
A Look at the Lives of Non-Custodial Fathers with Children on Welfare.

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Background: Definitions for Family Law/Child Support Policy

- ***Legal System*** - The state family court legal system is a system used to judge and make final determination on family issues between two or more parties interested in the issue of support for an dependent child.
 - ***Child Support System*** - The child support enforcement system was designed to insure that the state would be able to give parents acces to the legal system and reimburse itself for cash welfare benefits paid to poor mothers and their children. (Family Policy)
 - Administrative agency that concerns itself with child support orders.
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State of Wisconsin – Situational Analysis

- In 2001, Wisconsin had proportionately more black people in jail or prison – 4,058 inmates per 100,00 residents more than any state in the nation.
- Disparities in the areas of ...
 - Poverty
 - Wages
 - Employment (**Milwaukee:** 1/3rd of Blacks unemployed(2000)
 - Black Male Unemployment (Milwaukee: 47.3% (2000)*
 - Education (HS Graduation Rate: Black (65.7%) White (94.7%)

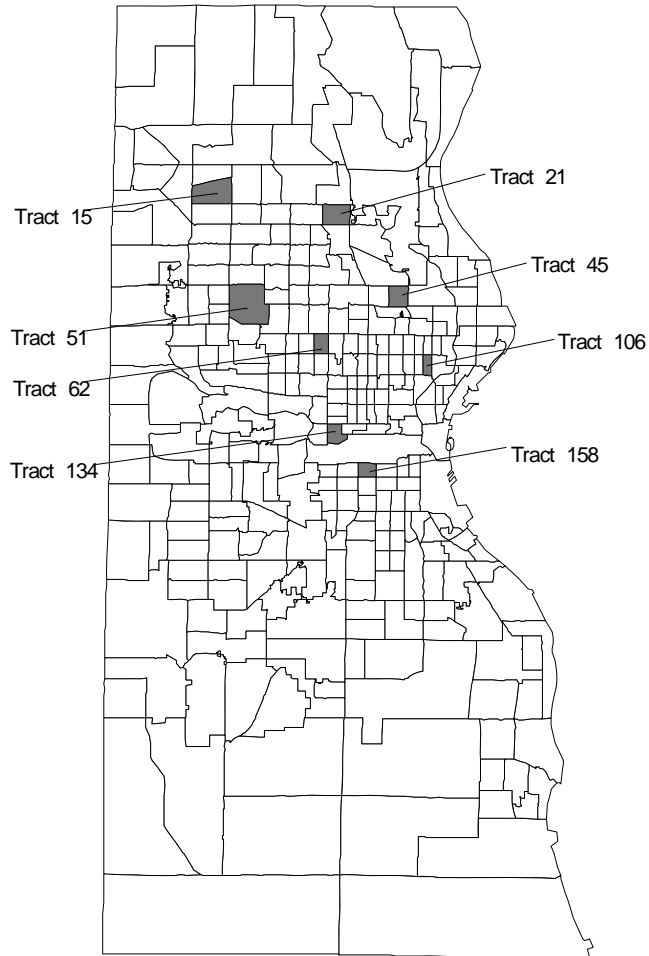
Sources:

Center on Wisconsin Strategy (UW) and *Center for Economic Development (UWM)

Research Limitations

- Generalizability of findings
 - Sample restrictions
 - White (Non-Hispanic) and African-American Non-custodial Fathers
 - TANF children
 - Milwaukee and Dane County
 - Self Selection
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Research – Census Tracts and City Demographics



RACE	White	Black
Milwaukee	50%	37%
NW section of Milwaukee	23%	61%
Education Level among those ≥ 25 years of age: percent with less than 12 years education	26.1%	35.3%
Poverty Level	25.7%	36.3%
Unemployment Rate	9.7%	12.1%

Demographics (Milwaukee)

- Average Age: 34
 - Average number of children: 4
 - Range for number of children: 1 to 12
 - Sole custody of at least one biological child: 5 ncps
 - Ever live with a biological child: 31 ncps
 - Ever live with a non-biological child: 21 ncps
 - 24 ncps had high school or beyond education
 - 8 ncps were unemployed at the time of the interview.
 - Average wages: \$7 an hour.
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Research: Key Findings

- Multiple Children
 - Variety of custodial care for children.
 - Significant marriage and cohabitation
 - Barriers to employment
 - Significant incarceration for non payment of child support
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A Look at the Lives of Children on Welfare with Non-Custodial Fathers.

- The lives of these men reflected involvement at some level with at least one of their biological children. More than one-third had either formal or informal custody of at least one of their children, and another 43 percent had frequent or regular visitation. Only 19 percent had contact without regular visitation.

“I don’t have no papers. This is just between me and her, because I’m not going to go through the system trying to get joint custody and all this. You got to do what you got to do as far as being a dad. As far as I’m concerned, we cool, she got a good job, her husband got a good job. I like her husband. He likes me. And we got an understanding. So, that is the key thing.”

A Look at the Lives of Non-Custodial Fathers with Children on Welfare.

- Most of the fathers considered it their responsibility to act as fathers to the non-biological children they lived with (children of current or previous girlfriends), and they were actively involved in those children's lives, emotionally and financially.

“Yeah, I’m involved with somebody else’s kid. I’ve been raising my fiancée’s son since. . . I been dating this young lady for four years. Her baby’s daddy ain’t been doing nothing he’s supposed to do so I guess I’m his daddy. So, everybody asking, you got another son? Yeah, I got another son. I’m helping him, I’m doing whatever I can.”

Research: Findings on Supports and Barriers

Loft, a 22-year-old SSDI recipient with one son, had a temporary placement job in a factory. He lived with his biological mother in a Milwaukee housing development, along with the mother of his child. He explained that while they both were working, “sometimes the baby’s grandmother (my momma) watches him [my baby], and her retiree buddies. Church members watch him, and sometimes grandma watch him too.”

“You have to be very skilled in Milwaukee to get a job—unless you want to be a dishwasher, a newspaper carrier, slinging burgers at McDonald’s or—work in a factory for \$6–\$7 an hour . . . I mean, there are jobs in Wisconsin, but . . . So how are people going to survive here, when the average rent in Milwaukee, in a nice neighborhood, is \$400–\$500 a month? How can you live on \$6 or \$7 an hour? You can’t. They have these job fairs. The most they’re offering is \$6, \$7, \$8 at the most . . . let’s take my family, a family of 6. I really need to be making no less than \$15 an hour. No less.

Research: Findings on Supports and Barriers

- A large majority of the men in the study had worked or were working with temporary employment placement agencies.

“Yeah, man! Then they promise you that... This job might be long term. After ninety days you are supposed to be hired. But then the company can work you eighty-nine days, and say we don't need you. So then you into a job, get settled into it, think this is going to be it. Then boom. You back on the unemployment list waiting on another job.”

- Some of the men had a social network which enabled them to be referred to a job. Gary was the only member of the sample with a job history of more than 10 years at the same place of employment. Gary has a son and daughter. He is earning \$8.00 an hour. After 25 years of service.
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Research: Findings on Supports and Barriers

Anthony Miller, a 23-year-old father of three children talks about his involvement with drug trafficking....

“I [sold] drugs because employment [was] really a problem, it was just, you know—all the turn-downs—and everyone, they want you to have high standards, and quality, and experience and everything like. – [So] I dropped out of high school.”

I was doing it for my family. I was . . . you know— they was cutting food stamps. And I knew people out there selling their food stamps. I was doing it for my child. Mostly, I want[ed] my child to have everything. I was kind of like doing it for myself, too, for those things that I had wanted—and that’s about it. When I was out there doing it. I enjoyed it. I mean, except for when it came fight time—you know, having a guy pull a gun on you or scare you half to death. Kind of make you want [to] change anyway. [When] my friend got killed I was like— it’s time to change. .

- ❑ Although one-half of the men were currently employed, for many of these fathers their jobs were unstable or paid low wages. Several fathers worked in the informal economy to meet their basic needs.
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Research: Findings on Supports and Barriers

- Criminal charges were common; the most frequent criminal charges were traffic violations, and in a few cases drug possession or use.
 - In the first year interviews of this research, 66 percent of the fathers—24 of 36—had had a previous criminal charge or a civil action against them. The prior conviction had generally occurred several years before the first interview. During the course of our research relationship, several of the men received additional criminal charges or civil actions. By the end of the second year, the number with a charge or action increased by 25 percent, to 33 of the fathers, or 91 percent of the sample.
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Research: CSDE Ethnographic Study

Child Support Policy and Incarceration

The number of people who were booked into the Milwaukee County Jail with at least one of their charges being “**Failure to support child**”

Statutes #'s 948.22(3) & 948 (2):

- Booking date between 04-01-1999 and 12-31-1999 = 2093
- Booking date between 01-01-2000 and 12-31-2000 = 3074
- Booking date between 01-01-2001 and 04-30-2001 = 1059

Figures provided by the Milwaukee County Sheriff Department (1/18/2002)

Implications for child support policy

- Many of the men in the study lived with at least one of their “non-custodial” children. Often these men were balancing the payment of a monthly child support order and the expenses associated with day to day living for themselves and their children.
 - The processes and intention of imputed and defaulted child support orders require reconsideration. These are often based on imputed earnings, which has resulted in unrealistic orders.
 - The benefits of the pass-through policy are undermined by the amount of debt that men owe from previous AFDC arrears and by poor employment prospects.
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Selected Milwaukee Projects (2007)

- Pass-Through (Moore and Ryan legislation)
 - Prison Project
 - Order modification/suspension
 - “Word of Hope” Ministries (Monday project)
 - re-entry project
 - Fatherhood Conference
 - debt forgiveness project
 - Section 1115 grant project
 - legal counsel for paternity or order establishment
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Implications for child support policy

- Policymakers, legal professionals, and the judicial system need to study the use and the availability of effective “pro se” (without a legal representative) forms.
 - Arrears and retroactive child support can be so large that the amount of debt will be impossible to *ever* pay for many of these fathers.
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Implications for child support enforcement research

- It is important to discern how paternity is established. Since the early 1990's there has been limited research that has studied the effects of paternity establishment policy and process. It is particularly important that we do more research on the outcome of default judgments, pro se requests for paternity establishment, or attorney assisted petitions for paternity establishments.
 - There has been very limited research study on the indirect effects of the child support policy system on the children of very poor parents.
 - Current and previous research is based on an assumption that the well-being of custodial families is dependent on a formal, legal child support order through the current judicial or administrative systems. An important area for research study in the future should explore why some custodial parents do not request formal child support.
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Implications for child support enforcement research

- Generally, in child support policy research, there is little regard paid to the actual amount of child support owed by a non-custodial parent.
 - Results of previous research indicate the importance of future work that will specifically target the variable of race in issues related specifically to child support system operations and enforcement policy and practice.
 - Non-payment of child support is based on an inability to pay, enforcement techniques, no matter how stringent, cannot be successful in forcing payment. That is if the non-custodial parent does not have no money, he cannot pay. Research should be directed at those with a ability to pay.
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