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Statistical Brief

Support Networks Among American Families

Who's Helping Out and Who's Being Helped: 1988

Not every household is economically self-sufficient. Many need financial help from friends, relatives, and others living elsewhere in order to make ends meet. In 1988, Americans gave \$24 billion in financial support to persons living in other households or in group quarters. These payments included court-ordered alimony and child support payments, as well as voluntary regular and lump-sum payments for living expenses.

Eight million persons (4.5 percent of adults age 18 and over) provided support to 12.4 million persons who didn't live in the same household. Incidentally, children living away at college—even those over age 21—aren't considered members of another household and therefore aren't included in this figure.

This Brief examines characteristics of both providers and recipients of this assistance. Data come from a supplement to the Survey of Income and Program

Participation (SIPP), conducted between October 1988 and January 1989.

Many support more than one person.

Although most providers supported only one person not living in the same household with them, 26 percent supported two; another 11 percent supported three or more. Providers supported 1.55 persons, on average. The average provider contributed \$2,980, 7 percent of their family income.

Men and younger adults are more likely to support children.

About 3 in 4 who provided assistance were men; they were more likely than women to support only children (59 versus 16 percent). Age makes a big difference too. Seventy-three percent of providers age 25 to 44 supported children. Just 34 percent of those aged 45 to 64 did so. Middle-aged providers were more likely to support dependent adult relatives (71 percent), such as elderly parents, grown children, aunts, and uncles.

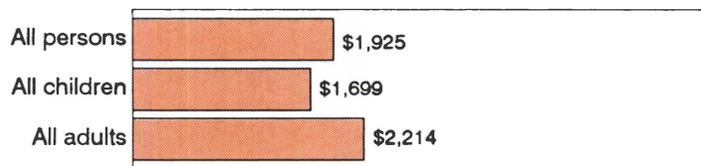


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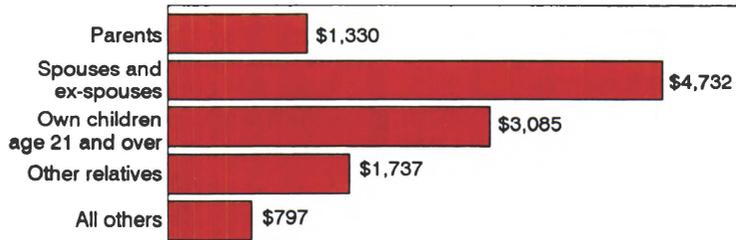
U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and
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Spouses Living Elsewhere and Ex-Spouses Receive the Most Support

Average amount of annual financial support received by recipients, by relationship to the provider: 1988



Detailed Relationship of Adults



Provider Profile

Percent distribution of persons supporting nonhousehold members, by characteristic of provider: 1988

Type of Payments Made

Regular (continuous)	67%
Lump-sum (one-time only)	23%
Both	10%

Race and Hispanic Origin

White	85%
Black	11%
Other	4%
Hispanic origin*	11%

Sex

Men	76%
Women	24%

Age

18-24	4%
25-44	58%
45-64	29%
65 and older	9%

Marital Status

Married, spouse present	48%
Separated	10%
Widowed	5%
Divorced	27%
Never married	10%

Family Income
(excludes providers with no family income)

Under \$15,000	15%
\$15,000 - \$29,999	28%
\$30,000 - \$44,999	22%
\$45,000 and over	34%

Years of School Completed

Less than high school	18%
High school only	31%
College, 1 year or more	51%

Who Providers Supported

Children under 21 years old only	49%
Adults only	45%
Both	6%

* Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Half the providers are fathers supporting their children.

Four million fathers supported 6.3 million children under 21 not living in the same household with them. These men paid, on average, \$2,883—8 percent of their family income. Slightly more than half (52 percent) supported one child only; 32 percent supported two; the remainder provided support to three or more.

Some men provide assistance to former or current wives.

Another large group of providers were men assisting their former or current spouses. There were over 500,000 men who supported their ex-wives; another 200,000 supported current wives who, for various reasons, were living elsewhere. These men paid an average of \$4,583 in 1988, 11 percent of their family income.

More than 4 in 10 recipients are adults.

About 5.4 million adults—44 percent of all recipients—received financial support from someone in another household. Most of these recipients were the provider's parents or grown children. Among those whose relationship could be determined, 33 percent were parents of the provider; another 24 percent were adult children living outside their parents' home.

Other adult recipients included ex-spouses (11 percent), more distantly related relatives such as aunts and uncles (20 percent), current spouses who weren't living in the provider's household (4 percent), and nonrelatives (5 percent). The latter two percentages are not significantly different.

Parents receive financial assistance from their sons.

Fifty-eight percent of parents who received help from their

children but did not live with them received it from their sons. However, there was no significant difference between sons and daughters in the level of payments made (\$1,340 versus \$1,317).

Adults are more likely to receive lump-sum payments.

Overall, persons over age 21 were more likely than those under 21 to receive lump-sum, rather than continuous, payments. For example, 47 percent of adult children receiving payments from their parents received lump-sum payments only, compared to 8 percent of children under age 21.

More information:

Who's Helping Out? Support Networks Among American Families: 1988, Current Population Reports, Series P-70. No. 28. For sale by the U.S. Government Printing Office. Stock No. 803-044-00016-3. \$2.50.

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