

By Lydia Scoon-Rogers

CENSUS BUREAU

P60-196
Issued March 1999

This report presents data on parents who have custody of children whose other parent is absent from the home. It focuses on the child support income that custodial parents with current awards received, and other provisions of awards, such as visitation rights, joint custody, and health insurance.

NOTE: The data in this report were collected prior to the passage of the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996*. The source of data is the April 1996 supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS), with limited comparisons to data from the April 1994 CPS. Changes first implemented in the April 1994 CPS and also used in the April 1996 CPS mean that many of these recent data are not comparable with data from the April 1992 CPS and earlier supplements. Key changes for 1994 and beyond contributing to this break in series were: the inclusion of overdue child support (back support) in the amount of child support due, refinements in the screening of who should respond to the supplement, questionnaire restructuring to computerize the survey, revised terminology referring to types of child support agreements or awards, detailed questions about the amount of child support due, and new questions on pass-through payments (child support collected on behalf of welfare recipients by a state enforcement office, a portion of which is passed through to recipients).

Note also that children, defined for the purposes of this report, are own children under 21 years of age, rather than the usual definition of own children under 18 years of age.

Nearly 3 out of every 10 children live with only one of their parents.

In spring 1996, 22.8 million children under 21 years of age lived with 13.7 million custodial parents while their other parent lived elsewhere. These children comprised about 28 percent of all children under 21 years old living in families.

These children usually live with their mother.

About 11.6 million or 85 percent of the 13.7 million custodial parents were women (see Table 1). Even though women make up the vast majority of custodial parents, 2.1 million men were custodial parents (15 percent).

Many custodial parents (and their families) are poor.

About 30 percent (4.2 million) of custodial parents whose children's other parent was absent from the home had family incomes below

the poverty threshold—compared with 16 percent of all parents. The poverty rate for custodial mothers (33 percent or 3.9 million) was more than twice as high as that for custodial fathers (14 percent or 0.3 million), as shown in Figure 1.

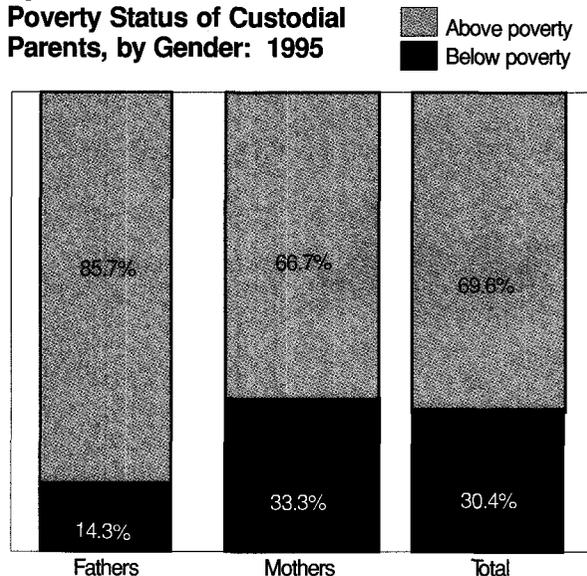
Custodial mothers are more likely to receive child support awards than custodial fathers.

In spring 1996, 58 percent or 8.0 million of the 13.7 million custodial parents had child support awards. Award rates were 61 percent for mothers and 40 percent for fathers.

Most custodial parents with awards have a legal agreement entered through a court, government agency, or other legal body.

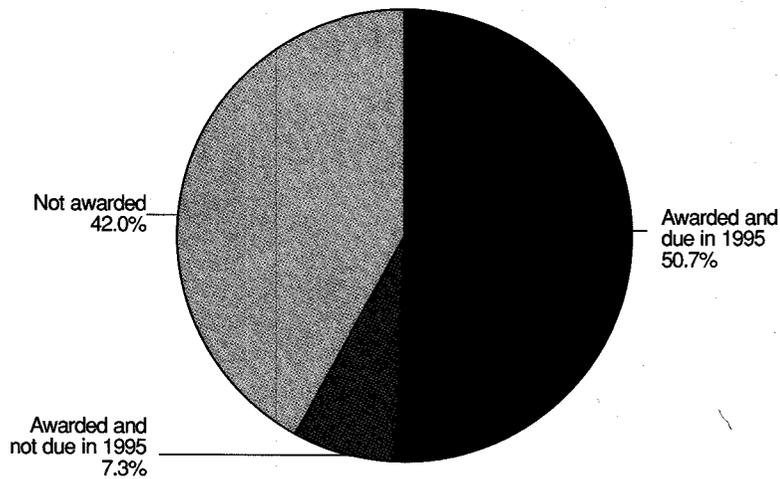
About 7.3 million of the custodial parents with awards (92 percent of the 8.0 million) had a legal agreement established by a court or

Figure 1.
Poverty Status of Custodial Parents, by Gender: 1995



Base: 13.7 million people with children from absent parents (custodial parents), 11.6 million custodial mothers, and 2.1 million custodial fathers.
Source: April 1996 Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Figure 2.
Award of Child Support Payments
(As of spring 1996)

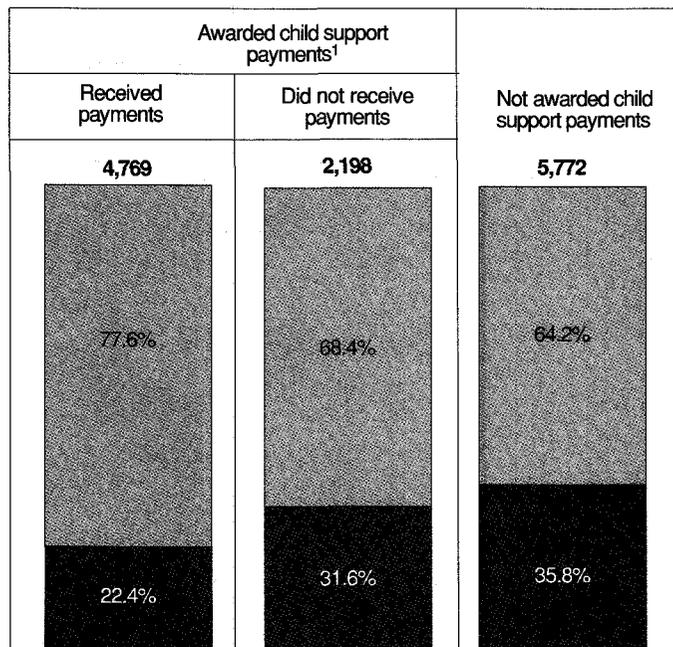


Base: 13.7 million people with children from absent parents (custodial parents).
Source: April 1996 Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Figure 3.
Poverty Status of Custodial Parents, by Child Support Award Status: 1995

(Numbers in thousands)

■ Above poverty
■ Below poverty



¹ Excludes a small number who were awarded payments but were not supposed to receive them in 1995.

Source: April 1996 Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

other government entity in 1996. Another 0.7 million custodial parents had some other, nonlegal agreement or understanding.¹

The remaining 5.8 million custodial parents (42 percent of all custodial parents) and their 9.2 million custodial children had no awards of financial support from the children's other parent in 1995 (see Figure 2).

Custodial mothers are more likely to receive payments due.

About 7.0 million (87 percent) of the 8.0 million custodial parents awarded child support by spring 1996 were supposed to have received child support payments in 1995. Of the 6.2 million *women* due payments, 70 percent received at least a portion of the amount they were owed. The corresponding rate for the 700,000 *men* due payments was 57 percent.²

When men and women receive child support, they receive about the same amount.

Women who received at least a portion of the child support income that was owed received an average of \$3,767 in 1995. The average amount men received was not statistically different, \$3,370.

Nonetheless, mothers receiving child support have much lower total incomes than fathers receiving child support.

In 1995, custodial mothers who received child support that was due had total individual incomes of about three-fourths the amount of custodial fathers receiving child support (\$21,829 compared with \$30,030). On average, these support payments constituted

¹A nonlegal agreement is any written or verbal agreement or understanding that was never approved or ordered by a court or government agency.

²Details may not add to totals because of rounding.

17 percent of the women's income and only 11 percent of the men's.

Differences in a labor force participation and earnings contribute to women's lower income. Approximately 82 percent of custodial mothers receiving child support worked, statistically the same as 87 percent of their male counterparts. However, only 51 percent of custodial mothers receiving child support worked year-round, full-time, compared with 72 percent for custodial fathers. Even for those mothers and fathers who worked year-round, full-time, the average income of custodial mothers was lower. The average income of custodial mothers with child support income that worked year-round, full-time was \$29,672 in 1995, compared with \$36,834 for custodial fathers.

Custodial parents who do not receive child support due have a relatively high poverty rate.

About 32 percent of custodial parents with awards that did not receive any child support due them in 1995 were poor. The percentage of custodial parents without an award that were poor was statistically the same, 36 percent. In contrast, about 22 percent of custodial parents receiving some or all of the child support owed were poor (see Figure 3).

Unpaid child support totalled \$10 billion.

About \$17.8 billion (63 percent) of the \$28.3 billion in child support owed in 1995 was actually paid—\$10.5 billion less than the amount due. Nearly all of the money paid went to custodial mothers (\$16.4 billion). Similarly, almost all of the child support due that was not paid was owed to custodial mothers (\$9.3 billion).

³Custodial parents receiving child support *without current awards* may be those with awards for children past the age of eligibility for payments, those with awards officially starting after 1995, or those with no awards (no legal or nonlegal awards) at all.

Another \$2.5 billion was received in 1995 by some custodial parents *without current awards*.³ In total, \$20.3 billion in child support was received in 1995.

Visitation and joint custody are associated with higher child support payment rates.

About 10.6 million (77 percent) of the 13.7 million parents who *were not* living with their children (noncustodial parents) had joint custody and/or visitation provisions for contact with their children. The 7.0 million noncustodial parents who owed child support in 1995 were more likely to have made payments if they had either joint custody or visitation rights—74 percent with such provisions made payments compared with 35 percent without them (see Figure 4).

Many child support awards include health care insurance.

About 3.3 million noncustodial parents provided health insurance to children living with their custodial parents. Of that number, 1.8 million noncustodial parents did so as required in a child support agreement. Another 200,000 noncustodial parents supplied health insurance even when the agreement stipulated that it was the custodial parent's responsibility.

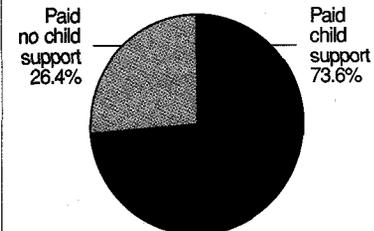
The remaining health insurance coverage provided by noncustodial parents was from 400,000 noncustodial parents where the child support agreement did not have a health benefits requirement for either parent, and from another 900,000 noncustodial parents where no child support award existed.

Custodial parents without legal awards had common reasons why.

Those custodial parents with no child support award and those with a nonlegal award were asked why they did not have a legal child support award. The two most

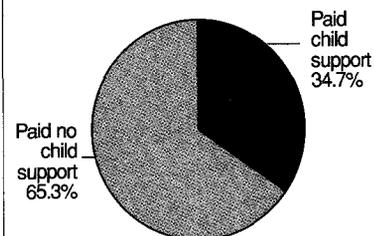
Figure 4.
Child Support Payment Status of Noncustodial Parents With and Without Visitation or Joint Custody: 1995

With Visitation or Joint Custody



Base: 6.0 million noncustodial parents.

Without Visitation or Joint Custody



Base: 0.9 million noncustodial parents.

Source: April 1996 Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of the Census.
Details may not add to total because of rounding.

common reasons stated by custodial parents with no child support award were: that they did not feel the need to have a legal agreement and that the child's other parent could not afford to pay (about 1.5 million custodial parents identified with each reason). The two most common reasons stated by custodial parents with a *nonlegal award* were: that they did not feel the need to have a legal agreement and that the child's other parent provides what he/she can (about 300,000 parents identified with each reason).

Most requests for government assistance are to collect from or establish a legal agreement.

About 5.9 million custodial parents made 13.0 million contacts to a child support enforcement office

The New Child Support Data Series

Data from the April 1992 Current Population Survey (CPS) and earlier years are not comparable to data collected in 1994 and beyond, because of changes starting with the April 1994 CPS questionnaire, as discussed in the "NOTE" at the beginning of the report. Comparisons between data from the April 1994 and 1996 CPS surveys are appropriate, however.

- The total number of custodial parents did not significantly differ between 1994 and 1996 (about 13.7 million each year), nor did the number of custodial mothers (11.5 million in 1994, not statistically different from 11.6 million in 1996) nor the number of custodial fathers (2.2 million in 1994, not statistically different from 2.1 million in 1996).
- Both the number of custodial parents due child support in 1995 and those that received at least some child support payments in 1995 were not statistically different than corresponding 1993 estimates (7.0 million due child support in 1995, comparable to 6.7 million in 1993; and 4.8 million receiving child support in 1995, comparable to 4.6 million in 1993).
- The average amount of child support custodial parents received did not change between 1993 and 1995, after adjusting for inflation.
- One statistically significant change from 1993 to 1995 to note in Table 2 was the increase in the number of custodial parents that received the full amount of child support due — from 2.3 million to 2.7 million custodial parents. The respective percentages increased from 34 percent to 39 percent.

("IV-D office"), department of social services, or other government agency for assistance. The most common reasons for the contacts were to collect child support due (3.4 million contacts), to establish a legal agreement (3.1 million contacts), to receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children or Medicaid (2.4 million contacts), or to locate the other parent (1.6 million contacts).

Focusing on the most prevalent group of custodial parents — custodial mothers — reveals that the likelihood of custodial mothers receiving some or all the child support due them varies across socioeconomic groups.

Poverty status: Of poor women due child support payments in 1995, 62 percent actually received payments. The receipt rate for nonpoor women due payments was 73 percent.

Race and Hispanic origin: The percentage of White women who received child support payments that were due them was 73 percent, compared with 59 percent for Black women. About 58 percent of Hispanic women received some or all child support owed to them.⁴

Age: Women ages 30 and over were more likely to receive child support payments owed them (71 percent) than women under age 30 (65 percent).

Marital status: Of women due child support, the percentage of never-married women who received payments in 1995 was 56 percent, compared with 73 percent for ever-married women.

Educational attainment: Women with at least a bachelor's degree were more likely to receive the child support due them (79 percent) than

⁴The difference between the percentages of Blacks and Hispanics receiving child support owed was not statistically significant. However, because Hispanics may be of any race, readers should use caution in comparing data for Hispanics with data for race groups.

women with less education (68 percent).

About the survey. Data are from the 1994 and 1996 April supplements to the Current Population Survey (CPS). The April supplement is conducted by the Bureau of the Census and sponsored, in part, by the Office of Child Support Enforcement of the Department of Health and Human Services. Changes to the April 1994 and 1996 questionnaires mean that many of these recent data are not comparable to data from the April 1992 CPS and earlier supplements (see "NOTE" at the beginning of the report for more detail).

Accuracy of the estimates. All survey data are subject to sampling variability as well as survey design flaws, respondent classification errors, and data processing mistakes. The Census Bureau has taken steps to minimize errors, and analytical statements have been tested and meet statistical standards. However, because of methodological differences, use caution when comparing these data with data from other sources. In addition, between April 1994 and 1996, a new, 1990 census-based sample design was phased in, and the entire CPS sample was reduced.

Contact Andy Zbikowski, Demographic Statistical Methods Division, at 301-457-4214, or via E-mail at azbikows@census.gov for information on the source of the data and the accuracy of estimates, including the use and computation of standard errors.

More information. Detailed tables are available via the Internet at: www.census.gov/hhes/www/chldsupt.html. For additional questions or comments, contact staff at 301-457-3242.

Table 1.
Child Support Payments Agreed to or Awarded Custodial Parents

(Numbers in thousands. Parents living with own children under 21 years of age whose other parent is absent from the home. Amounts in dollars)

Characteristic	Child support agreed to or awarded									
	Supposed to receive child support payments in 1995									
	Number	Number	Number	Number	Received payments in 1995	Average child support	Average total money income	Received no payments in 1995	Average total money income	Child support not awarded
ALL CUSTODIAL PARENTS										
Total	13,739	7,967	6,966	4,769	\$3,732	\$22,543	2,198	\$17,398	5,772	\$18,927
Standard error	287	222	208	173	\$187	\$546	118	\$577	190	\$591
Custodial mothers	11,634	7,123	6,233	4,353	\$3,767	\$21,829	1,880	\$16,093	4,511	\$14,068
Standard error	265	210	197	165	\$200	\$539	109	\$575	168	\$375
Custodial fathers	2,105	844	733	416	\$3,370	\$30,030	318	\$25,122	1,261	\$36,312
Standard error	116	73	69	52	\$471	\$2,628	45	\$1,917	90	\$2,141
Poverty Status in 1995:										
Family income below poverty level	4,172	2,103	1,761	1,067	\$2,531	\$6,855	694	\$6,043	2,069	\$5,660
Standard error	162	116	106	83	\$510	\$202	67	\$272	115	\$147
Visitation and Joint Custody Arrangements With Non- custodial Parents in 1995:										
Visitation privileges only	7,469	4,683	4,074	2,924	\$3,297	\$21,110	1,150	\$17,460	2,555	\$20,084
Joint custody only ¹	121	95	73	39	(B)	(B)	35	(B)	26	(B)
Visitation and joint custody	3,044	2,089	1,901	1,487	\$4,592	\$26,836	414	\$21,082	908	\$29,404
Neither	3,105	1,100	917	318	\$3,770	\$15,630	599	\$14,767	1,953	\$13,012
CUSTODIAL MOTHERS										
Race and Hispanic origin:										
White	7,970	5,403	4,782	3,488	\$4,100	\$23,067	1,294	\$17,642	2,567	\$15,517
White, not Hispanic origin	6,545	4,709	4,191	3,149	\$4,274	\$23,958	1,041	\$19,083	1,836	\$17,965
Black	3,323	1,509	1,273	749	\$2,116	\$16,614	524	\$12,376	1,814	\$11,916
Hispanic origin ²	1,530	725	613	354	\$2,420	\$14,801	259	\$11,744	806	\$9,567
Current Marital Status:										
Married	2,216	1,516	1,368	981	\$3,546	\$19,968	387	\$16,289	699	\$15,418
Divorced	4,003	3,028	2,692	2,044	\$3,990	\$26,521	648	\$21,257	975	\$19,243
Separated	1,791	942	798	552	\$4,182	\$18,432	246	\$13,157	850	\$14,881
Widowed ³	316	178	163	94	\$9,624	\$21,641	69	(B)	138	\$17,490
Never married	3,309	1,459	1,212	683	\$2,271	\$13,224	530	\$10,862	1,850	\$10,201
Educational Attainment:										
Less than high school diploma	2,419	1,145	945	523	\$2,106	\$9,299	422	\$8,368	1,274	\$7,172
High school graduate	4,396	2,702	2,350	1,586	\$3,179	\$16,827	764	\$15,385	1,694	\$13,531
Some college, no degree	2,545	1,682	1,467	1,085	\$3,932	\$22,505	383	\$16,492	863	\$16,107
Associate degree	953	634	586	459	\$4,899	\$28,484	126	\$22,935	318	\$17,587
Bachelors degree or more	1,322	960	885	700	\$5,338	\$37,109	186	\$31,086	362	\$32,907

(B) Represents base less than 75,000.

¹Joint custody may be physical, legal or both. Legal custody does not necessarily include visitation.

²Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

³Widowed parents have children from a previous marriage that ended in divorce or from a previous nonmarried relationship.

Source: April 1996 Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Table 2.

Comparison of Custodial Parent Population, and Child Support Awarded, Due, and Received: 1993 and 1995

(Numbers in thousands. Parents living with own children under 21 years of age whose other parent is absent from the home. Amounts in dollars)

Characteristic	1993		1995		Difference (1995 less 1993)
	Number ¹	Standard error	Number ²	Standard error	
ALL CUSTODIAL PARENTS					
Total	13,690	286	13,739	287	49
Custodial mothers	11,505	264	11,634	265	129
Custodial fathers	2,184	118	2,105	116	-79
Awarded	7,800	219	7,967	222	167
Due child support	6,685	204	6,966	208	281
Received child support	4,614	170	4,769	173	155
Received full amount of child support	2,280	120	2,718	131	*438
Average child support income received (in 1995 dollars)	\$3,370	\$135	\$3,732	\$187	\$362

*Statistically significant at the 90-percent confidence level

¹As of spring 1994.²As of spring 1996.

Source: April 1994 and 1996 Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

FIRST-CLASS MAIL
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS
PERMIT NO. G-58

U.S. Department of Commerce
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS
Washington, DC 20233
Official Business
Penalty for Private Use, \$300