

Child Support

LYDIA SCOON-ROGERS

A large percentage of families with children were families where only one of the child(ren)'s parents were present in the home.

As of spring 1992, 11.5 million women and men were custodial parents of children under 21 years old whose other parent was absent from the household. The families they maintained comprised almost one-third of all families with own, never-married children under 21 years old. The majority (9.9 million) of custodial parents were women, but a significant number of men provided homes for own children whose mothers were absent (1.6 million).

Custodial mothers had higher child support award rates and payment rates than did custodial fathers.

In the spring of 1992, 54 percent or 6.2 million women and men had awards for child support. Specifically, 56 percent of custodial mothers had awards, compared with 41 percent of custodial fathers. While 6.2 million custodial parents had awards for child support, only 5.3 million of them were supposed to receive payments in 1991 — about

4.9 million women and 0.4 million men.¹ Of those women due payments, 76 percent actually received some payment (all or part). The receipt rate for custodial fathers was somewhat lower, 63 percent.

Custodial mothers and fathers had some similar reasons for not being awarded child support and some different reasons.

Both custodial mothers and custodial fathers stated one of the two most important reasons they were not awarded child support was they did not pursue an award (approximately one-third of each stated this). The other most important reason for custodial mothers was that they were unable to locate the father (20 percent), and for custodial fathers, it was that they did not want an award (34 percent).²

¹Reasons why support payments were not supposed to be received in 1991 included: payments were awarded after the 1991 income year, death of the absent parent occurred, or the child awarded payments was age-ineligible in 1991.

²There was no significant difference in the percentages of custodial mothers and fathers each stating "did not pursue an award" as a reason and the percentage of fathers stating "did not want an award."

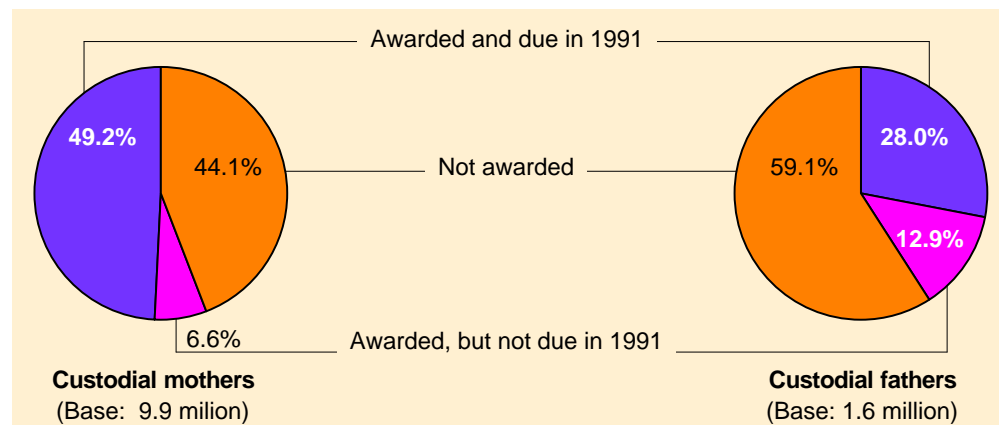
Women received more child support income than men.

The mean child support amount received by custodial mothers receiving some or all child support due in 1991, \$3,011, was approximately one-third more than that received by their male counterparts, \$2,292. On average, 17 percent of these custodial mothers' income came from child support payments, compared with 7 percent of custodial fathers' income.

While both custodial mothers and fathers benefited from child support, these payments did not help custodial mothers' total money income catch up with that of custodial fathers.

Custodial mothers who received at least some portion of child support payments had a higher income on average, (\$18,144) than those that did not receive any payments due them (\$14,602) and those not awarded payments (\$10,226). Similarly, the mean income of custodial fathers who received child support payments was \$33,579, compared with about \$26,000 for both custodial fathers that did not receive any

Award of Child Support Payments for Custodial Parents: Spring 1992



payments due them and custodial fathers not awarded payments (\$25,184 and \$27,578, respectively).

A sizeable amount of child support went unpaid in 1991.

The aggregate amount of child support received was \$11.9 billion in 1991, 33 percent or \$5.8 billion short of the \$17.7 billion due. Custodial mothers received practically all of it — \$11.2 billion — while custodial fathers received \$0.6 billion.

Even though women had higher award rates and received more child support than their male counterparts, they were still more likely to be in poverty.

Women living with children of noncustodial fathers were approximately 2 1/2 times more likely to be in poverty than their male counterparts. Approximately 35 percent of custodial mothers had family incomes below the official poverty definition, compared with 13 percent of custodial fathers. Even if the full amount of child support had been received, it would have had little impact on the poverty statuses of custodial mothers and fathers.

Some child support awards included health benefits.

Of the 6.2 million parents awarded child support payments as of 1992, 41 percent had health insurance benefits included in their child support award. In 1991, only 69 percent of noncustodial parents who were required to provide health insurance benefits as part of the child support award actually did. These percentages did not vary significantly by sex of the custodial parent. Health insurance benefits were also provided to 18 percent of the 3.6 million custodial parents who were not required to receive it as part of a child support award.

Paying child support was more common among noncustodial parents that had provisions to make contact with their children than noncustodial parents that had no provisions.

Approximately 4.4 million noncustodial parents with visitation privileges and/or joint custody owed child support in 1991. Seventy-nine percent of these noncustodial parents paid all or part of it. By comparison, 56 percent of the 0.9 million noncustodial parents

having no visitation or joint custody provisions but owing child support paid all or part.

Custodial mothers and fathers often had different socioeconomic characteristics.

A larger percentage of custodial fathers were White, compared with custodial mothers (85 and 70 percent, respectively). The percentage of custodial fathers that were Black was 12 percent, smaller than the percentage of custodial mothers that were Black, 27 percent. The percentages of Hispanic custodial mothers and Hispanic custodial fathers were not significantly different (about 10 percent).³

In 1992, about one-half of custodial fathers (46 percent) were currently married, compared with over one-fourth of custodial mothers (27 percent). Custodial mothers were approximately 3 1/2 times as likely to be never-married as custodial

³Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race. These data do not include the population of Puerto Rico. There was no significant difference between the percentage of Black custodial fathers and Hispanic custodial fathers.

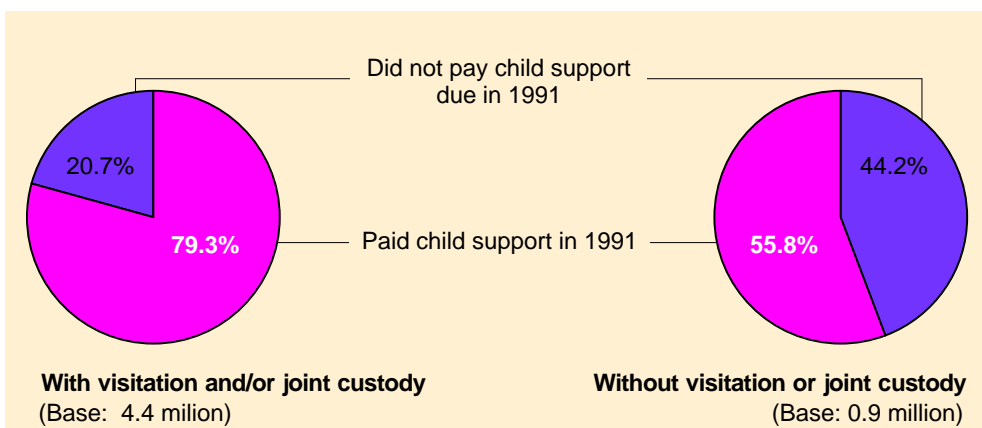
fathers — 26 and 8 percent, respectively. Custodial fathers and mothers were equally as likely to be divorced or separated, about 46 percent.⁴

Fathers with children whose mothers were absent from the home were typically older than their female counterparts. Approximately half (46 percent) of custodial fathers were 40 years old and over, compared with 24 percent of custodial mothers. While custodial mothers were more likely to be under 30 years old (31 percent) than custodial fathers (11 percent), the percentages of custodial fathers and mothers under 18 years old were not statistically different — about 1 percent for each.

Custodial fathers were twice as likely to have received a bachelor's degree as their female counterparts. Approximately 19 percent of custodial fathers received at least a bachelor's degree, compared with 10 percent of custodial mothers. However, over half of both custodial fathers (56 percent) and mothers (64 percent) had not attended college.

⁴There was no significant difference between the percentages of currently-married custodial mothers and never-married custodial mothers. In addition, there was no significant difference between the percentage of currently-married custodial fathers and the percentages of divorced or separated mothers or fathers.

Child Support Payment Status for Noncustodial Parents With and Without Visitation or Joint Custody: 1991



For Further Information

See: Current Population Reports, Series P60-187, *Child Support for Custodial Mothers and Fathers: 1991*, forthcoming.

Contact: Lydia Scoon-Rogers
Income Statistics Branch
301-763-8576