



Focus

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Paternity and public policy

by Daniel R. Meyer

Daniel Meyer is an assistant professor at the School of Social Work, University of Wisconsin–Madison, and an IRP affiliate.

Policy attention is turning with new interest to issues surrounding the legal establishment of paternity for children born out of wedlock. Even five years ago, the possibility of a conference focused solely on such issues would have been questionable, owing to the paucity of information on the topic. Now a body of research has begun to emerge. Its findings were highlighted at a conference jointly sponsored in February 1992 by the Institute for Research on Poverty and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This article provides background information on the topic

of paternity establishment, summarizes the findings reported at the conference, and makes inferences about future policy. The last section points out the gaps in our knowledge.

The reasons for growing interest in establishing paternity

Four factors have contributed to the rise in interest in paternity establishment.

First, the percentage of children born outside marriage has increased dramatically in the last thirty years, from 5 percent in 1960 to 11 percent in 1970, 18 percent in 1980, and 27 percent in 1989.¹ This increase occurred among both whites and blacks. The percentage of births to white unmarried mothers rose from 2.3 percent in 1960 to 19.2 percent

in 1989; for blacks it rose from 21.6 percent to 65.7 percent over the same years (see Figure 1). A number of factors account for the increase, among them a decline in marriage, substantially lowered birth rates among married women, and increased sexual activity among unmarried women.²

Second, many children born out of wedlock are poor and depend on public assistance. The poorest demographic group in the United States consists of children in single-parent families;³ especially poor are those living with never-married mothers: 54 percent of such families had incomes below the poverty line in 1989, compared to 27 percent of divorced families and 15 percent of all families with children.⁴ Many of these poor children receive public assistance. Whereas 28 percent of children receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) were born out of wedlock in 1969, by 1990 that fraction had increased to 54 percent.⁵ Some research has shown that never-married mothers and their children are significantly more likely to depend on AFDC for longer periods of time. David Ellwood found that the average number of years of AFDC receipt by never-married women was 9.3, compared to 4.9 for divorced women and 6.8 for separated women.⁶

Third, concerns about the poverty and dependency of single-parent families have prompted a review of the child support system to determine whether noncustodial parents provide sufficient amounts of child support. This critique has revealed that the system is weakest for children of

never-married mothers.⁷ These data are disturbing. Fewer never-married women have child support awards—24 percent in 1989, compared to 48 percent of separated women and 77 percent of divorced women. Even among those with awards, more than one-fourth receive no payments. And even when never-married women have an award and obtain some payment, their annual average receipt is \$1888, compared to \$3060 for separated women and \$3322 for divorced women.⁸ The recognition that never-married women receive much less child support than do other single mothers has led to new interest in paternity establishment, since until paternity is established the formal system cannot award or collect child support.

Finally, paternity establishment brings with it a variety of other benefits. Legally acknowledged fathers may provide health insurance and inheritance.⁹ Furthermore, only when paternity has been established can children receive Social Security benefits (should the father die or become disabled) or military benefits that accrue through the father's service. Medical histories and genetic information are available to children whose father is known. And emotional and psychological benefits, including a sense of identity and heritage, can be gained through identification of fathers.

Paternity establishment has thus taken on greater importance because it affects increasing numbers of children, because many of these children are poor and depend on public assistance, because the child support system may not

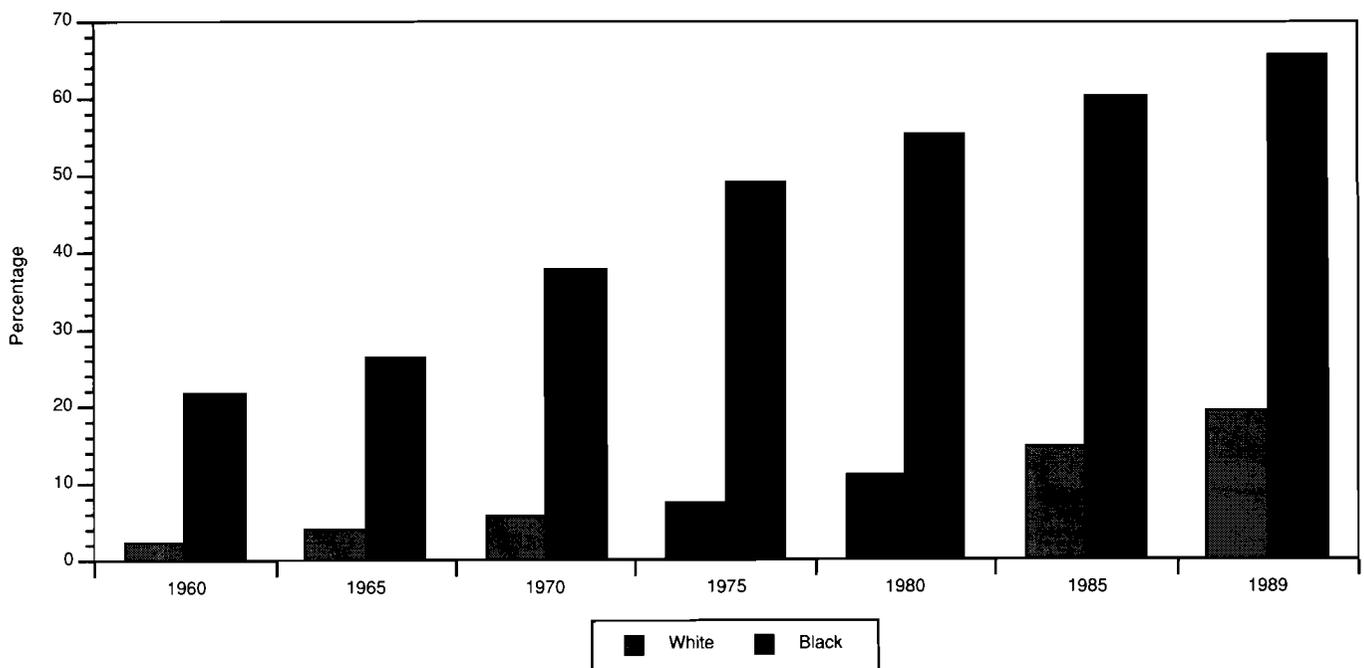


Figure 1. Births to Unmarried Women As a Percentage of All Births, by Race, 1960–1989.

Source: U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, *1992 Green Book* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1992), p. 1074; *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1991* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1991), p. 67, and *1987*, p. 61.

Note: Percentages for blacks prior to 1970 include black and other.

be working well for these families, and because there is increased interest in the nonfinancial benefits of paternity establishment. A variety of issues surrounding the topic were explored by the papers presented at the conference. The following overview describes the legal and historical context of paternity establishment, summarizes the important findings of the conference papers, and assesses the policy implications of the findings.

The legal and historical background of establishing paternity

Because the legal procedures surrounding paternity establishment in the United States lie in the realm of family law, they have been a state rather than a federal responsibility. Until the late twentieth century most states relied on the Elizabethan Poor Laws as precedent for paternity laws and procedures. Because these laws considered nonmarital intercourse to be “both a sin and a crime—both a moral and a government offense,” a paternity suit was a criminal action, and a judicial process was required to establish proof beyond a reasonable doubt. Furthermore, because the usual purpose of a paternity action was to collect support for the child, voluntary acknowledgments of paternity were few. Additionally, until recently it was difficult to prove paternity. Now, however, genetic testing makes it possible to establish paternity by medical tests rather than judicial process.¹⁰

As a result of changes in attitude, technological advances, and the growing importance of establishing paternity, the federal government has taken an increasingly active role in promoting paternity establishment. In 1967 it required states to attempt to establish paternity for children born out of wedlock who were receiving AFDC. In 1975 Congress added Part D to Title IV of the Social Security Act, creating a federal Office of Child Support Enforcement and requiring each state to establish a corresponding office (known as IV-D offices). These offices were given the responsibility of establishing paternities for both AFDC and non-AFDC families. Legislation in 1984 extended the period in which states could take paternity action to a child’s eighteenth birthday. The 1988 Family Support Act set goals for the number of paternities established by the states, with financial penalties to be assessed when states do not meet these goals. That legislation also requires parties in contested cases to take genetic tests if requested by any party, gives greater financial responsibility to the federal government for genetic testing, encourages states to establish civil (rather than criminal) processes for paternity establishment, establishes time limits for processing paternity cases, and requires states to obtain social security numbers from both parents when issuing birth certificates.

Several observers have concluded that the state IV-D offices have typically focused more on enforcing existing child support orders than on establishing paternity.¹¹ This

may be changed by the Family Support Act’s requirement that the number of paternity establishments increase.

In the early years of the child support offices, many workers believed it was not usually cost-effective to establish paternity. In a study funded by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement to determine if this was true, Edward Young reviewed case files from 1980 to 1983 in three county child support offices that were thought to have effective paternity procedures. He found that in Dane County, Wisconsin, child support collections for AFDC cases with paternity established offset the expenses of the agency on all paternity establishments; the average case broke even within 23 months.¹² A more recent study in Nebraska also found that the benefits of focusing on paternity establishment outweighed the costs.¹³

The low priority for paternity cases has been documented by other research as well.¹⁴ Several papers from a 1986 conference on young unwed fathers demonstrated that few children of these fathers had paternity established, even fewer had child support awards, and still fewer received child support.¹⁵ Observers of the child support system noted that problems in the paternity establishment process seemed the greatest hurdle to receipt of child support.¹⁶

The situation may be improving. The ratio of paternities established by the child support offices to the number of nonmarital births has increased from .19 in 1979 to .22 in 1980 to about .28 in 1983. Both the paternity adjudication rate and the probability of obtaining a child support award increased over the period from 1979 to 1986.¹⁷ However, the vast majority of children from nonmarital relationships still do not have paternity established, and even more do not have child support orders.

Another recent finding is that many fathers informally admit paternity and, once approached by the child support system, voluntarily acknowledge paternity.¹⁸ The likelihood of establishing paternity, however, declines as children age,¹⁹ in part because contact between unmarried fathers and their children tends to decline over time.²⁰

Principal findings from the conference papers

Variation in practices

Until recently, the only descriptions of paternity processes and organizational structures were from local or state studies. To obtain a national picture, the Urban Institute in 1990 conducted a National Survey of Paternity Establishment Practices, covering child support agencies in 249 counties in 42 states and the District of Columbia.²¹ The major conclusion of the study was that great diversity exists around the country both in organizational arrangements and in the process of paternity adjudication. The three basic types of organization appear to be a “human services agency model,” in which paternity is handled by an agency

Paternity Establishment: A Public Policy Conference

These conference papers (IRP Special Reports 56a and 56b) may be obtained from the Institute for Research on Poverty, 1180 Observatory Drive, 3412 Social Science Building, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706. The price for either SR 56a or SR 56b is \$8.00. The set of two may be purchased for \$15.00.

Special Report 56a: Overview, History, and Current Practices

Conference Overview—Paternity and Public Policy: Findings, Policy Issues, and Future Research Needs
Daniel R. Meyer

A Brief History of the Legal Structure for Paternity Establishment in the United States
Marygold S. Melli

New Data on State Performance in the Establishment of Paternity: Is It Valid and What Use Can Be Made of It?
John K. Maniha

Paternity Establishment in 1990: Organizational Structure, Voluntary Consent, and Administrative Practices
Pamela A. Holcomb, Kristin S. Seefeldt, and Freya L. Sonenstein

Interorganizational Dependencies and Paternity Establishment
Charles F. Adams, Jr., David Landsbergen, and Daniel Hecht

Paternity Establishment in 1990: Performance at the Local Level
Freya L. Sonenstein, Pamela A. Holcomb, and Kristin S. Seefeldt

Innovative State Programs: Washington, Delaware, and Virginia
John Hoover, Barbara Paulin, and Harry Wiggins

Special Report 56b: Studies of the Circumstances of Mothers and Fathers

Paternity Establishment among Never-Married Mothers: Estimates from the 1986 Current Population Survey, Alimony and Child Support Supplement
Burt S. Barnow

Paternity Establishment in Arizona: A Case Study of the Process and Its Outcomes
Ann Nichols-Casebolt

Paternity Establishment for AFDC Mothers: Three Wisconsin Counties
Sara McLanahan, Renee Monson, and Pat Brown

Executive Summary of a Study of Paternity Decisions: Perspectives from Young Mothers and Young Fathers
Esther Wattenberg, Rose Brewer, and Michael Resnick

Teen Fathers and the Child Support Enforcement System
Maureen A. Pirog-Good

Do the Earnings Deficiencies of Unwed Fathers Account for Their Low Child Support Payments?
Robert I. Lerman

Can Fathers Support Children Born outside of Marriage? Data on Fathers' Incomes over Time
Daniel R. Meyer

that is not primarily legal (43 percent of the counties); a “legal agency model,” in which the IV-D office contracts with private attorneys or contracts with or operates out of the office of the prosecuting attorney or the attorney general (21 percent); and a “two-agency transfer model,” in which a human services agency typically handles voluntary cases but transfers any contested cases to a legal agency (36 percent).

Stages in the process of establishing paternity are also distinguished,²² as are distinctions in the ways that contested and uncontested cases are handled.²³ Although the national trend has been toward encouraging voluntary consent, 20 percent of the counties still do not give fathers an

opportunity to acknowledge paternity outside a court process, and another 20 percent allow only one opportunity.

Additional diversity exists in the way the state offices treat teenage fathers.²⁴ Over three-quarters reported that they attempted to pursue all paternity cases regardless of age; the remainder did not pursue cases in which the father was “too young.” The likelihood of a teen father being assigned child support also differs across the states. More than half the states have some minimum support award (ranging from \$10 to \$100 per child per month) that may be applied to a teen father. Even very young fathers may be required to pay child support: in half the states, child support administrators recalled at least one case in which a father under the age of sixteen was assigned child support payments.

Weakness of the data

The key indicator of success in establishing paternity is the ratio of paternities established to the total number of children for whom paternities need to be established. Obtaining accurate numbers for both the numerator and denominator is quite difficult.

The numerator poses particular problems because there are no national data collected on the number of paternities established. Since 1978 state child support offices have reported the number of paternities that are established through the IV-D System; since 1986 they have also reported expenditures on paternity establishment. However, because many states do not have automated systems, it is difficult to assess the accuracy of these numbers.²⁵ In addition, in most states only a limited number of mothers with nonmarital births enter the child support office. Other women establish paternity through a court or administrative process independently of the child support office, and we have no way to estimate their number. Another method of estimating the number of paternities established would be to use national survey data, but the commonly used large surveys have not asked specific questions about paternity establishment. Several researchers try to approximate the numerator using the Current Population Survey's Child Support Supplement, but conclude that this measure is quite imprecise.²⁶

The denominator, the number of children who are eligible to have paternity established, also poses problems. As a part of vital statistics, the number of nonmarital births is collected on an annual basis, but there is no aggregate count of the number of children eligible for paternity establishment at a single point in time. Not all children born from a nonmarital union are potentially eligible for paternity establishment. Children put up for adoption, those whose parents marry, and those who die or whose father has died are not candidates. One estimate is that 10 percent of the nonmarital births in Wisconsin in the 1980s were not eligible for paternity establishment.²⁷

If the paternity ratio is seen as a measure of state or local agency performance, then the denominator could be considered the number of nonmarital births in that jurisdiction in each year. However, the number of children potentially in need of having paternities established includes those aged zero to eighteen, and comparing the number of paternities established in one year to the number of nonmarital births is therefore problematic. In addition, mobility into and out of the jurisdiction can confound the numbers. A measure of IV-D agency performance might compare the number of paternities established to the active paternity caseload, but in one study less than half of the counties sampled could answer the question "How many paternity cases were active in your office in FY 1989?"²⁸ and many states had substantial difficulty in identifying all children in IV-D cases born out of wedlock.²⁹

Uncertainty of success

Given these data problems, success in paternity establishment is difficult to ascertain in the nation as a whole, in states, or in individual child support offices. A simple comparison of the number of paternities established by state IV-D offices in 1987 with the number of out-of-wedlock births in 1985 (assuming it may take two years to establish paternities) reveals an establishment rate of 31.3 percent.³⁰ At the county level, the ratio of paternities established by IV-D offices in FY 1989 to the number of out-of-wedlock births in 1988 yields a weighted mean of .49 for a nationally representative sample of counties. This ratio varied greatly across the counties, however, ranging from .04 to 3.25, and it was greater than 1 in eleven of the 249 counties surveyed.

Another method is to compare the number of children aged zero to eighteen who have had paternity established with the number of children who are eligible for establishment. Burt Barnow thus estimates that 24.5 percent of unmarried women with children had paternity established in 1989, and 4.3 percent did not; for the remaining 71.2 percent of the sample, whether paternity had been established was unknown.³¹

Two conference papers look at individual AFDC cases within a state to compare those having paternities established with those needing but not obtaining paternity establishment. The results from Arizona and Wisconsin are vastly different, suggesting the degree of variation around the country.³² In Arizona only 3.8 percent of AFDC children had paternity established one to two years after their case was opened. In Wisconsin between 42 percent and 69 percent of nonmarital children receiving AFDC in December 1988 had paternity established when the records were reviewed one to two years later.

The Family Support Act sets a standard for the number of paternities to be established by the child support office in relation to the number of out-of-wedlock children in the AFDC caseload. Each state was required to report its base rate as of December 1988. The percentage varied dramatically across the states, from 11 percent in Oklahoma to 84 percent in Maryland, the average being 45 percent.³³ Because of questions regarding the accuracy of these numbers, John Maniha conducted several comparisons to other measures of state performance and found that the ranking of the states on this measure was consistent with other known measures of their performance.³⁴

Correlates of failure and success

Poor connections between the AFDC system and the child support system may be connected to low levels of paternity establishment.³⁵ This appears to be particularly possible in the case of child support offices that follow the "legal agency model." Charles Adams and his colleagues assert that one way to address problems of the interface of the AFDC and child support systems is for the child support

agency to be directly administered by human services departments (the human services agency model). This model may create problems later, however, when interaction with the courts becomes important. Adams believes the most effective strategy is to use a human services model, but to focus on voluntary acknowledgments of paternity to reduce dependence on the legal system.³⁶

Another finding is that counties that initiate the paternity process early are likely to have much higher success rates.³⁷ More than 60 percent of the unmarried fathers in one sample were present at the births of their children, which suggests that starting the paternity establishment process in the hospital (or even before) may lead to higher adjudication rates.³⁸

Counties that can process cases quickly are also likely to have much higher success rates.³⁹ When the system is slowed by time lags, tasks often need to be done more than once. For example, if a mother provides an address for the father during the intake interview, but the case does not proceed for some time after that, then a search for the father's address may be required if he moved during the intervening period.

Finally, effective record-keeping systems are important to success. The technology used in state child support systems is often quite inadequate.⁴⁰ Adams and his colleagues argue that the capacity to share information electronically throughout the paternity establishment process is a necessary ingredient in an effective system.⁴¹

Characteristics of mothers and fathers associated with successful adjudication

Mothers who were white non-Hispanics, aged twenty to twenty-nine, had one or two children, had at least a high school education, lived in the suburbs, or had family incomes between \$5000 and \$15,000 were most likely to have had paternity established.⁴²

We have much more information on mothers than fathers but two conference participants, Maureen Pirog-Good and Robert Lerman, used the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to obtain data on fathers. Pirog-Good reports that teen fathers are more likely to come from single-parent families and from families of lower socioeconomic status, tend to have been in more trouble with the criminal justice system, to have lower levels of education, and to experience divorce. Teen fathers tend to enter the labor force earlier than men who don't become fathers in their teens and thus have higher incomes through age twenty. However, their average earnings do not rise as fast as those of non-teen fathers, and their mean earnings even decrease by the time they are twenty-nine. Teen fathers are unlikely to pay child support.⁴³

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Institute for Research on Poverty
1180 Observatory Drive
3412 Social Science Building
University of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin 53706
(608) 262-6358
Fax: 608-265-3119

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Lerman examines the relationships among earnings, fatherhood, marriage, and child support behavior among young men. He finds that educational levels, skill levels, and other characteristics of young men have strong impacts on earnings and child support. Unwed fathers earn less, generally, than all others, and they also pay the least child support. The relationship between child support and earnings is complicated, with earnings in one year clearly being linked to higher child support payments in the next year, and child support payments in one year being linked to higher earnings in the next. Lerman concludes that policies should not only provide training to increase earnings, but might also attempt to increase the motivation to pay child support.⁴⁴

Esther Wattenberg and her colleagues and Daniel Meyer focused specifically on fathers in paternity cases. Those that Wattenberg interviewed were a very low income group. Although many were working, their jobs were marginal: unskilled, low-paid, or part-time.⁴⁵ Meyer found that although

many fathers had very low incomes at the time paternity was established, a sizable portion did not, and many increased their incomes significantly over the next three years.⁴⁶

Lack of national consensus

Many would now agree that there are advantages to society and to the children themselves in establishing paternity for almost every child born out of wedlock. Although there is a trend toward establishing the legal right to have a father, the authors of these papers and the participants at the conference noted that there is no agreement on how strong that right should be. Is it stronger, for example, than the right of a mother not to have contact with the father? Is it stronger than the rights of men who are not completely sure that they are the fathers? How strong should be the link between establishing paternity and securing a child support obligation?—weak, so that many paternities are established, or strong, so that children obtain the financial support to which they are entitled? The responses to these questions lead to specific policies.

Some argue that the system is beginning to focus more on efficiency, at the expense of the father's right to due process and his right to representation. Several factors are interrelated: states are moving toward encouraging voluntary consent, and some men who acknowledge paternity may not understand the implications of their statement. Second, many states and counties have moved toward greater use of default judgments (judgments made in the absence of the alleged father), clearly favoring efficiency at the expense of accuracy. In Virginia, blood test results indicating a 98 percent or greater probability of paternity are not rebuttable, raising the possibility that up to 2 percent of the putative fathers may be wrongly assigned paternity and an eighteen-year financial obligation. Finally, in some locations the petition for paternity is made by a branch of the court itself, raising questions about the fairness of the hearing.⁴⁷

Direction for policy

The conference papers have several policy implications. They point to the need for strengthened links between AFDC and child support workers. They indicate the desirability of regular monitoring of the incomes of fathers in paternity cases, since the earnings of many rise substantially over time. They make it clear that we must devise ways to speed the paternity process and to get it started as early as possible.

Many states have already begun to take action along these lines. A number of them are increasingly encouraging voluntary acknowledgment of paternity. In the state of Washington, for example, hospitals are required to give fathers the opportunity to sign an affidavit of paternity. The program appears to be successful in that the state is currently receiving an average of 644 affidavits per month, compared

Recent IRP Publications on Child Support

The following papers are available from the Institute for Research on Poverty, 1180 Observatory Drive, 3412 Social Science Building, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706.

Discussion Papers

Marieka Klawitter and Irwin Garfinkel, "Child Support, Routine Income Withholding, and Postdivorce Income for Divorced Mothers and Their Children." DP 938–91.

Daniel R. Meyer, "Child Support and Welfare Dynamics: Evidence from Wisconsin." DP 939–91.

Daniel R. Meyer, Irwin Garfinkel, Philip K. Robins, and Donald Oellerich, "The Costs and Effects of a National Child Support Assurance System." DP 940–91.

Irwin Garfinkel, Daniel R. Meyer, and Gary D. Sandefur, "The Effects of Alternative Child Support Systems on Blacks, Hispanics, and Non-Hispanic Whites." DP 946–91.

Marieka Klawitter and Irwin Garfinkel, "The Effects of Routine Income Withholding of Child Support on AFDC Participation and Costs." DP 961–91.

Elizabeth Phillips and Irwin Garfinkel, "Changes over Time in the Incomes of Nonresident Fathers in Wisconsin." DP 967–92.

Yin-Ling Wong, Irwin Garfinkel, and Sara McLanahan, "Single-Mother Families in Eight Countries: Economic Status and Social Policy." DP 970–92.

Daniel R. Meyer, "Data Adjustments in the Child Support Supplement of the Current Population Survey." DP 976–92.

Reprints

Donald T. Oellerich, Irwin Garfinkel, and Philip K. Robins, *Private Child Support: Current and Potential Impacts*. R 650, 1991.

Nora Schaeffer, Judith A. Seltzer, and Marieka Klawitter, *Estimating Nonresponse and Response Bias: Resident and Nonresident Parents' Reports about Child Support*. R 655, 1991.

Irwin Garfinkel, Donald Oellerich, and Philip K. Robins, *Child Support Guidelines: Will They Make a Difference?* R 662, 1991.

to approximately 1550 births to unmarried parents each month.⁴⁸ While this is not required of the hospitals in Virginia, the child support agency has signed agreements with several hospitals to provide a small fee for every voluntary acknowledgment the hospital provides.

Several states are experimenting with techniques to speed the process of establishing paternity. One method is to encourage paternity establishment outside the legal system. In Virginia, a voluntary acknowledgment of paternity has the same force and effect as a court order. Another means of speeding the process is to issue default judgments: in Oregon, one-third of the paternity cases are now decided by default.⁴⁹

States are also attempting to begin paternity establishment at an early stage. For example, Delaware has implemented a new program in which public health nurses contact unmarried women toward the end of their pregnancies and explain the benefits of paternity establishment. A referral is then made to the child support office, which follows up after the birth of the child. The Washington program, mentioned earlier, which offers fathers an opportunity to acknowledge paternity when the baby is born, has shown significant success, as have similar programs in Virginia and in Kent County, Michigan. One conference participant suggested that states should base child support staff in selected hospitals.⁵⁰

Attempts are being made to increase incentives for child support offices to give priority to paternity cases. In Wisconsin, Ohio, and California, payments are provided to counties that have high levels of paternity establishment.⁵¹

It has been suggested that we reexamine the incentives in place for parents to cooperate with the child support office. Currently there is a child support "pass-through," according to which the first \$50 per month paid by the noncustodial parent of a child receiving AFDC goes to the custodial family and the remainder, which goes to the state, serves to offset the costs of AFDC. Prior to 1984, when the pass-through was established, all child support went to offset the costs of AFDC. The intent of the pass-through was to provide a monetary incentive for custodial parents receiving AFDC to cooperate with the child support agency and also to give noncustodial parents some incentive to cooperate, since at least a portion of their payment would go to their children. Yet \$50 per month may not be large enough. According to Wattenberg, some of the young men and women who were interviewed by her project suggested that at least \$100 a month would be more appropriate.⁵² Nichols-Casebolt states that some of the intake workers in Maricopa County, Arizona, believe that AFDC mothers may be unwilling to cooperate with the formal child support system because the potential benefits (\$50 a month) are less than the potential cost involved in jeopardizing their relationship with the child's father.⁵³ If, on the other hand, the father pays informally and the mother reports to the Office of Child Support Enforcement that she does not

know where the father is, both may be better off financially. Adams and his colleagues do not specifically mention the pass-through, but they observe substantial reluctance of clients to cooperate with the child support system. They assert that this indicates "that administrative reforms alone might not be sufficient, and that interventions aimed more directly at influencing client attitudes might be required to achieve the performance standards prescribed in the 1988 legislation."⁵⁴

Nichols-Casebolt and others have suggested that increased education might be an appropriate strategy—that mothers who are made aware of the benefits of paternity establishment will be more likely to desire it, and that fathers may develop stronger relationships with their children if they have been motivated to accept responsibilities.⁵⁵ Several states and localities have developed educational materials on paternity and on child support for use in schools.

An educational strategy alone, however, has serious weaknesses. A study in Nebraska found that paternity establishment rates were not significantly higher for mothers who received "education" concerning the benefits of establishment.⁵⁶ In addition, if education increases the number of clients who expect paternity services and the child support system is not given additional resources, the system will not be able to handle new cases efficiently and may have raised the expectations of mothers to no avail.

Finally, Wattenberg and her colleagues and others have suggested that we completely separate the establishment of paternity from the child support process.⁵⁷ They suggest making a "Declaration of Parentage" form routinely available so that a simple statement before a notary will establish paternity, which would not be connected to the legal issues of child support, visitation rights, or custody.

It is unclear, however, how these processes can be disentangled. When a court reviews a request for child support on behalf of a child born out of wedlock, some determination of parentage must be made. If the Declaration of Parentage form is accepted by the courts, then the processes are linked. If it is not seen as binding, then how can it be used to grant the child eligibility for benefits from the father? Other benefits of paternity, such as medical history, genetic information, and emotional and psychological links are based more on whether the father is known than on whether a form has been signed.

Others advocate decriminalizing the whole paternity adjudication process and streamlining the process for those who voluntarily acknowledge paternity. Many states have moved in this direction, and, indeed, it is strongly encouraged by the Family Support Act.

Future research

The conference papers tell us what gaps in our knowledge remain to be filled. First, we clearly need more accurate

data. No current national data set can help us understand the characteristics of women who have had paternity established as opposed to those who have not. We have even less accurate data on the fathers, and no data that link specific mothers and fathers. We have very little information on individual mothers, fathers, and children over time. On the aggregate level, we now have some data from the states on the percentage of cases in the IV-D system for which paternity has been established. But the accuracy of this information is still open to question, and even after audit the numbers may be subject to error until automated systems are in use in every state. How do we know if new national policies on paternity are needed if we do not have an accurate picture of the current system? In the absence of national data, perhaps data from individual states should be more thoroughly analyzed and disseminated.

We are only beginning to understand the relationship, if any, between the structure of child support agencies, paternity practices, and adjudication rates. We presume a relationship exists between expenditures and effectiveness, but we are not sure what it is. Effectiveness is probably also related to the characteristics of the individuals involved, but we have no theory and little understanding of any links between individual characteristics and effectiveness. Clearly, additional work (perhaps using longitudinal data) on the factors associated with program performance would be helpful. A related set of unanswered questions concerns the paternity practices of the child support offices in regard to teen fathers. For how many of these fathers is a formal declaration of paternity deferred until they are older or gain a reliable income source? How many of these “deferred paternities” are eventually established?

We know little about the child support behavior of men after their paternity is established, other than that they tend to pay less than other noncustodial fathers. Do their awards change as their income changes? Does compliance increase over time? If lack of compliance is found, does it result from changes in income, changes in willingness to pay, or other factors? How much informal support is provided, and does it change over time? Although it appears that a large majority of noncustodial fathers for whom paternity is established cannot initially pay an amount of child support sufficient to raise their children out of poverty, to what extent can child support decrease the poverty of these children in the longer term? Can enough child support be collected to substantially reduce the reliance of mothers and children on AFDC?

We lack knowledge of the relationship between paternity establishment and visitation. Do fathers who have had paternity formally established have more contact with their children? Does this contact continue throughout the child’s life? If there is increased contact, what are its effects?

Little research exists to help us understand the mother’s perspective on paternity establishment. Wattenberg et al. have begun to obtain the views of AFDC mothers and

fathers on the costs and benefits of establishing paternity, but this work needs to be corroborated beyond the Minneapolis–St. Paul area, and broader samples need to be taken. We know little about the effects of and the extent to which sanctions are used when parents do not cooperate in the paternity-establishment process. Policy approaches that increase the incentive to establish paternity, such as a guaranteed amount of child support for custodial parents who have had paternity established, need to be tested and evaluated to see if they are effective.

Perhaps most important, we know little about the longer-term effects of establishing paternity. Most of the work to date has implicitly assumed that establishing paternity would benefit children in the long run, but this assumption is not based on research. The first effect would presumably be increased financial support for the child, but we have few data on the effects of paternity establishment on later child support awards and payments. Are child support awards established? Do fathers pay? Even if we observe that fathers who had paternity established five years ago are paying modest amounts of child support now, a further question remains: What if the fathers, mothers, and children for whom paternity was established five years ago were a fairly select group? Would establishing paternity for all other families now have the same effect?

The relationship between paternity establishment and the well-being of the child is not settled. If paternity is established routinely, what effects would this have? Would it increase contact between fathers who would otherwise not be involved with their children? If so, would increased contact increase conflict between the parents? Some work has been done on this question for children affected by divorces,⁵⁸ but not for children born out of wedlock.

A host of research issues have not yet been addressed. Answers to the questions posed, as well as to others, are critical if our society is to develop effective policies in an area of growing importance. ■

¹U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, *1992 Green Book: Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1992), p. 1074. Hereafter referred to as *1992 Green Book*.

²Sandra Danziger and Ann Nichols-Casebolt, “Teen Parents and Child Support: Eligibility, Participation, and Payment,” *Journal of Social Service Research*, 11 (1988), 1–20.

³Irwin Garfinkel and Sara S. McLanahan, *Single Mothers and Their Children: A New American Dilemma* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1986).

⁴U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No. 173, *Child Support and Alimony: 1989* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1991), p. 11.

⁵*1992 Green Book*, p. 669.

⁶Ellwood, "Targeting Would-Be Long-Term Recipients of AFDC." Report prepared for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., Princeton, N.J., 1986.

⁷Because most national data sets do not permit accurate identification of all children born from nonmarital relationships, researchers usually rely on data on never-married mothers. A nonmarital child who is not legitimated and whose mother eventually marries is also eligible for paternity establishment and child support, but these analysts miss this group. In addition, some divorced, separated, and widowed women have nonmarital children who are eligible for paternity establishment.

⁸The data in this paragraph come from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Child Support and Alimony: 1989*, p. 5.

⁹Esther Wattenberg, Rose Brewer, and Michael Resnick, "Executive Summary of a Study of Paternity Decisions: Perspectives from Young Mothers and Young Fathers." Summary of a report prepared for the Ford Foundation, February 1991. Conference paper. For information on how to obtain the conference papers, see box, p. 4.

¹⁰See Marygold Melli, "A Brief History of the Legal Structure for Paternity Establishment in the United States." Conference paper.

¹¹See Charles F. Adams, David Landsbergen, and Daniel Hecht, "Interorganizational Dependencies and Paternity Establishment." Conference paper.

¹²Edward M. Young, "Costs and Benefits of Paternity Establishment." Report to the Office of Child Support Enforcement, 18-P-00229-99-01, 1985. Dane County includes Madison, the state capital.

¹³David A. Price and Victoria S. Williams, "Nebraska Paternity Project: Final Report." Submitted to Nebraska Department of Social Services by Policy Studies, Inc., Denver, Colo., 1990.

¹⁴See, for example, Blanche Bernstein, "Shouldn't Low-Income Fathers Support Their Children?" *The Public Interest*, 66 (1982), 55-71; Margaret A. Kohn, "Child Support Enforcement and Young Unwed Fathers," in *Young Unwed Fathers: Research Review, Policy Dilemmas and Options*, ed. Jacqueline Smollar and Theodora Ooms, report to the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. DHHS, under Contract HHS-100-85-0004, 1987; and Esther Wattenberg, "Establishing Paternity for Nonmarital Children," *Public Welfare*, 45 (1987), 9-13, 48.

¹⁵Jacqueline Smollar and Theodora Ooms, eds., *Young Unwed Fathers*.

¹⁶Danziger and Nichols-Casebolt, "Teen Parents and Child Support."

¹⁷Ann Nichols-Casebolt and Irwin Garfinkel, "Trends in Paternity Adjudications and Child Support Awards," *Social Science Quarterly*, 72 (1991), 83-97.

¹⁸Kohn, "Child Support Enforcement and Young Unwed Fathers"; Wattenberg, "Establishing Paternity for Nonmarital Children"; and Sandra Danziger and Ann Nichols-Casebolt, "Child Support in Paternity Cases," *Social Service Review*, 64 (1990), 458-474.

¹⁹Danziger and Nichols-Casebolt, "Teen Parents and Child Support."

²⁰Sandra Danziger, "Father Involvement in Welfare Families Headed by Adolescent Mothers," IRP Discussion Paper no. 856-87, 1987; Wattenberg, "Establishing Paternity for Nonmarital Children."

²¹See Pamela A. Holcomb, Kristin S. Seefeldt, and Freya L. Sonenstein, "Paternity Establishment in 1990: Organizational Structure, Voluntary Consent, and Administrative Practices"; and Sonenstein, Holcomb, and Seefeldt, "Paternity Establishment in 1990: Performance at the Local Level." Conference papers.

²²Ann Nichols-Casebolt, "Paternity Establishment in Arizona: A Case Study of the Process and Its Outcomes." Conference paper.

²³Holcomb et al., "Paternity Establishment in 1990."

²⁴See Maureen P. Pirog-Good, "Teen Fathers and the Child Support Enforcement System." Conference paper.

²⁵John K. Maniha, "New Data on State Performance in the Establishment of Paternity: Is It Valid and What Use Can Be Made of It?" Conference paper.

²⁶See Burt S. Barnow, "Paternity Establishment among Never-Married Mothers: Estimates from the 1986 Current Population Survey, Alimony and Child Support Supplement." Conference paper. See also Laudan Y. Aron, Burt S. Barnow, and William McNaught, "Paternity Establishment among Never-Married Mothers: Estimates from the 1986 Current Population Survey, Alimony and Child Support Supplement." Report by Lewin/ICF to the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. DHHS, 1989.

²⁷Danziger and Nichols-Casebolt, "Child Support in Paternity Cases."

²⁸Sonenstein et al., "Paternity Establishment in 1990."

²⁹Maniha, "New Data on State Performance in the Establishment of Paternity."

³⁰The data in this paragraph are drawn from Sonenstein et al., "Paternity Establishment in 1990."

³¹Barnow, "Paternity Establishment among Never-Married Mothers."

³²Compare the data in Nichols-Casebolt, "Paternity Establishment in Arizona," with those in Sara McLanahan, Renee Monson, and Pat Brown, "Paternity Establishment for AFDC Mothers: Three Wisconsin Counties." Conference papers.

³³Maniha, "New Data on State Performance in the Establishment of Paternity," p. 12. The base rates were needed because one of the state standards was that paternity establishments must have increased by at least six percentage points above that base by September 30, 1992.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁵Nichols-Casebolt, "Paternity Establishment in Arizona."

³⁶Adams et al., "Interorganizational Dependencies and Paternity Establishment."

³⁷McLanahan et al., "Paternity Establishment for AFDC Mothers."

³⁸Wattenberg et al., "Executive Summary of a Study of Paternity Decisions."

³⁹Nichols-Casebolt, "Paternity Establishment in Arizona."

⁴⁰Maniha, "New Data on State Performance in the Establishment of Paternity."

⁴¹Adams et al., "Interorganizational Dependencies and Paternity Establishment."

⁴²See Barnow, "Paternity Establishment among Never-Married Mothers," and McLanahan et al., "Paternity Establishment for AFDC Mothers," for discussion of characteristics of mothers who were likely to have paternity established.

⁴³Pirog-Good, "Teen Fathers and the Child Support Enforcement System."

⁴⁴Lerman, "Do the Earnings Deficiencies of Unwed Fathers Account for Their Low Child Support Payments?" Conference paper.

⁴⁵Wattenberg et al., "Executive Summary of a Study of Paternity Decisions."

⁴⁶Meyer, "Can Fathers Support Children Born outside of Marriage? Data on Fathers' Incomes over Time." Conference paper.

⁴⁷Adams et al., "Interorganizational Dependencies and Paternity Establishment."

⁴⁸The discussion of the Washington program is in John Hoover, Barbara Paulin, and Harry Wiggins, "Innovative State Programs: Washington, Delaware, and Virginia." Conference paper.

⁴⁹Adams et al., "Interorganizational Dependencies and Paternity Establishment."

⁵⁰Nichols-Casebolt, "Paternity Establishment in Arizona."

⁵¹U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Paternity Establishment*, 3rd edition (Washington, D.C.: National Institute for Child Support Enforcement, 1990).

⁵²Wattenberg et al., "Executive Summary of a Study of Paternity Decisions."

⁵³Nichols-Casebolt, "Paternity Establishment in Arizona."

⁵⁴Adams et al., "Interorganizational Dependencies and Paternity Establishment," p. 2.

⁵⁵Nichols-Casebolt, "Paternity Establishment in Arizona."

⁵⁶Price and Williams, "Nebraska Paternity Project."

⁵⁷Wattenberg et al., "Executive Summary of a Study of Paternity Decisions."

⁵⁸See Sara McLanahan, Judith A. Seltzer, Tom Hanson, and Elizabeth Thomson, "Child Support Enforcement and Child Well-Being: Greater Security or Greater Conflict?" Paper presented at conference, "Child Support and Child Well-Being," Airlie House, Airlie, Va., December 1991.

Research Opportunities

IRP Small Grants and Sabbatical Grants, 1992-1993

The Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will sponsor the twelfth competition under the Small Grants and Sabbatical Grants program for research on poverty-related topics during the period July 1993 through June 1994. Subject to availability of funding, two programs are offered: (1) several grants of up to \$15,000 each (two months salary, plus related research costs) are available and do not require residence in Madison or Washington, D.C.; (2) a smaller number of grants of up to \$35,000 each are available for visitors in residence at either IRP or the Department of Health and Human Services during the 1993-94 academic year. The latter awards may be made for research sabbaticals or postdoctoral research. Researchers must hold the Ph.D. To obtain guidelines (available October 1), write to Small Grants Program, Institute for Research on Poverty, 1180 Observatory Drive, 3412 Social Science Building, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706. Application deadline: February 5, 1993.

University of Michigan's Research and Training Program on Poverty, the Underclass, and Public Policy

The University of Michigan's Research and Training Program on Poverty, the Underclass, and Public Policy offers one- and two-year postdoctoral fellowships to American minority scholars to expand knowledge in this area in all the social sciences. Fellows will conduct their own research and participate in a year-long seminar on Poverty, the Underclass, and Public Policy under the direction of Sheldon Danziger, Professor of Social Work and Public Policy, and Mary Corcoran, Professor of Political Science, Public Policy, and Social Work. Funds are provided by the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. Applicants must have completed their Ph.D. by August

1, 1993. The application deadline is January 8, 1993. For an application packet, contact the Program on Poverty, the Underclass, and Public Policy, School of Social Work, 1065 Frieze Building, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1285.

Fellowships and Grants from the Social Science Research Council

The Social Science Research Council, through its Committee for Research on the Urban Underclass, is providing fellowships and grants in 1993 with funds from the Rockefeller Foundation. Research topics must be related to the urban underclass. Special emphasis is placed on the recruitment and training of minority students and scholars.

1. Dissertation fellowships are available to provide financial support for full-time research directed toward the completion of the doctoral dissertation. These fellowships offer stipends of up to \$1000 a month for up to 18 months and additional resources of up to \$4000 to cover research expenses incurred during the fellowship period. Applications will be accepted from any doctoral candidate who has completed all the requirements necessary for the Ph.D. except the dissertation, and whose proposal has been approved by the candidate's dissertation committee.

2. Faculty members and university administrators may apply for the support of undergraduate research assistance on topics related to the urban underclass. Stipends of up to \$4000 per student and research-related expenses of up to \$1000 per student are available for undergraduates who are members of minority groups. For group research projects, at least half of the students must belong to minority groups.

Applications must be postmarked by December 10, 1992. For further information and application materials contact Social Science Research Council/Research on the Urban Underclass, 605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158.