stepfather" pattern in which children experience their mothers' remarriage or cohabitation and have little time when no significant adult male is at home; the "grandfather" pattern in which children live for a time with their mother and grandparents; and the "chaotic" pattern in which children experience no stability with respect to a reorganization of their nuclear family or coresidence with grandparents. The data for this study come from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY)

which includes interviews with a panel of young women aged 14 to 21 in 1979 and interviewed yearly thereafter through 1986. Children of these women were also interviewed in 1986. The combined mother and child data, with the child as the unit of analysis, were used in this study; there were 1,357 children age 4 to 6 in the specific subsample used. Note that because of the nature of the NLSY sample, the children in this study were all born to relatively young mothers.

The results showed that most of the children (about 70 percent) from disrupted families experienced one of the patterns of coresidence with adult males during the period examined; the type of pattern varied by the ethnicity of the child. The results also showed that children from the disrupted families who experienced different patterns of coresidence with adult males were not significantly different from children in intact families over the same period with respect to verbal-intellectual functioning, controlling for child's gender and ethnicity, a composite variable measuring "maternal resources," and average household size. The model of psychosocial dysfunctioning using the same controls plus child's age indicated a significant interaction between the "grandfather" pattern and the child's ethnicity: white children experiencing "grandfather" pattern exhibited higher levels of dysfunction than other children. No other significant differences in psychosocial functioning according to coresidence pattern were observed. The authors attribute the greater problems among white children in the grandfather pattern to stronger norms of nuclear family independence among white families than black families. The authors also discuss the findings that most children experiencing the various patterns of coresidence did not differ from the children in intact families on the outcome measures, suggesting that during the initial adjustment period after marital dissolution, the absence of a father-figure or the presence of biological-father-substitutes appear to have no influence on most children's intellectual or psychosocial functioning.

Hernandez, P.M., A.H. Beller, and J.W. Graham. 1995. "Changes in the Relationship Between Child Support Payments and Educational Attainment of Offspring, 1979-1988." *Demography* 32 (2): 249-260.

This study examines whether the effect of child support on children's educational attainment changed between 1979 and 1988, a period during which government efforts to enforce child support increased with the passage of new laws. Previous research has found that child support has a stronger positive effect on children's educational attainment than other forms of income. This has often been attributed to unobservable factors such as fathers' interest in their children's development. The authors propose that their analysis is a simulated "natural experiment" for investigating fathers' unobservable characteristics that may influence whether they voluntarily pay child support. Presumably, if over the 1979-1988 period reluctant payers make up a larger proportion of all payers and less willing payers have less interest in their children's well-being (and the payment of child support does not affect fathers' interest in their children), then the strength of the observed positive effect of child support on children's education should decrease over this period.

The data used for this study come from the 1979 and 1988 Current Population Surveys and pertain to mothers and their eldest children between the ages of 16 and 19. Three measures of children's educational attainment are used: years of schooling completed, whether or not the child is behind in or has dropped out of high school, and whether or not the child has graduated from high school. The results

lent support to the hypothesis that the positive effect of child support diminished between 1979 and 1988 as more fathers reluctant to pay child support entered the payment system. Specifically, the study found that in 1979, relative to children in intact families, the receipt of child support totally eliminated the disadvantage of children in single-mother families as far as years of schooling completed and the chance of being behind in school, and eliminated 70 percent of their decreased likelihood of graduating from high school. In contrast, in 1988, child support eliminated approximately half of the disadvantage in years of school completed and likelihood of being behind, and had no effect on the chance of graduating from high school. The authors conclude that while "the results suggest that child support represents in part some unobservable aspects of the father-child relationship which are not as positive among reluctant payers as among voluntary compliers,... other explanations for the decline in the effectiveness of child support cannot be ruled out." One explanation includes the decline in men's earnings, which suggests that a given level of child support may represent a lower amount of noncustodial father's income.

Kelly, Joan B. 1993. "Current Research on Children's Postdivorce Adjustment: No Simple Answers." *Family and Conciliation Courts Review* 31(1): 29-49.

Author reviews what existing literature reveals about the role of the following factors on children's adjustment following divorce: parental conflict, adjustment of the custodial parent, access and closeness to the noncustodial parent, and type of custody arrangement. Three general types of child outcomes were considered: externalizing problems (e.g., aggressive, impulsive, and antisocial behaviors, problem behaviors, poor peer relationships, less compliance with authority figures); internalizing behaviors (anxiety, depression, withdrawal), and intellectual and academic functioning. The most consistent and reliable findings concern externalizing behaviors. With respect to parental conflict, she notes that such conflict can directly influence children's "emotional and behavioral adjustment through modeling processes" and may indirectly affect children through lowering the quality of the parent-child relationship (pages 32-33). She found that conflict need not have negative consequences if parents "avoid direct, aggressive expressions of their conflict in front of the child or use compromise styles of conflict resolution" (p. 35). Children are most affected if they feel caught in the middle between their two parents. The adjustment of the custodial parent on children's adjustment after divorce "is a central one only barely studied thus far" (p. 37). Studies have found maternal depression, anxiety, psychological symptoms, social adjustment, and self-esteem are related to children's adjustment. The author recommends that studies include several objective measures of parental adjustment in future studies. She notes that almost no studies have examined paternal adjustment on children and no studies have examined the "effect and interaction between both parents' adjustment, conflict, time with both parents, and residence" on children (p. 37). With respect to access and closeness to the noncustodial parent on children's adjustment, the evidence is mixed or inconclusive. Finally, custody status by itself does not affect children's adjustment following a divorce.

King, Valerie. 1994. "Nonresident Father Involvement and Child Well-Being: Can Dads Make a Difference?" *Journal of Family Issues* 15(1): 78-96.

This study examines whether children with highly involved nonresident fathers benefit compared to children with less involved fathers. The forms of involvement addressed in this study are visitation and

child support payment. The data for this study are from the child supplement to the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. The analysis focuses on children living in households with their mothers who had a father living elsewhere in 1988. The independent variable of fathers' visitation is a categorical variable indicating the number of times in the past 12 months the child has seen his or her father, ranging from never to almost every day. The other independent variable of child support is an indicator of the amount of money (in thousands of dollars) received in the past calendar year. Control variables include the child's sex, race, birth order, mother's marital status, region of residence, distance from father, mother's education, household income, and time since divorce. The dependent variables indicating child well-being consist of five scaled assessments that measure (1) behavioral problems, (2) perceived scholastic competence, (3) feelings of self-worth, (4) mathematics achievement, and (5) reading achievement, plus several individual measures of school-related behaviors (e.g., scholastic standing, suspension status), trouble-related behaviors (e.g., lied to parents, stolen something), and emotional health (e.g., seen psychiatrist). The results indicated that father visitation was not beneficial for any of the aspects of child well-being examined. Father visitation was significantly related to only one well-being measure, and it indicated that visitation is associated with children staying out later than parents said they could. On the other hand, higher amounts of child support were related to beneficial academic outcomes: higher perceived scholastic competence and higher reading and math achievement. Higher child support payments were also related to children being less likely to report that their parents visited school because they did something wrong. However, an unexpected result was also observed: higher child support payments were also associated with mothers' reports of being told their child needed mental help. The author points out that the findings are consistent with previous research that found no benefits of father visitation for children's well-being and positive effects of child support limited to the realm of academic achievement. However, none of the behavioral measures showed benefits from fathers' involvement, contrary to prior research. There appears to be limited evidence that nonresident father involvement has positive benefits for children, except for possibly the benefits of child support for children's academic outcomes.

Knox, V.W. and M.J. Bane. 1994. "Child Support and Schooling." In *Child Support and Child Well-Being*, I. Garfinkel, S.S. McLanahan, and P.K. Robins (Eds.) pp. 285-316.

Using data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), this study investigates whether children in single parent families who receive higher child support payments attain higher levels of education. The children in the PSID sample were ages 2 to 8 in 1968. The specific outcome variables examined are the number of grades completed and the probabilities of high school graduation and of college entry by age 21. The authors outline four hypotheses: (1) Higher child support payments increase total family income which is associated with increased educational attainment for young adults; (2) "Child support has a positive effect on attainment because it enables mothers to reduce reliance on [income] sources that have negative effects," (e.g., working more hours than preferred); (3) "Child support has positive effects on children's educational outcomes, independent of its effect on total income or on mothers' use of other income sources"; (4) "Child support income is associated with prior characteristics of fathers, mothers, or their relationship that may have positive effects on children." The results pertaining to the number of grades children completed by age 21 suggested that total income did not have a significant effect on grades completed; however, when income sources were differentiated, the amount of child

support received did have a positive effect on grades completed, controlling for income received from welfare and maternal earnings (each of which had no significant effect). The positive effect of the amount of child support payments on grades completed could not be attributed to the simple receipt of any payment or fathers' education level. Similar results were observed for the effect of child support level on the probabilities of high school graduation and college entry. Based upon these results, the authors also illustrated the effects of increases in child support payments on the probability of high school completion and college entry for children in four hypothetical families with different income sources.

Langston, Lundy. 1994. "Force African-American Fathers to Parent Their Delinquent Sons--A Factor To Be Considered At The Dispositional Stage." *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law* 4 (2):173-200.

In the first section of this article, entitled "The Demise of the African-American Male," the author discusses two issues: problems experienced by African-American male children and the absence of African-American fathers. The author asserts that African-American male children act out or rebel with violent behavior when they realize that they experience unfair negative treatment because of their skin color, and that factors including a lack of education, the absence of appropriate role models, and the decrease in economic opportunities exacerbate this behavior. The author suggests that the fathers of African-American male children may be able to help them to cope with problems particular to African-American males and keep them from engaging in violent criminal activity. She then discusses several reasons why these fathers are not present in their sons' lives, which include some historic and economic factors, as well as the roles of government assistance programs and racism. ??The second section, "Placement in the Best Interests of the Delinquent African-American Male," discusses the criteria most often used in the courts to determine children's custody arrangements, called the "best interests test." Under this criteria, the courts attempt to place children with the parent or guardian that can best promote their well-being. In cases involving serious juvenile offenses, delinquents are generally removed from their mothers' homes and become wards of the state. The state then decides whether to place the delinquent in various custody arrangements, such as with a friend or relative, a state industrial school, or a private institution. The author suggests that placement with the delinquent's father should be considered as an additional option. The third section, "The African-American Father as Nurturer for his Delinquent Son," the author suggests that African-American fathers (or possibly other African-American male role models) can provide their sons with guidance that his mother cannot. In the final section, "Forced Parentage is Not New," the author concludes that, even though absent African-American fathers may not have been involved in their sons' lives, they should be given the opportunity to parent. She suggests that the state should not hesitate to place the delinquent with their father if it has been determined it is in the child's best interest. She concludes with examples of "forced parenting" in which the state sanctions parents for not adequately supervising their children.

Marsiglio, W. 1993. "Contemporary Scholarship on Fatherhood." *Journal of Family Issues* 14(4): 484-509.

This article is a review of literature on fatherhood that identifies and discusses "three central foci that

have influenced the direction of contemporary sociological scholarship on fatherhood issues." The first focus is cultural images of fatherhood, that is, "the norms, values, and beliefs surrounding the social status of father and its associated roles that are shared by the general population or a sizable segment of it." Regarding this focus, Marsiglio points out that the "breadwinner" role has historically been associated with fathers, but that more varied images of fathers have recently emerged, including a "good dad--bad dad" dichotomy (i.e., "the involved, nurturing father versus the uninvolved, 'deadbeat' father who ignores his paternal obligations"). Also discussed is how this image is affected by race and social class. The second focus Marsiglio discusses is the social psychology of fatherhood. Included in this discussion is identity theory, which "posits that fathers' self-perceptions, which are subject to change over time, are organized in an ordered fashion so that fathers will experience some of their statuses (e.g., worker, friend, son) and father roles (e.g., breadwinner, nurturer, companion) as more important than others." The third focus addressed is paternal conduct, which has been the subject of much research in as far as the relationship between the type and level of fathers' involvement with their children and their children's well-being. Marsiglio discusses how researchers have taken several different approaches to studying this issue. The article concludes by considering directions for future research and policy regarding fatherhood, including some methodological issues (e.g., derivation of data from mothers' versus fathers' reports), some substantive issues (e.g., the processes by which fatherhood images are internalized by men, women, and children), and some social policy issues (e.g., defining and increasing males' sense of responsibility in financial and other areas).

Mason, Mary Ann. 1994. *From Father's Property to Children's Rights: The History of Child Custody in the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Author provides an overview of changes in how the state has intervened in child custody issues from colonial times to the present. In her afterward she discusses three lessons that can be drawn from her review: "One lesson is that the legal history of child custody is far more about the rights of mothers, fathers, and masters than it is about the welfare of children....A second lesson that can be gleaned...is that the law has maintained a two-tiered system in dealing with poor children and relatively rich children in custody matters....A third lesson that emerges ... is the changing rights of biological parents....Perhaps because the law no longer attempts to uphold the sanctity of marriage, and there are no longer clear-cut presumptions to determine custody, the biological fact of parenthood is looked on with ever greater favor" (pages 188-191). The book contains the following chapters: 1. Fathers/Masters: Children/Servants: Child Custody in the Colonial Era; 2. From Fathers' Rights to Mothers' Love: The Transformation of Child Custody Law in the First Century of the New Republic, 1790-1890; 3. The State as Superparent: The Progressive Era, 1890-1920; 4. In the Best Interest of the Child? 1960-1990; 5. The Ascendancy of the Social Sciences.

McKenry, Patrick C., Sharon J. Price, Mark A. Fine, and Julianne Serovich. 19??. "Predictors of Single, Noncustodial Fathers' Physical Involvement With their Children." *The Journal of Genetic Psychology* 15(3): 305-319.

The hypotheses for this study were derived from family boundary theory which refers to a system of rules regarding the participation of family members in family life. Divorced families are faced with the

difficult task of establishing new boundaries and roles. The researchers' general hypothesis was that factors that help the noncustodial father's sense of belonging and meaningful role behavior would result in greater involvement with his children. The specific hypotheses were as follows: 1) certain father characteristics (e.g., education level) or attitudes indicative of motivation for parenting should be related to fathers' level of involvement; 2) certain child characteristics (e.g., younger, male, only child) should be related to higher levels of father involvement; 3) fathers who have cooperative relationships with their former spouses will interact with their children more frequently; 4) certain structural characteristics (e.g., geographic distance from child, time since divorce, remarriage status) will affect fathers' involvement because they may make fathers more physically or emotionally distant from their children. The data for this study come from the National Survey of Families and Households which was conducted in 1987 and 1988. The researchers used responses from 86 divorced, nonremarried, noncustodial fathers of minor children who had complete data. The dependent variable of fathers' involvement was measured using four indices of involvement: frequency of visitation, length of visitation, time spent in meaningful activities, and extent of talking on the telephone and/or writing. A total involvement measure was computed by summing the scores on the individual measures. The results indicate that fathers were more involved if they reported being satisfied with being parents and if they perceived that they had influence on their children's lives. None of the child characteristics examined (i. e., child's age, gender, number of children) significantly affected fathers' involvement. The frequency of fathers' contact with their spouses was positively related to fathers' involvement level. The results also showed that fathers who lived farther away had less involvement with their children.

McLanahan, Sara and Gary Sandefur. 1994. *Growing up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

The authors analyzed four large, nationally-representative surveys to study the effects of single parent families on children's lives. The data sets used were the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), the High School and Beyond (HSB), and the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). THE PSID, NLSY, and HSB are longitudinal data sets, while the NSFH is cross-sectional. The measures of child well-being that they use are high school grades and graduation, college attendance and graduation, early childbearing and marriage, and early labor force attachment. They recognize that these measures do not cover all aspects of well-being, but believe they are good indicators of the likelihood that the children will be economically independent (i.e., not in poverty) in adulthood. Based on the results of their analyses of these data bases and their accumulated knowledge from over ten years of research on the topic, the authors reach the following conclusions: (1) "Children who grow up in a household with only one biological parent are worse off, on average, than children who grow up in a household with both of their parents, regardless of the parents' race or educational background, regardless of whether the parents are married when the child is born, and regardless of whether the resident parent remarries" (p. 1). (2) "...that growing up with only one biological parent frequently deprives children of important economic, parental, and community resources, and that these deprivations ultimately undermine their chances of future success. Low income -- and the sudden drop in income that often is associated with divorce -- is the most important factor in children's lower achievement in single-parent homes, accounting for about half of the disadvantage. Inadequate parental guidance and attention and the lack of ties to community resources account for most

of the remaining disadvantage" (p. 3). They make policy recommendations based on three underlying principles that they derived from their research: The first principle is "something must be done immediately to *reduce the economic security* of children growing up in single-parent families....A second principle...is *shared responsibility*. We believe the costs of raising children must be distributed more equally among men and women and between parents and nonparents....Fairness demands that fathers and society at large assume greater responsibility....The third, and perhaps most important, principle...is that programs should be *universal*, that is, they should be available to all children and all parents" (pages 154-155). The book contains the following chapters: 1. Why We Care about Single Parenthood; 2. How Father Absence Lowers Children's Well-Being; 3. Which Outcomes are Most Affected; 4. What Hurts and What Helps; 5. The Value of Money; 6. The Role of Parenting; 7. The Community Connection; 8. What Should be Done.

McLanahan, S.S., J.A. Seltzer, T.L. Hanson, and E. Thomson. 1994. "Child Support Enforcement and Child Well-being: Greater Security or Greater Conflict?" In *Child Support and Child Well-Being*, I. Garfinkel, S.S. McLanahan, and P.K. Robins (Eds.) pp. 239-256.

This study addresses the question of "whether child support increases parental conflict and, if so, whether the increase is large enough to outweigh the benefits associated with greater economic security." The authors first present a path model of child support affecting child well-being directly and indirectly through parent-child contact and through parental conflict. The model suggests that child support payments can increase parental conflict and parent-child contact, each of which in turn affect child well-being. The data used for the study are from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), conducted in 1987 and 1988. The data subset analyzed pertains to 844 children under age 18 with a living nonresidential father; respondents for these children were their mothers. Indicators of child well-being consisted of two measures: the child's grade point average (GPA) in school and a dichotomous variable of school problems (coded 1 if the child dropped out of school, or the parent was asked to meet with the child's teacher or principal because of behavior problems, or the child had ever been suspended or expelled). The parental conflict measure pertained specifically to conflict related to the child; the father-child contact measure pertained to contact over the past 12 months. Child support includes that received according to legal agreements as well as other financial contributions. The results indicate that the direct effect of receiving more child support is to increase children's GPA and to decrease school problems. The indirect effects of child support via parental conflict and via parent-child contact were very small compared to the direct effect of child support.

Because these results may be contaminated by unobserved characteristics of fathers who pay support (e. g., greater commitment to their children), the study also sought to examine whether a measure of predicted child support based solely upon observed characteristics of the mother, characteristics of the child, and the state of residence, acted similarly in its effect on child well-being. This analysis was intended to give some suggestion of the effects of a universal child support system on the average child. It was found that the direct effect of predicted child support was not statistically significant, but suggested that higher levels of predicted child support received was related to higher GPAs and fewer school problems among children who were born in marriage. For children who were born outside of marriage, the effect of child support was also nonsignificant, but suggested that child support was

associated with parental conflict and more school problems. The authors concluded that these results should be interpreted cautiously because the measure of predicted child support was not well-specified.

Mott, F.L. 1993. *Absent Fathers and Child Development: Emotional and Cognitive Effects at Ages Five to Nine*.

This monograph uses data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) to examine the effects of single parenthood on the development of young elementary school aged children. The author takes a more demographic than psychological approach and focuses on longer term aspects of child adjustment to their parents' separation. The first chapter of the monograph provides an introduction and overview of issues, including a historical overview of trends in marriage and divorce and associated implications for children, and outlines the two primary objectives of the study: (1) "describe the marital family transition processes from the perspective of the children in our sample and specify what family factors appear to be associated with these transitions," and (2) "examine and analyze linkages between various paternal absence configurations and subsequent child emotional and cognitive well-being." Chapter 1 also provides a summary of the findings of previous research on the effects of fathers' absences on children. Chapter 2 describes the sample used in the study and how representative it is of all five to nine year olds in the nation. Chapter 3 provides a "profile of father-figure contact," that is, a descriptive account of the fathers who leave the home and the extent to which new father figures take their place, as well as the patterns of visitation by absent fathers. Chapter 4 uses tabular and multivariate analyses to describe the traits associated with father-present and father-absent families and to explore factors that are both linked with child well-being and the likelihood that a father will leave the home. Also in chapter 4, longitudinal data are used to examine how the absence of a father affects the family's socio-economic well-being over time. In chapter 5, the extent to which variations in children's behavior are related to their fathers' presence or absence is explored. The relative emotional well-being of children experiencing various "paternal configurations" is also tested. The analyses in chapter 6 are parallel to those in chapter 5, except the focus is on children's cognitive well-being. In chapter 7, the extent to which the quality of the home environment varies between homes with fathers present and with fathers absent is explored and whether home quality mediates the consequences of a father absence. Chapter 8 synthesizes the results and discusses their implications for children's well-being.

Munsch, J., J. Woodward, and N. Darling. 1995. "Children's Perceptions of Their Relationships with Coresiding and Non-Coresiding Fathers." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 23 (1/2): 39-54.

This study examines the quality of father-child relationships after parental divorce by using qualitative measures of the father-child relationship, rather than variables indicating the provision of economic support or the amount and type of father-child contact that are more often used in research. More specifically, this study compares the perceptions of children who live with their fathers to those who do not using several measures of relationship quality: (1) the overall quality of the relationship with his/her father; (2) the types of roles that their fathers fulfill (e.g., teacher, companion, role model); and (3) the chance that he/she will rely on their father for support during a stressful time. The sample of children used for this study were part of the Understanding and Building Teenage Competency Project at Cornell University; it included 395 seventh and eighth grade students from two schools in central New York,

one school in a rural community, and one school in a medium-sized city. The results indicated that children who live apart from their fathers more often consider other male figures as the "most important male parent" in their lives than do children with coresidential parents. However, children with nonresidential fathers considered their fathers more functional in certain roles than did children residing with their fathers, specifically, for the roles of "teacher," "supporter," and "challenger." Residential status of fathers was also related to whether children relied on their fathers for support, with more of those living with their fathers (56%) than living apart (33%) reporting that they went to their father for help with stressful events. In contrast, the residential status of fathers was not found to be significantly associated with the measures of overall relationship quality. In their discussion, the authors suggest that this study indicates that nonresidential fathers can have good relationships with their children and fulfill a variety of roles. They speculate that the relatively positive perceptions of nonresidential fathers may be because fathers who remain involved with their children may be particularly dedicated or because the relatively limited contact with nonresidential fathers is more valuable and thus more memorable.

Pearson, J., and N. Thoennes. 1990. "Custody After Divorce: Demographic and Attitudinal Patterns." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 60(2): 233-249.

Using the same data from divorced parents as in a previous study (Pearson and Thoennes, 1988), the authors further examine patterns associated with various types of sole and joint custody arrangements following divorce. This study focuses on the characteristics of divorced parents with various types of custody arrangements, some of parents' experiences with the various custody types (e.g., level of parental conflict, satisfaction with the arrangement), and certain behavioral and attitudinal outcomes (e.g., child adjustment). The results showed that families with joint custody-joint residential arrangements had parents with the highest education and household income levels at the time of separation compared to families with other custody types. Mothers themselves with joint custody-joint residential arrangements also earned more than mothers with other arrangements. The authors suggest that these findings reflect the higher financial cost of maintaining two residences for children and the more flexible work schedules of high-earning parents. Most parents with joint custody-joint residential arrangements (70 percent) also had only one child, compared to about one-third to one-half of parents with other custody arrangements. As far as the effect of custody type on parental cooperation after divorce, the authors found that most parents opting for joint custody, and particularly joint residential arrangements, were relatively friendly and cooperative before and after divorce and thus concluded that postdivorce relationships were a reflection of predivorce characteristics, not the type of custody arrangement. The analysis yielded mixed results regarding the effect of custody type on parent satisfaction and conflict. There were no differences by custody type with respect to satisfaction with actual custody and visitation practices; however joint custody parents had reported the lowest satisfaction with the legal agreement one year after the child custody order. There was also no clear relationship between custody type and conflict; parents with each custody type reported some amount of disagreement regarding various aspects of each custody type. Regarding the parent-child relationship, the study found that nonresidential parents with joint custody were more involved with their children than were noncustodial parents in sole custody cases. The parents in sole custody arrangements also more often reported feeling overwhelmed with parenting responsibilities than did those with joint custody arrangements; parents with joint custody more often shared child-rearing tasks. The final issue examined was the effect of custody type on child

adjustment to divorce; the authors found no effect of custody type on measures of children's depression, aggression, delinquency, social withdrawal, and somatic complaints. However, regular visitation did emerge as positively related to children's adjustment. Similar to their 1988 study, the authors conclude that while the joint custody arrangement worked well for the families in this study, they note that the sample contained relatively wealthy and educated families who have had cooperative relationships.

Pearson, J. and N. Thoennes. 1988. "Supporting Children After Divorce: The Influence of Custody on Support Levels and Payments." *Family Law Quarterly*, 22(3): 319-339.

This study examines the relationship between various types of sole and joint custody arrangements after divorce and whether child support is ordered, the amount of child support ordered, and the amount of child support actually received by mothers for their children. The data come from interviews done for several research projects in Denver studying couples using mediation services, including the Denver Custody Mediation Project and the Child Support and Child Custody Project, and from court records. Families in the study were interviewed at repeated intervals both before and after child support was awarded, yielding information from 211 mothers with sole custody arrangements, 64 mothers with joint legal custody and maternal residential arrangements, 63 mothers with joint legal custody and joint residential arrangements, 54 fathers with sole custody arrangements, and 26 fathers with joint legal custody and paternal residential arrangements. The results indicated that in almost all cases of sole custody by mothers (93 percent) fathers were ordered to pay child support. Fathers were also required to pay support in 81 percent of the joint legal custody cases in which mothers had the children residing with them. In joint legal-joint residential custody cases, only 44 percent of fathers were ordered to pay support. The authors found that many of the joint residential arrangements without support orders involved families with fewer children, lower paternal earnings and higher maternal earnings. The amount of child support awarded was found to be unrelated to the type of child custody arrangement. There also were no differences in other financial provisions such as cost-of-living increases or children's educational expenses by custody type; these provisions were very rare across all the types of custody arrangements. Among families with child support orders, the type of custody arrangement was found to be related to voluntary child support payment patterns, with mothers in joint custody arrangements reporting to have received more. Specifically, mothers with sole custody reported receiving 63 percent of what they were owed, compared to 81 percent of payments received by those with joint legal-maternal residency and 95 percent by those joint custody-joint residence arrangements. Some variables were found to be stronger predictors of child support payment than custody type; these included the absence of employment problems, the number of weekend visits, and the level of cooperation between parents, each of which were positively related to payment of support. The authors also found that visitation and paternal involvement played a relatively large role in determining whether fathers made contributions outside of regular support payments. The authors conclude that because their sample of joint custody arrangements included relatively wealthy families with fewer children and cooperative relationships at the time of divorce, the findings cannot support increased imposition of joint custody arrangements. However, they do suggest that the option of joint custody be presented to divorcing couples more often, since child support was more regular and complete with this arrangement.

Seltzer, Judith A. 1994. "Effects of Joint Legal Custody on Child Support and Time with Children

after Divorce." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America, Miami, FL, May, 1994.

The causes and effects of joint legal custody and of the relationship between contact, child support, and child well-being can be better understood by analyzing data gathered both before and after marital separation. In this way, one can control for the effects of pre-separation characteristics on the type of legal custody arrangements obtained and on fathers' involvement after separation. Using preliminary longitudinal data from the National Survey of Families and Households, this study examines the characteristics associated with divorce and with obtaining joint legal custody arrangements. It also provides a preliminary look at the effects of joint legal custody on child support payments and on the amount of time nonresident fathers spend with children, controlling for the quality of the pre-divorce marital relationship. The first portion of the analysis examines whether marital duration, three measures of marital quality (i.e., conflict, happiness, aggression), parents' education, parents' annual income, and the number and age of minor children are related to the likelihood of separation. The results suggested that marital happiness is negatively associated with separation and that marital aggression is positively associated with separation, controlling for the other family characteristics. The second part of the analyses looked at families who separated and had some type of legal custody arrangement to predict who acquires joint legal custody arrangements. None of the characteristics examined (i.e., mothers education, number of minor children, race, duration of separation, marital aggression) were found to be significantly associated with whether parents obtained a joint custody agreement. In the third and final analysis stage, the effect of having a joint custody arrangement on child support payments and on the amount of time that nonresident parents spend with children is examined. The results indicate that the nonresident parents spend more time with children after marital separation in cases of joint custody arrangements than in other arrangements, controlling for pre-divorce marital quality. As for the effect of joint custody on child support payments, the results indicated that the effect of joint custody interacted with the length of separation to affect child support. For parents without joint legal custody, child support payments decline as the length of separation increases. For those with joint legal custody, child support payments remain stable over time. The author notes that caution should be taken in interpreting these results because the preliminary child support data suggest unexpectedly high dollar amounts of child support; this is being investigated before release of the public use data. She concludes, however, that the quality of parents' relationships appears to affect the likelihood of separation, but does not affect whether parents will have joint legal custody of their children after divorce or the amount of nonresident parents' involvement after separation. The study results also suggest that joint legal custody is associated with greater nonresident parent-child involvement.

Seltzer, Judith A., Sara McLanahan, and Thomas L. Hanson. 1995. "Will Child Support Enforcement Increase Father-Child Contact and Parental Conflict after Separation?" Paper presented at The Effects of Child Support Enforcement on Nonresident Fathers conference, Princeton University, September, 1995.

This study examines the effects of child support enforcement on nonresident father-child contact and on conflict between parents. Child support enforcement may increase father-child contact because fathers want to monitor how support payments are spent or because making the payments may encourage

fathers' to think of themselves and consequently act like "good fathers." On the other hand, contact may decrease with support payments because fathers may pay support as a tradeoff for spending time with their children. As for parental conflict, child support enforcement may increase contact and thus conflict among parents who otherwise try to avoid each other, or because enforcement laws will encourage mothers to become more aggressive in seeking payments. On the other hand, mothers may become more satisfied with their payments, reducing conflict. Data from the first and second waves of the National Survey of Families and Households are used to examine these issues. The analysis focuses on families in which the parents separated between waves 1 and 2 and the child was under age 18 at wave 2 and living with their mothers. Two measures of child support were used, a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not any support was paid and a continuous variable indicating the amount of support paid. Nonresident fathers' contact with their children was measured by categorical variables indicating how often the father saw the child in the past 12 months, whether or not the child had visited overnight, and the number of overnight visits. Conflict between parents was measured relative to six aspects of childrearing; the variables used were a dichotomous one indicating any conflict as well as variables counting of the number of childrearing aspects for which any conflict and "a great deal" of conflict was reported.

The results indicate that paying child support is related to higher frequencies of contact, even after controlling for parents' incomes, fathers' attachment to children before separation, and the quality of parents' predivorce relationship with each other. However, the *amount* of child support paid does not affect the frequency of contact. This is preliminary evidence that increasing the percentage of fathers who pay any child support will increase father-child contact. To investigate whether enforcing child support payments would affect father-child contact, the researchers examined the effect of a predicted probability of paying support, reasoning that the predicted probability of paying support should increase the amount of contact if, in fact, child support and contact are causally related. The results indicate that the predicted probability of support is not related to contact, suggesting that child support enforcement will not increase contact between nonresident fathers and children. As far as child support's effect on parental conflict, the results indicated that payment of child support had no effect on whether parents report having any conflict after separation. However, both making any child support payments and higher amounts of payments were significantly associated with a decreased likelihood of experiencing *high levels* of conflict. This suggests that enforcing child support payment may expose children to some additional parental conflict, but not to extreme levels of conflict.

Seltzer, Judith A., Sara McLanahan, and Thomas L. Hanson. 1995. "Parents' Involvement with Children Before and After Separation." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America. San Francisco, CA, April, 1995.

This study uses longitudinal data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) to examine how parents' involvement with their children before separation affects their custody, visiting, and child support behaviors after separation. The NSFH consisted of a time 1 interview in 1987 or 1988 and a time 2 followup interview between 1992-1994. This study uses data from 1,882 families in which the child randomly selected for the original NSFH interview was living with both biological parents at time 1, was under age 18 at time 2, and whose parents' relationships were dissolved, but not by a death,

at time 2. Most of the analyses focuses on 281 families in which at least one parent was interviewed in the time 2 survey. The analyses first examines whether parents' involvement with children and their attitudes about parental responsibility at time 1 affects whether the parents separated between time 1 and time 2. The results indicated that mothers and fathers who believe that parenting would be worse if they were separated are less likely to separate than other parents, after controlling for several family, child, and marital relationship characteristics. In contrast, there was no significant relationship between the frequency of children's activities with mothers or fathers and whether or not parents separated. The analyses also examined the factors influencing whether the child lived with the mother after her marital separation. The results suggested that there is little association between parent involvement with children before divorce and where children live after divorce; however, children who have good predivorce relationships with their mothers before divorce are more likely to live with them after divorce. The same effect was observed for fathers but was not statistically significant. The last stage of analyses in this study examined the effects of parents' attitudes and behavior before separation on visiting and child support by nonresident fathers after separation. The results indicate that when mothers spend more time with their children in activities before divorce, the fathers are less likely to visit their children weekly after divorce. No other independent variable, including fathers' involvement before divorce, emerged as a significant predictor of nonresident father visitation. Several independent variables examined were associated with the amount of child support nonresident fathers pay after divorce. The results indicate that fathers pay more child support if they believed before the divorce that parenting would be more difficult after divorce and if they reported that they sometimes desired to be free of the responsibilities of parenthood. The authors conclude that their study provides preliminary evidence that there is some consistency in the extent of parents' involvement with their children before and after divorce with respect to living arrangements after separation. However, after living arrangements have been determined, fathers' predivorce involvement has no effect on his visiting or child support behavior after the divorce.

Shaw, D.S., R.E. Emery, and M.D. Tuer. 1993. "Parental Functioning and Children's Adjustment in Families of Divorce: A Prospective Study." *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 21(1): 119-134.

Using prospective data, this study examines whether the difficulties children experience after parents divorce are also found to be present before divorce, and what factors may be responsible for children's predivorce adjustment problems. The authors hypothesize that, prior to divorce, "children from to-be-divorced families would show more behavior problems than children from always-married families" and that "differences in child adjustment prior to and following parental separation would be related to parenting problems that began prior to parental dissolution, particularly conflict between the parents." The data for this study come from the New York Longitudinal Study which collected data from a convenience sample of 132 children from 84 families. The parents of the sampled children were relatively well-educated (40% of mothers and 60% of fathers had postgraduate college degrees), predominantly Jewish (78%), and all white. Families were selected for the study in 1956 when the subject children were infants and followup data were collected until the children were 22 years old. Assessments of child behavior were made at age 3, 5, 16-17, and 18-22. Data on child care practices and attitudes were collected from parents when their children were age 3. Of the 132 children, 35

experienced their parents' divorce. The results suggested that the predivorce behavior of children from to-be-divorced families did not significantly differ from those in always-married families. However, boys from divorced families displayed poorer post-divorce adolescent and young adult adaptation than boys from intact families. No such difference was found for girls. The results also indicated that to-be-divorced parents had more marital conflict than always-married parents. Early parental conflict was also found to be negatively related to children's later adjustment as adolescents and young adults, more so for boys than girls. The authors suggest in their conclusion that future research on children from divorced families include examinations of the predivorce family environment in addition to child adjustment.

Umberson, Debra and Christine L. Williams. 1993. "Divorced Fathers: Parental Role Strain and Psychological Distress." *Journal of Family Issues* 14(3): 378-400.

The authors used national survey data as well as data from in-depth interviews with 45 divorced fathers to examine whether divorce increases parental role strain for fathers and whether parental role strain helps to explain the high rates of psychological distress often observed in divorced men. The survey data was from *Americans' Changing Lives: Wave I*. It consisted of a probability sample of persons living in households in the continental U.S. A total of 3,617 respondents, aged 24 and older were interviewed face-to-face. For the analyses reported in this paper, a subsample of 155 divorced men and 812 married men with children were studied. The in-depth interviews were conducted with 45 divorced fathers living in Austin, Texas. Using ordinary least squares regression, the authors ran two sets of models. In the first set, psychological distress symptoms and alcohol consumption were regressed on a set of background variables including marital status, length of time divorced, whether or not the men had minor children, race, education, income, and age. In the second set, parental role strain was added to determine if it contributed to the model. As in previous studies, the authors found that divorced men exhibited higher levels of psychological distress and alcohol consumption than married men. Adding parental role strain to the model significantly added to the models. "The estimated effect of divorce on psychological distress is reduced by 48% and is no longer statistically significant once parental role strain is taken into account. The estimated effect of divorce on alcohol consumption is reduced by 26%. These results suggest that some of the estimated effect of divorce on psychological distress and alcohol consumption among men may be mediated by strains associated with being a divorced parent" (page 386). The in-depth interviews revealed several sources of strain: visitation and child support arrangements, relationship with former spouse, and difficulties with new personal and social identities as divorced fathers. Common stresses were the pain of having to return children after short visits, disruptions in daily routines, loss of control over their children, lack of control over how child support payments are spent, difficulties with their ex-spouses some of who created barriers to visiting the children, and difficulties adapting to the new role of being a divorced father. The authors note that a weakness of their study is its reliance on cross-sectional data.

Veum, Jonathan R. 1993. "The Relationship between Child Support and Visitation: Evidence from Longitudinal Data." *Social Science Research* 22(3): 229-244.

The author used longitudinal data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to explore the relationship between payment of child support and visitation. He created a file consisting of custodial

mothers and non-custodial fathers. He then used a set of simultaneous equations to examine whether changes in child support led to changes in visitation or vice versa, after accounting for the unobserved heterogeneity of the respondents. He found that there was no causal association between payment of child support and visitation. Rather, he concludes that the positive association between visitation and child support that has been observed in cross-sectional studies is due to unmeasured characteristics of the parents. He notes that policies that produce changes in one behavior could affect the other indirectly though such factors as level of parental commitment or the relationship between the parents. He recommends more studies to examine the effects of these unobserved variables that can change over time on child support and visitation. He also notes that his sample consisted of relatively young mothers and fathers with young children followed over a relatively short period of time. His analyses should be repeated on samples that include older parents and children and that follow the families longer to see if the same results are obtained.

Weiss, Y. and R.J. Willis. 1985. "Children as Collective Goods and Divorce Settlements." *Journal of Labor Economics*, 3(3): 268-292.

The authors begin by outlining a basic economic model of marriage in which the resources of the family are divided among three uses: the consumption of the husband, the consumption of the wife, and the expenditure on children. The consumption level of husbands and wives are private goods; child expenditures are treated as public, or collective, goods. The allocation of family resources between the public and private uses when the husband and wife are married will be different than when they are divorced. In marriage, the husband and wife agree on an allocation of resources between their own consumption and child expenditures. In the divorced state, the family's allocation between private consumption and child expenditure is less efficient because the custodian has control over child expenditures and does not internalize the effect of their allocation on the non-custodian; the non-custodian cannot monitor the extent of the allocation to children. The authors' also suggest their model explains why wives usually obtain child custody and receive positive transfers (alimony, child support, and property settlements). According to their model, child custody goes to the parent most willing to spend a large share of resources on children. Assuming this is more true for wives and the husband is committed to transferring his income to the wife, it is to his advantage to also relinquish child custody because the wife will choose to a high level of child expenditures. If the husband were to transfer income to the wife and assume child custody, he could afford only a level of child expenditures that is lower than desirable, i.e., lower than that spent in the marriage state. The authors also discuss the implications of noncompliance with the divorce settlement to their model. According to the model, whether or not fathers will voluntarily make alimony and child support payments and the amount of payment depends on their preferences for child expenditure and his relative income. For instance, the father has a high income and the mother has a low income, the father will have an incentive to voluntarily transfer resources to the wife in order to maintain his desired level of child expenditure. However, his desired level of child expenditures decreases with the loss of proximity to the child. The cost of maintaining contact between the noncustodial parent and the child is costly for both parents and thus tends to reduce contacts. Consequently, less child support is paid by the noncustodian who has less incentive to maintain the quality of the children voluntarily.

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Christine Winqvist Nord

Westat, Inc.

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