Understanding the Neighborhood Contexts of Custodial and Noncustodial Parents in the Child Support System

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INTRODUCTION

Neighborhood contexts matter for a range of family well-being outcomes, including children's social mobility (Chetty et al., 2016), family health (Arcaya et al., 2016), and economic well-being and advancement (Ludwig et al., 2013). Critically, neighborhood contexts can either compound or mitigate the impact of individual and household factors as determinants of current and future well-being (Chyn & Katz, 2021; Sharkey & Faber, 2014).

We know relatively little about the neighborhoods in which Wisconsin custodial and noncustodial parents and children live, but we expect that these contexts may matter for the capacity to support children. First, location may matter for parents' ability to engage with the child support system; we know that travel to engage in services has been cited as a barrier by noncustodial parents and staff who serve them (Vogel & Hossain, 2023). Understanding how distance between noncustodial parents and their children and distance to their child support agencies impacts child support outcomes could provide new insights on why some noncustodial parents may have difficulty in meeting their child support obligations. Second, neighborhood features—including socioeconomic conditions, amenities, and services like the availability of public transportation—may also exacerbate or mitigate challenges in complying with child support obligations. We expect this to matter in part because neighborhood disadvantage could negatively impact job and earnings opportunities and subsequent child support compliance among non-custodial parents.

This study examines the nature and potential child support implications of the neighborhood contexts of parents and children involved in the child support system. In this report we examine the geographic proximity between custodial and noncustodial parents when child support is first ordered; the neighborhood characteristics of custodial and noncustodial

parents; how close or far noncustodial parents live from the child support agency that services their case; and how neighborhood characteristics, in conjunction with parental characteristics, are associated with child support outcomes. Using comprehensive administrative data from Wisconsin, we identify custodial and noncustodial parents for all nonmarital births in 2015 that have a formal child support order. Using address data from the time of the initial order, we identify the zip codes where custodial and noncustodial parents live, and link this to zip-code characteristics related to the economic, demographic, and built environment. We further use administrative data from various sources to obtain demographic and earnings data for parents and calculate child support compliance rates for the noncustodial parents, defined as the annual amount paid divided by the amount owed.

Analysis of our final sample (N = 7,509) reveals heterogeneity in distances between noncustodial and custodial parents and distances to their child support agency assigned at the time of order. Both custodial and noncustodial parents live in areas that are less economically advantaged than the state as a whole at the time of their initial child support order, while the neighborhood characteristics of custodial and noncustodial parents are broadly similar to each other. Modeled relationships between individual and neighborhood characteristics, proximity between parents, and child support compliance rates one year following the order find mixed results. As shown in prior literature (e.g., Bartfeld & Meyer 2003; Berger et al., 2021), noncustodial parent earnings and parent race remain important predictors of compliance, and there are racial differences in compliance rates. We further find that neighborhood amenities are not generally associated with compliance, but better-resourced and higher-income neighborhoods do show some evidence of higher compliance among non-Hispanic white fathers. Noncustodial parents who live 50 miles or further from their child support agency have lower compliance

rates. Experiencing a residential move within the first year of the order is also associated with lower compliance rates. Our focus in the current study is identifying short-term associations among individual characteristics, neighborhood characteristics, and child support outcomes. We conclude by offering several avenues for additional research to build on this work.

Background

Importance of Neighborhoods

A rich social science literature has underscored how local environments can play a meaningful role in well-being for both children and adults. Families function within local communities, and characteristics of communities can shape their experiences and opportunities (Friedline et al., 2020; Logan, 2012). For example, local-area poverty rates and concentrated disadvantage have been shown to be inversely associated with academic achievement among children and labor market outcomes later in life (Chetty et al., 2016; Chyn & Katz, 2021; Hicks et al., 2018). For adults, living in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood has been linked to fewer job opportunities, poorer health, and increased parenting stress (Arcaya et al., 2016; Casciano & Massey, 2008; Riina, 2024). Moreover, racialized residential segregation often compounds the effects of economic disadvantage; limited opportunities and prolonged neighborhood disinvestment in racially-segregated Black neighborhoods have made it harder for Black families to achieve upward socioeconomic mobility compared to their white peers (Agan & Starr, 2020; Besbris et al., 2015; Faber, 2020; Massey & Denton, 1993; Rugh et al., 2015; Sampson et al., 2008).

The built environment, or the human-made physical make-up of the local community also matters. Neighborhood institutions connect individuals and families to needed services and resources (Small, 2006). Yet, the availability of neighborhood amenities is spatially clustered

and unevenly distributed across communities, with implications for family well-being (Massey & Denton, 1993; Rhubart et al., 2022; Shannon, 2020). For example, the availability of amenities like grocery stores is linked to declines in food insecurity and improved family health outcomes (Richardson et al., 2017; see also Finlay et al., 2023), but not all neighborhoods have grocery stores. Similarly, neighborhood investments around public transit and broadband internet can assist with tasks of daily living and connect individuals to needed services and opportunities but this investment is spatially unequal across neighborhoods (Nilsson & Delmelle, 2018). 'Disamenities' like liquor stores are correlated with other indicators of neighborhood hardship and negatively associated with community health and neighborhood safety (Lardier et al., 2021; Matheson et al., 2014). Overall, this literature underscores how individual-level explanations of economic and social disparities are insufficient in the absence of attention to the local environments in which people live.

Child Support Context

In this study, we consider how both socioeconomic characteristics and local amenities shape child support compliance. Though payments from noncustodial parents (NCPs) provide an important source of income for custodial parents, many NCPs are unable to fully comply with their order due to limited financial means, underemployment, and other hardships (e.g., Cancian and Meyer, 2004; Cancian, Kim and Meyer, 2021; Berger et al., 2021). As such, understanding and addressing limited compliance with child support orders remains a key focus of the child support literature. Much of this literature has focused on individual characteristics and policy contexts, confirms that NCP income is an important predictor of compliance (e.g., Bartfeld & Meyer, 2003), and identifies differences in payment and compliance rates across racial/ethnic

and educational-attainment categories given intersecting systems of privilege and marginalization by race and class (e.g., Grall, 2020; Berger et al., 2021).

There is less attention to neighborhood contexts in the existing child support literature, but we expect that certain aspects of the local environment could matter for child-support outcomes above and beyond individual characteristics. First, given the prior literature linking socioeconomic characteristics to families' economic outcomes, it is possible that neighborhood disadvantage could matter for noncustodial parents' financial stability, earnings potential, and job opportunities. We proxy neighborhood disadvantage by using measures of the local-area poverty and unemployment rates, rent burdens, and median household income along with local racial and educational composition. In terms of the built environment, we think carefully about the types of amenities that could impact parenting, employment, and managing child support responsibilities. To do so, we leverage the increasing availability of microbusiness data that provides the neighborhood locations of amenities and services to create measures of the built environment across multiple categories. Having local amenities like doctors' offices, grocery stores, and daycare providers close by could make parenting responsibilities easier for both NCPs and CPs. Furthermore, having more of such amenities may serve as a proxy for being a better-resourced neighborhood across a range of dimensions. We further consider two disamenities, liquor stores and convenience stores, to serve as additional proxies for economic hardship alongside the aforementioned socioeconomic characteristics.

We think about the available infrastructure in communities in two ways. First, the availability of public transit may make travel to work easier and may reduce travel burdens for NCPs when it comes to visiting their children if the CP is in a different neighborhood. It could also reduce travel burdens related to visiting a child support agency for case management or

making payments. Indeed, transportation barriers emerged as a widespread barrier to child support payments in a recent study of low-income fathers (Berger et al., 2021). We also consider the availability of broadband internet, which can facilitate job searches, communication, and case management for NCPs. Reliable broadband is not available everywhere within Wisconsin (Public Service Commission of Wisconsin, 2024), particularly in rural areas, which could limit access to virtual services for many NCPs (Vogel & Yeo, 2022).

Finally, we expect that distance to child support agencies and distance between NCPs and CPs could be important spatial measures to consider when evaluating compliance. We hypothesize that greater distances and residential moves may decrease compliance rates due to logistical and economic barriers. As prior research has underscored, local institutions can connect individuals to resources (Small, 2006), and child support agencies are one such institution. Child support agencies and caseworkers may be able to support noncustodial parents not just with managing their cases, but also by helping NCPs navigate barriers regarding employment and financial insecurity (Vogel & Hossain, 2023). We expect that the ability to visit agencies in person could better facilitate accessing these supports. Likewise, we expect that living close to the custodial parent may make it easier to remain in contact with the child, which may help address issues around willingness to pay child support.

This study proceeds in two phases. First, because we know little about the neighborhood contexts of parents involved in the Wisconsin child support system, we descriptively evaluate the neighborhood characteristics of both custodial and noncustodial parents and compare them to typical neighborhood characteristics within the state. This descriptive work also considers intersections between individual and neighborhood characteristics by looking at neighborhood contexts by race/ethnicity of the parents. In the second phase, we model the relationships

between neighborhood contexts, individual characteristics, and child support compliance rates to understand how neighborhood contexts may shed additional insights on disparities in compliance rates among noncustodial parents.

DATA AND METHODS

This study uses longitudinal data from the Wisconsin Administrative Data Core (WADC), a dataset maintained by the Institute for Research on Poverty containing linked administrative records from a variety of Wisconsin state agencies. Using child support records from the Kids Information Data System (KIDS), we identify nonmarital births in Wisconsin in 2015 that had a child support order in effect anytime through 2021. We then incorporate a range of information from WADC about the order and associated payments as well as the characteristics and addresses (zip codes) of both parents. Finally, we merge in information about the demographic and economic characteristics and built environments of where parents live. While our current analyses focus on neighborhood characteristics and child support outcomes during the first year, our selection of 2015 births affords potential for a longer follow-up period in subsequent work.

Sample Construction

We begin with 10,248 nonmarital births with both parents identified and a non-zero support order in place. We restrict our sample to cases where the father was identified as the noncustodial parent throughout the first year of the order (based on being the support obligor), thus excluding cases in which the mother is the NCP or the NCP changes during the year. We further limit the sample to cases in which both parents resided in Wisconsin at the time of the order, as we lack information on out-of-state earnings. Finally, we limit the sample to cases in

which both parents had valid Social Security Numbers, as this is necessary to link to earnings. After applying these criteria, the final dataset consisted of 7,509 children born in 2015 with active child support orders sometime between 2015 and 2021. This final sample was used to describe the neighborhood context of parents, and to assess child support compliance and individual and contextual factors that may influence payment behavior.

Construction of Individual and Neighborhood-Level Variables

To measure compliance with child support orders, our key outcome measure, we compared the total amount owed to the total amount paid during the first 12 months following the start date of the support order, using monthly KIDS records. We define compliance as the percentage of the total obligation that was recorded as paid in the first year.

Demographic information for fathers and mothers of the children in our sample, including age, race/ethnicity, and education, was incorporated from WADC demographic files. Mothers' and fathers' total earnings for the year following the start of the child support order were constructed from quarterly earnings records from the Unemployment Insurance program, as was an indicator for whether each parent had any formal earnings in the year. The child's age at time of first order was calculated in months based on birthdate and start of order. Parents' residential zip codes at the time of the order, as well as any subsequent zip codes in the first year, were incorporated from KIDS. We also incorporated the address of the child support agency (CSA) responsible for servicing the order at the time the order was initiated (typically the county CSA where the CP lives).

We note several caveats about the above measures: We include the best available measure of educational attainment, but we recommend caution with any interpretation of education findings as these data may be incomplete. The earnings measures include earnings

from jobs covered by the UI system but do not capture self-employment, gig work, under-the-table earnings, or out-of-state earnings, and as such are an underestimate of total earnings. Finally, the address data from which zip codes are obtained does not always capture residential moves if they are not known or reported to the child support system.

Neighborhoods are defined based on zip codes. We link zip-code level data[1] from the National Neighborhood Data Archive (NaNDA) and the American Community Survey (ACS) to the mothers and fathers in our sample, based on the address at the start of the order. NaNDA provides aggregate, zip-code level data on the counts of establishments within each zip code, across amenity types. We use these to variously describe the presence or absence of an amenity or the density (i.e., number of establishments per thousand residents) in parents' zip codes. For the establishment data, we generate an index of amenity access based on five types of amenities relevant to family well-being: banks, supermarkets or grocery stores, doctors' offices, youth organizations, and daycare facilities. The amenities index, ranging from 0 to 5, is the number of amenity types for which the density in the zip code is above the state average for all zip codes, such that higher numbers denote better-resourced areas on these dimensions.

We separately keep measures of the densities of convenience stores and liquor stores to consider exposure to disamenities alongside our amenities index. NaNDA also provides information on the availability of public transit and broadband internet access, which we include separately in our models as binary indicators of whether a zip code has any public transit stops or any broadband internet providers. Most of the NaNDA data is annual, and we keep the data from

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[1]Because zip codes are based on postal routes rather than geography, NaNDA and ACS data are provided as Zip Code Tabulation Area (ZCTA) data, which is a standard Census geographic unit. We use a crosswalk to match ZCTAs to zip codes and generate zip-code level neighborhood information.

2015, the year of the child's birth.[2] Socioeconomic and demographic characteristics for each zip code come from a pooled 2015–2019 ACS sample. From the ACS, we identify the poverty and unemployment rates, median household income, median rent and rent burden (i.e., the share of income spent on rent), the share of college graduates, and the racial and ethnic composition of each Wisconsin zip code. We link these data to the zip codes of NCPs and CPs at the time of the child support order.

Finally, we construct several measures from the KIDS zip code data itself. These include indicators of: residential mobility, coded as 1 if a parent moved to a different zip code during the year following the order; distance between parents at the start of the order, calculated as distance between zip code centers; and distance between NCPs and the child support agency serving their case, calculated as the distance between NCP zip code center and the point coordinate of the child support agency. We note that the zip code characteristics discussed above are captured at the start of the child support order, and do not vary over time. As such, our models do not capture changes in neighborhood contexts for those who move over the period.

Descriptive Analysis

We begin by describing demographic characteristics and earnings of custodial parents (CPs) and noncustodial parents (NCPs). We also characterize the distribution of compliance rates among NCPs. To consider residential spatial characteristics, we map the geographic distribution and density of CPs and NCPs within zip codes across the state. Additionally, we describe the typical distances between CPs and NCPs, as well as their distances from child support agencies. We further compare key neighborhood indicators (e.g., poverty rates and amenities) between

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[2]Public transit data is an exception; NaNDA provides the number of transit stops in the zip code as of 2018.

NCPs and CPs and also against state-level averages to understand the relative degree of neighborhood advantage or disadvantage for NCPs and CPs statewide. To illustrate the potential for neighborhood (dis)advantage to compound individual (dis)advantage, we also compare the neighborhood characteristics of white, Black and Hispanic parents.

Empirical Model for Child Support Compliance

We model how individual and neighborhood characteristics are associated with compliance rates using a series of nested OLS regression models that progressively incorporate additional sets of explanatory variables. Model 1 includes only NCP characteristics such as age, race and ethnicity, education, and earnings. This baseline model aims to identify associations between individual-level demographic and economic factors and compliance rates. Model 2 adds analogous CP characteristics, as well as an indicator for the number of months between the child's birth and the start of the order. By including these variables, we can differentiate the role of NCP attributes from those of the CP. Model 3 introduces distance measures and an indicator of whether either parent had moved since the child support order began. These measures capture the potential impact of geographic proximity and residential mobility on compliance. Finally, Model 4 incorporates neighborhood socioeconomic and built environment characteristics. The inclusion of neighborhood-level variables allows us to explore the role of broader community contexts in shaping child support compliance. We also estimate our final model separately by race/ethnicity of the NCP, to assess whether there are different associations between individual and/or neighborhood characteristics and child support compliance for white, Black, and Hispanic NCPs.

RESULTS

Parent and Neighborhood Characteristics

In terms of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, our parent sample looks similar to previous studies examining Wisconsin families involved in the child support system (e.g., Pilarz & Cuesta 2023). As shown in Table 1, the typical NCP father in our sample is about 30 years old. Forty percent of our NCP sample is non-Hispanic white, another 39% is non-Hispanic Black, and 11% is Hispanic. About 84%of NCPs have earnings in the UI data, and the average earnings in the first year of the order is $17,905. Just 11%of NCP fathers have more than a high school degree. CP mothers have similar characteristics, but with lower earnings than NCP fathers ($13,115 on average). In terms of child support, the typical NCP father in our sample has an order established about 20 months after the child's birth, including one-third with orders within the first 6 months (not shown). Fathers' average compliance rate is 60% in the first year after the order begins. Figure 1 presents the distribution of compliance within our sample: while 35% of NCPs have fully complied with their order, another 13% had not paid any of the order within the first year. The remaining 52% of NCPs have paid support in some capacity but continue to owe money by the end of the one-year period. This heterogeneity aligns with prior work on compliance among nonmarital fathers. For instance, in a recent study utilizing a sample of nonmarital births in Wisconsin in 2017 and 2018, Pilarz and Cuesta (2023) reported 12–13% of NCPs with support orders paid no support in the first year and 55–56% paid in part, while 32% paid in full.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Characteristics	Mean/Percent
Fathers' Characteristics	
Average Age	29.5
Race	
Non-Hispanic White	40.4%
Non-Hispanic Black	39.2%
Hispanic	11.3%
Other	9.1%
Education	
Less than High School	28.9%
High School Graduate	59.6%
More than High School	3.9%
Missing	7.5%
Earnings in First Year of Support Order	$17,905.32
Any Earnings During Year	83.6%
Mothers' Characteristics	
Average Age	26.9
Race	
Non-Hispanic White	48.8%
Non-Hispanic Black	31.9%
Hispanic	11.2%
Other	7.9%
Education	
Less than High School	16.1%
High School Graduate	71.3%
More than High School	11.5%
Missing	0.9%
Earnings in First Year of Support Order	$13,114.73
Any Earnings During Year	84.3%
Case Characteristics	
Months from Birth to Order	19.8
Compliance in First Year of Order	60.2%
Observations	7,509

Note: Sample is nonmarital births in Wisconsin during 2015 with formal child support orders, for whom fathers are the noncustodial parent and both parents reside in Wisconsin at time of order.

Figure 1: Noncustodial Fathers' Compliance in First Year of Order
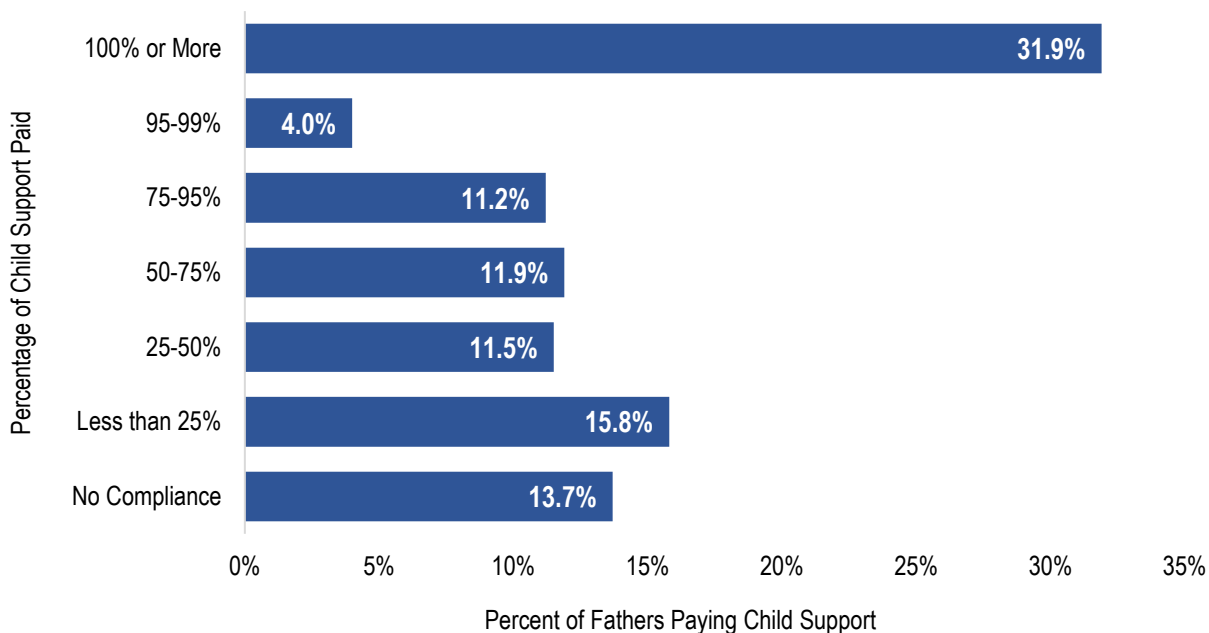
Notes: Sample is nonmarital births in Wisconsin during 2015 with formal child support orders, for whom fathers are the noncustodial parent and both parents reside in Wisconsin at time of order (n = 7,509). Compliance is child support paid divided by support owed during the first 12 months of the order.

Table 2 adds new insights on Wisconsin parents in the child support system by describing the neighborhood contexts among our sample of both NCP and CP parents. We compare zip code characteristics of NCP fathers and CP mothers to population-weighted state averages to represent what people typically encounter, in neighborhoods throughout the state. Asterisks represent statistically significant differences between NCP fathers and CP mothers. About one-third of children in our sample have both parents living in the same zip code at the time of the order, but even when we consider only parents who live in different zip codes (see Appendix Table A), overall patterns of NCP and CP characteristics remain similar.

Table 2: Neighborhood Characteristics of Noncustodial Fathers and Custodial Mothers

	Fathers	Mothers		State Average
Demographic / Economic Characteristics				
Race / Ethnicity				
Non-Hispanic White Residents (% of Zip Code)	65.2%	66.3%	***	80.8%
Non-Hispanic Black Residents (% of Zip Code)	18.4%	17.6%	***	5.7%
Hispanic/Latinx Residents (% of Zip Code)	9.7%	9.4%	*	7.7%
Non-Hispanic Some Other Race(s) Residents (% of Zip Code)	8.8%	8.8%		7.8%
Other Demographics				
Residents under Age 18 (% of Zip Code)	24.0%	24.0%		21.5%
Residents Aged 18–64 (% of Zip Code)	61.2%	61.0%	***	62.6%
Residents Aged 65 and Older (% of Zip Code)	14.8%	15.1%	***	15.9%
Households with Kids (% of Zip Code)	30.4%	30.4%		28.0%
Residents with College Degree or Higher (% of Zip Code)	24.6%	24.6%		31.4%
Poverty Rate	16.8%	16.3%	***	12.5%
Unemployment Rate	5.3%	5.2%		3.7%
Rural (% of Residents)	20.0%	20.8%	**	25.7%
Household Income (median)	$53,042.20	$53,768.64	***	$62,662.70
Gross Rent (median)	$826.44	$824.89		$872.79
Rent as Percent of Household Income (median)	29.1%	28.8%	***	27.1%
Built Environment Characteristics				
Public Transit Access in Zip Code (% w/ Any)	53.5%	51.7%	***	44.5%
High Speed Internet Provider (% w/ Any)	78.4%	77.6%		77.0%
Neighborhood Amenities Density (per 1,000 People)				
Bank Branch	0.35	0.36	***	0.41
Supermarket	0.42	0.41	*	0.34
Doctors' Offices	0.65	0.64		0.70
Youth Organizations	0.05	0.05		0.04
Daycare Services	0.79	0.77	*	0.57
Liquor Stores	0.11	0.10	*	0.09
Convenience Stores	0.17	0.17		0.16
Neighborhood Index	2.35	2.31	**	2.22
Distance and Mobility Measures				
Distance between NCP and Child Support Office (Miles)	16.3	6.2	***	
Distance between NCP and CP (Miles)	14.7	14.7		
NCP Moved during First Year of Order	35.3%	30.0%	***	
Parent's Live in Same Zip Code	30.9%	30.9%		
Observations		7,509		

Notes: Neighborhoods are based on zip code. Densities are the number of facilities per 1,000 people in the zip code. The Neighborhood Index is the number of amenity types (i.e., banks, supermarkets, doctors' offices, youth organizations, and child care facilities) for which the density is above the population-weighted state average. Asterisks denote significant differences between fathers and mothers: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$.

Relative to the typical Wisconsin resident, both NCPs and CPs live in more diverse and urban neighborhoods containing more households with children. Their neighborhoods also tend to have more economic disadvantage, as proxied by education, median household income, poverty rates, and unemployment rates. Yet, as Table 2 indicates, parents' resident neighborhoods are above or about the same as state averages for family well-being amenities (i.e., supermarkets or grocery stores, doctors' offices, youth organizations, and daycare

facilities). Parents tend to live in zip codes with higher densities of supermarkets and daycares relative to the state average while densities of youth organizations and convenience stores are about the same as the typical Wisconsin resident. Density of bank branches is lower, however. In terms of disamenities, liquor store densities are marginally higher for our sample of parents' neighborhoods, and convenience store availability is about the same as the state average. More of our parent zip codes have public transit compared to the state average, and broadband internet accessibility is about the same as the state average. Many of the observed differences are consistent with the higher share of CPs and NCPs residing in urbanized areas compared to the state average.

When comparing NCP and CP neighborhoods, differences remain substantively small, but many are statistically significant. For example, CP mothers in this sample tend to live in neighborhoods with slightly lower poverty rates and higher median household incomes. Their neighborhoods also have a higher share of non-Hispanic white residents and lower shares of non-Hispanic Black residents. In terms of the built environment, CP mothers are slightly under-resourced compared to NCPs in terms of public transit availability, daycare services, and grocery stores. The neighborhood index of family well-being amenities is 2.35 for NCP fathers and 2.31 for mothers, but the difference is statistically significant. The differences between NCP and CP neighborhoods, nonetheless, are quite small across all measures considered here, in contrast to the differences between both NCP and CP neighborhoods and statewide averages, which are often substantial.

NCP and CP distance to the child support agency managing the case at order establishment also differs significantly, with NCPs further away (16 miles compared to 6 miles for CPs). Figure 2 demonstrates significant variability in the distance between NCP residence

and their child support agency. More than 12% of NCPs live 50 miles or further from their respective agency, another 11% live between 20 and 50 miles away, while about 35% live within just five miles of the agency. On average, parents live about 15 miles from each other. Figure 3 reveals a fair number of NCPs (about 10%) living 50 miles or further from the custodial parent of their child. Residential mobility is high among both parents, with approximately one-third of CPs (30%) and NCPs (35.3%) appearing to move during the first year of the order. The number could be higher in that we only capture moves resulting in a zip code change and known to the child support agency.

Figure 2: Noncustodial Fathers' Distance from Child Support Agency
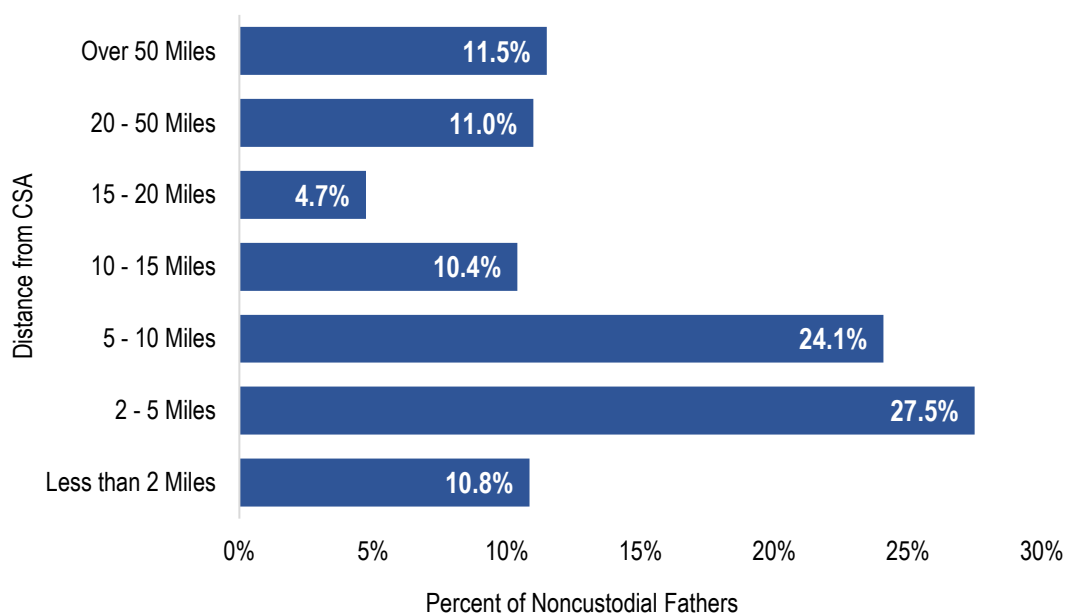
Notes: Sample is nonmarital births in Wisconsin during 2015 with formal child support orders, for whom fathers are the noncustodial parent and both parents reside in Wisconsin at time of order (n = 7,509). Distances are as of the starting month of the support order and based on fathers' zip code centroids and exact addresses of child support offices. Distance categories are mutually exclusive.

Figure 3: Parents' Distance from Each Other
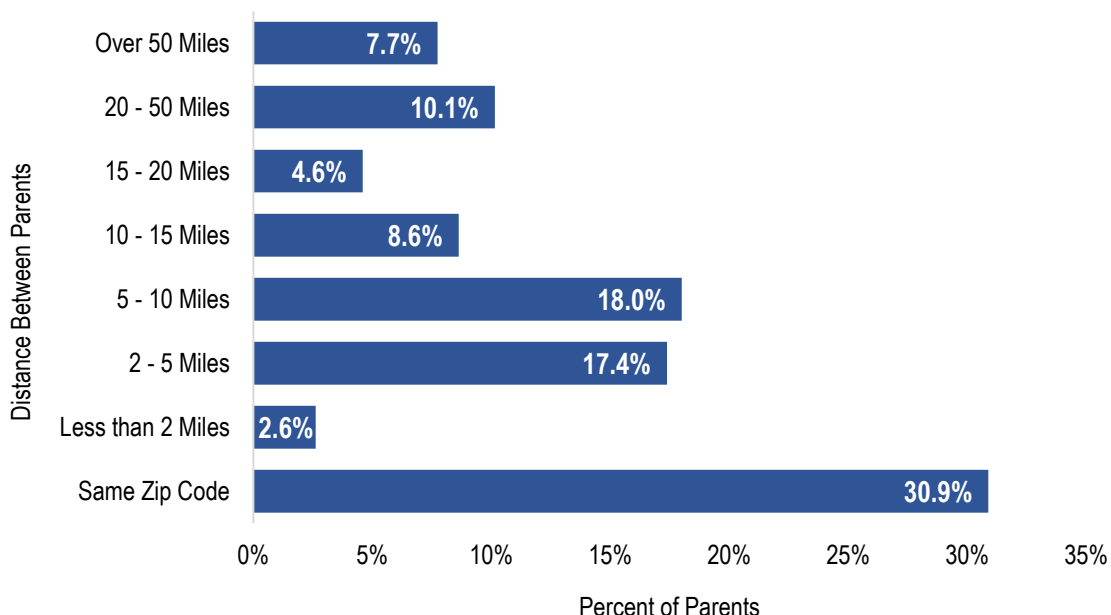
Notes: Sample is nonmarital births in Wisconsin during 2015 with formal child support orders, for whom fathers are the noncustodial parent and both parents reside in Wisconsin at time of order (n = 7,509). Distances are as of the starting month of the support order and based on zip code centroids. Distance categories are mutually exclusive.

Finally, we consider zip code characteristics by parent race and ethnicity in Table 3, revealing racial heterogeneity in neighborhood conditions. Black and Hispanic NCPs more commonly live in relatively disadvantaged communities compared to white NCPs. This is true for socioeconomic characteristics—where Black and Hispanic NCPs experience higher poverty and unemployment rates, higher rent burdens, and lower median household incomes—and for the availability of some amenities. On average, Black and Hispanic NCPs also live in zip codes with fewer banks and more liquor stores than white NCPs. However, grocery stores, day care centers, public transit, and high-speed internet are typically more available in these communities. The higher availability of these amenities is likely because Black and Hispanic NCPs live in more urban areas compared to white NCPs, as measured by the share of rural residents in the zip code. White NCPs live about 20 miles from their child support agency, on average, and about 18

miles from their child's custodial parent. These distances are lower for Black and Hispanic

NCPs, at about 13 and 11 miles, respectively.[3] Table 3 also provides characteristics for CP

mothers, who experience similar trends by race and ethnicity. As with our overall sample,

mothers live closer to child support agencies regardless of race: white CPs live about 8 miles

from their child support agency, while Black and Hispanic CPs live about 5 miles from their

agencies.

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[3]Note that parent distances from each other differ between CPs and NCPs because there are mixed-race NCP and CP pairs in our sample. The category "Other" race for NCPs and CPs is excluded from Table 3.

Table 3: Neighborhood Characteristics of Noncustodial Fathers and Custodial Mothers by Race/Ethnicity

	Fathers			Mothers		
	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Hispanic
Demographic/Economic Characteristics						
Non-Hispanic White Residents (% of Zip Code)	85.8%	44.4%	59.6%	85.0%	39.7%	60.0%
Non-Hispanic Black Residents (% of Zip Code)	3.3%	37.9%	12.2%	3.5%	43.3%	11.7%
Hispanic/Latinx Residents (% of Zip Code)	6.0%	10.4%	22.3%	6.4%	9.7%	22.5%
Non-Hispanic Some Other Race(s) Residents (% of Zip Code)	6.7%	9.9%	8.1%	6.9%	10.1%	8.0%
Residents under 18 years old (% of Zip Code)	21.9%	26.1%	24.9%	22.0%	26.7%	24.8%
Residents Aged 18–64 (% of Zip Code)	60.9%	61.6%	61.5%	60.9%	61.1%	61.5%
Residents Aged 65 and Older (% of Zip Code)	17.3%	12.3%	13.5%	17.1%	12.2%	13.7%
Households with Kids (% of Zip Code)	28.1%	32.4%	32.3%	28.3%	33.1%	32.1%
Residents with College or Higher (% of Zip Code)	25.4%	24.3%	22.8%	25.8%	23.5%	23.0%
Poverty Rate	11.1%	22.6%	18.1%	11.2%	23.5%	18.1%
Unemployment Rate	3.6%	7.1%	5.3%	3.7%	7.6%	5.3%
Rural (% of Residents)	35.1%	4.5%	11.2%	33.5%	2.8%	8.9%
Median Household Income	$60,032.01	$45,760.44	$51,543.50	$60,280.23	$44,612.08	$51,565.08
Median Gross Rent	$802.41	$858.21	$834.10	$807.46	$861.68	$838.77
Median Rent Gross Rent as % of Household Income	26.4%	32.3%	29.0%	26.4%	32.9%	29.1%
Built Environment Characteristics						
Public Transit Access in Zip Code (% w/ Any)	30.4%	77.9%	58.2%	32.0%	80.1%	59.5%
High Speed Internet Provider (% w/ Any)	65.3%	92.7%	85.1%	67.1%	93.3%	85.9%
Neighborhood Amenities Density (per 1,000 People)						
Bank Branch	0.41	0.28	0.34	0.41	0.27	0.35
Supermarket	0.33	0.52	0.45	0.33	0.53	0.46
Doctors' Offices	0.62	0.64	0.78	0.62	0.62	0.76
Youth Organizations	0.04	0.06	0.03	0.04	0.06	0.04
Daycare Services	0.55	1.10	0.66	0.55	1.19	0.64
Liquor Stores	0.08	0.13	0.12	0.08	0.14	0.12
Convenience Stores	0.19	0.16	0.16	0.19	0.16	0.15
Neighborhood Index	1.99	2.74	2.39	2.01	2.77	2.38

|	Fathers			Mothers		
	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Hispanic
Distance Measures						
Child Support Office Distance from Parent (Miles)	20.2	12.7	12.5	7.6	4.9	4.9
Parent's Distance from Each Other (Miles)	17.7	11.7	11.2	18.2	9.5	9.9
Moved within First Year of Order	31.3%	40.8%	31.3%	24.9%	37.3%	29.3%
Observations	**3,040**	**2,942**	**847**	**3,670**	**2,397**	**842**

Notes: Neighborhoods are based on zip code. Densities are the number of facilities per 1,000 people in the zip code. The Neighborhood Index is the number of amenity types (i.e., banks, supermarkets, doctors' offices, youth organizations, and child care facilities) for which the density is above the population-weighted state average.

Visualizations of Parents and their Communities

To better illustrate the spatial patterns of parents' community characteristics, we present four maps of Wisconsin zip codes.[4] First Figures 4a and 4b present the geographic distribution of NCP and CP parents in our sample. In our 2015 birth cohort, unmarried parents involved in the child support system—specifically, who have a formal child support order for the child in question—are spread across the state. We see that the distribution of parents largely reflects typical state population patterns, with fewer parents in more rural areas (lighter colors) and more parents (darker colors) clustered in urban areas like Eau Claire, Green Bay, Milwaukee, and Madison. Zip codes with no parents in the sample are clustered in the northern part of the state.

[4]Maps reflect Zip Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs). Most Wisconsin zip codes exactly match the boundaries of a ZCTA, but some ZCTAs (about 11%) include multiple zip codes. When ZCTAs include multiple zip codes, we use the mean value across zip codes when describing median household income and the neighborhood amenity index. More on ZCTAs: https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/zctas.html

Figure 4A: Distribution of Noncustodial Fathers by Zip Code
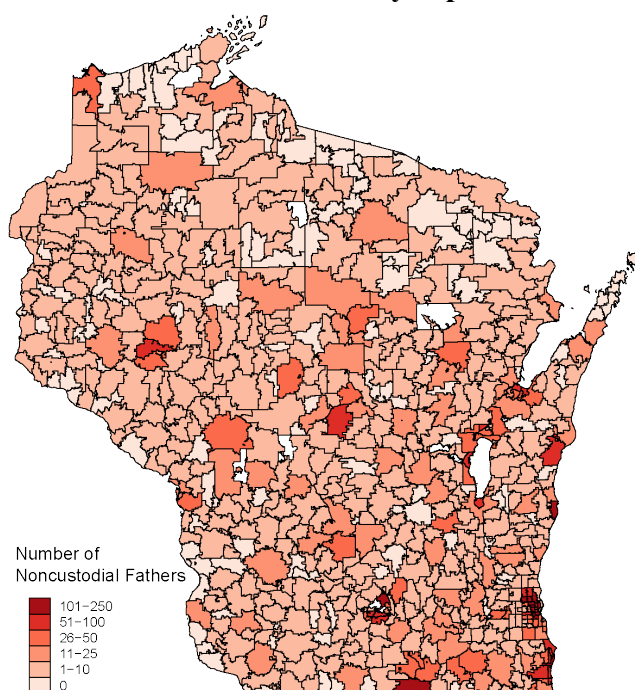
Notes: Panel A shows the geographic distribution (by zip code) of noncustodial fathers born of nonmarital children in Wisconsin during 2015 who had formal child support orders. Areas in grey are zip codes with no parents in our sample.

Figure 4B: Distribution on Custodial Mothers by Zip Code
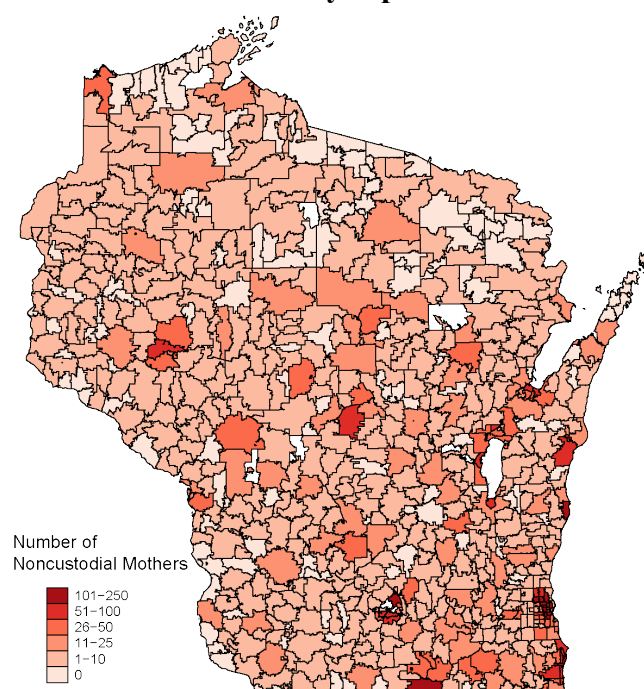
Notes: Panel B shows the geographic distribution (by zip code) of custodial mothers of nonmarital children born in Wisconsin during 2015 who had formal child support orders. Areas in grey are zip codes with no parents in our sample.

Figure 5: Median Household Income by Zip Code
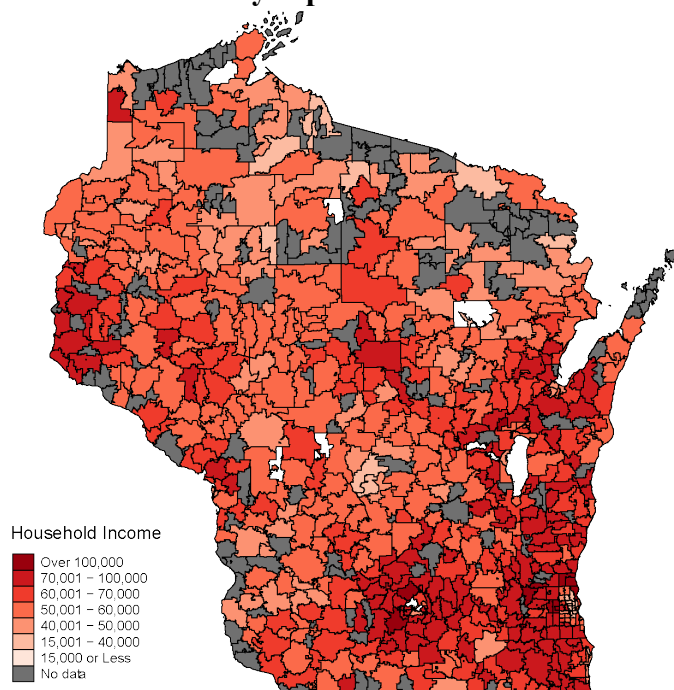
Notes: Areas are zip codes; grey areas are zip codes with no parents in our sample. Data are from the American Community Survey 2015–2020.

Figure 6: Neighborhood Amenities Index by Zip Code
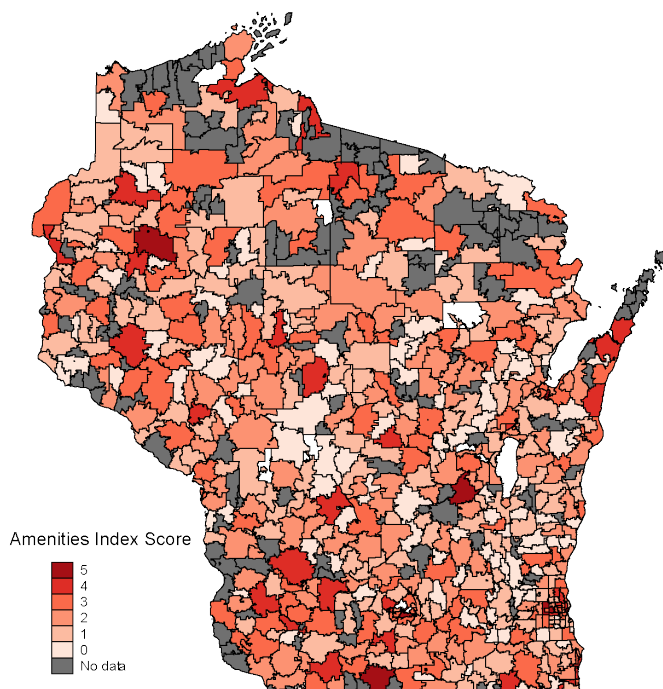
Notes: The Neighborhood Amenity Index is the number of five types of amenities (i.e., banks, supermarkets, doctors' offices, youth organizations, and child care facilities) with higher densities (number per 1,000 people) than the state average. Areas are zip codes; grey areas are zip codes with no parents in our sample. Data are from the National Neighborhood Data Archive (NaNDA) for 2015.

Turning to neighborhood characteristics, we see several spatial patterns. First, median household income shown in Figure 5 tends to be highest in areas around urban centers. Very few zip codes have median incomes below $15,000, but there are several with average incomes below $40,000; these are often more rural areas. A few zip codes within Milwaukee also have low median incomes. For our neighborhood amenities index, shown in Figure 6, we present a map reflecting the count of amenities, where the zip code density for each of our family well-being amenities (e.g., banks, supermarkets or grocery stores, doctors' offices, youth organizations, and daycare facilities) is greater than its respective state average. Higher numbers, presented in the map as darker colors, denote better-resourced neighborhoods. Notably, the map reveals that most zip codes tend to have at least one amenity that is more available to that community than its average availability in the state. However, amenity availability patterns tend to align with urbanicity, where parents in more urban and suburban neighborhoods tend to have more resource availability relative to the state average.

Altogether, our descriptive analyses reveal numerous insights about Wisconsin parents interacting with the child support system. Not only do parents themselves have diverse socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds, but the communities they live in also vary widely across multiple dimensions. Further, our new distance measures between NCPs and their child support agencies, and between NCPs and CPs, indicate substantial heterogeneity in NCP proximity to both their children and the case management office. Next, we focus on how diversity of socioeconomic contexts and neighborhood-level resource availability may impact NCP child support compliance. These characteristics may be associated with unequal economic opportunities and parenting support for NCPs.

Model Results for Child Support Compliance

We begin by modeling compliance rates as a function of standard NCP socioeconomic and demographic characteristics (Model 1). Compliance rates are lower among non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic NCP fathers, compared to non-Hispanic white NCP fathers (B = -0.13 and -0.07, respectively, $p < 0.001$). Compared to NCP fathers without a high school diploma, having a high school degree (or more) is positively associated with compliance by about 2 percentage points, though these increases fail to reach significance. NCP earnings matter a great deal: for every additional $1,000 of earnings, compliance increases by about two percentage points ($p < 0.001$) and having no earnings at all is associated with a decline in compliance of about 4 percentage points relative to those with any earnings ($p < 0.05$).

In Model 2, we add CP mother characteristics and the age of the child at the time of the order. NCP fathers' race and earnings remain important predictors of compliance in these models. We also see that as the child gets older the compliance rate declines (e.g., a five percentage-point decline in compliance for a one-year-old child compared to a newborn ($p < 0.001$). A longer time lag between birth and order could occur for a variety of reasons, ranging from difficulty identifying or locating the father, to parents initially having their own informal arrangements, to parents who are partnered and subsequently split up and seek support. For example, many parents enter the formal child support system as a condition of enrolling in and receiving some forms of public assistance. The race/ethnicity and wages of the CP mother also modestly matter for compliance rates; with non-white mothers associated with lower compliance rates compared to white mothers and mothers' earnings positively associated with compliance, though the magnitudes of these coefficients are smaller than the NCP coefficients.

Model 3 adds our distance and mobility measures. In these models, the same NCP and CP individual-level characteristics emerge as strong predictors of compliance (e.g., race/ethnicity, earnings, and child age). We also see mixed evidence regarding the importance of parents' distance to each other and NCPs' distances to their child support agencies. Compared to NCPs who live in the same zip code as the CP, there are neither substantive nor significant differences in compliance for those who live up to twenty miles apart, a range that encompasses more than 80% of all couples in our sample; compliance is lower by about 5 percentage points for the 10% of parents living 20–50 miles apart ($p < .05$); and the coefficient becomes positive but not significant at the farthest distances. In contrast, as NCPs live further from their child support agency, compliance increases. For parents living between 10 to 15, 15 to 20, and 20 to 50 miles, there is a suggestive increase of about 4 percentage points, relative to NCPs living within two miles, though these increases are not significant save for one category (10–15 miles, $p < 0.01$). For the fathers living farthest away (over 50 miles) there is a roughly 5% decline in compliance ($p < .05$). Together, these findings suggest that while distance may matter on the margins, for the typical NCP father it does not substantively impact compliance and the relationships we do observe do not suggest a clear pattern, at least when modeling alongside individual characteristics.

Model 3 also shows that moving matters for compliance: compliance is lower by seven percentage points when NCP fathers change neighborhoods during the first year ($p < .001$), and by about two percentage points when CP mothers move ($p < .01$), all else equal. Thus, residential instability of both the NCP father and CP mother are negatively associated with child support compliance.

Finally, our last model (Model 4) also includes measures of neighborhood socioeconomic and built environment characteristics. The coefficients on individual-level characteristics remain stable and the general findings for our distance and mover measures remain broadly consistent with the prior model, though we no longer see the counterintuitive significant increase in compliance at moderate relative to low distances to CSAs. After accounting for these factors, neighborhood contexts matter only modestly and for a few key measures. First, rurality of the community is associated with an increase in compliance: compliance is close to four percentage points higher for NCPs living in fuller rural as compared to fully urban areas (p < 0.05), net of other individual and contextual factors. The median household income of the neighborhood also matters; for every additional $1,000 in median household income, compliance increases by about one percentage point (p < 0.05). Meanwhile, unemployment rates, rent burden, and the racial composition of the community matter little. Amenities, too, matter little. Whereas we expected public transportation and (in particular) family well-being amenities to shape compliance by easing economic opportunity for NCPs, we don't see evidence of this mechanism at play in these initial models.

However, when we stratify models by NCP fathers' race and ethnicity, there are some interesting differences, particularly in the role of residential mobility and neighborhoods. Looking first at our distance measures, we find little evidence of systematic patterns. Regarding distance between parents, coefficients tend to be positive but small in magnitude and mostly not significant for white NCP fathers (other than fathers 5 to 10 miles from the mother having a 3 percentage point compliance advantage over those who live the closest); negative, somewhat larger in magnitude, but generally not significant for Black NCP fathers, though those who live 15–20 miles away have compliance that is 8 percentage points lower (p < .05), and those 20–50

miles 7 points lower but not significant; and small with varying signs among Hispanic fathers. Regardless of NCP race/ethnicity, distance to a child support agency is never significant, though coefficients are uniformly negative and consistent with a four- to five- point reduction in compliance among fathers at least 50 miles from their CSA among each of the groups, similar to the magnitude of the significant coefficient in the full-sample model from Table 4. Moving to a new neighborhood (i.e., change in zip code) is associated with lower compliance across race and ethnicity, though considerably more for white NCP fathers (a 10 percentage point decline, $p <$ .001) than Hispanic (a 6 point decline, $p < .05$) or Black fathers (a 4 point decline, $p < .001$). Finally, looking at neighborhood characteristics, we see mixed results by NCP race and ethnicity. The associations between rurality, median household income and compliance in Table 4 are largely driven by their associations among non-Hispanic white NCPs, in particular—with compliance 9 percentage points higher in fully rural as compared to fully urban zip codes—and increasing by 1.75 percentage points for each $1,000 increase in median household income. Neither rurality nor median income has a significant association with compliance rates for Black and Hispanic NCPs. Similarly, our index of family well-being amenities is substantively and often significantly associated with compliance for white NCPs but not Black and Hispanic NCPs, with increases in compliance ranging from three to ten percentage points, with the largest coefficient for neighborhoods with above-average availability of all amenities. For Black NCPs, increases in the index are positively associated with compliance, but estimates are small in magnitude and fail to reach significance. For Hispanic NCPs, the increasing availability of these amenities are negatively (but not significantly) associated with compliance. The availability of public transit is, counterintuitively, negatively associated with compliance among Hispanic NCPs, reducing compliance by about seven percentage points ($p < 0.05$).

Table 4: OLS Regression of Noncustodial Fathers' Compliance with Child Support Order in First Year

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Economic and Demographic Characteristics				
Father's Race (Ref = Non–Hispanic White)				
Non–Hispanic Black	-0.132***	-0.0980***	-0.0919***	-0.0841***
	(0.00871)	(0.0116)	(0.0116)	(0.0122)
Hispanic	-0.0666***	-0.0612***	-0.0622***	-0.0576***
	(0.0126)	(0.0137)	(0.0136)	(0.0140)
Other	-0.0935***	-0.0742***	-0.0724***	-0.0695***
	(0.0139)	(0.0148)	(0.0146)	(0.0148)
Father's Education (Ref = Less than High School)				
High School Graduate	0.0158	0.0135	0.0136	0.0118
	(0.00843)	(0.00844)	(0.00837)	(0.00840)
More than High School	0.0246	0.0263	0.0318	0.0323
	(0.0206)	(0.0205)	(0.0204)	(0.0205)
Father's Age	-0.000596	-0.000154	-0.00000898	0.0000433
	(0.000589)	(0.000809)	(0.000797)	(0.000798)
Father's Earnings ($1,000)	0.0182***	0.0182***	0.0175***	0.0175***
	(0.00129)	(0.00126)	(0.00127)	(0.00127)
Father's Earnings Squared ($1,000)	-0.000126***	-0.000125***	-0.000121***	-0.000122***
	(0.0000206)	(0.0000202)	(0.0000202)	(0.0000203)
No Earnings	-0.0371*	-0.0318	-0.0407*	-0.0422**
	(0.0166)	(0.0164)	(0.0163)	(0.0163)
Months from Birth to Order (Ref = Less than 6 Months)				
6–12 Months		-0.0194	-0.0195	-0.0184
		(0.0101)	(0.0101)	(0.0101)
12–24 Months		-0.0482***	-0.0467***	-0.0464***
		(0.0116)	(0.0115)	(0.0115)
24–36 Months		-0.0494***	-0.0478***	-0.0472***
		(0.0131)	(0.0130)	(0.0130)
More than 36 Months		-0.0363**	-0.0320**	-0.0318**
		(0.0115)	(0.0120)	(0.0120)
Mother's Race (Ref = Non-Hispanic White)				
Non-Hispanic Black		-0.0530***	-0.0529***	-0.0469***
		(0.0117)	(0.0120)	(0.0126)
Hispanic		-0.00490	-0.00370	0.00135
		(0.0139)	(0.0139)	(0.0141)
Other		-0.0481**	-0.0422**	-0.0402**
		(0.0151)	(0.0149)	(0.0150)
Mother's Education (Ref = Less than High School)				
High School Graduate		0.00572	0.00313	0.00284
		(0.0104)	(0.0103)	(0.0103)
More than High School		-0.00626	-0.00938	-0.00893
		(0.0144)	(0.0143)	(0.0143)
Mother's Age		-0.000122	-0.000203	-0.000203
		(0.00101)	(0.000997)	(0.001000)
Mother's Earnings ($1,000)		0.00124	0.000558	0.000493
		(0.000658)	(0.000646)	(0.000645)
Mother's Earnings Squared ($1,000)		-0.0000379**	-0.0000284*	-0.0000276*
		(0.0000117)	(0.0000112)	(0.0000111)
No Earnings		-0.000388	-0.00627	-0.00667
		(0.0124)	(0.0122)	(0.0122)
Distance and Mobility Measures				
Distance Between Parents (Ref = Same Zip Code)				
Less than 2 Miles			0.00105	0.00677
			(0.0245)	(0.0250)
2–5 Miles			-0.00571	-0.00211
			(0.0117)	(0.0120)
5–10 Miles			-0.00979	-0.0104
			(0.0106)	(0.0108)
10–15 Miles			0.00308	0.00238
			(0.0137)	(0.0137)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
15–20 Miles			-0.0143	-0.0166
			(0.0189)	(0.0190)
20–50 Miles			-0.0474*	-0.0440*
			(0.0199)	(0.0201)
Over 50 Miles			0.0301	0.0233
			(0.0235)	(0.0274)
Father's Distance from Child Support Office **(Ref = Less than 2 Miles)**				
2–5 Miles			0.00296	0.00386
			(0.0132)	(0.0139)
5–10 Miles			0.0103	0.00918
			(0.0137)	(0.0147)
10–15 Miles			0.0445**	0.0262
			(0.0163)	(0.0176)
15–20 Miles			0.0370	0.0214
			(0.0202)	(0.0211)
20–50 Miles			0.0412	0.0289
			(0.0216)	(0.0222)
Over 50 Miles			-0.0549*	-0.0546*
			(0.0223)	(0.0272)
Father Moved within First Year of Order			-0.0713***	-0.0720***
			(0.00792)	(0.00796)
Mother Moved within First Year of Order			-0.0225**	-0.0219**
			(0.00819)	(0.00820)
Fathers' Neighborhood Characteristics				
Rurality (Ranges 0–1)				0.0395*
				(0.019)
Unemployment (Ranges 0–1)				0.154
				(0.244)
Median Household Income ($1,000)				0.00886*
				(0.00411)
Median Rent Burden (Ranges 0–1)				0.123
				(0.115)
Share Non-Hispanic White (Ranges 0–1)				0.0124
				(0.0318)
Any Public Transportation				-0.0155
				(0.0111)
Zip Code has at Least One High-Speed Internet Provider				0.00582
				(0.0117)
Neighborhood Amenities Index (Ref = 0)				
1				0.0121
				(0.0183)
2				0.00337
				(0.0181)
3				0.0162
				(0.0184)
4				0.000152
				(0.0195)
5				0.0398
				(0.0262)
Liquor Stores per 1,000 People				0.0151
				(0.0353)
Convenience Stores per 1,000 People				-0.0207
				(0.0245)
Observations	**7,509**	**7,509**	**7,509**	**7,509**

Notes: Sample is nonmarital births in Wisconsin during 2015 with formal child support orders, for whom fathers are the noncustodial parent and both parents reside in Wisconsin at time of order. Standard errors in parentheses. Model also includes indicators for missing education, missing mover status for each parent, and for the size (area) of the zip code. * = p < .05; ** = p < .01; *** = p < .001.

These results suggest potential differences in the quality of amenities and/or differential access to these amenities by NCP race. More generally, differences may show how more-advantaged neighborhoods align with better outcomes for different segments of the population, or to the predictive value of our index in rural areas (where a large segment of white NCPs reside) as compared to urban areas. We are unable to evaluate these possibilities directly using this data, but future research could consider more nuanced neighborhood measures to better understand intersections between parent race, neighborhood contexts, and child support compliance. Nevertheless, the results in Table 5 help explain some of the null findings we see in Table 4. Specifically, aggregate models of neighborhood contexts may obscure important racial differences, particularly regarding neighborhood amenities.

Table 5: OLS Regression on Father Compliance w/ Child Support Order in First Year by Race and Ethnicity

	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Hispanic
Economic and Demographic Characteristics			
Father's Education (Ref = Less than High School)			
High School Graduate	0.0500***	0.000973	-0.0139
	(0.0138)	(0.0127)	(0.0241)
More than High School	0.0646	0.0230	-0.0588
	(0.0348)	(0.0272)	(0.0721)
Father's Age	-0.00106	-0.000674	-0.000169
	(0.00123)	(0.00128)	(0.00262)
Father's Earnings ($1,000)	0.0139***	0.0306***	0.0248***
	(0.00138)	(0.00140)	(0.00195)
Father's Earnings Squared ($1,000)	-0.0000918***	-0.000326***	-0.000252***
	(0.0000196)	(0.0000268)	(0.0000318)
No Earnings	0.0148	-0.0159	0.0000547
	(0.0279)	(0.0188)	(0.0426)
Months from Birth to Order (Ref = Less than 6 Months)			
6–12 Months	-0.0164	-0.0239	-0.0144
	(0.0151)	(0.0159)	(0.0322)
12–24 Months	-0.0577***	-0.0501**	-0.0655
	(0.0168)	(0.0188)	(0.0374)
24–36 Months	-0.0302	-0.0563**	-0.104*
	(0.0193)	(0.0212)	(0.0408)
More than 36 Months	-0.0305	-0.0194	-0.0273
	(0.0166)	(0.0210)	(0.0356)
Mother's Race (Ref = Non-Hispanic White)			
Non-Hispanic Black	-0.00866	-0.0301	-0.0959*
	(0.0299)	(0.0172)	(0.0413)
Hispanic	-0.00113	-0.00695	0.00489
	(0.0247)	(0.0265)	(0.0266)
Other	-0.0137	-0.0265	0.0353
	(0.0246)	(0.0314)	(0.0536)
Mother's Education (Ref = Less than High School)			

	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Hispanic
High School Graduate	0.0154	-0.00447	0.00324
	(0.0171)	(0.0153)	(0.0281)
More than High School	0.0250	-0.0150	-0.0458
	(0.0226)	(0.0222)	(0.0424)
Mother's Age	-0.000851	0.000390	-0.000652
	(0.00153)	(0.00159)	(0.00308)
Mother's Earnings ($1,000)	0.000113	-0.000570	0.00302
	(0.000908)	(0.000960)	(0.00268)
Mother's Earnings Squared ($1,000)	-0.0000172	-0.0000145	-0.0000325
	(0.0000144)	(0.0000161)	(0.0000575)
No earnings	-0.00411	-0.00595	0.0666
	(0.0181)	(0.0199)	(0.0386)
Distance and Mobility Measures			
Parent Distance from Each Other (Ref = Same Zip Code)			
Less than 2 Miles	0.0728	0.0219	-0.0922
	(0.0897)	(0.0315)	(0.0623)
2–5 Miles	-0.0181	-0.0190	0.0458
	(0.0251)	(0.0161)	(0.0341)
5–10 Miles	0.0333*	-0.0261	-0.00943
	(0.0160)	(0.0173)	(0.0318)
10–15 Miles	0.0341	-0.00239	0.0146
	(0.0177)	(0.0261)	(0.0450)
15–20 Miles	0.0193	-0.0841*	-0.0365
	(0.0226)	(0.0428)	(0.0633)
20–50 Miles	0.00204	-0.0735	-0.0398
	(0.0236)	(0.0493)	(0.0765)
Over 50 Miles	0.0171	0.00795	0.00213
	(0.0360)	(0.0547)	(0.0961)
Father's Distance from Child Support Office (Ref = Less than 2 Miles)			
2–5 Miles	0.00379	-0.0153	0.0269
	(0.0245)	(0.0224)	(0.0371)
5–10 Miles	-0.0148	0.00692	0.0302
	(0.0246)	(0.0248)	(0.0416)
10–15 Miles	0.0275	-0.0168	0.0881
	(0.0256)	(0.0343)	(0.0555)
15–20 Miles	0.000906	0.0940	0.101
	(0.0277)	(0.0585)	(0.0759)
20–50 Miles	-0.0145	0.0333	0.0445
	(0.0292)	(0.0516)	(0.0752)
Over 50 Miles	-0.0490	-0.0395	-0.0464
	(0.0367)	(0.0548)	(0.0914)
Father Moved within First Year of Order	-0.0964***	-0.0403***	-0.0629*
	(0.0125)	(0.0122)	(0.0254)
Mother Moved within First Year of Order	-0.0209	-0.0216	-0.00434
	(0.0127)	(0.0123)	(0.0260)
Fathers' Neighborhood Characteristics			
Rurality (Ranges 0–1)	0.0870***	0.0429	-0.0751
	(0.0236)	(0.0630)	(0.0826)
Unemployment (Ranges 0–1)	0.812	-0.105	-0.252
	(0.419)	(0.379)	(0.769)
Median Household Income ($1,000)	0.0175**	-0.00145	0.0136
	(0.00550)	(0.00796)	(0.0132)
Median Rent Burden (Ranges 0–1)	0.0361	-0.191	-0.664
	(0.166)	(0.211)	(0.418)
Share Non-Hispanic White (Ranges 0–1)	-0.0272	-0.0281	-0.157
	(0.0625)	(0.0550)	(0.0980)
Any Public Transportation	0.00340	-0.00407	-0.0784*
	(0.0159)	(0.0207)	(0.0331)
Zip Code Has at least 1 High-Speed Internet Provider	0.00943	-0.0278	0.0329

	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Hispanic
	(0.0142)	(0.0273)	(0.0409)
Neighborhood Amenities Index (Ref = 0)			
1	0.0570**	0.00798	-0.101
	(0.0221)	(0.0410)	(0.0561)
2	0.0316	0.0383	-0.0916
	(0.0223)	(0.0404)	(0.0586)
3	0.0488*	0.0159	-0.0525
	(0.0229)	(0.0394)	(0.0607)
4	0.0316	0.00157	-0.103
	(0.0271)	(0.0402)	(0.0627)
5	0.104**	0.0231	-0.0638
	(0.0381)	(0.0467)	(0.0927)
Liquor Stores per 1,000 People	0.0158	0.179	-0.158
	(0.0335)	(0.0926)	(0.157)
Convenience Stores per 1,000 People	0.0261	-0.0387	0.0934
	(0.0331)	(0.0839)	(0.109)
Observations	**3,040**	**2,942**	**847**

Notes: Sample is nonmarital births in Wisconsin during 2015 with formal child support orders, for whom fathers are the noncustodial parent and both parents reside in Wisconsin at time of order. Standard errors in parentheses. Model also includes indicators for missing education and missing mover status for each parent, and for the size (area) of the zip code. $*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001$.

Finally, in contrast to the lack of any evident link between neighborhood attributes and compliance for Black NCPs, we find that the link between their own earnings and compliance is considerably higher than for white NCPs. Each $1,000 increase in earnings is associated with a 3 percentage point increase in compliance, slightly higher than the 2.5 point increase for Hispanic households and considerably higher than the 1.4% increase for white households.

DISCUSSION

The extant literature on child support outcomes has tended to focus, broadly, on how outcomes are shaped by socioeconomic characteristics of parents, family dynamics, and child support policy. At the same time, there is increasing interest in a more holistic approach to thinking about child support-involved families, including the kinds of barriers noncustodial fathers face and the appropriate role of child support agencies in supporting families. Here, we have explored how utilizing information about where child support-involved parents live can extend our understanding of their circumstances and, potentially, their child support outcomes.

To do this, we have used longitudinal administrative data that provides granular information about where parents live over time, and we have examined parents' mobility, proximity to each other and child support agencies, neighborhood attributes, and whether and how these factors relate to compliance with child support obligations.

We find that NCP fathers and CP mothers live in neighborhoods that are broadly similar in terms of socioeconomic factors and the built environment, despite small differences on many dimensions. Compared to the state as a whole, NCP fathers live in neighborhoods that are more urban, less economically advantaged, more racially and ethnically diverse—consistent with high racial and ethnic diversity among the NCPs themselves—and vary both positively and negatively in terms of availability of a range of amenities. We find, further, that Black and Hispanic NCPs tend to live in less amenity-rich neighborhoods compared to their white counterparts. This is reflected in higher poverty and unemployment rates, lower median household incomes, and higher rent overall and relative to prevailing incomes. Indeed, the economic disadvantage of typical NCP neighborhoods relative to the state as a whole is almost entirely driven by neighborhoods of Black and Hispanic NCPs. They face lower access to some amenities, though higher access to others, with many differences consistent with the much higher concentration of Black and Hispanic NCP fathers (like the Black and Hispanic population in Wisconsin overall) in more urban areas.

We find mixed evidence about the extent to which neighborhood attributes are associated with differences in child support compliance, above and beyond parents' own characteristics, which themselves are consistent with well-established associations between earnings, race, and compliance outcomes. Aspects of both the socioeconomic and built environments appear important among non-Hispanic white NCPs, for whom median household income and greater

access to a range of amenities show fairly robust positive associations with compliance, as does living in a rural area. In contrast, no neighborhood characteristics are significantly or substantively linked to compliance for Black or Hispanic NCPs, other than a counterintuitive association between public transportation and compliance among Hispanic NCPs. Regarding our neighborhood amenity index, while it is comprised of five broadly relevant factors, we view it as a proxy for better-resourced neighborhoods more so than simply a tally of a limited subset of amenities.

We also find heterogeneity in how far NCPs live from their ex-partners as well as from the CSAs managing their child support orders. While we speculated that living farther from CPs would be linked to lower compliance, the evidence here is inconsistent in that we see occasional significant coefficients but no coherent pattern, albeit some suggestive evidence of declining compliance among Black NCPs as they live farther from the CP. In the case of distances from CSAs, NCPs who live at least 50 miles away do show significantly lower compliance, though the lack of evidence of meaningfully-patterned differences among closer ranges leads us to be cautious in drawing strong conclusions. It may be that increases in online service provision renders distance to CSAs less important for contemporary families; and for parents with stable jobs in the formal labor market, payment is typically routinized via automatic withholding. At the same time, the lower compliance among NCPs who live farthest from their CSAs suggests a potential benefit of county coordination in facilitating service connections, such as to local employment resources, for payers who live in a different county than the one to which they owe support.

An important insight from this work is that residence—and thus neighborhoods—are fluid in this population. We document high rates of residential mobility in the first year among

both CPs and NCPs which, among low-income populations, is often coupled with economic instability (e.g., Kull et al., 2016; Phinney, 2013). Residential moves are more common among NCPs than CPs, and particularly common among both CP and NCP Black parents. Across all models, moving is significantly and negatively linked to compliance, particularly for NCPs and of the largest magnitude for white NCPs. We likely underestimate mobility, however, in that we only capture moves between zip codes, and only moves that are known to the child support system. While we cannot tell from this work whether the move itself contributes to noncompliance or is, rather, a response to economic hardship, the strong negative connection between mobility and economic hardship is notable and warrants further study. These relationships are also consistent with links between self-reported housing instability and lower child support payments as seen in a recent study of low-income noncustodial parents (Berger et al., 2021). We also note that a move as captured in these data implies a change in neighborhood, and thus the neighborhood measures that we use, while reflective of where parents live at the start of the year, do not themselves capture changes over the year.

Our findings have potential implications for child support professionals' understanding of the populations they serve and for policy and practice. While our findings regarding neighborhood attributes and compliance are mixed, the links between overall income level in communities and compliance—and, for white NCPs, the link between neighborhood amenities and compliance—highlights the importance of ensuring that orders are right-sized relative to realistic economic opportunities. In future work, we anticipate incorporating the relative dollar amount of existing orders into our analysis to account for how high-burden orders may interact with economic opportunities to shape compliance. The robust negative association between NCP moves and child support compliance also warrants attention. Clarifying the mechanism(s) by

which mobility is associated with a decline in compliance—specifically, whether hardship and/or child support avoidance prompt moves or whether moves are themselves triggers of noncompliance—will be important to examine. Regardless, our findings confirm that short-term changes in residence are predictive of lower compliance, and information about a change in address might be a valuable time for child support workers to proactively assess whether additional supports for NCPs might be beneficial. In light of the high rate of moving for this population, and its negative association with compliance, efforts to strengthen residential stability may also help.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This report provides a first step in understanding the role of broader neighborhood-level contexts for families engaged in the child support system. There are several future research directions; we highlight two notable avenues. First, residential instability among child support families warrants further study. Results described above follow families for just one year after the start of a child support order, and we see that nearly a third of NCP fathers move zip codes at least once during this period. Projects incorporating a longer time horizon and more precise measures of geography (e.g., Census tract) could more directly evaluate relationships between residential instability and subsequent child support compliance. Second, incorporating measures of distance and built environment characteristics enables a more expansive view of barriers that NCP fathers may face in managing child support. In this paper, we focused on neighborhood contexts and resources that may impact economic opportunities and logistical needs of NCP fathers. More comprehensive indices of neighborhood resources could uncover additional relationships. Specific attention to how neighborhood contexts and parent proximity intersect with custody arrangements, sanctions for non-payment, and the burden of support orders could

provide further insights into the direct and indirect ways that context matters for child support outcomes. On a practical note, the increasing availability of public-use neighborhood data makes this type of analysis increasingly possible and relevant. This report highlights the potential of bringing child support research into conversation with a robust, multidisciplinary literature on the role of place in families' economic and social lives.

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APPENDIX

Table A: Neighborhood Characteristics of Non-Custodial Fathers and Custodial Mothers with Different Zip Codes

	Fathers	Mothers		State Average
Demographic / Economic Characteristics				
Non-Hispanic White Residents (% of Zip Code)	63.5%	65.1%	***	80.8%
Non-Hispanic Black Residents (% of Zip Code)	20.3%	19.2%	***	5.7%
Hispanic/Latinx Residents (% of Zip Code)	9.7%	9.2%	*	7.7%
Non-Hispanic Some Other Race(s) residents (% of Zip Code)	8.8%	8.8%		7.8%
Residents under Age 18 (% of Zip Code)	24.1%	24.1%		21.5%
Residents Aged 18–64 (% of Zip Code)	61.4%	61.0%	***	62.6%
Residents Aged 65 and Older (% of Zip Code)	14.5%	14.9%	***	15.9%
Households with Kids (% of Zip Code)	30.5%	30.6%		28.0%
Residents with College Degree or Higher (% of Zip Code)	24.9%	25.0%		31.4%
Poverty Rate	17.1%	16.5%	***	12.5%
Unemployment Rate	5.4%	5.3%		3.7%
Rural (% of Residents)	19.5%	20.7%	**	25.7%
Median Household Income	$52,958.76	$54,009.79	***	$62,662.70
Median Gross Rent	$833.48	$831.25		$872.79
Median Rent Gross Rent as % of Household Income	29.3%	28.9%	***	27.1%
Built Environment Characteristics				
Public Transit Access in Zip Code (% w/ Any)	56.3%	53.7%	***	44.5%
High Speed Internet Provider (% w/ Any)	78.5%	77.3%		77.0%
Neighborhood Amenities Density Measures (per 1,000 People)				
Bank Branch	0.34	0.35	***	0.41
Supermarket	0.43	0.42	*	0.34
Doctors' Offices	0.65	0.63		0.70
Youth Organizations	0.05	0.05		0.04
Daycare Services	0.82	0.80	*	0.57
Liquor Stores	0.11	0.10	*	0.09
Convenience Stores	0.17	0.17		0.16
Neighborhood Index	2.35	2.29	**	2.22
Distance Measures				
Child Support Office Distance from Parent (Miles)	20.9	6.3	***	
Parent's Distance from Each Other (Miles)	21.3	21.3		
Moved within First Year of Order	38.6%	32.3%	***	
Observations		5,190		

Note: Asterisks denote significant differences between fathers and mothers: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$