

Smith

# Child Support for Custodial Mothers and Fathers

1997

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## Consumer Income

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### Current Population Reports

By Timothy Grall

#### Custodial parents numbered 14 million in 1998.

In spring 1998, an estimated 14.0 million parents had custody of 22.9 million children under 21 years of age whose other parent lived elsewhere. Custodial mothers represented 85.1 percent of all custodial parents while the remaining 14.9 percent were fathers, statistically unchanged since 1994. See Table A. About 25.8 percent of all children under 21 living in families had a parent not living in the home.

#### More custodial parents worked, and participation in public programs declined, compared with 1993.

The proportion of custodial parents employed in full-time, year-round jobs increased from 45.6 percent to 51.4 percent between 1993 and 1997.<sup>1</sup> Although the percentage of custodial mothers working full-time increased from 40.9 percent to 46.9 percent during this time, they were still less likely than custodial fathers to be employed full-time (76.9 percent in 1997). An additional 31.7 percent of custodial mothers and 16.8 percent of custodial fathers worked part-time during 1997. See Figure 1.

As employment increased, reliance on public assistance

decreased. The proportion of all custodial parents participating in at least one public assistance program (medicaid, food stamps, public housing or rent subsidy, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Aid to Families With Dependent Children, or general assistance) decreased from 40.7 percent in 1993 to 34.1 percent in 1997. The rate of program participation for custodial mothers declined from 45.2 percent in 1993 to 38.1 percent in 1997. The level for custodial mothers was, however, still about three times that of custodial fathers (which declined from 17.0 percent to 11.0 percent), due in part to the differential rates of employment. See Internet Table 4.

**NOTE:** This report presents data on parents with children whose other parent is not living with the family. It focuses on the child support income that custodial parents reported receiving during the calendar year prior to the survey, as well as other support provided, such as health insurance and noncash support. Because child support is frequently ordered until a child is 21 years old or completes college, this report specifically includes *own* children under 21, rather than the usual definition used by the Census Bureau of children under 18 years of age. Some children living with neither biological parent, such as those living with grandparents or foster parents, may also be eligible for child support but are not included in this report.

The source of data is the 1998 April supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS), which provides information for calendar year 1997. Some of the households in the sample also participated in the 1998 March CPS, when additional supplemental information, such as income and health insurance coverage in the preceding year, was also collected. Changes to the April CPS supplement in 1994 do not allow for comparisons with CPS data collected before that year. These changes included refining the screening of potential respondents, restructuring the questionnaire to accommodate computerizing the survey, revising terminology that refers to types of child support agreements or awards, increasing the detail in questions about the amount of child support due, including overdue child support (back support) in the amount of child support due, and adding new questions on pass-through payments (child support collected for public assistance recipients by a state enforcement office, some of which passes through to recipients). All statements in this report were tested for statistical significance at the 90 percent confidence level. Additional detailed tables are available via the Internet at: <<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/chldsupt.html>>.

<sup>1</sup>The March CPS collects information on income, employment, and program participation during the preceding year.

Demographic Programs

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**Poverty rates declined for custodial parents between 1993 and 1997.**

The proportion of custodial parents and their children living below poverty decreased from 33.3 percent to 28.9 percent between 1993 and 1997. However, the poverty rate for families with a noncustodial parent<sup>2</sup> in 1997 was still much higher than the poverty rate for *all* families with related children (15.7 percent).<sup>3</sup> In 1997, custodial mothers were still three times as likely as custodial fathers to be poor (32.1 percent and 10.7 percent, respectively).<sup>4</sup> See Figure 2.

**Demographic characteristics varied by sex of custodial parents.**

Custodial mothers were as likely to be divorced or to have never married (about 31 percent each), while 21.9 percent were currently married. Among custodial fathers, a much higher proportion were divorced (45.2 percent), 25.2 percent were currently married, and 18.1 percent had never married.<sup>5</sup>

About 56.1 percent of custodial mothers were non-Hispanic White, compared with 74.4 percent of custodial fathers. Over one-quarter of custodial mothers were Black (27.9 percent), compared with 10.2 percent of custodial fathers. The proportions of custodial mothers and custodial fathers who were

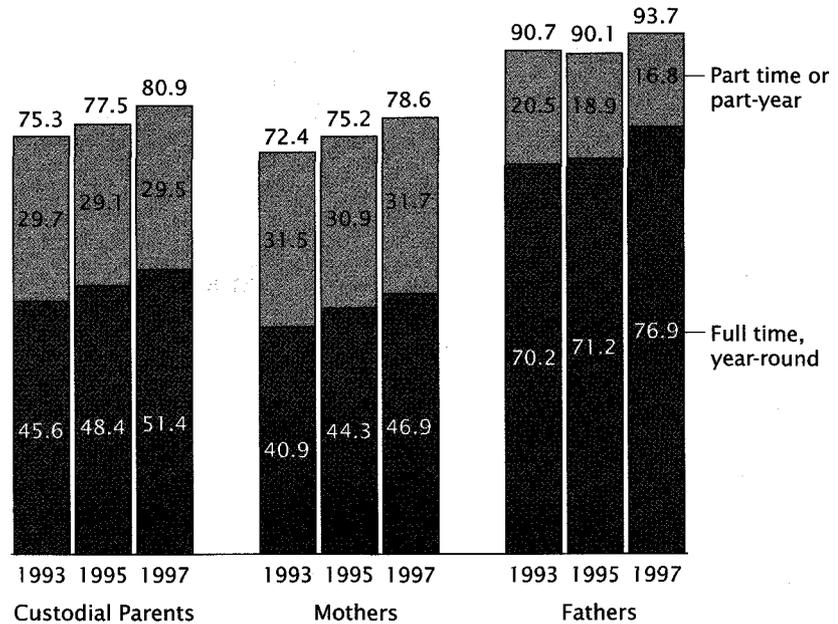
<sup>2</sup>The term noncustodial parent refers to the parent who is not a member of the household in the sample. Some of these parents may, in fact, share custody of their children.

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, *Poverty in the United States: 1998*, Current Population Reports, Series P60-207, March 1997.

<sup>4</sup>The proportion of all custodial parents below poverty in 1997 (28.9 percent) was not significantly different from the proportion of custodial mothers below poverty that same year (32.1 percent).

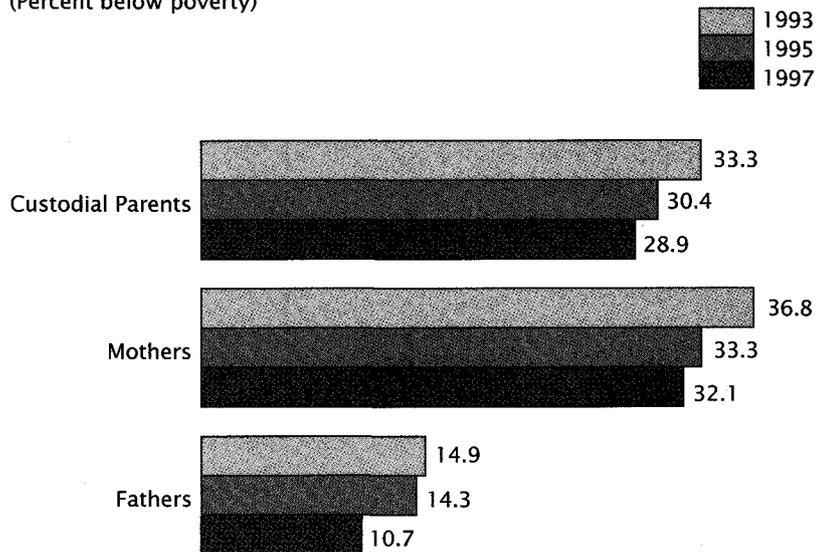
<sup>5</sup>The proportion of custodial mothers currently married (21.9 percent) was not significantly different from the proportion of fathers currently married (25.2 percent).

Figure 1.  
**Employment Status of Custodial Parents: 1993-1997**  
(Percent)



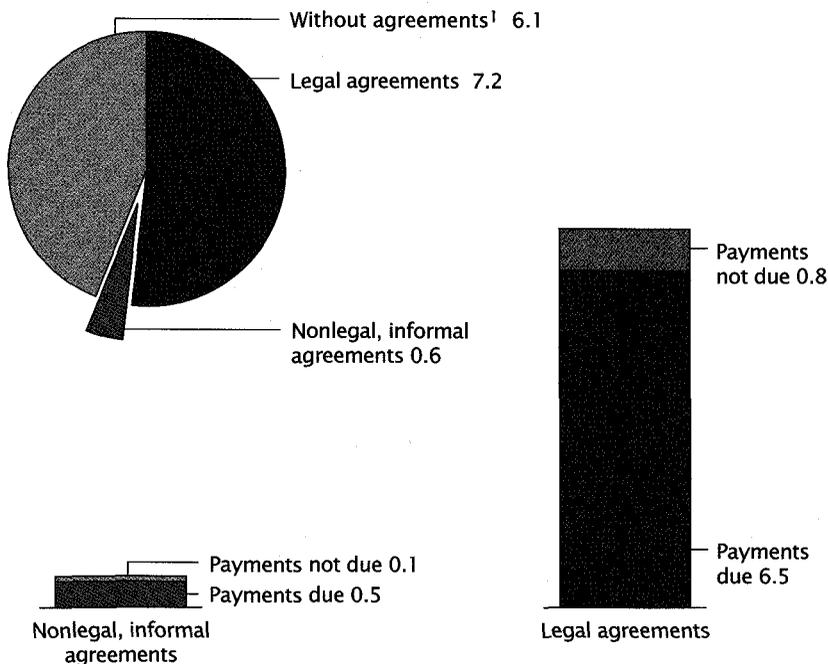
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1994, 1996, and 1998.

Figure 2.  
**Poverty Status of Custodial Parents: 1993-1997**  
(Percent below poverty)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1994, 1996, and 1998.

Figure 3.  
**Award Status of Custodial Parents: 1998**  
 (Numbers in millions)



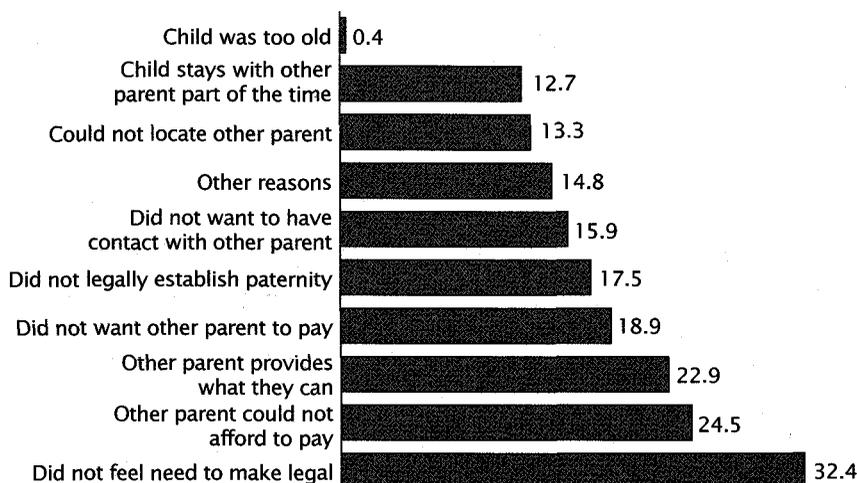
Numbers may not add to totals due to rounding.  
<sup>1</sup>Includes 0.2 million custodial parents with pending agreements.  
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1998.

of Hispanic origin (about 14 percent each) were not significantly different.<sup>6</sup> Over half (56.9 percent) of all custodial parents had only one child; about 44.5 percent of custodial mothers and 34.6 percent of custodial fathers had two or more children living with them. See Internet Table 4.

**About 56 percent of custodial parents had child support agreements in 1998.**

Of the 14.0 million custodial parents in 1998, 7.9 million (56.3 percent) had some type of support agreement or award for their children. Most of these agreements were *considered* legal, (established by a court or other government entity), while 0.6 million were nonlegal informal agreements or understandings.<sup>7</sup> The remaining 6.1 million custodial parents had no child support agreements, or agreements were pending (0.2 million). See Figure 3.

Figure 4.  
**Reasons No Legal Agreement Established for Custodial Parents: 1998**  
 (Percent)



Base: 6.6 million custodial parents without agreements or with informal agreements. Excludes those with pending agreements. Total of percentages exceeds 100 because respondents could list more than one reason.  
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1998.

When 6.6 million custodial parents without agreements or with nonlegal, informal agreements were asked why they did not have a legal agreement, the reason cited most often was that they did not feel the need to get legal and go to court (32.4 percent).<sup>8</sup> Others reasons included that they felt the other parent could not afford to pay or that the other parent provided what they could for support (about 23 percent each). See Figure 4 for a listing of all reasons.

<sup>6</sup>Hispanics may be of any race. The proportion of custodial fathers who were Black (10.2 percent) was not significantly different from the proportion who were Hispanic (12.9 percent).

<sup>7</sup>A nonlegal agreement is any written or verbal agreement or understanding between the parents that was never approved or ordered by a court or government agency.

<sup>8</sup>Excludes 0.2 million custodial parents with pending awards or agreements. Respondents may have given more than one reason.

**Custodial mothers were more likely to be awarded child support than fathers.**

About 59.5 percent of custodial mothers and 38.2 percent of custodial fathers had child support agreed to or awarded to them in spring 1998. Award rates were highest (about two-thirds) for custodial mothers who were either divorced, non-Hispanic White, or had at least some college education. Only about one-half of custodial mothers who were either Black or of Hispanic origin, who had less than a high school diploma, or had never married were awarded child support. See Table B.

**More custodial parents received the full amount of child support due in 1997.**

Of the 7.9 million custodial parents with child support agreements or awards, about 7.0 million were due payments in 1997. Among these parents, about two-thirds (67.4 percent) reported receiving either part or full payment of child support due, statistically unchanged since 1993.

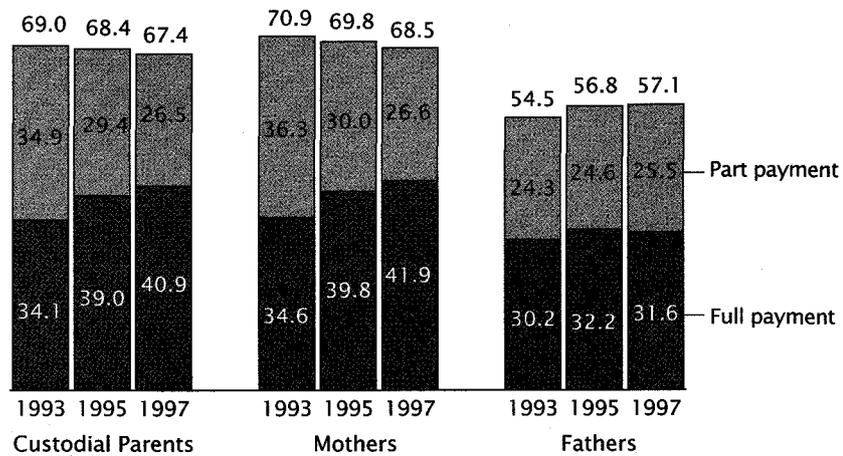
However, the proportion of custodial parents receiving all payments they were due increased from 34.1 percent in 1993 to 40.9 percent in 1997, while the proportion who received some, but not all, of what was due fell from 34.9 percent to 26.5 percent.<sup>9</sup> See Figure 5.

The amount of child support received by custodial mothers who received any payments for 1997 was \$3,700, not statistically different from the average received by custodial fathers (\$3,300). See Internet Table 5.

Payments to the 2.9 million custodial parents receiving the full child

<sup>9</sup>The proportion of custodial parents receiving full child support payments in 1993 (34.1 percent) was not significantly different from the proportion receiving part payments that same year (34.9 percent).

Figure 5.  
**Custodial Parents Receiving Part or Full Child Support Payments Due: 1993-1997**  
(Percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1994, 1996, and 1998.

support obligation they were due averaged \$4,700 in 1997. Among this group, custodial mothers tended to receive more (\$4,800) than custodial fathers (\$4,000). Payments to custodial parents who received some, but not all, child support due averaged \$1,900 that year.<sup>10</sup> See Internet Table 6.

**Custodial parents reported receiving about 59 percent of child support due in 1997.**

The 7.0 million custodial parents with agreements or current awards were due an average of \$4,200 in child support in 1997, creating an aggregate of \$29.1 billion of child support due. Of this amount, about \$17.1 billion (58.8 percent) was received, or \$2,400 per custodial-parent family. Neither the aggregate amount due nor aggregate amount received in 1997 was significantly different from amounts for 1995.

<sup>10</sup>Average child support received by all custodial parents receiving full payments in 1997 (\$4,700) was not significantly different from the average received by custodial mothers that same year (\$4,800).

Overall, custodial mothers received more and a greater proportion of the total due: \$15.8 billion of the \$26.4 billion in support they were due (59.8 percent). Custodial fathers were due \$2.7 billion and reported receiving \$1.3 billion, or 48.1 percent. Custodial parents *without current awards*<sup>11</sup> also reported receiving another \$2.1 billion for child support in 1997. In total, whether due from agreements or not, custodial parents received \$19.2 billion for support of their children in 1997. See Internet Table 1.

**Income was higher and poverty lower for custodial parents receiving all child support due.**

For the 2.9 million custodial parents who reported receiving all child support that they were due, family income averaged \$27,500.

<sup>11</sup>Custodial 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 1997, or those with no awards (no legal or nonlegal awards) at all.

The poverty rate for these families was 15.2 percent. Among the 1.9 million parents receiving part of the child support due, annual average income was \$20,400 and 29.2 percent were poor — not statistically different from the average income and poverty rate of the 6.1 million custodial parents who did not have child support awarded. For the 2.3 million custodial parents due child support but who did not receive any payments, annual family income averaged \$18,400. About 35.7 percent of these custodial-parent families had incomes below the poverty threshold. See Internet Tables 4, 5, and 6.

### **Child support compliance was highly related to joint custody and visitation.**

Among the 7.0 million custodial parents due child support payments in 1997, most (84.3 percent) had arrangements with the noncustodial parents for joint child custody or visitation privileges with their children. About three-quarters (73.3 percent) of these custodial parents due child support received either full or partial payments. The 1.1 million custodial parents due support but without joint custody or visitation arrangements had a much lower rate of receiving support, 35.5 percent. The highest rate of receiving at least some child support (83.2 percent) occurred when the noncustodial parent had both joint custody and visitation privileges. See Table B.

### **Custodial parents with agreements or awards were more likely to receive noncash support.**

Besides financial payments made to custodial parents on behalf of their children, many parents living outside the household also provided assistance in the form of noncash support. Over half (56.4 percent) of all

custodial parents received at least one type of noncash support from the noncustodial parent. This proportion was higher among the 7.9 million custodial parents with agreements or awards (63.2 percent) than among the 6.1 million custodial parents without them (47.5 percent).

The type of noncash support most often received was birthday, holiday, or other gifts (53.6 percent). About 35.0 percent received clothes from the noncustodial parent, 23.1 percent received food or groceries, 18.6 percent had medical expenses paid (other than health insurance), and 8.9 percent had partial or full payments for child care or summer camp. See Internet Table 10.<sup>12</sup>

### **About one-quarter of noncustodial parents provided health insurance for their children.**

Health insurance for children was included in approximately 4.6 million child support agreements or awards in 1997. Of these agreements, the noncustodial parent provided health insurance 43.8 percent of the time. There were also 2.7 million agreements where health insurance was not a provision of the child support award.<sup>13</sup> Even though it was not required by these agreements, 13.5 percent of noncustodial parents still provided health insurance. This was not significantly different from the proportion of noncustodial parents providing health insurance for children of the 6.1 million custodial parents without child support awards. In total, 3.3 million (23.5 percent) of noncustodial parents provided health insurance for their children. See Internet Table 8.

<sup>12</sup>Total of percentages exceeds 100 because more than one type of noncash support may have been received.

<sup>13</sup>Excludes 0.6 million awards made in 1998, but not due in 1997.

### **Total requests for assistance related to child support declined between 1994 and 1998.**

About 5.5 million custodial parents contacted a child support enforcement office ("IV-D office"), department of social services, or other welfare or TANF office for assistance related to child support in 1998, not significantly different from the number in 1994 (5.8 million). However, the total number of contacts for assistance decreased during this time period, from 13.0 million to 12.3 million. Multiple reasons for contact were possible and the most likely reasons are the same as in 1994. About 25.8 percent of the contacts were for collection of child support that was due, 22.9 percent were to establish a legal agreement or court award, 17.0 percent to get welfare or public assistance, and 13.9 percent for assistance in locating the noncustodial parent. See Internet Table 2.

*About the survey.* Data are from the 1994, 1996, and 1998 April supplements to the Current Population Survey (CPS), as well as from the corresponding March supplements. The Census Bureau conducts the April supplement sponsored, in part, by the Office of Child Support Enforcement of the Department of Health and Human Services. Data from the April 1992 and earlier supplements are not directly comparable to data from 1994 and later years because of changes made to the questionnaire (see "NOTE" at the beginning of the report for more detail).

*Accuracy of the estimates.* Statistics from surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and meet the U.S. Census Bureau's standards for statistical significance. Nonsampling errors in surveys may be attributed to a variety of sources,

such as how the survey was designed, how respondents interpret questions, how able and willing respondents are to provide correct answers, and how accurately the answers are coded and classified. The Census Bureau employs quality control procedures throughout the production process—including the overall design of surveys, the wording of questions, review of the work of interviewers and coders, and statistical review of reports.

The Current Population Survey employs ratio estimation, whereby sample estimates are adjusted to independent estimates of the national population by age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. This weighting partially corrects for bias due to undercoverage, but how it affects different variables in the survey is not precisely known. Moreover, biases may also be present when people who are missed in the survey differ from those interviewed in ways other than the categories used in weighting (age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin). All of these

considerations affect comparisons across different surveys or data sources.

For further information on statistical standards and the computation and use of standard errors, contact Aneesah Stephenson, Demographic Statistical Methods Division via e-mail at DSMD\_S&A@census.gov.

*More information.* For additional questions or comments, contact Timothy Grall at 301-457-6686, or via e-mail at Timothy.Scott.Grall@census.gov.

Table A.  
**Comparison of Custodial Parent Population and Those With Child Support Awarded, Due, and Received: 1993, 1995, and 1997**

(Numbers in thousands as of spring of the following year. Parents living with own children under 21 years of age whose other parent is not living in the home. Amounts in 1997 dollars)

Characteristic	1993		1995		1997		Percent change 1993 to 1997	Percent change 1995 to 1997
	Number	Standard error	Number	Standard error	Number	Standard error		
<b>ALL CUSTODIAL PARENTS</b>								
Total .....	13,690	286	13,739	287	13,987	304	2.2	1.8
Awarded .....	7,800	219	7,967	222	7,876	231	1.0	-1.1
Due child support .....	6,685	204	6,966	208	7,006	218	4.8	0.6
Average child support due .....	\$3,972	\$94	\$4,272	\$107	\$4,152	\$91	4.5	-2.8
Average child support income received .....	\$2,449	\$104	\$2,691	\$140	\$2,440	\$81	0.4	-9.3
Received any child support .....	4,614	170	4,769	173	4,720	180	2.3	-1.0
Received full amount of child support .....	2,280	120	2,718	131	2,863	140	*5.6	5.3
<b>CUSTODIAL MOTHERS</b>								
Total .....	11,505	264	11,634	265	11,905	281	3.5	2.3
Awarded .....	6,878	207	7,123	210	7,080	219	2.9	-0.6
Due child support .....	5,907	192	6,233	197	6,331	207	*7.2	1.6
Average child support due .....	\$4,016	\$104	\$4,345	\$118	\$4,172	\$96	3.9	-4.0
Average child support income received .....	\$2,545	\$116	\$2,771	\$197	\$2,503	\$87	-1.7	-9.7
Received any child support .....	4,190	162	4,353	165	4,335	172	3.5	-0.4
Received full amount of child support .....	2,044	114	2,482	125	2,650	135	*29.6	6.8
<b>CUSTODIAL FATHERS</b>								
Total .....	2,184	118	2,105	116	2,082	120	-4.7	-1.1
Awarded .....	922	77	844	73	796	74	-13.7	-5.7
Due child support .....	778	71	733	69	674	68	-13.4	-8.0
Average child support due .....	\$3,634	\$195	\$3,652	\$200	\$3,965	\$280	9.1	8.6
Average child support income received .....	\$1,725	\$188	\$2,011	\$303	\$1,856	\$206	7.6	-7.7
Received any child support .....	424	52	416	52	385	52	-9.2	-7.5
Received full amount of child support .....	235	39	236	39	213	38	-9.4	-9.7

\*Statistically significant at the 90-percent confidence level.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1994, 1996, and 1998.

**Table B.**  
**Child Support Payments Agreed to or Awarded to Custodial Parents: 1997**

(Numbers in thousands, spring 1998. Parents living with own children under 21 years of age whose other parent is not living in the home)

Characteristic	Child support agreed to or awarded									Child support not awarded		
	Number	Supposed to receive child support payments in 1997							Child support not awarded			
		Number	Number	Received payments in 1997			Received no payments in 1997				Number	Average total money income
				Number	Average child support	Average total money income	Number	Average total money income				
<b>ALL CUSTODIAL PARENTS</b>												
Total.....	13,987	7,876	7,006	4,720	\$3,622	\$24,741	2,286	\$18,370	6,111	\$19,925		
Standard error.....	304	231	218	180	\$108	\$693	125	\$709	204	\$560		
Custodial mothers.....	11,905	7,080	6,331	4,335	\$3,655	\$23,249	1,996	\$16,659	4,825	\$15,643		
Standard error.....	281	219	207	172	\$114	\$622	117	\$729	181	\$425		
Custodial fathers.....	2,082	796	674	385	\$3,251	\$41,529	289	\$30,179	1,286	\$35,986		
Standard error.....	120	74	68	52	\$304	\$4,522	45	\$2,058	94	\$1,927		
<b>Poverty Status in 1997</b>												
Family income below poverty level.....	4,038	2,101	1,794	978	\$2,317	\$7,222	816	\$6,336	1,937	\$5,673		
Standard error.....	166	120	111	82	\$152	\$254	75	\$281	116	\$173		
<b>Visitation and Joint Custody Arrangements With Non-custodial Parents in 1997</b>												
Visitation privileges only.....	7,630	4,736	4,301	3,014	\$3,406	\$23,085	1,287	\$18,828	2,894	\$19,077		
Joint custody only <sup>1</sup> .....	77	40	35	11	(B)	(B)	23	\$26,559	37	\$38,259		
Visitation and joint custody.....	2,680	1,795	1,567	1,303	\$4,546	\$30,094	264	\$26,918	885	\$37,697		
Neither.....	3,601	1,305	1,103	392	\$2,191	\$20,249	711	\$14,098	2,295	\$13,846		
<b>CUSTODIAL MOTHERS</b>												
<b>Race and Hispanic Origin</b>												
White.....	8,264	5,307	4,752	3,475	\$3,886	\$24,098	1,277	\$17,512	2,957	\$16,771		
Non-Hispanic.....	6,673	4,559	4,109	3,076	\$3,996	\$25,106	1,033	\$18,877	2,114	\$18,897		
Black.....	3,321	1,607	1,434	764	\$2,600	\$18,612	670	\$14,716	1,714	\$13,958		
Hispanic (of any race).....	1,710	798	688	433	\$3,012	\$17,023	256	\$12,467	912	\$11,560		
<b>Current Marital Status</b>												
Married.....	2,607	1,703	1,559	1,174	\$3,977	\$21,087	385	\$18,241	904	\$15,592		
Divorced.....	3,673	2,585	2,357	1,738	\$4,326	\$29,752	619	\$23,005	1,087	\$21,049		
Separated.....	1,565	880	765	507	\$3,547	\$20,510	258	\$14,828	685	\$16,849		
Widowed <sup>2</sup> .....	230	125	104	62	(B)	(B)	42	(B)	106	\$21,346		
Never married.....	3,831	1,788	1,547	855	\$1,966	\$13,769	692	\$10,771	2,043	\$12,088		
<b>Educational Attainment</b>												
Less than high school diploma.....	2,385	1,132	976	536	\$2,127	\$10,131	440	\$6,791	1,253	\$8,167		
High school graduate.....	4,399	2,608	2,336	1,513	\$3,398	\$19,413	823	\$15,002	1,791	\$13,805		
Some college, no degree.....	2,624	1,626	1,476	1,041	\$3,615	\$21,520	435	\$18,138	998	\$18,159		
Associate degree.....	1,043	728	653	515	\$3,733	\$25,607	138	\$24,743	315	\$19,109		
Bachelors degree or more.....	1,454	987	891	730	\$5,312	\$41,656	161	\$41,183	467	\$35,035		

B Represents base less than 75,000.

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

<sup>2</sup>Widowed parents have children from a previous marriage that ended in divorce or from a previous nonmarital relationship.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1998.

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