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Child Well-Being and Noncustodial Fathers

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Summary

The structure of a family plays an important role in children's well-being. A contributing factor to the high rates of child poverty over the long-term, and the increase in child poverty during the period from 2001-2007, was the increasing likelihood of children living in families headed by a single female. In 2012, about one-third of all children lived in families without their biological father present. According to some estimates, about 50% of children (who are currently under age 18) will spend or have spent a significant portion of their childhood in a home without their biological father.

In 2011, the poverty rate for children living in female-headed families (usually headed by a single mother) was 48%, compared to 11% for children living in married-couple families. Policies enacted in the mid-1990s focused on moving single mothers from the welfare rolls to work; with these policies in place and the economic expansion of the late 1990s, child poverty rates fell. However, these gains in the economic well-being of children were limited and temporary, as child poverty increased again in the 2000s, even before the onset of the recession that spanned from December 2007 to June 2009.

An option to improve the well-being of children living in single-mother families is to seek greater financial and social contributions from fathers, particularly noncustodial fathers. However, the ability of noncustodial fathers to support their children has been complicated by certain economic and social trends. Over the past three decades, changes in the labor market have led to less employment and lower typical wages for men. The wages of men with lower levels of educational attainment have fallen since the mid-1970s. Criminal justice policies have changed, leading to increases in the rate of incarceration of men. These trends, while affecting all racial and ethnic groups, had a disproportionate impact on African American men. The most recent recession has hit men's employment hard; and it has hit employment of young, African American men particularly hard.

Although social science research and analysis acknowledge a father's influence on the overall well-being of his children, federal welfare programs have to a large extent minimized or underplayed the role of fathers in the lives of children. Noncustodial fathers and other men are largely invisible to these programs as clients or recipients. They become visible only in their role as family income producers (e.g., payers of child support). Other federal programs and/or systems that have included many men on their rolls (such as employment and training programs and the criminal justice system) have not fully addressed the unique needs and circumstances of fathers, particularly those who do not have custody of their children.

The potential for revisions to the tax code in 2013 raises the issue of whether policies to "make work pay" for low-wage earners—an important part of the welfare reforms of the 1990s for custodial parents—could be extended to noncustodial parents. Additional potential policy options might include examining strategies for reducing child support arrearages; changing the financing structure of Child Support Enforcement (CSE) access and visitation programs for noncustodial parents; enhancing or expanding job training and education programs to assist low-income men and youth, which in turn can help them in providing for their (current or future) families; and redefining eligibility for certain programs so that disadvantaged young adults can receive more holistic training and other services that can better prepare them for adulthood.

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Introduction

The nation's future depends in large part on its children's ability to develop into contributing adult members of society. For that reason, and for what many would consider a society's moral obligation to care for the young and vulnerable, Congress and the nation take an interest in promoting children's well-being. It can be argued that children are the nation's most valuable resource, constituting the next generation of workers, taxpayers, and parents. Their well-being and ability to develop into productive adults in an increasingly competitive global economy is influenced by a variety of factors, and public policies can affect these factors to varying degrees.

Parents and family life exert a primary influence on children's well-being throughout their development and into adulthood. The family is the place where children develop their first attachments to other people—usually to their parent(s) as their primary care giver(s). Early attachments have been shown to have consistent and enduring influences on children's social and emotional development. The family is also the economic unit that obtains and manages the resources that meet a child's basic needs, while also playing a significant role in stimulating the child's cognitive, social, and emotional development.

The structure of a family plays an important role in children's well-being. Divorce, the loss of a parent due to death or incarceration, or being born to a single parent can change or create a family's composition and character and ultimately affect children's well-being. According to some estimates, about 50% of children under age 18 will spend or have spent a significant portion of their childhood in a home without their biological fathers.[1] In 2011, 23.6% of the 74.6 million U.S. children (under age 18) were living in families headed by their mothers, with their fathers not present.[2] A broad array of social science research and analysis[3] indicates that although most children who grow up in single-parent families become well-adjusted, productive adults, children raised in mother-only families (or with a mother and stepfather[4]) are more likely than children raised with both biological parents to do poorly in school,[5] have emotional and behavioral problems,[6] become teenage parents,[7] and have poverty-level incomes.[8]

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[1] David Popenoe, "A World Without Fathers (consequences of children living without fathers)," The Wilson Quarterly, March 22, 1996. See also Wendy Sigle-Rushton and Sara McLanahan, "Father Absence and Child Well-Being: A Critical Review," Princeton University, Center for Research on Child Wellbeing (Working Paper #02-20), November 2002. (Hereinafter, Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan, "Father Absence and Child Well-Being: A Critical Review.") **Note:** Children living with a single mother is the most common living arrangement for those who live without their biological fathers. However, some children live with stepfathers or adoptive fathers, as well as with other male relatives such as grandfathers.

[2] Based on analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2011, Table C-3, http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2011.html.

[3] Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, "Growing Up With a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps" (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). See also L. Bumpass, "Children and Marital Disruption: A Replication and Update," Demography, vol. 21(1984), pp. 71-82.

[4] In most of the studies cited in the child well-being references in this report, the presence of a stepfather did not lessen the negative effect of father absence on children.

[5] Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan, "Father Absence and Child Well-Being: A Critical Review," pp. 8-9.

[6] Ibid, pp. 10-12.

[7] Ibid, pp. 12-13.

[8] Ibid, pp. 14-15.

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This report displays and discusses some of the data related to the poverty of children and their living arrangements and data on male employment and earnings, educational attainment, and incarceration. It then provides information on federal programs that could play a greater role in addressing poverty of children through the fathers of these children (nearly all noncustodial parents are fathers). These programs provide economic assistance, family support, and job training and employment to eligible participants. The report also examines federal programs that have the purposes of preventing teen pregnancy and helping disadvantaged youth obtain the skills and support they need to make the transition to adulthood. The underlying premise of these programs generally is that the aid or services received from these programs by low-income[9] noncustodial fathers can help them in meeting their financial commitments to their children (or future children) and providing emotional support to their children. The report concludes by presenting several public policy approaches proposed by the policy community that might improve the lives of low-income noncustodial fathers and their children. For example, social policy could play a role by expanding economic assistance programs to noncustodial fathers, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); and implementing strategies to prevent the build-up of unpaid child support through early intervention.

Fathers' Involvement in the Lives of Their Children

There is widespread agreement that the negative outcomes associated with living in a single-parent family compared to living with both biological parents are primarily due to the low income of the family and the poor quality of the parent-child relationships. Single-parent families are more likely to be poor than two-parent families, especially if the lone parent is the mother. Public policy research and programs have generally focused on children and their single mothers, especially those on the lower end of the income and asset continuum, because these families tend to be impoverished, which generally translates into poorer outcomes and less well-being for children. During the welfare reform era, public policy initiatives were enacted to require low-income mothers to participate in the workforce, and to provide work supports for them. Welfare-to-work efforts might have succeeded in their primary goals of reducing the welfare rolls and spurring more work among single mothers. However, these families often remained poor; the work efforts of the single mother alone often failed to increase incomes as their low wages merely replaced low welfare benefits.[10] Since reaching an all-time low in 1969, the poverty rate for children generally has grown. The increase in the number of single-parent families, which tend to have a high incidence of poverty, has contributed to this overall higher rate.

Another way to address poverty in single-parent families and improve child well-being is through the fathers of these children (nearly all noncustodial parents are fathers). Even though there is general agreement among policymakers and the public regarding the importance of the father in improving the well-being of his children, federal *welfare* programs have to a large extent minimized or underplayed the role of fathers in the lives of children. Moreover, other federal programs and/or systems that serve or involve men—such as employment and training programs

[9] Even though some of the programs discussed in this report serve persons regardless of income status, public policy is usually focused on helping the more disadvantaged persons (i.e., low-income individuals).

[10] See discussion of how those who left the welfare rolls fared in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), *Final synthesis reporting of findings of ASPE Leavers Grants*, Washington, DC, 2001.

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and the criminal justice system—have not fully addressed the unique needs and circumstances of fathers, particularly those who do not have custody of their children.

In some cases (of child abuse and/or domestic violence), a father's involvement with his children may do more harm than good. However, in most cases, involving fathers in the lives of their children is generally regarded as a worthy policy goal. A myriad of studies indicate that an active and nurturing style of fathering is associated with better verbal skills, intellectual functioning, and academic achievement among adolescents. These studies suggest that fathers who are involved, nurturing, and playful with their infants have children with higher IQs, as well as better linguistic and cognitive capacities. Girls with involved, respectful fathers see how they should expect men to treat them and are less likely to become involved in violent or unhealthy relationships. According to some research, even from birth, children who have an involved father are more likely to be emotionally secure, be confident to explore their surroundings, and, as they grow older, have better social connections with peers. These children are also less likely to get in trouble at home, school, or in the neighborhood. It is also reported that children who grow up with involved fathers are more comfortable exploring the world around them and more likely to exhibit self control and pro-social behavior.[11] According to sociologist Dr. David Popenoe, "Fathers are far more than just 'second adults' in the home.… Involved fathers bring positive benefits to their children that no other person is as likely to bring."[12] The financial and emotional commitment of fathers to their children is a crucial factor in child well-being.

It may be that the next era of welfare reform will incorporate the new thinking in this area—that both parents are important to their children. The issues raised by father absence—and the social and economic context affecting men's abilities to be responsible fathers—spans a wide spectrum of social policy domains including income support, employment and training, housing, and the criminal justice system. Over recent decades, the wages of men have stagnated and even fallen. While women and single mothers increased their labor force participation, work and labor force participation among men actually declined. Additionally, incarceration rates for men, especially low-income men, have risen considerably over the past several decades. Efforts to help fathers, especially low-income fathers, play a successful role in improving the well-being of their children may prove to be challenging given that the financial situation of many men is precarious and their living situations are often complicated.[13]

Social and Economic Trends

There is a scarcity of data on the economic and demographic characteristics of noncustodial fathers. The Census Bureau's major household surveys that produce official employment and income statistics, the Current Population Survey (CPS) and the American Community Survey

[11] Jeffrey Rosenberg and W. Bradford Wilcox, "The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children," HHS, ACF, Administration on Children, Youth and Families Children's Bureau, Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2006.

[12] Ibid. See also David Popenoe, *Life Without Father: Compelling New Evidence that Fatherhood and Marriage are Indispensable for the Good of Children and Society*, The Free Press (a division of Simon and Schuster), 1996.

[13] In FY2011, roughly 14 million noncustodial fathers in the United States had children on the Child Support Enforcement (CSE) rolls. Data from the Urban Institute's 1997 National Survey of American Families (NSAF; the most recent available) found that two-thirds of nonresident fathers did not formally pay child support. Nearly all (90%) poor fathers did not pay, compared to just over half (56%) of non-poor fathers. Further, of the poor, nonpaying fathers who were not institutionalized (mostly in prison), 43% did not work.

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(ACS) do not capture information to determine whether a man living in a household without children is a noncustodial father. The most recent snapshot of noncustodial fathers was taken through the Urban Institute's National Survey of American Families (NSAF), discussed above, which was part of the Institute's Assessing New Federalism project initiated in the wake of the 1996 welfare reform law and privately funded through foundations.

Given the lack of recent and consistent trend information on noncustodial fathers, this report talks about men in general to provide a sense of the economic and social context in which noncustodial fathers live. That is, the report does not provide information on the characteristics of noncustodial fathers, but rather provides the economic and social trends generally affecting men that have a bearing on the ability of noncustodial fathers to help support their children.

Child Poverty Rates

Persistently high rates of child poverty, which refers to children under age 18, have long been a social policy concern. In 2011, the official poverty rate for children was 21.9%, meaning that a little more than one in five children were classified as poor. Child poverty rates vary dramatically by family setting. In 2011, the child poverty rate for related children in female-headed families (usually headed by a single mother) was 48%. For children living in families headed by a married couple, the poverty rate was 11.0%.

Female-headed families have historically been the focus of policies for disadvantaged families with children. The reasons for this focus include the following:

- the high rates of poverty among children living in families headed by a single woman, indicating high rates of economic disadvantage among such families;
- cash welfare for needy families was, for many years, legally restricted to families with either an absent or disabled father; even when these legal restrictions were relaxed, the cash welfare rolls were still dominated by families headed by single parents, at least until recently; and
- the desire to reduce the welfare rolls, both because of the view that welfare receipt itself helped promote disadvantage and to save taxpayer money.

Figure 1 shows the trend in child poverty rates from 1959 (the first year for which official poverty statistics are available) through 2011. It includes the poverty rate both for all children and for children living in female-headed families. The female head is usually a single mother. It shows that improvements in child poverty rates generally occurred through the 1960s. However, the child poverty rate for all children reached a low point in 1969, increased somewhat through the 1970s, and rose sharply beginning in 1979. The poverty rate for children in female-headed families declined until 1979. In the 1980s, the overall child poverty rate generally fluctuated around the 20% mark. Poverty among children in female-headed families failed to drop below 50% during that decade.

The mid-1990s saw major changes in policies affecting families with children. Tax legislation in 1993 significantly expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for families with children and with workers. The 1996 welfare reform law (The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, P.L. 104-193) made major changes to cash welfare that sought to require work and reduce welfare "dependency." The 1996 welfare law also further expanded aid to the working poor by substantially increasing child care subsidies. It also made major changes

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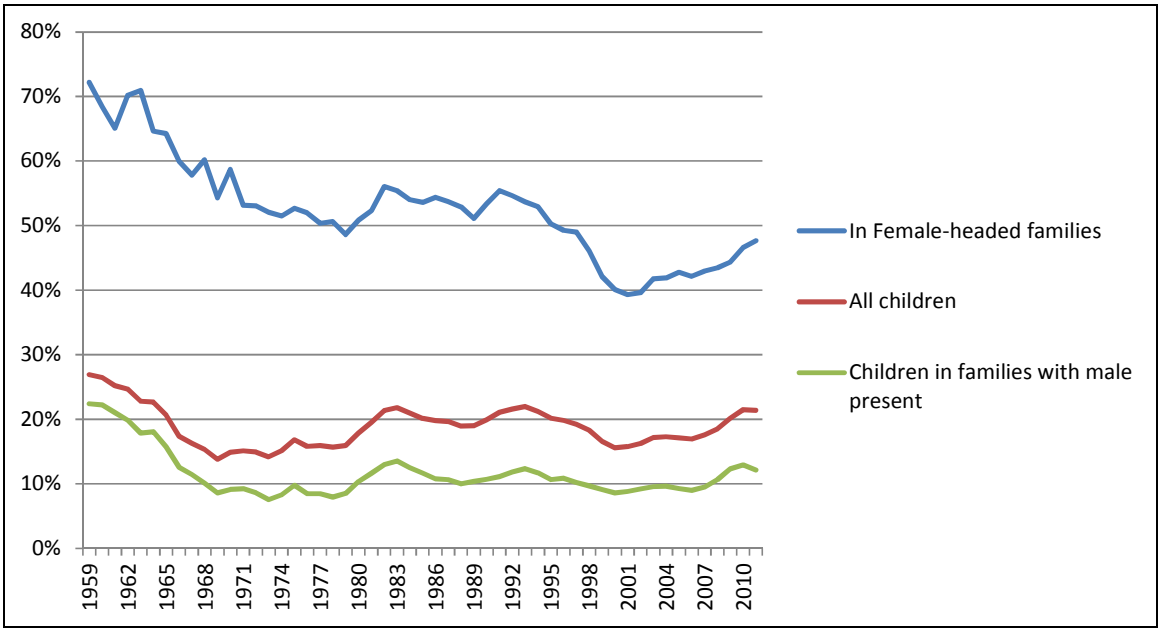
to the Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program. A year later, the Balanced Budget Act of 1995 (P.L. 105-35) created the State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which provided health coverage to the children of the working poor.

In the wake of these policy changes, which occurred during an economic expansion, the cash welfare rolls declined precipitously and employment among single mothers increased. The child poverty rate also declined, falling from 22.7% in 1993 to 16.2% in 2000. The poverty rate for children in families with a male present was lower than the overall poverty rate, and also declined. The poverty rate for children in female-headed families fell 14 percentage points, from 53.7% in 1993 to 39.3% in 2001.

Figure 1. Poverty Rates for Children, by Family Type: 1959 to 2011



Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The improvements in poverty rates for children in the late 1990s were limited. In 2000, the child poverty rate had declined to 16.2%, its lowest rate since 1978 but still above the 14.0% rate of 1969. The poverty rate for children living in families headed by single mothers reached 39.3% in 2001, its all-time low over the period for which official poverty statistics are available but still representing two in five such children living in poverty. Moreover, the improvements did not last. During the 2000s, child poverty rates increased again. This increase occurred even *before* the onset of the deep recession that began in December 2007.

Living Arrangements of Children

A contributing factor to the high rates of child poverty over the long term, and the increase in child poverty during the period from 2001 to 2007, was the increasing likelihood of children living in families headed by a single female. **Figure 2** shows that in 1959, less than 1 in 10 children (9%) lived in families headed by a single female. This proportion increased almost every year until the mid-1990s, reaching 24.0% in 1995. The share of children living in female-headed

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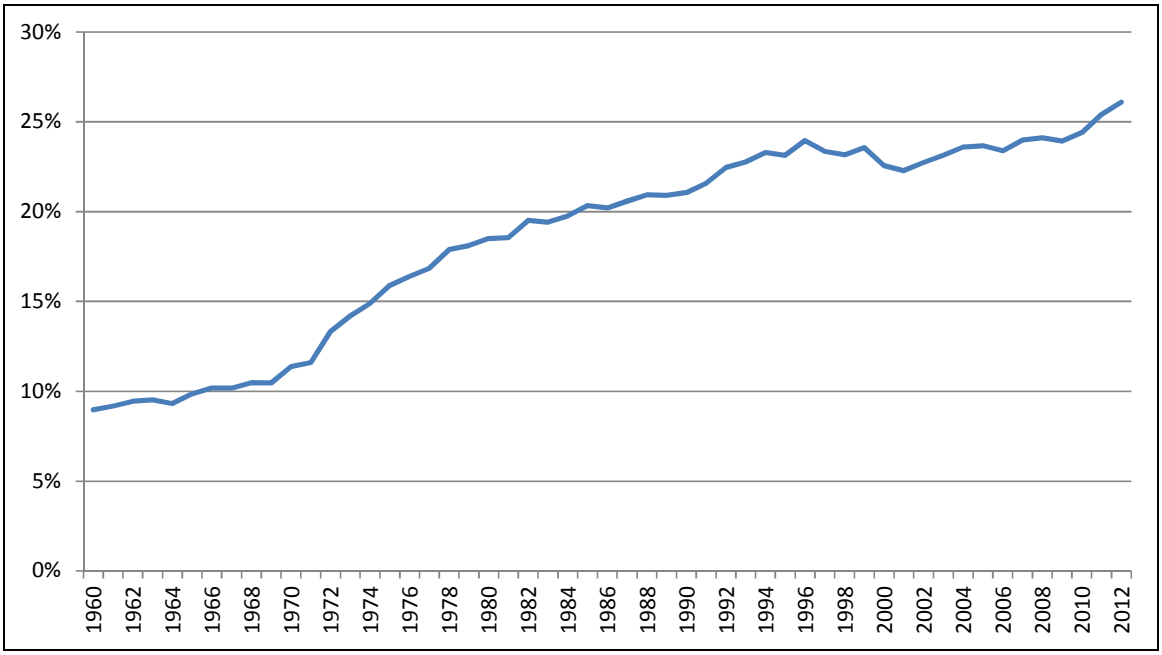
families fell slightly during the remainder of the 1990s, before rising again in the 2001-2009 period.

Figure 2. Percent of all Related Children Under Age 18 Living in Single-Parent, Female-Headed Families: 1960 to 2012



Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The period from 2001 to 2009 saw particularly steep increases in the share of children born to unmarried mothers. In 2001, 33.2% of all births were to unmarried mothers. The proportion of children born to unmarried mothers reached 41.0% in 2009—the highest level during the period for which these data are available.[14] In 2011, 40.7% of all births were to unmarried mothers, slightly below the peak level for this measure.

Figure 3 shows the living situations of children in March 2012. In that month, about 58% of children lived with both their biological parents, who were married to each other. However, this means a little more than 4 in 10 children were living in other situations. Just over 3% of children lived with both their biological parents who were unmarried and 13% lived with their biological fathers without their biological mothers. However, about one-third of all children lived in families without their biological fathers present.

[14] Brady E. Hamilton, Joyce A. Martin, and Stephanie J. Ventura, *Births: Preliminary Data for 2008*, HHS, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics Report, Volume 58, Number 15, April 6, 2010.

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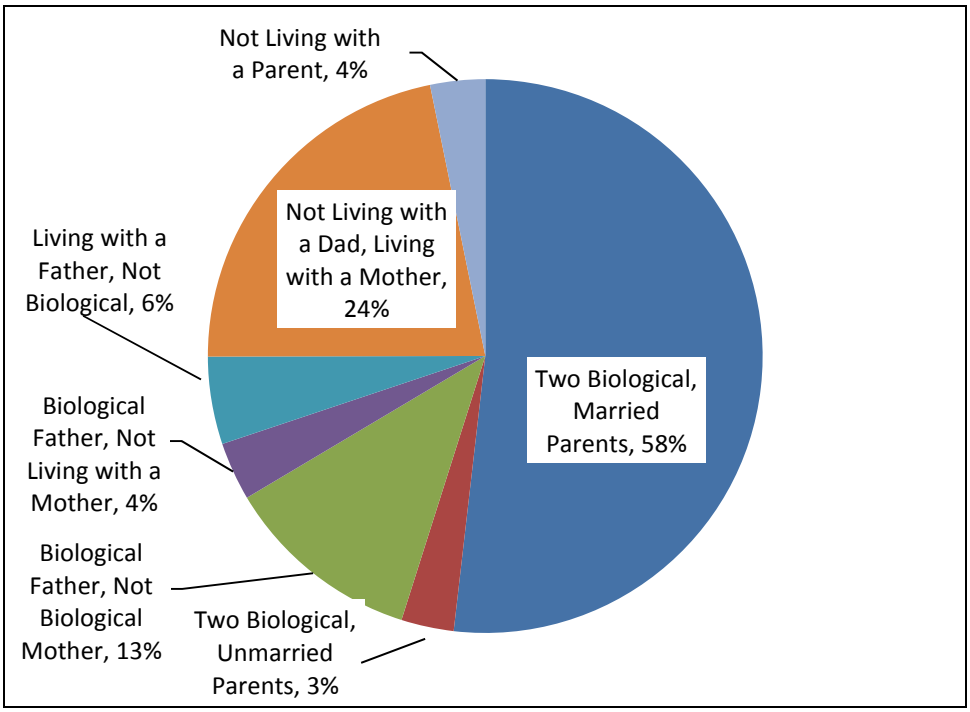
Figure 3. Living Arrangements of Children, March 2012



Source: Congressional Research Service tabulation of the March 2012 Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey.

Although little is known (empirically, in aggregate) about the men who spend years living apart from their biological children, anecdotal evidence suggests that some of these men are in relationships with women who have children fathered by other men. The advent of multiple relationships that produce children, often referred to as multiple partner fertility (i.e., when mothers and fathers have had children with more than one partner), generally complicates the family situation of children. Thus, many fathers may not be living with their own biological children but rather with the children of another man. In short, noncustodial and surrogate fathers play a large part in the family lives of children, but most federal programs have minimal official contact with them and therefore little is known about their characteristics.

Challenges of Increasing Involvement of Noncustodial Parents with their Children

A father's involvement with his children may be influenced by a number of factors. Over the past three decades, changes in the labor market have led to less employment and lower typical wages for men. Criminal justice policies have changed, leading to increases in the rate of incarceration of men. What has not changed much over this period is that men living apart from their biological children have not been a primary focus of policies to assist men, or their biological children, who are economically disadvantaged. Though there are likely to be financial and nonfinancial benefits of increasing the involvement of noncustodial fathers with their children, policies to promote such engagement face an uphill battle given these economic and social trends.

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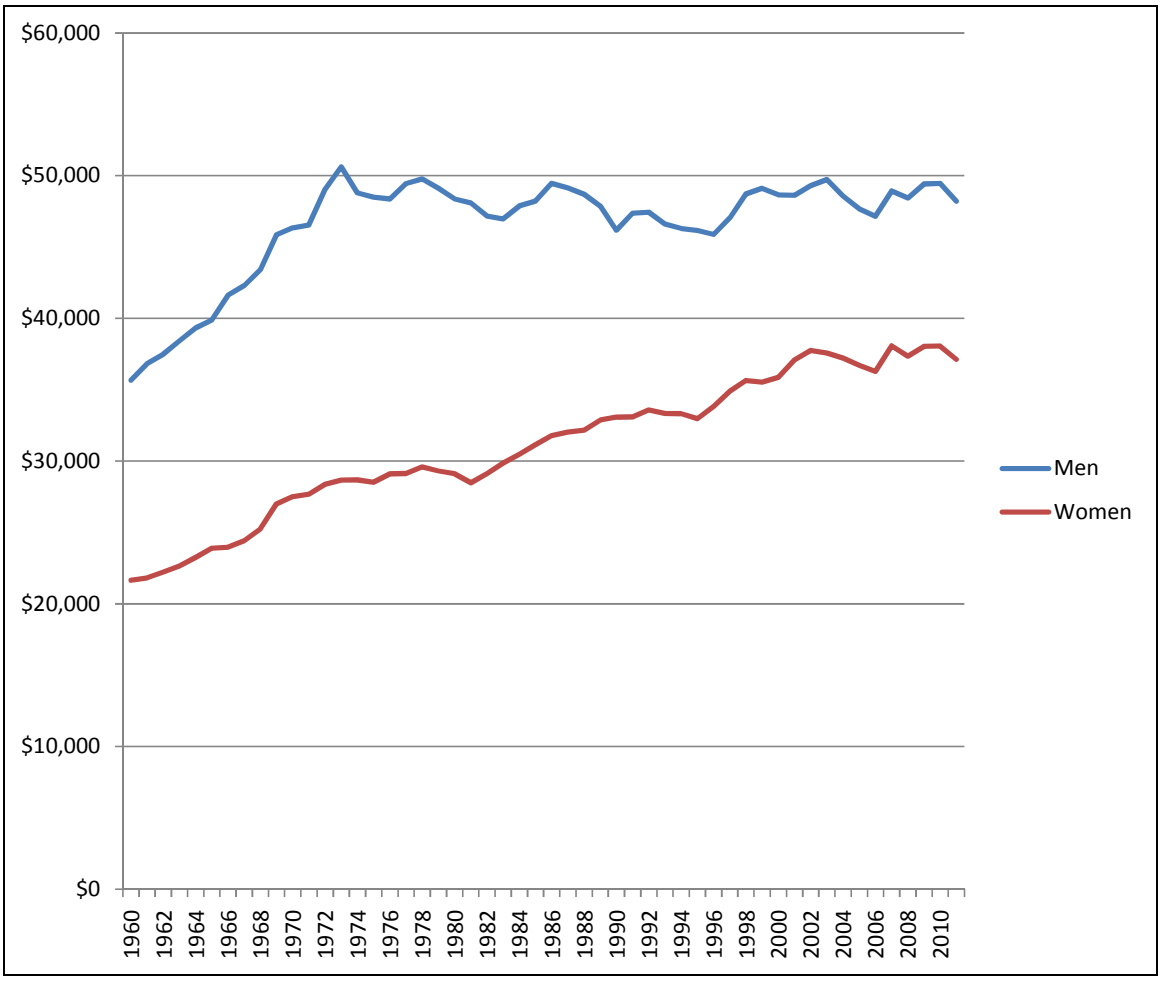
Earnings

The earnings of typical full-time, full-year workers are a key indicator to how they are faring in the workforce. **Figure 4** displays the median annual earnings of men and women from 1960 to 2011 (in inflation-adjusted dollars) who worked full-time during an entire year. When adjusted for inflation, the median annual earnings for a man working full-time, full-year peaked in 1973. While there have been fluctuations in the real wages of men since then, the inflation-adjusted median annual earnings for men in 2011 was lower than it was in 1973 by 4.8%. The median annual earnings for men reached their post-1973 low point in 1996 at 9% below the 1973 level. Real wage growth in the late 1990s and the early 2000s made up for some of the lost ground in men's earnings, but this period of growth was short-lived. In contrast to the trend for men, the median wage for women who work full-time, full-year generally increased from 1973 to the early 2000s. However, since 2002 the median wage for women who work full-time, full-year has fluctuated some with little increase from 2002 to 2011.

Figure 4. Median Annual Earnings of Men and Women Who Work Full-Time, Full-Year: 1960 to 2011

In 2011 (inflation-adjusted) Dollars



Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

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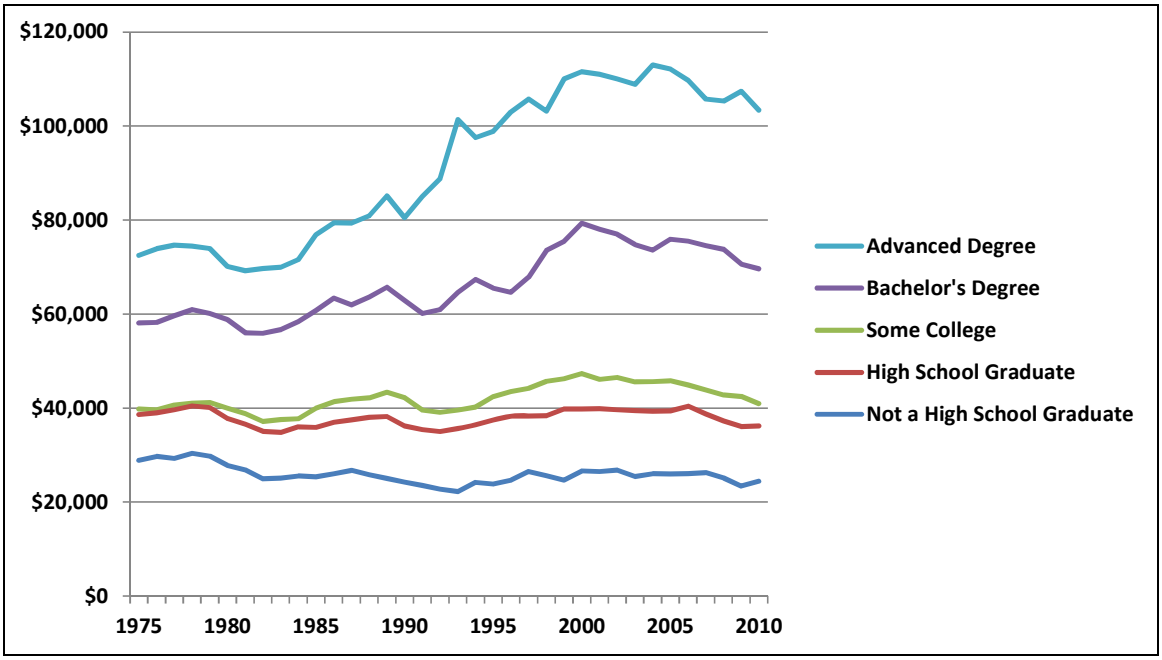
Notes: Constant dollars were computed using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for all Urban Consumers Research Series (CPI-U-RS).

The trend in typical earnings for men varied markedly by education status. **Figure 5** shows the average inflation-adjusted earnings for men by educational attainment from 1975 to 2010. From the late 1970s through the early 2000s, inflation-adjusted earnings have increased for men with college degrees. The greatest payoff in recent years has been for men with advanced degrees, who have earned an average of more than $100,000 in each year since 1996. However, for men lacking a high school diploma, inflation-adjusted earnings fell substantially. In 2010, the annual average earnings for a man lacking a high school diploma was $24,413, which is 20% below the $30,000 that such a man earned on average in 1978. The inflation-adjusted earnings of men with a high school diploma declined by less, but they were still 11% lower in 2010 than they were in 1978.

Figure 5. Average Annual Earnings for Men Aged 18 and Older, by Education Level: 1975 to 2010

In 2010 (inflation-adjusted) Dollars



Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Notes: Constant dollars were computed using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for all Urban Consumers Research Series (CPI-U-RS).

Employment

Wages alone do not tell the full story about how individuals of working age are faring in the labor market. Whether they are actually employed, either full-time or part-time, is perhaps a more telling indicator of their economic well-being. The increase in labor force participation and employment among women during the post-World War II period is well known; however, during this period, the rate of employment among men declined. **Figure 6** shows the employment rate for men and women over the period from 1948 to 2012. Men began the period with an employment rate over 80%. Women began the period with an employment rate around 30%. By

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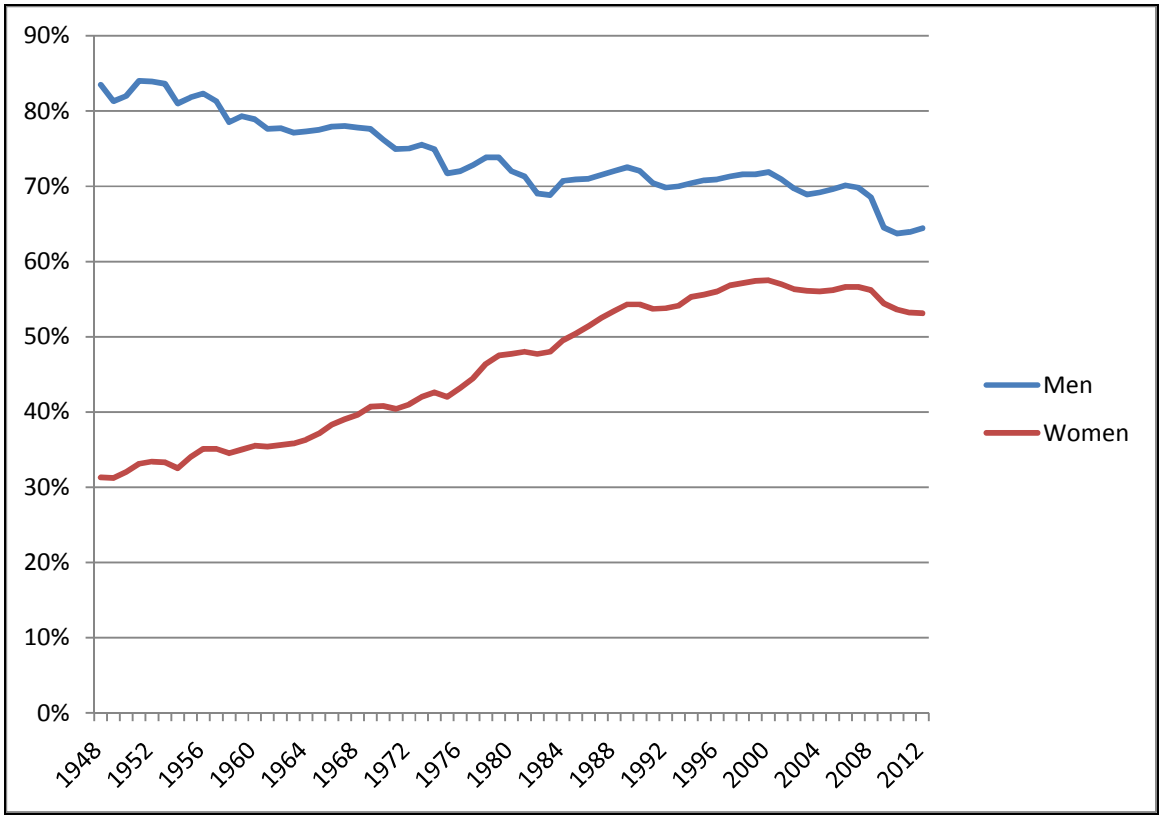
2007 (generally before the recession that began in December of that year), the employment rate for men had declined to 69.8%, while the employment rate for women had risen to 56.6%. The recession caused drops in the employment rate for both men and women, though the decline was more pronounced for men (to 63.7% by 2010, a decline of 6.1 percentage points, compared to 53.1% for women in 2012, a decline of 3.5 percentage points). As shown in the figure, the employment rate for men rebounded some from 2010 to 2012, but the employment rate for women continued to decline in those years.

Figure 6. Employment Rates for Men and Women: 1948 to 2012



Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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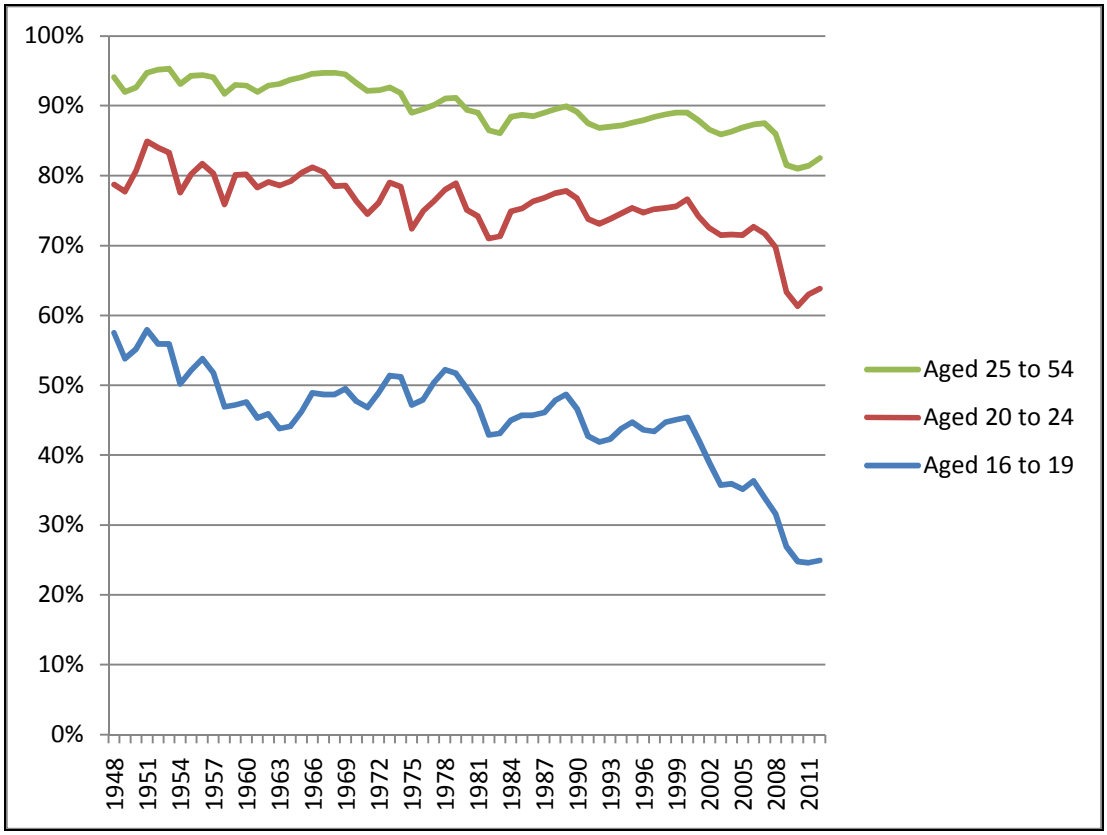
The decline in the employment rate for men stems from several factors, including the aging of the population, retirements, and the increasing prevalence of early retirements. However, it also reflects declining employment rates among both prime-aged men (ages 25 to 54) and young men. **Figure 7** shows the employment rates for men by age. As shown, employment rates declined among all groups represented in the figure. In 1948, over 90% of prime-aged men were employed, a rate that fell into the 80% range before the onset of the recession in December 2007. The employment rate had also declined for the younger groups. For teens, employment rates that were in the mid-50% range at the beginning of the period had fallen to just above 30% in 2007. For young adults (20 to 24 years old), employment rates fell from around 80% to 72% in 2007. Employment rates for older men also fell, though they are not shown in the figure (presumably, many of these men are not fathers of children under age 18).

Figure 7. Employment Rates for Men by Age: 1948 to 2012



Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The long-term decline in employment rates for teens and young adults partially reflects increases in school enrollment among these age groups.[15] Thus, these trends can partially be viewed as a consequence of a positive social trend. However, not all of these trends reflect a tendency toward voluntary withdrawal from the workforce to complete schooling. Unemployment rates among teens and young men tend to be high. Moreover, the recession that began in December 2007

[15] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 2011,* "Total fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by sex, age, and attendance status: Selected years, 1970 through 2020," September 2011. This publication includes future projections of enrollment.

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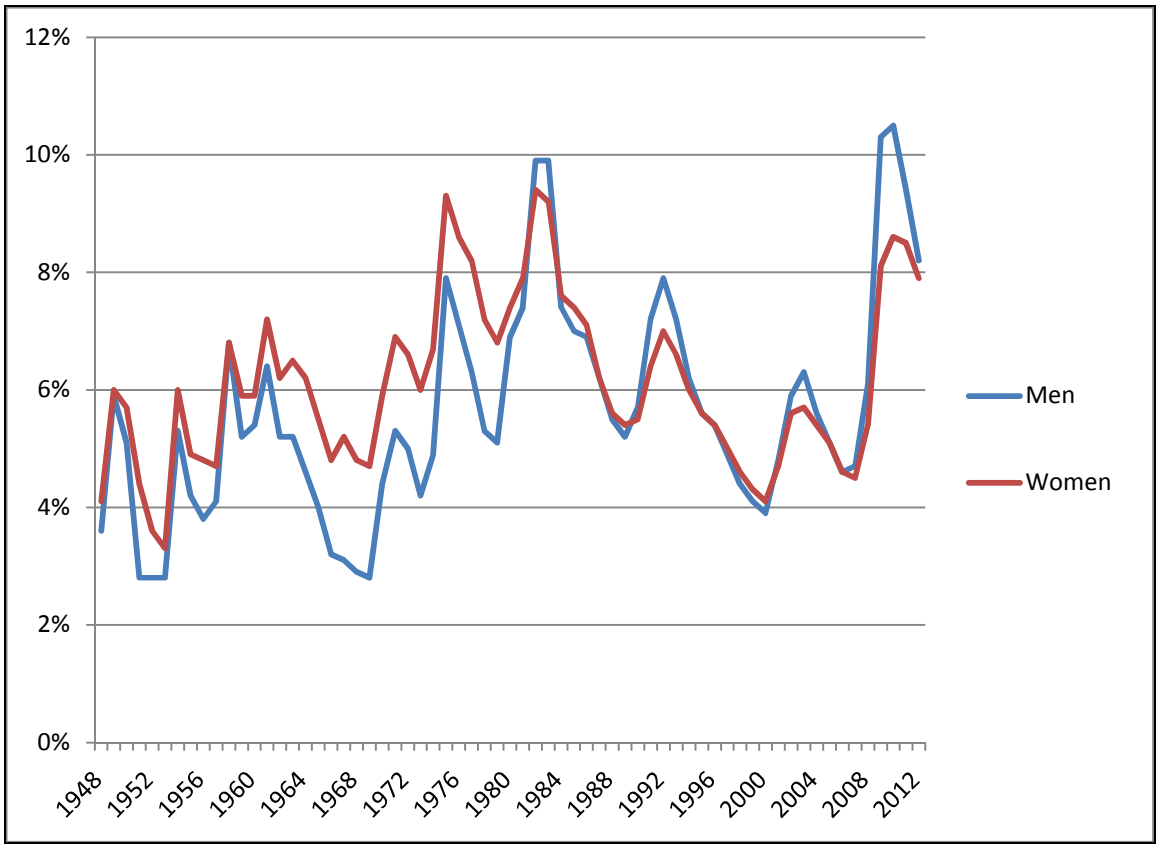
disproportionately affected young men. The impact of this recession on men in general and on men by age is discussed in the next section.

The 2007-2009 Recession

The recession that began in December 2007, sometimes called "the Great Recession," has disproportionately affected men. **Figure 8** shows unemployment rates for men and women from 1948 to 2012. Unemployment reflects the number of people actively looking for, but unable to find, work. The unemployment rate for men was 10.5% in 2010—the highest rate in any year since 1948. Additionally, the unemployment rate for men exceeded that for women by 2.2 percentage points in 2009 and 1.9 percentage points in 2010. The unemployment rates for men fell by a greater amount than the rate for women in 2011 and 2012, so that in 2012 the amount that the unemployment rate for men exceeded that for women was 0.3 percentage points.

Figure 8. Unemployment Rates for Men and Women: 1948 to 2012



Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS) based on data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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Incarceration

Incarceration has affected the ability of men to participate in the labor market and the lives of their children. At the end of 2010, 1.6 million persons, of whom 1.5 million were men, were imprisoned in federal or state facilities.[16] Incarceration rates in the United States have increased in recent decades. The growth of the prison population, which is predominately male, poses another challenge in attempting to increase financial and social support from noncustodial fathers to their children.

Figure 9 shows incarceration rates, by sex, for 1925 to 2010. As shown in the chart, men are far more likely than women to be incarcerated. Additionally, there was a stark increase in the rate of incarcerated beginning in the late 1970s, lasting through the early 2000s. In 1975, 220 per 100,000 men in the population were incarcerated. By 1990, this number had increased to 575 men per 100,000 men in the population. By 2000, the incarceration rate for men had increased to 904 per 100,000. In 2010, 943 per 100,000 men were incarcerated.

The incarceration rate for women also increased post-1975, but remained far lower than that for men. From 1925 to 1975, the incarceration rate for women never exceeded 10 per 100,000 women. In 2010, the incarceration rate for women was 67 per 100,000, well short of the 943 per 100,000 for men.

[16] Paul Guerino, Paige M. Harrison, and William J. Sabol, *Prisoners in 2010*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, February 9, 2012.

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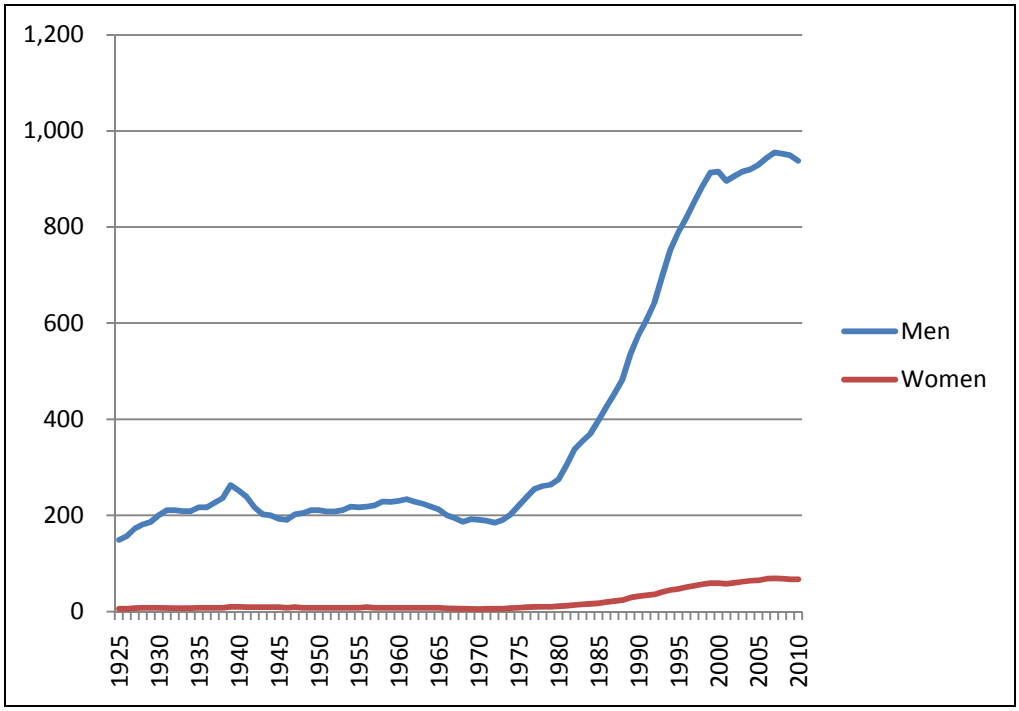
Figure 9. Incarceration Rates By Sex: 1929-2010

Federal and State Prisoners per 100,000 in the Population



Source: Congressional Research Service, based on data from the University of Albany *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics*, Table 6.28.2010, accessed via the internet on December 12, 2012, http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook/pdf/t6282010.pdf

African American Families

The social and economic conditions in the labor force and with respect to incarceration, while occurring in the population as a whole and across racial and ethnic groups, have disproportionately affected African American families. In 2011, the poverty rate for African American children was 37.4%, compared to 21.9% of all children.

In the population as a whole, one-third of all children lived in households that lacked their biological fathers in 2012. Among African American children, nearly two-thirds (64%) lived apart from their biological fathers in 2012.

The relatively high rates of economic disadvantage and father absence among African American children occur despite improvements in some social indicators for African American men, reflecting a history of relative disadvantage. However, African American men are still relatively worse off than white men and, on some measures, Hispanic men.

For example, the educational attainment level for African American men has increased. In 1965, 25% of African American men ages 25 and older had completed four years of high school, compared with 50% of white men ages 25 and older. The proportion of men with at least that level of schooling increased for both white men and African American men, with greater improvement for African American men. However, **Figure 10** shows that despite this improvement in educational attainment, the percentage of African American men aged 25 and older who lack a high school diploma was still higher than that of white men—16% of African

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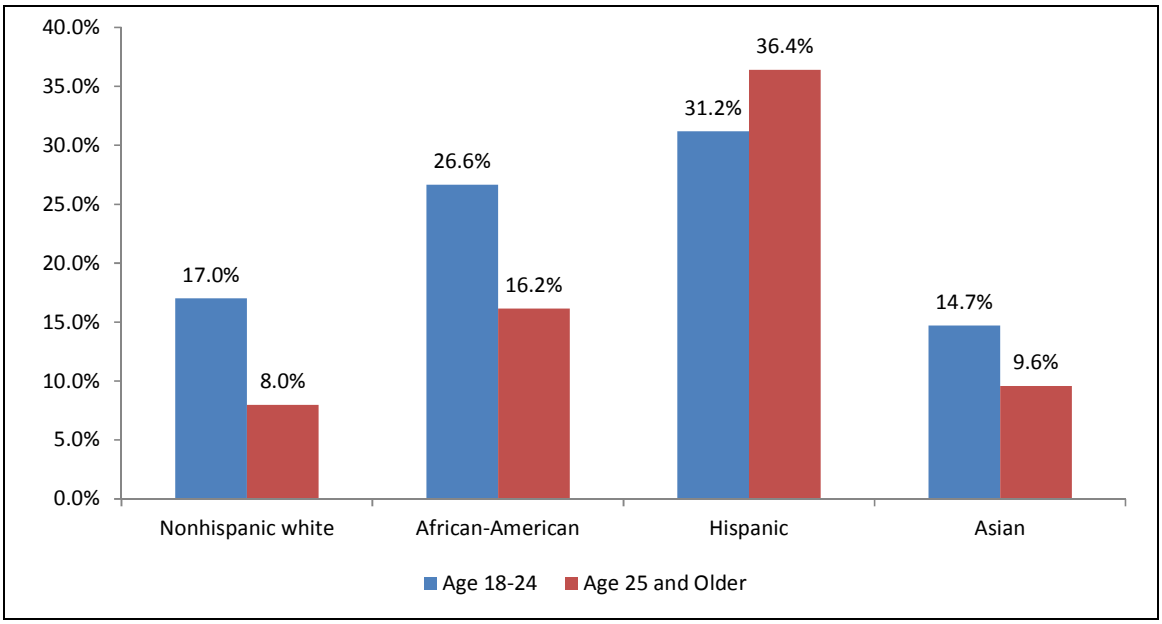
American men aged 25 and older lack a high school diploma compared to only 8.6% of white men aged 25 and older. (Hispanic men had the highest rate of lacking a high school diploma.) African American male youth ages 18 to 24 were also far less likely than their white counterparts to have a high school diploma.

Figure 10. Percent of Men Without a High School Diploma, by Race/Ethnicity and Age: 2011



Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Note African Americans include those of Hispanic origin. The Census Bureau data did not provide separate breakouts for non-Hispanic African Americans.

Moreover, African American men without a high school diploma typically earn less than other men without a high school diploma. **Figure 11** shows the average annually earnings for men without a high school diploma in 2010. African-American men (aged 18 and older) without a high school diploma had lower average earnings ($19,452) than did Non-Hispanic whites or Hispanics without a high school diploma.

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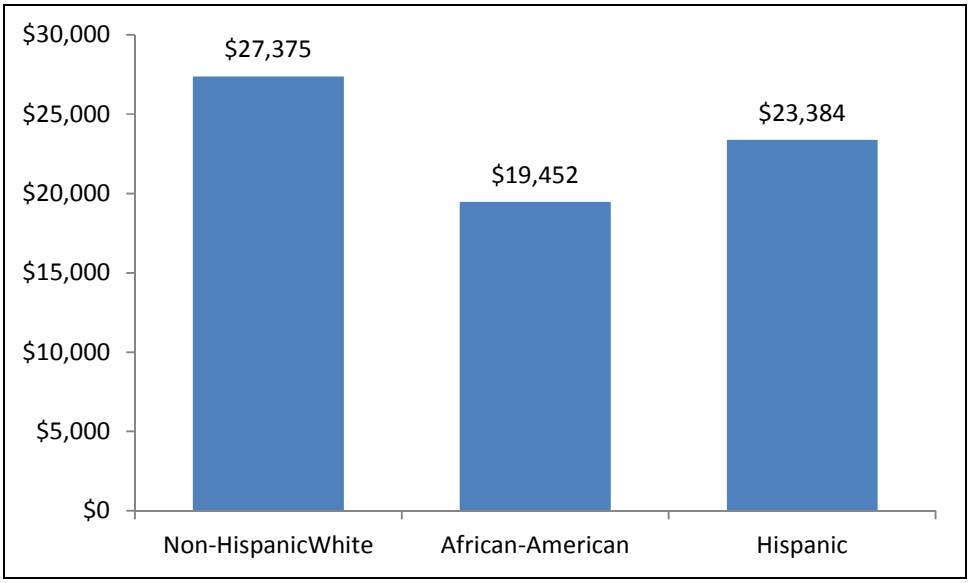
Figure 11. Mean Earnings for Men Without a High School Diploma, By Race/Ethnicity: 2010



Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Note African Americans include those of Hispanic origin. The Census Bureau data did not provide separate breakouts for non-Hispanic African Americans.

The most telling indicator of the poor employment outcomes for African American men without a high school diploma is the employment rate. **Table 1** shows the employment rates for men without a high school diploma in March of selected years by race and ethnicity for two groups: youth (ages 16 to 24) who were not enrolled in school, and all men ages 25 to 54. The years 1989, 2000, and 2007 represent years just before economic recessions, when the economy was performing at its cyclical peak. The year 2012 represents a year in the aftermath of the 2007-2009 recession. Over the past three decades, the employment rate for African American men without a high school diploma has declined. Their employment rate was at 54.9% in 1989 and 40.8% in 2000. In 2007 (before the recession), less than 3 in 10 African American men ages 16 to 24 who lacked a high school diploma and were not in school were employed. This proportion declined further following the recession, to less than 1 in 4 by 2012.

While the decline in employment rates for young African Americans has been noted elsewhere, employment rates for prime-aged African American men (ages 25 to 54) who lack a high school diploma also fell. Employment rates for other racial and ethnic groups also declined.

Table 1. Employment Rates in March of Selected Years for Men without a High School Diploma, by Race/Ethnicity and Age

(1989, 2000, 2007, 2012)

	1989	2000	2007	2012
Ages 16 to 24 (and not in school)				
African American	54.9	40.8	28.7	24.6
White No-Hispanic	81.3	72.3	55.0	53.7
Hispanic	81.7	80.2	74.0	54.1

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	1989	2000	2007	2012
Ages 25 to 54				
African American	69.9	59.9	53.6	36.3
White No-Hispanic	83.8	71.2	68.2	58.7
Hispanic	84.5	85.0	83.9	81.4

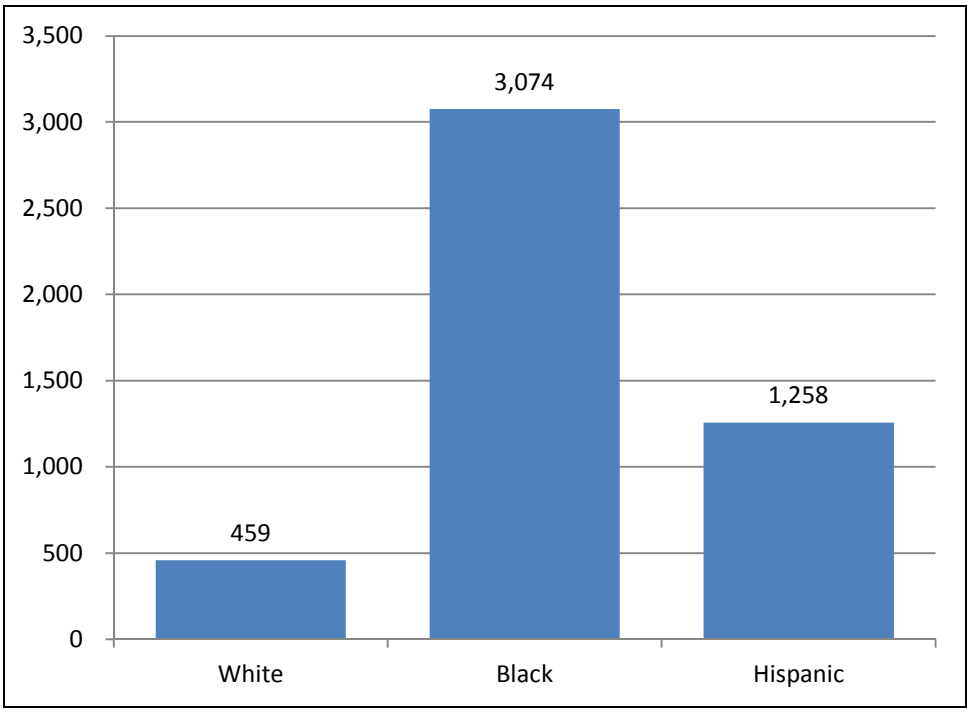
Source: CRS tabulations of the March Current Population Survey for selected years.

Note African Americans include those of Hispanic origin. The Census Bureau data did not provide separate breakouts for non-Hispanic African Americans.

One of the most stark indicators of disadvantage for African American men is their high incarceration rate. **Figure 12** shows incarceration rates (with sentences of one year or more) for men by race and ethnicity at the end of 2009. At that point in time, there were 3,119 African American men imprisoned per 100,000 in the population (3.1% of the population), compared to 487 white men and 1,193 Hispanic men per 100,000 in the population.

Figure 12. Incarceration Rates by Rates in 2010

Per 100,000 in the Population



Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS), based on data in Paul Guerino, Paige M. Harrison, and William J. Sabol, *Prisoners in 2010*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, February 9, 2012.

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Selected Federal Programs: Barriers Encountered by Noncustodial Fathers and Other Men

The focus of social policies for disadvantaged children has been on families headed by single mothers. These long-standing policies have provided cash and non-cash assistance to mothers. Yet noncustodial fathers, many of whom are low-income, could benefit from policies that would help them be positively involved in the lives of their children. Social policy might play a role across several policy domains:

- economic assistance, including the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP);
- family support, including the Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program and the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood programs; and
- human capital, including workforce programs.

This section provides information on these programs and also examines federal programs that have the purposes of preventing teen pregnancy and helping disadvantaged youth obtain the skills and support they need to become positive, productive, self-sufficient members of their communities. As noted earlier, the underlying premise is that the aid or services received from these programs by low-income, disadvantaged men may help them overcome economic and emotional barriers and aid them in becoming productive members of society in a number of ways—by giving them job training and employment opportunities (and thereby the ability to make regular child support payments), educational information and emotional support to promote positive interaction between them and their children, and supportive services and counseling that can help them stay connected to their communities and families (and thereby potentially avoid criminal activity).

Economic Assistance Programs

Economic assistance is designed to supplement the income of poor families to help them meet their basic needs. Noncustodial parents have either been ineligible for economic assistance based on low income because they do not live with their children, or they have not been a large population within low-income assistance programs.

The Social Security Act of 1935 (P.L. 74-271) provided federal funding for these programs. President Franklin Roosevelt's Committee on Economic Security justified proposing federal financial assistance for mothers' pensions as follows:

> The very phrases "mothers' aid" and "mothers' pensions" place an emphasis equivalent to misconstruction of the intention of the laws. These are not primarily aids to mothers but defense measures for children. They are designed to release from the wage-earning role the person whose natural function is to give her children the physical and affectionate guardianship necessary not alone to keep them from falling into social misfortune, but more affirmatively to rear them into citizens capable of contributing to society.

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The Social Security Act established social insurance programs (Old Age and Unemployment Insurance) for those expected to work to have them earn benefits for old age and temporary unemployment. It established need-tested cash benefits for two groups (at that time) not expected to work—the aged and families with children with a single mother or with an incapacitated father. While other groups (particularly the disabled) were subsequently granted benefits under the act, non-aged, able-bodied adult men were excluded from need-tested cash benefit programs as they were expected to work. Of course, the sentiment expressed in the committee's report—that single mothers were not supposed to work but rather to raise children—conflicted with the major social changes of the second half of the 20th Century, which saw increases in mothers' participation in the labor force and expectations that mothers should work.

The program established in the Social Security Act to provide need-tested aid to families with children was first called Aid to Dependent Children (ADC); it was renamed Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in 1962. Until 1961, federal funds were only provided to aid families with a single mother or an incapacitated father; in 1961, states were given the *option* to aid families with two able-bodied parents if one parent was unemployed. Even under this option, federal law required that AFDC for families with an unemployed parent be paid on more restrictive terms than those that existed for single-parent families or families with an incapacitated parent.

The fact that AFDC generally restricted aid to single-parent families caused concern among policymakers that cash welfare provided an incentive for some families to break up, contributing to the growing number of children living in single-parent, female-headed families. New need-tested benefit programs, designed during the 1960s and 1970s, generally did not restrict aid to families with children based on the absence of a parent. The Food Stamp program (now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP), created in the 1960s but expanded nationwide in the 1970s, provided aid based on national eligibility standards without regard to family structure. The Family Support Act of 1988 (P.L. 100-485) converted the state option to aid families with two parents, one unemployed, to a mandate effective October 1, 1990.

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), first created in 1975, did not legally restrict benefits to single-parent families with children, though it did require that a child be in the tax unit to be eligible for the credit. The mid-1990s saw major changes in aid to low-income persons and families, including substantial increases in aid to the working poor through expansions of the EITC, increased funding for subsidized child care, and the establishment of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). A small EITC was added for tax filers without children, though the bulk of the EITC expansions were for families with tax filers who had dependent children.

While aid to the working poor was expanded in the mid-1990s, there were also policy changes made during that period that curtailed benefits for those who did not work. The 1996 welfare reform law (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, P.L. 104-193) ended AFDC and its federal rules for determining financial and nonfinancial eligibility for cash welfare, replacing it with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. States were granted additional latitude in designing their cash assistance programs and were also given the authority to use TANF funds for a wide range of activities beyond those of traditional cash welfare programs. (TANF included some federal requirements, such as work standards and time limits for adult recipients of cash welfare.) The 1996 law also curtailed food stamps for recipients who are able-bodied adults (ages 18 to 50) without dependents (ABAWD). This rule,

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known as the ABAWD rule, restricts assistance to adults who are not working or participating in a work or training program to three months of assistance in a 36-month period.

Following these changes, cash welfare spending declined substantially. EITC grew, and in the 2000s the food stamp program also grew so that these two programs far surpassed TANF cash welfare as the major sources of cash aid for low-income families.

Eligibility restrictions have generally been lifted for families where the father lives with his children, and such families can be eligible for work supports such as earnings supplements from the EITC or benefits from SNAP. However, noncustodial fathers still face some programmatic barriers in receiving aid from economic assistance programs. Below are descriptions of the major features of three major economic assistance programs—TANF, EITC, and SNAP—and a discussion about how they relate to noncustodial parents.

Cross-Cutting Issues Affecting Economic Assistance Programs

There are two major issues that affect noncustodial parents across all cash and near-cash need-tested programs. The first centers on the financial incentives and disincentives for the noncustodial parent to join the household and live with their children, for those who have this option. In tax policy, this issue is known as the "marriage penalty"—where a couple is financially better off if two people live apart rather than marry. (However, in terms of the federal income tax, whether a couple is financially better off if they marry or not depends on the circumstances of each individual, so there are both marriage penalties and marriage "bonuses."[17]) There is an analogous situation in need-tested programs. If a noncustodial parent brings income to a family or household, need-tested benefits to that household can be reduced or even eliminated if the noncustodial parent's income puts a family over the income eligibility threshold. Yet this increase in income may not necessarily make the family economically better off than it would be if it was receiving benefits.

The second major issue is whether a noncustodial parent's payment of child support improves the economic well-being of the custodial parent and the children if the custodial parent's family or household receives need-tested aid. If child support income is considered countable income in a need-tested program, it can also reduce or end eligibility for the need-tested benefit. Thus, the noncustodial parent's paying of child support might not fully benefit his children, which reduces the willingness of the noncustodial parent to pay.

TANF Cash Assistance

The TANF block grant, while best known as a program that helps states fund cash welfare for needy families with children, helps fund a wide range of benefits and services that help to ameliorate the effects, or address the root causes, of economic disadvantage among families with children. The forms of economic aid include ongoing cash assistance (what most consider traditional welfare), non-recurrent short-term aid, and refundable tax credits for low-income families.

[17] See Congressional Budget Office, *For Better or for Worse: Marriage and the Federal Income Tax*, June 1997.

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TANF provides states with a set block grant amount that can be used to help achieve its broad goals. The basic block grant is $16.5 billion per year for all states, an amount that has remained the same since its establishment in 1996. In addition to federal funds, states have to contribute from their own funds a minimum amount each year (totaling $10.4 billion nationwide).

TANF requires that families receiving assistance have a dependent child, defined as under age 18 or age 18 if still in school. Unlike prior AFDC law, there are no restrictions on aiding two-parent families (though two-parent families are subject to separate work participation standards, discussed below). Most states have eliminated the vestiges of the more restrictive terms that applied to families with two able-bodied parents. In July 2010, 41 of the 49 states, and the District of Columbia, that had paid benefits to two-parent families eliminated these restrictions. (North Dakota does not pay benefits to two-parent families). Additionally, TANF law and regulations do not define what constitutes a "family," permitting states to include noncustodial parents as part of the "family," thus making them eligible for assistance.

Under TANF, as under AFDC before 1996, states determine the income and financial resource levels that make a family eligible for cash assistance, as well as the benefit amount. Monthly TANF cash benefit amounts represent only a fraction of poverty-level income in all states. In 2010 for a family of three, benefits ranged from about half of poverty-level income in Alaska ($928 per month in benefits; Alaska has a higher poverty level than the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia) and California ($723 per month) to 11% of poverty-level income in Mississippi ($170 per month).

Receipt of cash benefits triggers a number of requirements. Families with an adult cash welfare recipient are limited to 60 months of federally funded benefits (some families have only a child recipient and these families are generally not subject to time limits). Custodial parents must also cooperate with the child support enforcement system and assign (i.e., legally turn over rights) to the state any child support received as reimbursement for cash welfare.

Families with an adult recipient are also subject to TANF's work requirements.[18] The most prominent of these requirements, the work participation standards, do not apply directly to individuals. Rather, they are state performance measures that apply to the states, and require that a percent of families be either working or engaged in federally specified activities. In terms of requirements that apply to individual recipients and families, states are required to (1) assess each adult recipient's skills, work experience, and employability; (2) engage individual adult recipients within two years, though states define what activities a recipient must engage in to meet this requirement; and (3) sanction noncomplying families, though states determine how much to reduce a noncomplying families' benefit or end benefits for such a family.

In 2011, TANF cash welfare totaled $9.6 billion. Yet, TANF cash assistance serves only a small fraction of all families with poor children. In 2011, there were 16.1 million poor children, but only a monthly average of 3.4 million children were in families receiving cash assistance.

States can also use TANF funds for a wide range of activities other than cash assistance, with few rules or restrictions regarding the design of such benefits and services other than that they be aimed at achieving a TANF goal. This includes economic assistance, such as earnings

[18] For a discussion, see CRS Report R42767, *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): Welfare-to-Work Revisited* , by Shannon Bopp and Gene Falk.

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supplements through refundable tax credits and non-recurrent short-term benefits. For example, New York has used TANF funds to pay for the refundable portion of a "noncustodial Earned Income Tax Credit" that provides a wage supplement to noncustodial parents who pay child support (this will be discussed later in the report under policy options). Noncustodial parents can also benefit from non-recurrent short-term aid—benefits designed to meet needs expected to last four months or less.

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC or EIC) began in 1975 as a temporary program to return a portion of the Social Security tax paid by lower-income taxpayers, and was made permanent in 1978 by the Revenue Act of 1978 (P.L. 95-600). It has expanded several times since then. An expansion of the EITC in 1993 was a major component of the strategy to "make work pay" more than welfare. The 1993 expansion also included extending the EITC to tax filers without children, though (as shown below) this credit is small relative to that for filers with children and is available only to those with very low earnings.

As part of the tax code, the budgetary costs of the EITC are realized as foregone tax revenue available to the federal budget. EITC rules are uniform nationwide. The EITC has become the largest form of need-tested cash aid, with credits totaling $59.2 billion for tax year 2009.[19] Of this, the bulk of aid is for families with qualifying children (that is, taxpayers residing with children). EITC credits totaled under $1.4 billion for tax filers without qualifying children.

Table 2 compares EITC rules for childless filers and for single parents with children for 2012. As shown in the table, the maximum credit available for unmarried childless filers (including noncustodial parents not living with any of their children) was $475, compared to $3,169 for those with one qualifying child and maximum credits over $5,000 for filers with two or more qualifying children. Moreover, the EITC for childless filers was restricted to those with very low earnings. An unmarried childless filer became ineligible for any EITC credit once his income reached $13,980. A person who worked 40 hours per week at the 2012 federal minimum wage of $7.25 an hour earned $15,080 annually. Thus, a childless filer who worked 40 hours per week at the federal minimum wage for the entire year was *ineligible* for the EITC. In contrast, a single parent who earns more than two times the minimum wage was eligible for the EITC.

Table 2. Earned Income Tax Credits: Maximum Credits and Income Eligibility Amounts for Filers With and Without Children, 2012

(Filers with qualifying children are those filing as head of household, representing single parents)

	Childless Filers (Not Married)	One Qualifying Child	Two Qualifying Children	Three or More Qualifying Children
Maximum credit	$475	$3,169	$5,236	$5,891
Income threshold for credit eligibility	13,980	36,920	41,952	45,060

[19] CRS Report RL31768, *The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC): An Overview*, by Christine Scott.

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	Childless Filers (Not Married)	One Qualifying Child	Two Qualifying Children	Three or More Qualifying Children
Income threshold as a percent of earnings for a worker at the federal minimum wage working full-time	93%	245%	278%	299%

Source: Based on information in CRS Report RS21352, *The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC): Changes for 2012 and 2013*, by Christine Scott.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP, formerly known as food stamps, provides help to low-income families for purchasing food. Like the EITC, it reaches many more families and persons than does cash welfare. In FY2012, $74.6 billion in benefits were paid to 46.6 million persons in 22.3 million households.[20] Federal funds pay 100% of SNAP benefit costs; the federal government and the states share the cost of administering the program.

Low-income households are eligible for SNAP regardless of family type, though in permanent SNAP law there are restrictions for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDS), a group that would include most low-income noncustodial parents. Benefits are determined in federal law and are uniform nationally.[21] For a household consisting of a single person, the maximum monthly SNAP benefit in FY2013 is $200 per month; for a family of three, the maximum monthly benefit is $526 per month.

Though SNAP eligibility is generally not restricted by household type, most SNAP households have members who are elderly, disabled, or children. In FY2011, 47% of all SNAP households included children, 17% had an elderly member, and 20% had a disabled member. Only 24% of SNAP households, totaling 5.0 million, had only nonelderly, able-bodied adults.[22]

The 1996 welfare reform law established the ABAWD rule noted above, which affects able-bodied noncustodial parents who do not live in households with children. The ABAWD rule establishes a time limit for able-bodied adults ages 18 to 50 without dependents who do not work or work less than 20 hours per week, and who are not participating in an education training program. The time limit is three months in a 36-month period. An additional three months of benefits may be paid in the 36-month period if a person becomes employed, works at least 80 hours in a 30-day period, and then becomes unemployed again. States may apply for waivers of the ABAWD rule for areas of high unemployment.

[20] Preliminary FY2012 SNAP program participation data from the Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/snapmain.htm, accessed December 17, 2012.

[21] However, standard deductions and shelter deductions used in calculating the benefit are different for Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, and the Virgin Islands than they are for the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia.

[22] Congressional Research Service tabulations of the FY2011 SNAP Quality Control data file.

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Family Support

In addition to economic assistance programs, a number of federal programs are designed to provide other forms of support to families. Three federal programs in particular—Child Support Enforcement, Healthy Marriage, and Responsible Fatherhood—seek to assist men in providing financial and other support to their children or future children. The Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program focuses on collecting child support payments from noncustodial parents for the purpose of contributing to the payment of childrearing costs; however, it also promotes visitation and better relations between custodial and noncustodial parents through grants to states. Eligible activities under the CSE Access and Visitation program include but are not limited to mediation, counseling, education, development of parenting plans, visitation enforcement, and development of guidelines for visitation and alternative custody arrangements. Separately, the Healthy Marriage program recognizes that child well-being is associated with a child living with two parents. The program funds counseling and education initiatives targeted primarily to low-income individuals that seek to facilitate healthy relationships, with the ultimate goal of providing better outcomes for children. The Responsible Fatherhood program focuses on the financial and personal responsibility of noncustodial parents for their children, with the goal of increasing the participation of fathers in their children's lives. Some responsible fatherhood initiatives help noncustodial parents strengthen their parenting skills. Other initiatives try to discourage young men from becoming fathers until they are married and ready for the responsibility.

Child Support Enforcement (CSE)

The CSE program was enacted in 1975 as a federal-state program (Title IV-D of the Social Security Act) to help strengthen families by securing financial support for children from their noncustodial parent on a consistent and continuing basis and by helping some families to remain self-sufficient and off public assistance. Child support payments enable parents who do not live with their children to fulfill their financial responsibility to their children by contributing to the payment of childrearing costs. The CSE program is one of only a few federal programs that specifically interact with men based on their status as fathers.

The CSE program provides seven major services on behalf of children: (1) locating absent parents, (2) establishing paternity, (3) establishing child support orders, (4) reviewing and modifying child support orders, (5) collecting child support payments, (6) distributing child support payments, and (7) establishing and enforcing support for children's medical needs. All 50 states and four jurisdictions (the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands) operate CSE programs.[23] The CSE program is administered by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), which is in the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The federal government and the states share CSE program costs at the rate of 66% and 34%, respectively. The federal government also gives states an incentive payment to encourage them to operate effective CSE programs.[24] Federal law requires states to reinvest CSE incentive payments back into the CSE program or related activities.

[23] Historically, states were required to provide CSE services to Indian tribes and tribal organizations as part of the CSE caseloads. The 1996 welfare reform law (P.L. 104-193) allowed direct federal funding of tribal CSE programs at a 90% federal matching rate. In August 2012, there were 55 tribal CSE programs. For information on tribal CSE programs, see CRS Report R41204, *Child Support Enforcement: Tribal Programs*, by Carmen Solomon-Fears.

[24] In FY2012, the statutory maximum for federal CSE incentive payments to states (in aggregate) was $526 million.

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The CSE program serves both poor families (including those who receive TANF benefits) and non-poor families.[25] Child support collected on behalf of non-welfare families goes to the family, usually through the state disbursement unit. However, most child support collections on behalf of families receiving TANF benefits are used to reimburse state and federal governments for TANF payments made to the family.[26]

For low-income, TANF-receipt families, child support payments may not reach the children. This may be a disincentive to pay child support. The rules are complex and may leave the family with little to no benefit over and above the TANF benefit. CSE distribution rules determine which claim is paid first when a child support collection occurs. The order of payment of the child support collection is important because in many cases arrearages are never fully paid. While a family receives TANF cash benefits, the states and federal government retain any current child support and any assigned child support arrearages collected on behalf of that family up to the cumulative amount of TANF benefits paid to the family. While states may pay their share of collections to the family, they must pay the federal government its share of child support collections collected on behalf of TANF families. P.L. 109-171 (the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, enacted February 8, 2006) helped states pay for the cost of their CSE pass-through and disregard policies by requiring the federal government to share in the costs of the entire amount (up to $100 per month for one child, up to $200 per month for two or more children) of child support collections passed through and disregarded by states (this provision took effect on October 1, 2008).[27] This means that both states and the federal government share in the cost of child support passed through to families (and disregarded by the state in determining the family's TANF cash benefit). Based on February 2012 data, 22 states and the District of Columbia have a child support pass-through and disregard policy, and 28 states (and the three territories of Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands) do not.[28]

States must distribute the following child support collections to former TANF families first before the state and federal government are reimbursed (the "family-first" policy): (1) all current child support, (2) any child support arrearages that accrue after the family leaves TANF (these arrearages are called never-assigned arrearages), plus (3) any arrearages that accrued before the family began receiving TANF benefits. An exception to this rule occurs when child support

[25] The CSE program does not handle all child support payments. Some cases (40%-50%) are handled by private attorneys or collection agencies, or through mutual agreements between the parents. Thus, some of the families who received child support in 2012 probably received it without the help of the CSE program.

[26] In brief, TANF families are required to assign their child support rights to the state. As long as the child support payment collected on the TANF family's behalf is smaller than the state's TANF benefit for a family of the relevant size, the family remains on the TANF program and the child support collected for the family is divided between the state and the federal government, with the state having the authority to "pass through" some, all, or none of its share of the child support collected to the family without it affecting the family's TANF benefit and with the federal government sharing in some of the costs of giving the money to the family. The share of the child support collection that is distributed to the federal government is based on a state's Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP). The FMAP varies inversely with state per capita income (i.e., poor states have a higher federal matching rate, wealthy states have a lower federal matching rate). For more information on child support and TANF families, see CRS Report RL34105, *The Financial Impact of Child Support on TANF Families: Simulation for Selected States*, by Carmen Solomon-Fears and Gene Falk.

[27] In FY2011, only 3.7% of CSE collections (about $1.010 billion) were made on behalf of TANF families, about 13.5% of that amount (about $136 million) actually went to CSE families who received TANF benefits (pursuant to state CSE "pass through" provisions), and the rest was divided between the state and federal governments to reimburse them for TANF benefits paid to such families.

[28] National Conference of State Legislatures, *State Policies Regarding Pass-Through and Disregard of Current Month's Child Support Collected for Families Receiving TANF-Funded Cash Assistance*, Updated February 2012.

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arrearages are collected via the federal income tax refund offset program—those collections are divided between the state and federal government.[29] (Any child support arrearages that accrue during the time the family is on TANF belong to the state and federal government.) If a family has never received TANF benefits, the entire amount of the child support payment collected by the state from the noncustodial parent goes to the custodial parent via the state disbursement unit.

In FY2011, about 13% of the CSE caseload[30] consisted of TANF families; about 43% were families who had at some point been on the TANF program, and 44% were families that had never received TANF benefits. In FY2011, the CSE program collected $27.3 billion in child support payments from noncustodial parents and served 15.8 million child support cases.[31] Of the $27.3 billion collected in child support payments, about 93% went to families, 6% went to state and federal governments, and 1% consisted of medical support payments or fees paid to states. On average, in FY2011 the CSE program collected $5.12 in child support payments for each $1 spent on the program. In FY2011, total CSE expenditures amounted to $5.7 billion.

The CSE Program and Noncustodial Fathers

There is a growing consensus that the CSE program is one of the financial keys to helping families become and remain self-sufficient. Among poor families, child support on average constitutes about 40% of family income for households that receive it.[32] Moreover, data indicate that parents who make regular child support payments have better family relationships than those who do not (e.g., they have more interaction with their children).[33]

The CSE program has the potential to impact more children and for longer periods of time than most other federal programs. According to Census Bureau data, 13.7 million parents had custody of nearly 22 million children under age 21[34] while the other parent lived somewhere else in 2009. Of those 13.7 million custodial parents, 31% received child support, 29% received food stamp (SNAP) benefits, 23% received Medicaid benefits, 10% received public housing assistance, and 5% received TANF benefits; some parents may have received multiple benefits.[35] In many cases,

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[29] P.L. 109-171 gave states the option of distributing to former TANF families the full amount of child support collected on their behalf (i.e., both current support and all child support arrearages—including arrearages collected through the federal income tax refund offset program). This provision took effect on October 1, 2009, or October 1, 2008, at state option.

[30] The CSE program defines a CSE "case" as a noncustodial parent (mother, father, or putative/alleged father) who is now or eventually may be obligated under law for the support of a child or children receiving services under the CSE program. If the noncustodial parent owes support for two children by different women, that would be considered two cases; if both children have the same mother, that would be considered one case.

[31] In FY2011, about 4% of CSE collections were made on behalf of TANF families, 33% were made on behalf of former TANF families, and 64% were made on behalf of families who had never been on TANF.

[32] Urban Institute, "Child Support Plays an Increasingly Important Role for Poor Custodial Families," by Elaine Sorensen, December 2010.

[33] The Urban Institute, "Do Nonresident Fathers Who Pay Child Support Visit Their Children More?," by Heather Koball and Desiree Principe, New Federalism/National Survey of America's Families Series B, No. B-44, March 2002.

[34] Since, in some states, child support can be ordered by a court until a child is 21 years old or completes college, the survey data upon which this Census report is based covers parents' own children under age 21 rather than applying the U.S. Census Bureau's usual definition of children as those under age 18.

[35] U.S. Census Bureau, "Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2009," by Timothy S. Grall, *Current Population Reports,* P60-240, December 2011, Detailed Tables (Table 4). To view detailed tables, see http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/chldsu09.pdf. For information on noncustodial parents, see Elaine Sorensen and Tess Tannehill, "Demographic Survey Results from Nine-State IV-D Programs," December 18, 2007.

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the CSE program may interact with parents and children for 18 years, and in some cases for up to 30 years if the noncustodial parent owes past-due child support.[36]

Over the last 10-15 years, the CSE program has expanded its mission beyond its initial welfare cost-recovery goal to focus on providing its clients with more effective and efficient CSE services and fostering parental responsibility. In FY2011, there were 17.3 million children in the CSE program. Given that most of these children had a living mother and father and that most of them were living with their mother,[37] there were roughly 14 million noncustodial fathers with children on the CSE rolls in FY2011.[38]

Work Programs

To receive federal matching funds, states are required, among other things, to establish and implement a number of child support enforcement tools. One such tool requires state child support officials to have the authority to seek a judicial or administrative order that directs any noncustodial parent owing past-due support to a child receiving TANF benefits to pay that child support in accordance with a plan approved by the court or to participate in appropriate work activities.[39] This enforcement tool, which was mandated by the 1996 welfare reform law (P.L. 104-193), reflected Congress' acknowledgement that many noncustodial parents lack the education and skills necessary to obtain a job. The purpose of the CSE work-activities provision is to provide some noncustodial fathers of children receiving TANF cash assistance with employment opportunities so that they can meet their child support obligations by passing on some of their earnings to their children.[40] The tool allows judges to remand nonpaying

[36] In most states, the child support order is initiated when parents divorce or separate or when a never-married parent seeks assistance and child support is established for the child. The child support order generally lasts until the child reaches the state's "age of majority (usually age 18)," and if the noncustodial parent owes past-due child support payments, the state can continue collecting such child support arrearages for a stipulated period beyond this age.

[37] Annual CSE data include CSE cases and number of children in the caseload. These data do not indicate the number of living noncustodial fathers, which is estimated based on a special Census Bureau series on child support. The latest available data from that series is 2009. The 2009 data indicate that 1.1% of custodial parents in 2009 were widowed (17,340,000 x 1.1% = 191,000; 17,340,000 – 191,000 = 17,149,000).

[38] Ibid. Based on 2009 Census Bureau data, about 17% of custodial parents were fathers (18% x 17,000,000 = 3,060,000; 17,149,000 – 3,060,000 = 14,089,000).

[39] This provision is found in Section 466(a)(15) of the Social Security Act (Title 42 USC §666(a)(15)).

[40] The now defunct Welfare-to-Work (WtW) program was designed to help states and localities move hard-to-employ welfare recipients and certain low-income noncustodial parents into lasting unsubsidized jobs. The program was established in P.L. 105-33 (the Balanced Budget Act of 1997) to supplement TANF block grant funds. It was administered by the U.S. Department of Labor. The $3 billion grant ($1.5 billion for FY1997-1998 and $1.5 billion for FY1998-1999) consisted of two main parts: formula grants to states and competitive grants to local communities. Three-quarters of the funds were distributed by formula to states, which were required to pass on 85% of their formula funds to workforce investment boards (WIBs). The other quarter of the funds was distributed competitively based on grant applications from state and local agencies, nonprofit organizations, and public and private entities. According to evaluation information, hundreds of programs were implemented with WtW grants, through various agencies and organizations, and all were required to coordinate with TANF agencies. The WtW formula grant program was terminated by Section 105 of the Department of Labor 2004 appropriation (P.L. 108-199). Program evaluators indicated that all WtW programs had ended by the end of 2004. According to an evaluation of the WtW program by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., and the Urban Institute: "WIA [Workforce Investment Act] administrators generally felt the WtW grants program had three positive systemic benefits: it helped to establish welfare recipients as a key customer group for the One-Stop Career Center system; it improved the working relationship between the welfare and workforce agencies; and it made it possible to devote resources to developing and testing new strategies (e.g., employer partnerships, transitional employment, retention services) for serving the hard-to-employ" (Source: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., and the Urban Institute, "Welfare-to-Work Grants Programs: Adjusting to (continued...)

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noncustodial parents (of a child receiving TANF benefits) to a TANF work program, with the mandate to participate in the program, pay the child support owed, or be confined in jail. This obligation can be monitored to ensure compliance by the noncustodial parent. If the parent is in fact working surreptitiously, it is likely that the work program will conflict with his or her other job, forcing the parent to admit to having earnings and thereby to pay child support. If the noncustodial parent really is jobless, the program can help him or her get a job.[41] In 2011, 29 states and the District of Columbia were operating at least 38 work-oriented programs for noncustodial parent with active CSE agency involvement. Although most of the programs were not statewide, some were.[42] One example of a child support-driven employment project is the Texas Noncustodial Parent Choices Program.[43]

In addition, a number of state CSE programs have established employment programs in partnership with state and local workforce development boards and local courts for noncustodial parents regardless of whether the child is enrolled in the TANF program.[44]

Access and Visitation

A noncustodial parent's right to visit with his or her children is commonly referred to as visitation or child access. State family or domestic relations law almost universally treats child support and visitation as completely separate issues. Although a noncustodial parent's right to visit with his or her children and receipt of child support payments by custodial parents are legally separate issues, some research indicates that fathers who pay child support (as compared to those who do not) are more likely to visit their children.[45] The Parents' Fair Share (PFS) demonstration, a large-scale scientifically designed (with experimental and control groups) national demonstration project conducted from 1994-1996, was designed to increase support payments, employment and earnings, and parental involvement. The study found that PFS did not generally lead to increases in the frequency or length of contact that noncustodial parents had with their children. However, PFS was effective at increasing the occurrence of regular visits at sites where it served families with relatively low visitation rates (i.e., significant results were seen at the two sites whose level

(...continued)

Changing Circumstances," by Demetra Smith Nightingale, Carolyn Taylor O'Brien, Michael Egner, Nancy Pindus, and John Trutko, November 2003).

[41] Lawrence M. Mead, "Toward a Mandatory Work Policy for Men," *The Future of Children* (Princeton-Brookings), v. 17, no. 2, Fall 2007, p. 56.

[42] Office of Child Support Enforcement, "Work-Oriented Programs for Noncustodial Parents," February 29, 2012.

[43] The Texas Noncustodial Parents (NCP) Choices Program provides enhanced child support case compliance monitoring and employment services for noncustodial parents linked to a TANF/Medicaid case who are unemployed or underemployed and are not compliant with their child support obligations. Participation in the program is mandatory as ordered by CSE associate judges in the 14 sites currently funded by the Texas Workforce Commission and the Office of Attorney General (OAG). NCP Choices launched three new sites and expanded one existing site in spring 2010. According to the Texas CSE website, noncustodial parents ordered into NCP Choices have, on average, made no payments in the eight months prior to program entry and pay an average of $176 per month in the first year after program entry. Evaluation results show this as an overall 57% increase in child support payments for noncustodial parents participating in this program as compared to a control group of similar noncustodial parents in the OAG caseload (http://www.oag.state.tx.us/cs/ofi/index.shtml).

[44] HHS, ACF, OCSE, "Noncustodial Parents: Summaries of Research, Grants and Practices, July 2009." See also Shane Spaulding, Jean Baldwin Grossman, and Dee Wallace, "Working Dads: Final Report on the Fathers at Work Initiative," Public/Private Ventures, 2009.

[45] Heather Koball and Desiree Principe, "Do Nonresident Fathers Who Pay Child Support Visit Their Children More?," The Urban Institute, Series B, No. B-44, March 2002.

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of noncustodial parental involvement was extremely low at the outset of the demonstration program).[46] According to the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), there is some evidence that supports the premise that a noncustodial parent who has increased access to his or her child(ren) will be more likely to comply with a child support order. This finding is particularly dramatic for fathers who were unmarried to the custodial parent at the time of the child's birth.[47] Concurrently, there are also data that support the contention that a range of factors such as new relationships and childbearing by mothers, time elapsed since the parents lived together, drug use by fathers, incarceration rates, joblessness, and low-earnings lower the amount of time noncustodial fathers spend with their children.[48]

Federal and state policymakers have increasingly promoted efforts that address child support and access and visitation in the same forum. In order to promote visitation and better relations between custodial and noncustodial parents, the 1996 welfare reform law (P.L. 104-193) provided $10 million per year for grants to states for access and visitation programs.[49] An annual entitlement of $10 million from the federal CSE budget account is available to states for these grants. Eligible activities include but are not limited to mediation, counseling, education, development of parenting plans, visitation enforcement, and development of guidelines for visitation and alternative custody arrangements.

According to data from OCSE, all 50 states plus the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands have provided access and visitation services to over 500,000 noncustodial parents and their families since the program became operational in FY1998. Most participating noncustodial parents have received parenting education, supervised visitation services, mediation services, and help in developing parenting plans. According to a report on the grant program for FY2008, states contracted with over 374 court and/or community- and faith-based nonprofit service providers for the delivery of access and visitation services to noncustodial parents and their families. The report indicated that over 85,000 individuals were served by the grant program, compared to 20,000 who were served by the grant program during its first year of operation in FY1998.[50]

Modification of Child Support Obligations

In FY2011, $111.3 billion in child support arrearages was owed to families receiving CSE services, but less than 7% ($7.7 billion) of those arrearages was actually paid. Still, 62% of obligors continued to make payments on their child support arrearages. One interpretation of this information is that many noncustodial parents simply have too many financial obligations (e.g.,

[46] Virginia Knox and Cindy Redcross, "Parenting and Providing: The Impact of Parents' Fair Share on Paternal Involvement," MDRC, October 2000.

[47] Office of Child Support Enforcement, "Noncustodial Parents: Summaries of Research, Grants and Practices (Child Access and Visitation – Employment and Training – Fatherhood – Incarceration and Re-Entry – Projects in Progress)," July 2009, pp. 26-34.

[48] *The Future of Children*, vol. 20, no. 2, Fall 2010, "Capabilities and Contributions of Unwed Fathers," by Robert I. Lerman, p. 76.

[49] Even before the 1996 welfare reform law (P.L. 104-193), the Family Support Act of 1988 (P.L. 100-485) authorized a limited number of grants to states for demonstration projects to develop, improve, or expand activities designed to increase compliance with child access provisions of court orders.

[50] HHS, OCSE, "Child Access and Visitation Grants: State/Jurisdiction Profiles for FY 2008," March 8, 2010.

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food and shelter for themselves) to cover with their limited incomes; therefore, they may always be a little or a lot behind in meeting their child support obligations.

An Urban Institute study revealed the following findings on those with child support arrearages: (1) high debtors were expected to pay a larger percentage of their income for current child support orders—the median child support order for high debtors (i.e., noncustodial parents who owed $30,000 or more in child support arrearages) was 55% of their income compared to 13% for non-debtors and 22% for those who owed less than $30,000 in child support arrearages; (2) high debtors with a current support order tended to have older orders than other obligors; (3) high debtors were more likely to have multiple current child support orders than non-debtors; (4) high debtors were less likely to pay support than non-debtors; (5) high debtors were less likely to have a known address; and (6) high debtors were twice as likely to have an interstate child support case as a non-debtor.[51]

Under the CSE program, states are given significant latitude regarding modifications and reviews of child support orders.[52] Federal law requires that states give both parents the opportunity to request a review of their child support order at least once every three years, and states are required to notify the parents of this right. In order to prevent child support arrearages, especially for noncustodial parents who are unemployed or in prison, some analysts argue that child support modification laws should be changed so that they are more sensitive to periods of incarceration, unemployment, or injury/illness during which the noncustodial parent's ability to pay child support decreases. They contend that it is virtually impossible for most low-income noncustodial parents with those types of barriers to stay current in meeting their monthly child support payments.

Child Support and Ex-Offenders

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, of the 1.5 million inmates held in the nation's prisons (federal and state) in mid-2007, approximately 809,800 of them (53%) were parents. These prisoners collectively had 1.7 million children under the age of 18.[53]

Of the estimated 700,000 persons who are released from prison each year,[54] about 400,000 of them are fathers and mothers.[55] Many of these former inmates have formal child support obligations. Although the proportion of incarcerated noncustodial parents in state and federal prisons is only roughly 5% of the CSE caseload[56] at any one point in time, the cumulative impact is much higher. States indicate that 30%-40% of their "hard to collect from" cases consist of noncustodial parents who have a criminal record.[57]

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[51] Elaine Sorensen, Liliana Sousa, and Simon Schaner, "Assessing Child Support Arrears in Nine Large States and the Nation," The Urban Institute, July 11, 2007, pp. 19-24, http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/07/assessing-CS-debt/.

[52] This flexibility and discretion only applies to prospective modification of child support orders. Federal law prohibits the retroactive modification of child support orders (Section 466(a)(9) of the Social Security Act).

[53] Lauren E. Glaze and Laura M. Maruschak, "Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children," U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, August 2008.

[54] MDRC, "Building Knowledge About Successful Prisoner Reentry Strategies," February 11, 2009.

[55] Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) and Community Legal Services, Inc.,"Every Door Closed: Facts About Parents With Criminal Records," 2003.

[56] Between FY2006 and FY2009, the CSE caseload has ranged between 15.7 million and 15.8 million cases.

[57] HHS, ACF, OCSE, "Section 1115 Demonstration Grants—Projects in Support of the Prisoner Reentry Initiative (continued...)

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Pursuant to P.L. 107-273, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and state and local law enforcement agencies have been developing programs to assist with successful re-entry for the thousands of people being released from state and federal prisons each year.[58] Also, HHS, primarily through its Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) and state and local CSE agencies, has been approving program waivers and providing demonstration funds that foster effective methods of working with incarcerated and recently released parents and with re-entry programs. HHS has indicated that there are several reasons why CSE agencies should be concerned about ex-offenders and prisoner re-entry programs:

> One is the large number of parents in the child support caseload with a criminal background. Another is the likelihood that their children are recipients of public assistance and are vulnerable to a variety of negative outcomes. A third reason is that these parents are accessible in prison settings and respond positively to outreach efforts by child support personnel. Finally, 16 to 18 percent of child support arrears, which exceeded $107 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2007, are held by incarcerated or recently released obligors.[59]

Moreover, given tight fiscal times, states are looking to find creative ways to maximize the use of their resources. State and federal prison officials and CSE officials may find that it is mutually beneficial to work together on behalf of inmates who are parents.[60] Some analysts have suggested that state and federal prisons can strengthen their re-entry programs by incorporating information on CSE obligations and services. Further, CSE programs can make their programs more successful by identifying parents with child support obligations while they are in prison so that parents are better able to avoid the accumulation of excessive child support arrearages and so that information can be provided to prisoners that highlights the benefits of including child support payments in their post-release plans.[61]

Several strategies have been suggested that would involve both the criminal justice system and the CSE program in proactively addressing the reality that more ex-offenders are being released back into local communities. They include (1) making inquiries about a prisoner's parental status and whether or not he or she is required to pay child support as part of the prison intake process; (2) encouraging prisoners to contact the CSE agency regarding questions about the paternity and child support order establishment rules, due process procedures, collection methods, and other concerns; (3) informing inmates about how they can have their child support orders modified so that they do not incur high child support debt while in prison; (4) encouraging inmates to

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(...continued)

(HHS-2009-ACF-OCSE-FD-0013)," http://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/closed/HHS-2009-ACF-OCSE-FD-0013.html. (Hereinafter, HHS, ACF, OCSE, "Section 1115 Demonstration Grants—Projects in Support of the Prisoner Reentry Initiative.")

[58] The Prisoner Re-entry Initiative was authorized by Section 2421 of the 21st Century Department of Justice Appropriations Authorization Act (P.L. 107-273). The 21st Century Department of Justice Appropriations Authorization Act authorized appropriations for the initiative for FY2003-FY2005. However, the initiative has received funding since FY2001. Historically, funding for the initiative has been appropriated under the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) appropriation, but the funds have been transferred to the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), where they are administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) in the Department of Justice (DOJ). See CRS Report RL33489, *An Overview and Funding History of Select Department of Justice (DOJ) Grant Programs*, by Nathan James, January 16, 2008).

[59] HHS, ACF, OCSE, "Section 1115 Demonstration Grants—Projects in Support of the Prisoner Reentry Initiative."

[60] CRS Report R40499, *Child Support Enforcement and Ex-Offenders*, by Carmen Solomon-Fears.

[61] Esther Griswold and Jessica Pearson, "Twelve Reasons for Collaboration Between Departments of Correction and Child Support Enforcement Agencies," *Corrections Today*, v. 65 Issue 3, June 2003, pp. 87-90,104.

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maintain contact with their children while they are in prison; and (5) helping former inmates develop a plan to pay their child support obligations.[62] It has also been suggested that prison intake procedures include an automated data match or weekly population list exchange among corrections and CSE agencies, and that policies be implemented to assist with the child support modification process, such as providing noncustodial parents with forms, addressed envelopes, and postage.[63]

Healthy Marriage Programs

The current healthy marriage initiative (which was part of P.L. 109-171, the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005; enacted February 8, 2006) resulted from two parallel developments.[64] First, in the late 1980s and early 1990s states and local communities came together to develop strategies to strengthen marriage and reduce divorce rates, with the goal of improving child well-being. Most of the early initiatives were targeted toward middle-income persons and focused on educating people on why marriage matters and on providing them with the knowledge and skills necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage. Second, during the welfare reform debate in the mid-1990s, Congress and the Clinton Administration expressed their concerns about the high cost of nonmarital childbearing and its adverse affect on child well-being. Subsequently, the 1996 welfare reform law (P.L. 104-193) stipulated that TANF funds were to be expended to achieve four statutory goals. One of the goals is to promote the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. Another of the goals is to end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits through work, job preparation, and marriage.[65] In the early 2000s, the George W. Bush Administration directed specific federal agencies[66] to test different ways of strengthening couple relationships and encouraging marriage to stabilize families.[67] The federally funded healthy marriage initiatives implemented after 1996 have been targeted primarily to low-income persons.

From the outset, information from HHS about the healthy marriage initiative proposed by President George W. Bush indicated that the healthy marriage initiative was not about (1) telling people that they should be married, (2) trapping people in abusive marriages, or (3) withdrawing support for single mothers.[68] In proclaiming November 24-30, 2002, as National Family Week, President Bush stated:

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[62] Vicki Turetsky, "Realistic Child Support Policies that Support Successful Re-entry," Center for Law and Social Policy, revised January 2007.

[63] "Report of the Re-Entry Policy Council—Charting the Safe and Successful Return of Prisoners to the Community," 2004. See also Rachel L. McLean and Michael D. Thompson, "Repaying Debts," U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2007.

[64] HHS, ACF, "Healthy Marriage Initiative, 2002-2008: An Introductory Guide," 2008, http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/docs/acfhminitiativeguide.pdf. (Hereinafter, HHS, ACF, "Healthy Marriage Initiative, 2002-2008: An Introductory Guide.")

[65] The other two goals are (1) providing assistance to needy families so that children may remain in their homes, or in the homes of relatives, and (2) reducing the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

[66] These HHS agencies were the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) (including the Office of Head Start, formerly known as the Head Start Bureau), the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), the Office of Refugee Resettlement, the Children's Bureau, the Office of Community Services, the Administration for Native Americans.

[67] HHS, ACF, "Healthy Marriage Initiative, 2002-2008: An Introductory Guide."

[68] HHS, ACF, Information Memorandum, "Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage Initiative (ACYF-CB-02-01, Attachment C)," Issuance date: March 12, 2002.

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> We know that by helping couples to build and sustain strong, two-parent families, we will contribute to the well-being of our children and the strength of our society.... My welfare reform agenda also will strengthen families. We plan on continuing to provide historically high levels of support for childcare and child support enforcement. And we will continue to encourage strong marriages and two-parent married families as a worthy policy goal.[69]

In proclaiming October 12-18, 2003, as Marriage Protection Week, President Bush stated:

> To encourage marriage and promote the well-being of children, I have proposed a healthy marriage initiative to help couples develop the skills and knowledge to form and sustain healthy marriages. Research has shown that, on average, children raised in households headed by married parents fare better than children who grow up in other family structures. Through education and counseling programs, faith-based, community, and government organizations promote healthy marriages and a better quality of life for children. By supporting responsible child-rearing and strong families, my Administration is seeking to ensure that every child can grow up in a safe and loving home.[70]

P.L. 109-171 established within TANF a new categorical grant for healthy marriage promotion initiatives.[71] The healthy marriage promotion initiative was funded at approximately $100 million per year for FY2006 through FY2010, to be spent through grants awarded by HHS to support research and demonstration projects by public or private entities, and technical assistance provided to states, Indian tribes and tribal organizations, and other entities. In 2006, pursuant to the DRA, the HHS Office of Family Assistance (OFA) awarded healthy marriage grants to 123 grantees. The grantees were awarded five-year contracts to implement healthy marriage programs. In FY2009, the contracts (in aggregate) amounted to about $93 million.[72]

P.L. 111-291 (the Claims Resolution Act of 2010; enacted December 8, 2010) extended funding for the Title IV-A healthy marriage grants for an additional year (i.e., through FY2011). For FY2011, P.L. 111-291 reduced the appropriation for awarding funds for healthy marriage promotion activities from $100 million to $75 million for the year.[73] Pursuant to P.L. 112-78 (enacted December 23, 2011), the Healthy Marriage grant program was extended at its FY2011 funding level (on a pro rata basis) through February 29, 2012. Pursuant to P.L. 112-96 (enacted February 22, 2012), the Healthy Marriage grant program was extended (at its FY2011 funding level) through the end of FY2012 (on a pro rata basis). P.L. 112-175 (the government-wide continuing resolution enacted on September 28, 2012) extended funding (on a pro rata basis) for the Healthy Marriage grant program through March 2013 (the first six months of FY2013).

The activities supported by the DRA healthy marriage initiatives are programs to promote marriage to the general population, such as public advertising campaigns on the value of marriage

[69] The White House, "National Family Week, 2002" (George W. Bush), Proclamation 7630 of November 22, 2002.

[70] HHS, "Marriage Protection Week, 2003," A Proclamation by the President of the United States of America (George W. Bush), October 3, 2003.

[71] This law also established within TANF a new categorical grant for responsible fatherhood initiatives (discussed below).

[72] HHS, ACF, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, *Budget Justification of Appropriations Estimates for Committee on Appropriations*, FY2011, p. 303. According to HHS data, 60% of the grantees are nonprofit, community-based organizations. Other grantees include post-secondary institutions, state and county governments, for-profit companies, and faith-based organizations.

[73] P.L. 111-291 equalized funding between the healthy marriage grant program and the responsible fatherhood grant program for FY2011.

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and education; education on "social skills" (e.g., marriage education, marriage skills, conflict resolution, and relationship skills) for engaged couples, those interested in marriage, or married couples; and programs that reduce the financial disincentive to marry, if combined with educational or other marriage promotion activities. Entities that apply for marriage promotion grants must ensure that participation in such activities is voluntary and that domestic violence concerns are addressed (e.g., through consultations with experts on domestic violence). Although healthy marriage programs are not income-based, the emphasis has been on providing such programs to low-income persons. In 2006, pursuant to the DRA, the HHS Office of Family Assistance (OFA) awarded healthy marriage grants to 123 grantees. The grantees were awarded five-year contracts to implement healthy marriage programs. In FY2009, the contracts (in aggregate) amounted to about $93 million.[74]

The DRA requires healthy marriage grantees to evaluate their programs. The evaluations must identify project milestones and expected outcomes, and describe the services and activities that were implemented in the program. HHS is currently overseeing three large-scale, multi-site longitudinal, scientific evaluations of approaches to providing healthy marriage education services.[75] The final results of the studies are expected between 2011 and 2013.[76] In addition, a comprehensive process and output evaluation of selected ACF healthy marriage projects that serve Hispanic families will be conducted for programs operating during the period from September 2007 through September 2012.[77]

Healthy Marriage Programs and Child Well-Being

A 2008 report examines the economic costs associated with the decline in marriage (which the authors contend increases the number of children and adults eligible for and in need of government services). [78] The authors of the report maintain that the decline in marriage is a product of both divorce and unmarried childbearing. The report estimates that combined, the high rates of divorce and nonmarital childbearing costs U.S. taxpayers at least $112 billion per year in federal, state, and local costs—$70.1 billion of which is federal costs.[79] It states that "these costs arise from increased taxpayer expenditures for antipoverty, criminal justice, and education programs, and through lower levels of taxes paid by individuals who, as adults, earn less because of reduced opportunities as a result of having been more likely to grow up in poverty."[80]

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[74] HHS, ACF, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, *Budget Justification of Appropriations Estimates for Committee on Appropriations*, FY2011, p. 303. According to HHS data, 60% of the grantees are nonprofit, community-based organizations. Other grantees include post-secondary institutions, state and county governments, for-profit companies, and faith-based organizations.

[75] HHS's Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) has funded and continues to fund many more federally funded evaluations of healthy marriage programs. For additional information on these evaluations, see ACF, "Healthy Marriage Initiative, 2002-2008: An Introductory Guide," 2008, pp. 13-15.

[76] Ibid., p. 28.

[77] HHS, ACF, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Hispanic Healthy Marriage Initiative, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/strengthen/hispanic_healthy/index.html#overview.

[78] Benjamin Scafidi et al., "The Taxpayer Costs of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing: First-Ever Estimates for the Nation and for All Fifty States," Institute for American Values, Georgia Family Council, Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, and Families Northwest, April 2008. (Hereinafter, Scafidi et al, "The Taxpayer Costs of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing: First-Ever Estimates for the Nation and for All Fifty States").

[79] The report does not separately estimate the economic costs associated with nonmarital childbearing.

[80] Scafidi et al, "The Taxpayer Costs of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing: First-Ever Estimates for the Nation and for All Fifty States."

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Another study examined the impact of nonmarital childbearing on poverty by using a regression analysis that was based on hypothetically matching single women and men in the population on the basis of factors such as age, education, and race. It found that if the share of children living with two parents in 2000 was increased to what it had been in 1970, the child poverty rate in 2000 would have declined by about 29% compared to the actual decline of 4.5%.[81] If that analysis is applied to 2011 data, 4.5 million fewer children would be in poverty.[82]

Although the DRA healthy marriage program grants are funded through the TANF title of the Social Security Act, the statute makes it clear that the healthy marriage grants are not targeted exclusively to low-income clients. Some observers of the healthy marriage program contend that by encompassing middle-income persons as part of its clientele, the focus of promoting marriage as a poverty-reduction strategy for low-income persons is substantially diminished and thereby activities and services (i.e., program components) that could potentially help persons, especially low-income persons, become more employable[83] (e.g., financial literacy, anger and stress management, self-awareness, emotional control, and respect for others) may not be offered by the program.[84]

Critics of marriage promotion programs caution that government must be careful about supporting programs that cajole individuals into marrying.[85] They note the problems associated with child-bride marriages (i.e., women marrying young) and the short-term and often unhappy nature of the so-called "shotgun" marriage (i.e., marriage hastened by pregnancy).[86] Others contend that marriage promotion programs could encourage women to stay in abusive relationships, that they minimize the excellent job that many single parents do in raising good children, and that marriage is a private rather than a government affair.[87] Some supporters of healthy marriage programs remark that many long-lasting marriages were based on financial alliances (e.g., to increase economic status, family wealth, status in the community, etc.). They assert that policies or programs designed to promote healthy marriages are not intended to force anyone into unwanted, unhealthy relationships, trap women in abusive relationships, or withdraw support from single mothers. Supporters maintain that a relationship is not healthy if it is not safe. They also maintain that marriage is a proven path out of poverty for women.[88]

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[81] Paul R. Amato and Rebecca A. Maynard, "Decreasing Nonmarital Births and Strengthening Marriage to Reduce Poverty," *The Future of Children*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Fall 2007), p. 130.

[82] The 4.5 million figure was derived by applying the 29% reduction rate to the 15.5 million children who were in families with below poverty-level income in 2011. According to the Census Bureau, in 2011, 15.5 million of the nearly 75 million children (under age 18) living in families were in families with poverty-level income. Also, in 1970, 85.2% of children lived with both parents; in 1980, 76.7%; in 1990, 72.5%; in 2000, 69.1%; and in 2011, 68.9%.

[83] Some of the "healthy marriage" literature explains that much of the debate around healthy marriage focuses on policy initiatives that may make persons more "marriageable," such as job training and employment programs, but that are distinct from the definition of "healthy marriage;" Kristen Anderson Moore, Susan M. Jekielek, Jacinta Bronte-Tinkew, Lina Guzman, Suzanne Ryan, and Zakia Redd, "What Is 'Healthy Marriage'? Defining the Concept," Child Trends, Research Brief, 2004-16, September 2004.

[84] Marguerite Roulet, "Fatherhood Programs and Healthy Marriage Funding," Center for Family Policy and Practice, June 2009.

[85] Dorian Solot and Marshall Miller, "Let Them Eat Wedding Rings," Alternatives to Marriage Project, 2002.

[86] Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., "Bringing Back the Shotgun Wedding," *National Affairs*, no. 90 (Winter 1988).

[87] Claire Hughes, "Marriage Promotion: Will It Work?," June 2004.

[88] Robert Rector, "Welfare Reform and The Healthy Marriage Initiative," The Heritage Foundation, February 10, 2005.

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Nonetheless, many observers are concerned about the impact of healthy marriage promotion programs on survivors of domestic violence or those still in abusive relationships. They assert that all marriage promotion programs must identify and respond to domestic violence issues in a manner that is effective for the individual program in question.[89] Some observers contend that policymakers should focus healthy marriage programs on couples who want to get married, couples who are free from substance abuse problems and/or violent tendencies, and couples who do not have any children by other partners.[90] Others note that the phrase "healthy marriage" is specifically used because healthy marriage initiatives do not tolerate violence of any sort and instead educate couples on effective ways to resolve conflict and successful approaches to forming and sustaining committed and loving long-term marriages.

Impact Findings from the Building Strong Families (BSF) Project

The Building Strong Families project[91] is one of the centerpieces of a broad policy strategy to support healthy marriage. The project, which was funded by HHS, sought to determine whether well-designed interventions can help interested unwed parents realize their hopes for a healthy marriage and thus enhance the well-being of their children. The findings from a recently released evaluation of the long-term impacts of the BSF program were not very encouraging. As indicated above, the BSF project was designed to answer the question of whether relationship-skills education could be effective in improving relationship communication and satisfaction among low-income couples, and whether improving a couple's relationship will enhance the well-being of their children. The BSF project provided relationship and marriage education, case management, and referrals to other services. The 36-month impact evaluation of the stability and quality of the couples' relationships found the following:

- When results are averaged across all programs, BSF had no effect on the quality of couples' relationships and did not make couples more likely to stay together or get married. In addition, it did not improve couples' relationship quality.
- BSF had no effect on couples' co-parenting relationship. BSF had small negative effects on some aspects of father involvement.
- BSF had no effect on the family stability or economic well-being of children; however, the program led to modest reductions in children's behavior problems.[92]

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[89] Anne Menard and Oliver Williams, "It's Not Healthy If It's Not Safe: Responding to Domestic Violence Issues Within Healthy Marriage Programs," November 2005 (updated May 2006), p. 2.

[90] Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*, University of California Press, 2005.

[91] The Building Strong Families (BSF) project was sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The project developed, implemented, and tested voluntary programs that offer relationship skills education and other support services to unwed couples who are expecting or who have just had a baby. Eight organizations volunteered to be part of a rigorous evaluation designed to test a new strategy to help new, unmarried parents strengthen their relationships. These organizations implemented BSF programs around the country, complying with a set of research-based program guidelines. Mathematica Policy Research, under contract with HHS, conducted an experimental evaluation of the eight BSF programs. More than 5,000 interested couples were randomly assigned to either a group that could participate in the BSF program or a control group that could not.

[92] Mathematica Policy Research, Inc, The Building Strong Families Project, "The Long–Term Effects of Building Strong Families: A Relationship Skills Education Program for Unmarried Parents," Executive Summary (OPRE Report 2012-28B), by Robert G. Wood, Quinn Moore, Andrew Clarkwest, Alexandra Killewald, and Shannon Monahan, November 2012. Also see early impact study: Robert G. Wood et al., "The Building Strong Families Project—Strengthening Unmarried Parents' Relationships: The Early Impacts of Building Strong Families," Mathematica Policy (continued...)

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According to the 36-month impact study, in all of the eight programs[93] evaluated, the BSF program failed to yield better outcomes for program participants than for a control group that did not have access to the program. The evaluation measured the living arrangements, relationship status, relationship quality, extent of father involvement with his child, domestic violence, and economic well-being of approximately 5,000 couples who were randomly assigned to either a control group or a group that had access to a BSF program.

According to the 36-month impact study:

> Qualitative research with BSF couples indicated that the need for fathers to "step up" and be more responsible was one of the strongest messages that couples took from the program. This expectation may have led some fathers in particularly disadvantaged circumstances to instead distance themselves from their partner and children. For example, if men do not see themselves as capable of being economically supportive or meeting other expectations of responsible fatherhood, they may reduce engagement with their children in order to protect themselves from a sense of failure.[94]

The Obama Administration indicated (after the early findings of the evaluations were released) that the BSF program was not comprehensive enough to improve the stability of couples and the well-being of children. They contend that the approach outlined in their proposed Fatherhood, Marriage, and Family Innovation Fund initiative will encompass a broader effort that "will provide the comprehensive support that parents and couples need to succeed in their relationships as well as in their roles as workers, providers, and engaged parents."[95] Some commentators have mentioned that program implementation problems and inconsistent participation are often reasons for unfavorable outcomes in scientific evaluations of social programs.[96]

Responsible Fatherhood Programs

The federal government has also sought to engage men in the lives of their children through what are known as responsible fatherhood programs.[97] These programs recognize that committed, involved, and responsible fathers are important in the lives of their children. These programs seek to promote the financial and personal responsibility of noncustodial parents for their children and increase the participation of fathers in their children's lives.[98] Some responsible fatherhood

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(...continued)

Research, Inc., May 2010, p. xii. (Hereinafter, Robert G. Wood et al., "The Building Strong Families Project—Strengthening Unmarried Parents' Relationships: The Early Impacts Of Building Strong Families.")

[93] The eight BSF programs evaluated were in (1) Atlanta, GA; (2) Baltimore, MD; (3) Baton Rouge, LA; (4) Orange and Broward counties, Florida; (5) Allen, Marion, and Lake counties, Indiana; (6) Oklahoma City, OK; (7) Houston, TX; and (8) San Angelo, TX.

[94] Mathematica Policy Research, Inc, The Building Strong Families Project, "The Long–Term Effects of Building Strong Families: A Relationship Skills Education Program for Unmarried Parents," Executive Summary (OPRE Report 2012-28B), by Robert G. Wood, Quinn Moore, Andrew Clarkwest, Alexandra Killewald, and Shannon Monahan, November 2012.

[95] HHS, ACF, "Study: Building Strong Families Evaluation Suggests Stronger Approach is Needed," May 21, 2010.

[96] Virginia Knox, Philip A. Cowan, Carolyn Pape Cowan, and Elana Bildner, "Policies That Strengthen Fatherhood and Family Relationships," MDRC, A Working Paper, 2009.

[97] For additional information, see CRS Report RL31025, *Fatherhood Initiatives: Connecting Fathers to Their Children*, by Carmen Solomon-Fears.

[98] Although programs that seek to help fathers initiate or maintain contact with their children and become emotionally involved in their children's lives are usually referred to as "fatherhood" programs, the programs are generally gender (continued...)

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programs help noncustodial parents strengthen their parenting skills. Other programs try to discourage young men from becoming fathers until they are married and ready for the responsibility.[99]

Even before the federal government became interested in responsible fatherhood programs, many states [100] and localities, private organizations, and nonprofit agencies had been operating responsible fatherhood programs since the early 1990s.[101] From the start, many CSE agencies recognized the importance of cultivating a collaborative relationship with these responsible fatherhood programs. During these early years, it was not always easy to form amicable connections, in part because there had been a longstanding tension between noncustodial parents and the CSE program. Noncustodial parents often claimed that by exclusively focusing on financial support, the CSE system devalued their role as a nurturer, disciplinarian, and mentor. Nonetheless, most responsible fatherhood programs clearly explained the goals and duties of the CSE program and encouraged noncustodial parents to interact with CSE agencies in a proactive manner.

During the 106th Congress, then-Representative Nancy Johnson, chair of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources, stated, "to take the next step in welfare reform we must find a way to help children by providing them with more than a working mother and sporadic child support." She noted that many low-income fathers have problems similar to those of mothers on welfare—namely, they are likely to have dropped out of high school, to have little work experience, and to have significant barriers that lessen their ability to find or keep a job. She also asserted that in many cases these men are "dead broke" rather than "deadbeats" and that the federal government should help these noncustodial fathers meet both their financial and emotional obligations to their children.[102] During this same time period, research indicating that father absence had a profound negative impact on children became more widely accepted.

As indicated above, the advantages and disadvantages of having federally funded responsible fatherhood programs have been debated in Congress since the 106th Congress (1999), but it was not until the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (P.L. 109-171) that specific funding was provided for these programs.[103] P.L. 109-171 included a provision that provided up to $50 million per year (for each of FY2006-FY2010) in competitive grants to states, territories, Indian tribes and tribal

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neutral. Their underlying goal is participation of the noncustodial parent in the lives of his or her children.

[99] HHS, ACF, Information Memorandum, "Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage Initiative (ACYF-CB-02-01, Attachment C)," Issuance date: March 12, 2002.

[100] For information on profiles of state programs and strategies to promote parenting and responsible fatherhood, see http://www.fatherhood.gov/resources/state.cfm.

[101] For a detailed early history of responsible fatherhood programs, see Kathleen Sylvester and Kathleen Reich, "Making Fathers Count: Assessing the Progress of Responsible Fatherhood Efforts," Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Social Policy Action Network, 2002.

[102] U.S. Congress, House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources, "Hearing on Fatherhood Legislation," Statement of Chairman Nancy Johnson. 106th Congress, 1st Session (October 5, 1999), p. 4. **Note:** Much of the research underlying the aforementioned statement is based on the Urban Institute's 1997 National Survey of American Families (NSAF); see Sorenson and Zibman, "Poor Dads Who Don't Pay Child Support: Deadbeat or Disadvantaged."

[103] Other sources of federal funding for fatherhood programs include the TANF program, TANF state Maintenance-of-Effort (MOE) funding, CSE funds, and Social Services Block Grant (Title XX) funds. According to HHS, many states use TANF funds for responsible fatherhood programs. In addition, many private foundations provide financial support for responsible fatherhood programs.

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organizations, and public and nonprofit community organizations (including religious organizations) for responsible fatherhood programs.[104] According to data from ACF, 99 grantees were awarded five-year contracts to implement responsible fatherhood programs. In FY2009, the contracts (in aggregate) amounted to about $45 million.[105]

For FY2011, P.L. 111-291 (the Claims Resolution Act of 2010) increased the appropriation for awarding funds for activities promoting responsible fatherhood from $50 million to $75 million for the year.[106] Pursuant to P.L. 112-78 (enacted December 23, 2011), the Responsible Fatherhood grant program was extended at its FY2011 funding level (on a pro rata basis) through February 29, 2012. Pursuant to P.L. 112-96 (enacted February 22, 2012), the Responsible Fatherhood grant program was extended (at its FY2011 funding level) through the end of FY2012 (on a pro rata basis). P.L. 112-175 (the government-wide continuing resolution enacted on September 28, 2012) extended funding (on a pro rata basis) for the Responsible Fatherhood grant program through March 2013 (the first six months of FY2013).

Most responsible fatherhood programs include parenting education; training in responsible decision-making, conflict resolution, and coping with stress; mediation services for both parents; problem-solving skills; peer support; and job-training opportunities. Like healthy marriage promotion programs, responsible fatherhood programs are not income-based, but the emphasis has been on providing such programs to low-income persons. An evaluation of responsible fatherhood programs sponsored by HHS—the National Evaluation of the Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated and Reentering Fathers and Their Partners (MFS-IP)—began in 2006. The evaluation is a multiyear (quasi-experimental) study that is expected to run from 2006 through 2013.

According to an HHS Research Brief:

> The impact study component of the MFS-IP evaluation, concluding in 2015, will determine the effectiveness of relationship education and other MFS-IP program components in strengthening relationship quality and stability and facilitating successful community reentry. Research suggests that healthy relationships contribute to reentry success, yet little is known about how to improve relationship quality for couples affected by incarceration. Relationship education that builds healthy relationship skills could play an important role in relationship quality throughout incarceration and during the critical reentry period. Even for lengthy periods of incarceration, communication and conflict resolution skills could result in more

[104] Under P.L. 109-171, responsible fatherhood funds can be spent on activities to promote responsible fatherhood through (1) marriage promotion (through counseling, mentoring, disseminating information about the advantages of marriage and two-parent involvement for children, etc.); (2) parenting activities (through counseling, mentoring, mediation, disseminating information about good parenting practices, etc.); (3) fostering economic stability of fathers (through work first services, job search, job training, subsidized employment, education, etc.); or (4) contracting with a nationally recognized nonprofit fatherhood promotion organization to develop, promote, or distribute a media campaign to encourage the appropriate involvement of parents in the lives of their children, focusing in particular on responsible fatherhood; and to develop a national clearinghouse to help states and communities in their efforts to promote and support marriage and responsible fatherhood.

[105] HHS, ACF, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Budget Justification of Appropriations Estimates for Committee on Appropriations, FY2011, p. 303.

[106] Thus, the Title IV-A Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grants, which were funded annually from FY2006 through FY2010 at $100 million and $50 million, respectively, were funded in FY2011 on an equal basis (i.e.,$75 million per program).

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> supportive relationships, improved co-parenting, and increased familial contact—all of which could be beneficial upon the individual's eventual release.[107]

A final report on the impact of the program is expected in 2015 or 2016.

Responsible fatherhood programs, in affirming the importance of fathers to their children's well-being, have to a certain extent encouraged open communication between noncustodial parents and the CSE program.[108] It is generally agreed that positive, constructive communication between noncustodial parents and CSE agencies sometimes leads to more child support for children.[109] Moreover, findings from several of the demonstration projects that provided noncustodial fathers with employment and supportive services indicate that partnerships between the CSE programs and employment programs can result in significant, sustained increases in the amount of child support paid to custodial parents on behalf of dependent children.[110] Given that recruitment of noncustodial parents to responsible fatherhood programs has been a challenge for many of these programs, some observers contend that it is important to integrate the CSE agency into fatherhood programs because they have more leverage than other agencies or entities in persuading noncustodial parents to participate.[111] They also note that the involvement of the CSE agency provides an improved knowledge base about the program to both staff and participants, and that the CSE agency has the unique ability to implement "realistic" child support order amounts and develop strategies to address noncustodial parents with large amounts of accumulated debt.[112]

Many commentators contend that to help fathers and mothers successfully meet their parental responsibilities, responsible fatherhood programs must be expanded to include broad-based collaborative strategies that include schools, employment programs, prison systems, churches, community organizations, and the health care system.[113] The role of these entities would be to recruit noncustodial parents to the programs and/or provide relevant information, and if appropriate, services, to existing programs. Some child welfare,[114] Head Start,[115] and prisoner re-entry programs have included responsible fatherhood initiatives or components in their programs.

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[107] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, ASPE Research Brief, "Strategies for Building Healthy Relationship Skills Among Couples Affected by Incarceration," by Christine Lindquist, Tasseli McKay, and Anupa Bir of RTI International, March 2012, p. 12.

[108] Maureen Waller and Robert Plotnick, "A Failed Relationship? Low-Income Families and the Child Support Enforcement System," *Focus* (University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty), vol. 21, no. 1 (spring 2000), pp. 12-17. See also "Family Ties: Improving Paternity Establishment Practices and Procedures for Low-Income Mothers, Fathers and Children," National Women's Law Center and Center on Fathers, Families, and Public Policy, Washington, DC, 2000, pp. 9-11.

[109] William J. Doherty, Edward F. Kouneski, and Martha Farrell Erickson, "Responsible Fathering: An Overview and Conceptual Framework—Final Report," HHS, ACF, Center for Policy Research and Policy Studies (HHS-100-93-0012), Washington, DC, September 1996.

[110] For more information, see CRS Report RL31025, *Fatherhood Initiatives: Connecting Fathers to Their Children*, by Carmen Solomon-Fears. Also see http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/Research/index.shtml and http://www.fatherhood.org/evaluation.asp.

[111] Urban Institute, "Ten Key Findings from Responsible Fatherhood Initiatives," by Karin Martinson and Demetra Nightingale, February 2008.

[112] Ibid., p. 8.

[113] Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Promoting Responsible Fatherhood," A Guide To Key Ideas, Effective Approaches, and Technical Assistance Resources for Making Connections Cities and Site Teams, 2005, http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/fatherhood_pages.pdf.

[114] HHS, ACF, Children's Bureau, "The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children," Section II, 8.

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Human Capital Programs

Unlike economic assistance programs that seek to support family consumption, and family support programs aimed at nurturing family relationships, human capital programs are focused on helping individuals develop the skills necessary to obtain employment and realize their economic potential. Several human capital programs are specifically designed to enhance employability and earnings.

While existing federal workforce development programs do not directly target noncustodial fathers per se, they can play a role in providing these fathers (and others) with opportunities to secure employment, which in turn can help them meet their obligations to their children. These programs provide a combination of job search assistance, education, and training services to prepare individuals for work or improve individuals' labor market performance. In the broadest sense, workforce development includes secondary and postsecondary education, private employer training, and the publicly funded system of job training and employment services. The federal government provides workforce development activities through programs authorized under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 (P.L. 105-220). Workforce development may include activities such as job search assistance, career counseling, occupational skill training, classroom training, or on-the-job training. Title I of WIA provides job training and related services to unemployed and underemployed individuals. Title I programs are administered by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), primarily through its Employment and Training Administration (ETA), and carried out by states and localities through what are known as workforce investment boards. Although WIA authorized funding through September 30, 2003, WIA programs continue to be funded through annual appropriations. In FY2012, programs and activities authorized under Title I of WIA were funded at $4.9 billion, including $2.6 billion for state formula grants for youth, adult, and dislocated worker training and employment activities. The remaining funding is for multiple national programs.

WIA does not expressly provide services to noncustodial parents and it is not clear the extent to which Title I programs reach noncustodial parents, since data are not kept on the parenting status of participants (except whether they are single parents). Generally speaking, Title I seeks to benefit all participants by increasing their employment, job wages, and occupational skills. As stated in the purpose of Title I, more skilled workers can "improve the quality of the workforce, reduce welfare dependency, and enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the Nation."[116] For noncustodial parents, attachment to the workforce and increased wages can improve their ability to provide for their children. Recent initiatives under WIA to engage prisoners re-entering the community may particularly benefit prisoners who are noncustodial parents and face difficulty in meeting their financial obligations upon re-entry.

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Fatherhood Programs, by Jeffrey Rosenberg and Bradford W. Wilcox, 2006, http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/chaptereight.cfm.

[115] HHS, "Father Involvement in Head Start and Early Head Start," http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/Parenting/hs.shtml.

[116] Section 106 of WIA.

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One-Stop Delivery System

One of the innovations of WIA was the establishment of the "One-Stop delivery system" (hereinafter, "One-Stop") to provide coordinated access to a range of employment and support services. WIA requires each state to establish a One-Stop delivery system to provide "core" services (i.e., intake and job search assistance) and provide access to "intensive" (i.e., individual employment plans, group counseling, etc.) and "training" (i.e., on-the-job training, skill upgrading and retraining services, etc.) among other services.

Each local workforce investment area in a state is required to have at least one physical One-Stop center in which the aforementioned programs and services are accessible. In addition, a state One-Stop delivery system may provide access to programs and services through a network of affiliated sites and through a network of One-Stop partners linked electronically. As noted, one of the characteristics of the WIA One-Stop system is to provide a central point of service for those seeking employment, training, and related services. To this end, WIA requires multiple partner programs and allows additional programs to operate in the One-Stop system. Some of these programs, including TANF and SNAP, are targeted to low-income individuals.[117]

WIA State Formula Grant Programs

Three formula grant programs for youth, adults, and dislocated workers provide funding for employment and training activities carried out by the national system of One-Stop Career Centers. Funds are distributed to states by statutory formulas based on measures of unemployment and poverty status for youth and adult allocations, and unemployment measures for dislocated worker allocations.[118] States in turn distribute funds to local workforce investment boards (WIBs), which administer and oversee local workforce development activities funded by WIA. There are no eligibility requirements for participation in services funded by the Adult Activities and Dislocated Worker Activities programs, but a youth must be low-income and have a barrier to employment (i.e., be a school dropout, in foster care, etc.) in order to participate in Youth Activities-funded services. However, Section 134(d)(4)(E) of WIA instructs local WIBs to give priority to recipients of public assistance and other low-income individuals for training and intensive services when funds are limited.

The state formula grant programs are the following:

- The Youth Activities program, discussed further under "Youth Activities," below, provides training and related services to low-income youth ages 14 through 21 through formula grants allocated to states, which in turn allocate funds to local entities. Programs funded under the youth activities chapter of WIA provide 10 "program elements" that consist of strategies to complete secondary school, alternative secondary school services, summer employment, work experience, occupational skill training, leadership development opportunities, supportive services, adult mentoring, follow-up services, and comprehensive guidance and

[117] The list of required partners, including references to the authorizing statutes for each program, is in Section 121(b)(1)(B) of WIA.

[118] For further information on the formula factors used in the state formula grant allocations, see Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, "Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and Wagner-Peyser Act Statutory Formulas for State Allotments," http://www.doleta.gov/budget/WIAFormDesc.pdf.

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counseling. In FY2012, funding for state grants for Youth Activities was $826 million.

- The Adult Activities program provides training and related services to individuals ages 18 and older through formula grants allocated to states, which in turn allocate funds to local entities. There are no income requirements to participate in WIA Adult Activities programs. Participation in the adult program is based on a "sequential service" strategy that consists of three levels of services. Any individual may receive "core" services, which primarily encompass job search assistance. To receive "intensive" services, including individual career planning and prevocational services (i.e., interview skills, development of learning skills, etc.), an individual must have received core services and need intensive services to become employed or to obtain or retain employment that allows for self-sufficiency. To receive training services—including on-the-job training, skill upgrading, and retraining—an individual must have received intensive services and need training services to become employed or to obtain or retain employment that allows for self-sufficiency. In FY2012, funding for state grants for Adult Activities was $771 million.
- A majority of WIA Dislocated Worker Activities funds are allocated by formula grants to states, which in turn allocate funds to local entities to provide training and related services to individuals who have lost their jobs and are unlikely to return to those jobs or similar jobs in the same industry. As in the Adult Activities program, there are no income requirements to participate in the WIA Dislocated Worker Activities program. The remainder of the appropriation is reserved by DOL for a National Reserve account, which in part provides for National Emergency Grants[119] to states or local entities (as specified under Section 173).[120] In FY2012, funding was $1.0 billion for state grants for Dislocated Worker Activities and $224 million for the National Reserve.[121]

Detailed WIA data on demographics and services received are based on the concept of program "exiters." An exiter is a participant who received a service funded by WIA or a partner program, has not received the service for 90 consecutive calendar days, and is not scheduled to receive future services.[122]

Of the three programs, the Adult Activities program serves the most individuals. In the most recent period for which data are available (April 1, 2011, through March 31, 2012), 1,247,220

[119] Grants authorized under WIA Section 173(a)(1) are for employment and training assistance to workers affected by major economic dislocations, such as plant closures or mass layoffs.

[120] WIA Sections 132(a)(2)(A) and (a)(2)(B) require that 20% of the amount appropriated for Dislocated Worker Employment and Training Activities be reserved for national emergency grants, projects, and technical assistance. The remaining 80% is to be used for state formula grants.

[121] In FY2009, the National Reserve includes $125 million for Community-Based Job Training (CBJT) grants (see below).

[122] Thus, the date on which an individual has finished his or her participation in WIA determines the program year for which data are generated on the exiter. For example, if an individual received services throughout the entire 2011 calendar year and last received WIA services on December 15, 2012, the data for that individual are included as part of Program Year (PY) 2012. A program year runs from July 1-June 30 (e.g., PY2012 runs from July 1, 2012-June 30, 2013). Due to deadlines for submitting data for the WIASRD annual Data Book, the most recent period for which data are available is April 1, 2011-March 31, 2012. U.S. Department of Labor, *PY2011 WIASRD Data Book,* Table II-1 and Table II-7, http://www.doleta.gov/performance/results/pdf/py_2011_wiasrd_data_book.pdf

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adults exited the Adult Activities program. Notably, 65.7% of exiters received only core services, which are generally limited to job search assistance and do not include education and job training. Of the approximately 35% of exiters who went on to receive more specialized services, including job training,

- 11.2% were single parents,
- 47.6% were low-income,
- 24.4% were recipients of public assistance,
- 7.8% were offenders, and
- 13.5% did not hold high school degrees.

Reintegration of Ex-Offenders Program

In addition to state formula grants, WIA authorizes funding for several national programs—Job Corps, Native American programs, Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker programs, Veterans' Workforce Investment programs, Demonstration and Pilot programs, National Emergency Grants, and YouthBuild. One of the programs administered under DOL's Demonstration and Pilot programs (authorized under Section 171 of WIA and Section 212 of the Second Chance Act of 2007, P.L. 110-199) is the Reintegration of Ex-Offenders program (REO). This program is the most relevant to low-income and noncustodial males.

The Reintegration of Ex-Offenders program consolidated funding from two previous demonstration projects, the Prisoner Reentry Initiative (PRI) and the Responsible Reintegration of Youthful Offenders (RRYO). PRI, which was first funded in FY2005, funds faith-based and community organizations that help recently released prisoners find work when they return to their communities. RRYO, first funded in FY2000, supports projects that serve young offenders and youth at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. In FY2008, the Reintegration of Ex-Offenders program combined the PRI and RRYO into a single funding stream. In FY2012, funding for this single program was $80.4 million.

Youth Programs

The nation's future depends on today's young people leaving school prepared for college or the workplace and beginning to make positive contributions to society. Some youth, however, face barriers to becoming taxpayers, workers, and participants in civic life. They may also disengage from their own families, including their children. Social science research indicates that many low-income, disadvantaged youth come from families in which their father was absent from the home. Single-parent households tend to have less income and other resources than two-parent households. Having fewer resources lowers children's school performance, decreases their labor force participation, and contributes to early childbearing.[123] For example, multiple studies of births among teenagers show that teens in single-parent households are more likely to have children and to do so outside of marriage compared to those in two-parent families.[124]

[123] Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 39-56.

[124] Ibid, p. 54. These studies do not account for whether teens are cohabiting with a partner. Also see Fragile Families (continued...)

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While the federal government does not have a single approach or policy for serving disadvantaged young people, select youth programs seek to ameliorate the negative outcomes they may experience.[125] The goals of these federal programs are not necessarily to engage teens and young adults in the lives of their children—if in fact they have children—but rather, to ensure that these young people are adequately prepared for adulthood. Three types of programs in particular focus on delaying early family formation or engaging young people in productive activities as they transition to adulthood: teenage pregnancy prevention programs, youth employment programs, and education programs. (Notably, the workforce programs include education services and the education programs include workforce elements.) Yet by preparing youth for adulthood, these programs may ultimately put teenagers and young adults in a better position to provide for and be involved in the lives of their (current or future) children.

Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Programs

In 2011, U.S. teen births accounted for 8.4% of all births and 18.4% of all nonmarital births. The birth rate for U.S. teenagers (ages 15 through 19) increased in 2006 and 2007 after a steady decline since 1991. However, in 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011 the teen birth rate dropped below the 2006 teen birth rate, reversing the two-year upward trend. Although the birth rate for U.S. teens has dropped in 18 of the past 20 years, it remains higher than the teen birth rate of most industrialized nations.[126]

The high volume of pregnancies and birth rates among teenage and never-married women is often attributed to a liberal view of sexual activity.[127] Some analysts also contend that contraceptive advancements have afforded women a false sense of security, thereby contributing to increased sexual activity and more pregnancies. The academic and professional communities also maintain that teen parenthood is one of the negative consequences of growing up without a father present in the household.[128] Moreover, policymakers suggest that, prior to its reform, "welfare" was seen as a guaranteed source of income for unmarried teenage mothers with grim marriage and job prospects. The president of the Alan Guttmacher Institute, an organization that studies reproductive health, commenting on a study about adolescent pregnancy and childbearing in "developed" countries, stated: "In the United States, poverty and inequity clearly are behind much of our high rates of pregnancy, birth and abortion. But lack of sensitive, confidential, low-cost contraceptive services and the denial of accurate and frank information about sex, are equally to blame."[129]

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Working Paper WP12-20-FF, *The Causal Effects of Father Absence*, by Sara McLanahan, Laura Tach, and Daniel Schneider, October 10, 2012.

[125] For information on these programs, see CRS Report RL33975, *Vulnerable Youth: Background and Policies*, by Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara.

[126] For more information, see CRS Report RS20301, *Teenage Pregnancy Prevention: Statistics and Programs*, by Carmen Solomon-Fears.

[127] U.S. Congress, House Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Human Resources, Testimony of Dr. Isabel V. Sawhill on Nonmarital Births and Child Poverty in the United States, June 29, 1999.

[128] General Accounting Office, Teen Pregnancy: State and Federal Efforts to Implement Prevention Programs and Measure Their Effectiveness, GAO/HEHS-99-4, November 1998. Though dated, this report continues to be relevant.

[129] Alan Guttmacher Institute, "United States and the Russian Federation Lead the Developed World in Teenage Pregnancy Rates," News Release, February 24, 2000, p. 2.

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An October 2006 study by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy estimated that in 2004, adolescent childbearing cost U.S. taxpayers about $9 billion per year: $2.3 billion in child welfare benefits; $1.9 billion in health care expenses; $2.1 billion in spending on incarceration (for the sons of women who had children as adolescents); $6.3 billion in lost tax revenue because of lower earnings of the mothers, fathers, and children (when they were adults); and $3.6 billion in offsetting public assistance savings (younger teens receive less annually over a 15-year period than those who give birth at ages 20-21). Research indicates that teens who give birth are less likely to complete high school and go on to college, thereby reducing their potential for economic self-sufficiency. The research also indicates that the children of teens are more likely than children of older parents to experience problems in school and drop out of high school, and are more likely to repeat the cycle of teenage pregnancy and poverty as adults. The 2006 report contends that if the teen birth rate had not declined between 1991 and 2004, the annual costs associated with teen childbearing would have been almost $16 billion (instead of $9 billion).[130]

In recognition of the negative, long-term consequences associated with teenage pregnancy and births, the prevention of teenage and out-of-wedlock childbearing is a goal of federal social programs. Thus, there are many federal laws that address the subject of teen pregnancy prevention. The Adolescent Family Life (AFL) program, created in 1981 (Title XX of the Public Health Services Act), was the first federal program to focus on adolescents. The AFL program provides comprehensive and innovative health, education, and social services to pregnant and parenting adolescents and their infants, male partners, and families. The AFL program is authorized to provide comprehensive sex education information, including information about contraceptive methods as well as abstinence-only-focused educational information. The AFL program did not receive any funding for FY2012.

The Title V Abstinence Education block grant to states (Section 510 of the Social Security Act, established in 1996 by P.L. 104-193) authorized a separate state formula grant program to support abstinence-only education programs. Funds are awarded to states based on the proportion of low-income children in each state compared to the national total, and may only be used for teaching abstinence. To receive funding, a state must match every $4 in federal funds with $3 in state funds. Section 510 provided $50 million for each of the six fiscal years FY1998-FY2003. Although the program has not been reauthorized, it received many temporary funding extensions between 2003 and 2009. Funds are administered by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within HHS. Prior to enactment of P.L. 111-148 (the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, ACA), funding for the Title V Abstinence Education program had ended on June 30, 2009. ACA restored funding for the somewhat controversial abstinence-only approach to teen pregnancy prevention. ACA appropriated $250 million for the abstinence-only block grant at $50 million per year for five years (FY2010-FY2014). P.L. 112-74, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2012 (enacted December 23, 2011), included funding of an additional $5 million for competitive grants for abstinence-only education for FY2012.

ACA also established a new state formula grant program and appropriated $375 million at $75 million per year for five years (FY2010-FY2014) to enable states to operate a new Personal Responsibility Education program, which is a comprehensive approach to teen pregnancy prevention that educates adolescents on both abstinence and contraception to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. It also provides youth with information on several adulthood

[130] The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, By the Numbers: The Public Cost of Teen Childbearing, by Saul D. Hoffman. October 2006.

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preparation subjects (e.g., healthy relationships, adolescent development, financial literacy, parent-child communication, educational and career success, and healthy life skills). The new Personal Responsibility Education program is mandated to provide programs that are evidence-based, medically accurate, and age-appropriate.

P.L. 111-117, the Consolidated Appropriations for FY2010, included a new discretionary Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) program that provides grants and contracts, on a competitive basis, to public and private entities to fund "medically accurate and age appropriate" programs that reduce teen pregnancy. Of the $109.5 million appropriated for the TPP program for FY2011, $105 million is for replicating programs that are proven through rigorous evaluation to be effective in reducing teenage pregnancy, behavioral factors underlying teen pregnancy, or other related risk factors; and $4.5 million is for research and demonstration grants. The TPP program is administered by the new Office of Adolescent Health within HHS. P.L. 111-117 also provides a separate $4.5 million (within the Public Health Service Act program evaluation funding) to carry out evaluations of teenage pregnancy prevention approaches. P.L. 112-74, the Omnibus Appropriations Act, 2012 (enacted December 23, 2011), included level funding of $104.790 million for the TPP program for FY2012 (at least $75 million for Tier 1 grants and at least $25 million for Tier 2 grants). P.L. 112-74 also increased funding for program evaluation to $8.455 million for FY2012.

Table 3 shows that federal funding for the teen pregnancy prevention programs mentioned above amount to $243.5 million for FY2012.

Table 3. Federal Funding for Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs, FY2012

Program Name	Federal Funding for FY2012 (in millions of dollars)
Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) Program	$105.0
Evaluation Funds for TPP Program	8.5
Adolescent Family Life (AFL) Program	0.0
Personal Responsibility Education Program	75.0
Title V Abstinence Education Block Grant	55.0
Total	$243.5

Source: Table prepared by CRS.

In addition, there are several other federally funded programs that provide pregnancy prevention information and/or services to both teens and adults. These programs include Medicaid Family Planning, the Title X Family Planning Program, the Maternal and Child Health block grant, the TANF block grant program, the Title XX Social Services block grant, and a couple of teen pregnancy prevention programs administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (within HHS).

Select Youth Workforce Programs

Since the 1930s, federal job training and employment programs and policies have sought to connect vulnerable youth ages 14 through 24 to work and school. Generally, these young people have been defined as being vulnerable because they are low-income and have a barrier to employment, such as having dropped out of school or spent time in foster care. The Workforce

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Investment Act of 1998 (P.L. 105-220) is the most recent federal law to provide job training and related services to unemployed and underemployed individuals, including youth. All youth job training programs and related services are authorized under Title I of WIA and are carried out by the Department of Labor. Each of the programs has a similar purpose: to connect youth to educational and employment opportunities, and to offer similar services for doing so. As discussed previously in this report, the unemployment rate for teens is higher than for young adults and adults generally. The 2010 rate marked the highest it has been during the post-World War II period.[131] Further, compared to their female counterparts, young men ages 16 through 24 are more likely to not be in school or working for at least one year.[132]

The WIA programs for youth include

- WIA Youth Activities, a formula grant program that includes employment and other services that are provided year-round;
- Job Corps, a program that provides job training and related services primarily at residential centers maintained by contractor organizations;
- YouthBuild, a competitive grant program that emphasizes job training and education in construction; and
- Reintegration of Ex-Offenders, a demonstration program for juvenile and adult offenders that provides job training and other services and is authorized under WIA's pilot and demonstration authority.

Together, these programs make up the federal job training system for disadvantaged young people. Youth in the programs often learn job training skills or are employed and are simultaneously working toward a high school diploma or its equivalent. However, services are carried out differently and by distinct entities. For example, local areas must provide 10 specific elements, including mentoring and follow-up services, to youth who receive services under the WIA Youth Activities formula grant program. YouthBuild program participants engage in employment and other activities primarily related to housing and other types of construction work. Job Corps is the only one of the programs that provides residential services, where youth can live onsite and receive health care services, child care, and other supports. The Reintegration of Ex-Offenders program is made up of several types of grants that provide educational services to students in schools that have been classified as "persistently dangerous," as well as employment and alternative education services to youth engaged in the juvenile justice system.

The programs generally serve vulnerable youth, but some have more targeted eligibility criteria. Participants in the Youth Activities formula grant program, YouthBuild, and Job Corps must be low-income and have specific employment barriers. The Youthful Offender component of the Reintegration of Ex-Offenders serves youth who have become involved in the juvenile justice or criminal justice system or youth at risk of becoming involved. Notably, young men are well represented in these programs, making up about half or more of the participants in each of the

[131] For further information, see CRS Report R40929, *Vulnerable Youth: Employment and Job Training Programs*, by Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara,

[132] For further information, see CRS Report R40535, *Disconnected Youth: A Look at 16- to 24-Year Olds Who Are Not Working or In School*, by Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara and Thomas Gabe.

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programs. For example, approximately 60% of the participants in Job Corps and approximately 70% of the participants in YouthBuild are males.[133]

The Youth Activities program and the Job Corps program, described in further detail directly below, highlight WIA's focus on helping at-risk young people achieve economic independence and gain skills needed for the workplace.

Youth Activities

The WIA Youth Activities formula grant program is arguably the centerpiece of the federal youth job training and employment system. As specified in the law, the program has several purposes: to provide assistance in achieving academic and employment success through activities that improve educational and skill competencies and foster effective connections to employers; to ensure ongoing adult mentoring opportunities for eligible youth; to provide opportunities for training, continued supportive services, and participation in activities related to leadership, citizenship, and community service; and to offer incentives for recognition and achievement to youth. Congress appropriated $825.9 million to Youth Activities in FY2012.

The program provides services in two ways: (1) through contracted organizations that receive WIA Youth Activities funding and collectively provide direct services to youth through what is referred to hereinafter as a local youth program; and (2) through One-Stop, described above. Youth Activities funds are distributed by DOL to state workforce investment boards (WIBs), which oversee workforce activities in each state, based on a formula that accounts for unemployment rates and the poverty status of youth. The state WIBs in turn distribute formula funds to programs run by local WIBs, based on similar criteria. Like state WIBs, local WIBs oversee workforce activities, but only for a designated local area. Among other activities, each local board must establish what is known as a "youth council," comprised of representatives that assist the WIB in awarding grants or contracts to youth providers that carry out youth workforce activities. Local programs must provide 10 activities or "elements" to youth that focus on education attainment, employment, follow-up services, and civic engagement.

A youth is eligible for Youth Activities if he or she is ages 14 through 21, a low-income individual, and has one or more of the following barriers: [134] deficient in basic literacy skills; a school dropout; homeless, a runaway, or a foster child; pregnant or parenting; an offender; or requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment. At least 30% of all Youth Activities funds must be used for activities for out-of-school youth, meaning youth who have dropped out *or* received a high school diploma or its equivalent but are basic skills deficient, unemployed, or underemployed.[135]

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[133] U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Job Corps, *Job Corps Annual Report Program Year 2009/2010*, http://www.jobcorps.gov/aboutjobcorps/performance_planning.aspx; and YouthBuild USA, "YouthBuild Program Demographics and Outcomes," https://youthbuild.org/youthbuild-demographics-and-outcomes.

[134] Up to 5% of youth participants in a local area may be individuals who do not meet the income criteria but have at least one barrier to employment, some of which are not identical to those listed above: (1) deficient in basic literacy skills; (2) a school dropout; (3) homeless or runaway; (4) an offender; (5) one or more grade levels below the grade level appropriate to the individual's age; (6) pregnant or parenting; (7) possess one or more disabilities, including learning disabilities; or (8) face serious barriers to employment as identified by the local WIB (20 C.F.R. 664.220).

[135] Title I, Section 101(33) of the Workforce Investment Act.

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The data on participation in the program are based on the concept of program "exiters." An exiter is a participant who received a service funded by WIA or a partner program, but has not received the service for 90 consecutive calendar days and is not scheduled to receive future services. The most recent data on youth participants (i.e., exiters) is for April 1, 2011, through March 31, 2012.[136] Nearly 128,000 youth ages 14 through 21 exited the program, of whom a majority (54.4%) were female; 31.1% were African American and 35.7% were Hispanic; 21.4% were pregnant or parenting; and nearly all (97.2%) were low-income.

In February 2009, President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-5, ARRA, Recovery Act). One of the stated purposes of ARRA was to preserve existing jobs and create new jobs. To this end, the law appropriated $1.2 billion for the WIA Youth program. The law emphasized that funds should be spent on summer youth employment opportunities, as well as year-round employment activities for older youth. ARRA extended the age of eligibility from 21 to 24 for activities funded pursuant to the law. Funding for the act was made available through June 30, 2010. ARRA also created a $5 billion temporary TANF Emergency Contingency Fund (ECF) for FY2009 and FY2010. The ECF reimbursed states for 80% of the increased costs of basic assistance, short-term emergency aid, and subsidized employment. The Departments of Health and Human Services and Labor issued a joint letter in January 2010 to encourage state and local TANF agencies and WIBs to consider using the TANF Emergency Contingency Fund to provide subsidized employment, as well as other benefits and services, to low-income youth. Further, the agencies encouraged co-enrollment of youth in the TANF and applicable WIA programs so that "participants in the TANF-funded subsidized employment opportunities can benefit from additional WIA services such as supportive services, occupational skills training, and other relevant services."[137]

Job Corps[138]

Job Corps is a job training program first established in 1964 that provides services to low-income individuals ages 16 through 24, generally through contracts administered by DOL with corporations and nonprofit organizations. The purpose of Job Corps is to provide young people with the skills needed to obtain and hold a job, enter the Armed Forces, or enroll in advanced training or higher education.[139] The program provides education and training, primarily in a residential setting, to vulnerable youth. Youth also receive support services, including child care, health education, counseling, and recreation. A youth is eligible for the program if she or he is low-income and meets one or more of the following criteria: basic skills deficient; homeless, a

[136] Youth Activities, Job Corps, and YouthBuild operate on the basis of a Program Year (PY), which runs from July 1 through June 30. For example, PY2008 is from July 1, 2008, through June 30, 2009. The incongruity between the program year and the most recent data for Youth Activities appears to be a function of the timing of data collection and the compilation of the data. That is, the most recent Data Book (PY2008) "does not use information for exiters after March 2009 because that information is incomplete." See *PY2008 Data Book*, January 19, 2010, available from DOL at http://www.doleta.gov/performance/results/pdf/PY_2008_WIASRD_Data_Book_FINAL_1192010.pdf.

[137] HHS and U.S. Department of Labor, *Joint ETA-ACF Letter*, January 19, 2010, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/policy/jointeta.html. For a list of states that have sought these waivers, see Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, "Workforce Investment Act Waiver Summary Report," available at http://www.doleta.gov/waivers/pdf/WIA-summary-waiver-report-03-31-11.pdf. For further information about WIA Youth and TANF collaborations, see Linda Rosenberg, *The 2010 Summer Youth Employment Initiative*, Mathematica Policy Research, Final Report, July 29, 2011, http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText_Documents/ETAOP_2012_02.pdf.

[138] Title I, Subtitle C of the Workforce Investment Act.

[139] 20 C.F.R. 670.110.

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runaway, or a foster child; a parent; or an individual who requires additional education, vocational training, or intensive counseling and related assistance in order to participate in regular schoolwork or to secure and maintain employment. Currently, there are more than 120 Job Corps centers in 48 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.[140] In FY2012, Congress appropriated $1.7 billion to Job Corps. In Program Year (PY) 2012 (July 1, 2011-June 30, 2012), Job Corps enrolled more than 55,000 youth, of whom most (59.1%) were male, 51.0% were black, and 16.4% were Hispanic.[141]

Most youth enroll in Job Corps without a high school credential. According to a random assignment evaluation of the program that began in 1994 and ended in 2006, the program substantially increased the education and training services that youth receive.[142] On average, program participants received the instructional equivalent of one additional year in school, compared to about half that time for youth who were not in the program. In turn, youth improved their literacy and numeracy skills, and they were more likely to obtain a GED and vocational certificates. Further, more than 90% of Job Corps enrollees participated in an education or training program during the 48 months after random assignment, compared to 72% of the control group.[143] Participation rates were highest in GED programs (37%); high school (32%); and vocational, technical, or trade schools (29%). The program substantially increased the receipt of GEDs and vocational certificates by program participants by more than 20 percentage points each. Job Corps generated employment and earnings gains initially, but not in the long run. Except among the oldest students (those ages 20 through 24), there were no longer-term program impacts on earnings.

Select Education Programs

Finally, select education programs, carried out by the Department of Education, seek to engage disadvantaged youth in activities that will lead to a high school diploma and college degree. As shown in **Figure 5**, men's earnings are strongly associated with educational attainment. While men with advanced degrees have seen the biggest gains in inflation-adjusted wages over time, the inflation-adjusted wages of men who are high school dropouts or high school graduates have declined.

Select federal education programs, authorized under separate laws, provide support for vulnerable young adults who are at risk of dropping out or have already done so. These include the TRIO programs to encourage vulnerable high school students to go to colleges that are authorized under the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA), as amended; and those that fund vocational training, including the Basic State Grants program, Tech-Prep, and other smaller programs authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-

[140] For the most recent number of centers, see the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Job Corps *Budget Justifications of Appropriation Estimates for Committee on Appropriations*, http://www.dol.gov/dol/budget/.

[141] U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Job Corps, "Student Outcomes/Who Job Corps Serves," http://www.jobcorps.gov/Libraries/pdf/who_job_corps_serves.sflb.

[142] John Burghardt et al., *Does Job Corps Really Work? Summary of the National Job Corps Study*, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., June 2001.

[143] Peter Z. Schochet, John Burghardt, and Sheena McConnell, *National Job Corps Study and Longer-Term Follow-Up Study: Impact and Benefit-Cost Findings Using Survey and Summary Earnings Records Data, Final Report*, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., August 2006, pp. 16-17.

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270, Perkins), as amended. In addition, the Department of Defense's quasi-military training program—known as Youth Challe*NG*e—includes several components, including education.

Federal TRIO Programs

The Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA, P.L. 89-329) authorizes a broad array of programs that together constitute the largest source of federal funds to support postsecondary education. HEA programs include numerous federal student aid (FSA) programs, as well as programs through which federal assistance is made available to institutions of higher education (IHEs) and other entities that support postsecondary education. The programs discussed below are intended to encourage and facilitate low-income students attending postsecondary institutions, among other similar and related goals.[144] The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA, P.L. 110-315) recently amended and extended the authorization for many HEA programs through FY2014. FY2012 funding for TRIO programs was $826.5 million.

The Department of Education awards five-year competitive grants to IHEs, public and private agencies and organizations, and, as appropriate, secondary schools under seven TRIO programs that are authorized under HEA. Three of these programs serve youth who are low-income, not yet enrolled in postsecondary education, and have barriers such as being a school dropout: Upward Bound (UB), Talent Search (TS), and Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC). The three programs are intended to support the educational persistence and achievement of disadvantaged students. At least two-thirds of each program's participants must be low-income and a first generation college student. Services must also be made available to foster care youth (including youth in foster care and youth who have left foster care after reaching age 13) or to homeless children and youth as defined under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

In FY2011, the most recent year for which data are published, UB, TS, and EOC served 588,908 students.[145]

Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 (Perkins)

The purpose of the Perkins Act is to "develop more fully the academic and career and technical skills of secondary education students and postsecondary education students" who enroll in career and technical education (CTE) programs. This is to be accomplished through such activities as developing challenging academic and technical standards and assisting students in meeting these standards; promoting the development of services and activities that integrate academic and career and technical instruction and link secondary and postsecondary education; supporting partnerships among secondary schools, postsecondary institutions, local WIBs, business and industry, and intermediaries; and providing individuals with opportunities for lifelong learning to develop the knowledge and skills needed to help the United States be competitive internationally.

[144] For additional information on reauthorization of the HEA and background on HEA programs, see CRS Report RL34654, *The Higher Education Opportunity Act: Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act*, by David P. Smole et al.

[145] U.S. Department of Education, *FY2013 Justifications for Appropriation Estimates to the Congress, Volume II,* p. S-121, http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget13/justifications/s-highered.pdf.

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The Perkins Act was most recently reauthorized by the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 (Perkins IV, P.L. 109-270). The act authorizes the State Grants program (a second program, Tech-Prep, was eliminated as part of the FY2011 budget). Most funding for CTE is provided at the state and local levels. As the federal share of funding for CTE represents a relatively small share of the total funding provided for CTE, it is not possible to determine which courses are fully or partially supported with federal dollars.

The majority of federal funding provided for CTE is delivered through the State Grants program (Title I). The state allotment is based on the state's population of persons ages 15 through 65 and the state's per capita income. The law requires states to distribute at least 85% of state grant funds to the local level (i.e., to eligible recipients, such as local education agencies (LEAs) and community colleges). States have discretion in how much funding is distributed for career and technical education at the secondary level versus postsecondary CTE. That is, a state could decide to use most or all of its state grant funding for either secondary or postsecondary education. In practice, states generally fund both levels of education. In FY2012, funding was $1.1 billion for the state grants.

While each state determines what percentage of funding will be used at the secondary and postsecondary levels, the distribution of these funds to the secondary level is determined by a formula that accounts for age distribution and poverty. At the postsecondary level, funds are distributed based on each eligible institution's number of Pell grant recipients and recipients of assistance from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The Perkins Act includes both required and allowable uses of these funds at the state and local levels. Several of these activities focus on both education and workforce development. In addition to the required and allowable uses of funds at the state level, the eligible agency (i.e., state) must adopt procedures it considers necessary to coordinate state level activities under Perkins with state level activities undertaken by state boards under Section 111 of WIA, which refers to One-Stop. The eligible agency must also adopt procedures it considers necessary to make available to One-Stop within the state a listing of all school dropout, postsecondary education, and adult education programs receiving assistance through the Perkins Act.

Student Participation in Career and Technical Education

During PY2006-2007 (the most recent year for which data are available), states reported that about 15.6 million students were enrolled in secondary and postsecondary CTE programs. These enrollment figures represent an unduplicated count of all students reported by each state as having taken one or more CTE courses. These courses, however, *may or may not* have been funded with federal Perkins funds. Most funding for CTE is provided at the state and local levels.

Approximately 2.6 million youth (16% of total students enrolled in CTE) were enrolled in Tech-Prep in PY2006-2007.[146] Of all CTE students, the majority were secondary education students. At both the secondary and postsecondary levels, most participating students were white, followed by

[146] It should be noted that not all states identify Tech-Prep students using the same criteria. Data on the characteristics of students participating in Tech-Prep programs were not provided. For more information, see U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, *Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998: Report to Congress on State Performance Program Year 2006-07*, September 2008, available online at http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/resource/perkinsrpt0607.pdf.

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Hispanic and black students. In addition, about one-third of participating students at the secondary and postsecondary levels were economically disadvantaged.

Youth ChalleNGe Program

The Youth ChalleNGe Program is a quasi-military training program carried out by the Army National Guard to improve outcomes for youth who have dropped out of school or have been expelled. Education and mentoring are major components of the program. It was established as a pilot program under the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2003 (P.L. 102-484), and Congress permanently authorized it under the National Defense Authorization Act for FY1998 (P.L. 105-85). Currently, 35 programs operate in 28 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Congress appropriated $115 million for FY2012. In 2012, more than 113,000 youth graduated from the program, of whom 79% were males, 23% were black, and 16% were Hispanic (race and ethnicity were not reported for 19% of cadets).[147]

Youth are eligible for the program if they are ages 16 to 18 and enroll prior to their 19th birthday, have dropped out of school or been expelled, are unemployed, are not currently on parole or probation for anything other than juvenile status offenses and not serving time or awaiting sentencing, and are drug-free. The program consists of three phases: a two-week, pre-program residential phase where applicants are assessed to determine their potential for completing the program; a 20-week residential phase; and a 12-month post-residential phase. During the residential phase, youth—known as cadets—work toward their high school diploma or GED and develop life-coping, job, and leadership skills. They also participate in activities to improve their physical well-being, and they engage in community service. Youth develop a "Post-Residential Action Plan (P-RAP)" that sets forth their goals, as well as tasks and objectives to meet those goals. The post-residential phase begins when graduates return to their communities, continue in higher education, or enter the military. The goal of this phase is for graduates to build on the gains made during the residential phase and to continue to develop and implement their P-RAP.

A core component of the post-residential phase is mentoring, during which a cadet works with a mentor to meet his or her goals as set forth in the P-RAP. This component is referred to as the "Friendly Mentor Match" process. Parents and youth are asked to nominate at least one prospective mentor prior to acceptance into the program. They are advised to identify an individual who is respected by the youth and would be a good role model.

Youth ChalleNGe was evaluated by MDRC, a social policy research organization, and initial findings were released in 2009 and 2010.[148] The evaluation used a random assignment research design, whereby youth were randomly selected to receive the treatment (i.e., to participate in the program) or assigned to a control group that did not participate in the program. The results of the evaluation are based on a survey administered about nine months and 21 months after the members of the program and control groups entered the study, when youth had just begun the program's post-residential phase. The evaluation of the youth after nine months found that the

[147] U.S. Department of Defense, National Guard, *Youth ChalleNGe Program 2012 Performance and Accountability Highlights*, 2009, http://ra.defense.gov/documents/resources/2012_NGYCP_Annual_Report-Final.pdf.

[148] Dan Bloom, Alissa Gardenhire-Crooks, and Conrad Mandsager, *Reengaging High School Dropouts: Early Results of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program*, MDRC, February 2009; and Megan Millenky, Dan Bloom, and Colleen Dillon, *Making the Transition: Interim Results of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Evalaution*, May 2010, http://www.mdrc.org/project_32_80.html.

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program group was much more likely than the control group to have earned a high school diploma or GED (45.6% vs. 10.1%), to be working (51.2% vs. 42.1%) and/or attending college (10.9% vs. 2.7%), to report having good or excellent health (76.7% vs. 68.4%), and to be less likely to have been arrested since the start of the evaluation (14.2% vs. 20.0%). These differences are statistically significant, meaning that they can be attributed to the program intervention. Some of the differences persisted after 21 months. The program group was still more likely to have obtained a high school diploma or GED (60.5% vs. 36.4%), to be working (55.0% vs. 50.1%), and/or attending college (11.6% vs. 7.0%). However, there was no significant difference between the groups in terms of their health or likelihood of arrest.

Federal Policy Options

While not comprehensive, this section discusses several federal policy options that may reduce some of the economic and other barriers faced by low-income men, many of whom are fathers. This section highlights one or two policy options from each of the four policy domains discussed earlier: economic assistance, family support, human capital, and disadvantaged youth. These options include modifying the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to make noncustodial parents eligible for a larger benefit; examining strategies for reducing child support arrearages; changing the financing structure of child support enforcement (CSE) access and visitation programs for noncustodial parents; enhancing or expanding job training and education programs to assist low-income men and youth, which in turn can help them in providing for their (current or future) families; redefining eligibility for certain programs so that disadvantaged young adults can receive more holistic training and other services that may better prepare them for adulthood; and encouraging states to serve noncustodial parents in their TANF programs.

Making Work Pay for Noncustodial Parents: EITC for Noncustodial Parents

Policy changes in the early- and mid-1990s were the culmination of decades of discussion about welfare reform for single mothers. As previously discussed, many of the policies put in place in the mid-1990s and continuing to this day were aimed to "make work pay" more than welfare through supporting low-wage work. The 1993 expansion of the EITC was the cornerstone of that policy. Subsequently, Congress enacted and then expanded the amount and refund ability of the child tax credit. In FY2013, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that the refundable portions of the EITC and the child tax credit will combined cost $80 billion in outlays.

In examining the economic trends among single parent families with children since 1996, a Congressional Research Service (CRS) analysis concluded:

> In the years immediately preceding 1996 welfare reform, and in the years since, the nation's income safety net has been transformed into one supporting work. Cash-welfare work requirements, the end of cash welfare as an open-ended entitlement by limiting the duration that individuals may receive federally funded benefits, and expanded earnings and family income supplements administered through the federal income tax system have helped to change the dynamics between work and welfare. The transformed system has helped to both

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> reduce single mothers' reliance on traditional cash welfare and reduce poverty among their children.[149]

These findings do not extend to families without children. Employment rates among both white and African American men without a high school diploma have declined over the past two decades. Noncustodial parents, including men living apart from their children, benefitted little from the EITC expansions of 1993. A second CRS analysis examined the impact of refundable tax credits (the EITC, the child tax credit, and the temporary "Making Work Pay" credit in force for 2009 and 2010) on poverty in 2009. That analysis found that in 2009, the refundable credits reduced the poverty rate for families with children by 29%, but barely reduced poverty rates at all for single persons without custodial children.[150]

The potential for legislation to overhaul the tax code in 2013 might prompt the examination of the current structure of refundable tax credits, potentially addressing the differences that exist between custodial and noncustodial parents in their tax treatment. A further expansion of wage supplements through the EITC has garnered interest as a potential means of increasing work effort and financial support from noncustodial parents to their children. These proposals seek to reverse the decline in employment among men with low earnings, just as the EITC is believed to have increased the work effort of single mothers.

At the federal level, legislation has been introduced to either expand EITC to childless workers, including noncustodial parents, or specifically to noncustodial parents who pay child support. In the 112th Congress, H.R. 2193, the Julia Carson Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2011 (Representative Danny Davis) included an increase in the EITC paid to all childless workers, including noncustodial parents. The bill would have raised the maximum credit from its current 7.65% of earnings to 20% of earnings.

On the other hand, in the 110th Congress then-Senator Bayh, with co-sponsorship from then-Senator Obama, proposed (as a part of their responsible fatherhood bill (S. 1626, 110th Congress)) to target much of the benefit of an expanded EITC to noncustodial parents who pay their current child support. It would have doubled the EITC from that usually paid to a "childless" worker for a noncustodial parent who paid in full the child support they owed during a year.

New York has operated a "noncustodial EITC" tied to full payment of child support during a year since 2006. An Urban Institute evaluation of New York's noncustodial EITC found that it increased the share of noncustodial parents that paid their child support in full, but was most effective for those noncustodial parents with relatively small child support obligations (under $3,000 per year).[151] It did not increase work effort among all noncustodial parents, but a significant increase in work was found for the subset of noncustodial parents who owed such small child support payments during a year. However, the effects were either smaller or did not exist for those with greater obligations. Additionally, within the population of noncustodial

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[149] CRS Report R41917, *Welfare, Work, and Poverty Status of Female-Headed Families with Children: 1987-2011*, by Thomas Gabe.

[150] See CRS Report R41999, *The Impact of Refundable Tax Credits on Poverty Rates*, by Margot L. Crandall-Hollick. The reduction in poverty rates is based on a comprehensive income measure that includes the value of SNAP food benefits as well as using a measure of income after taxes. This differs from the official poverty measure, which uses pre-tax money income.

[151] See Austin Nicols, Elaine Sorenson, and Kye Lippold, *The New York Noncustodial Parent EITC: Its Impact on Child Support Payments and Employment* , Urban Institute, June 27, 2012.

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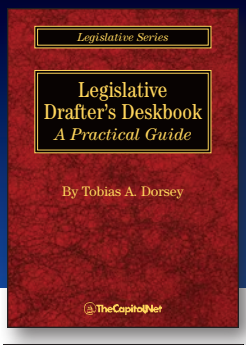

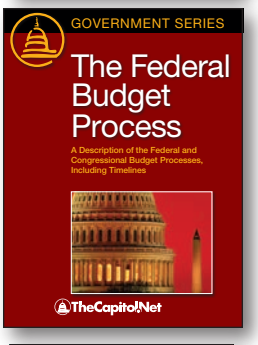

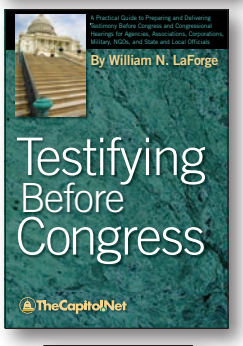

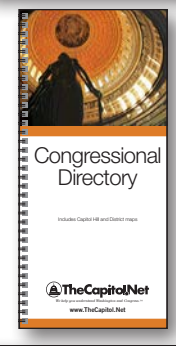

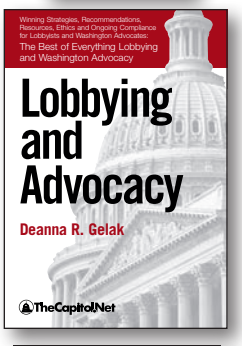

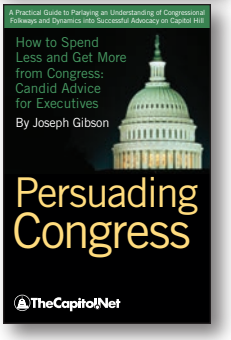

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parents in New York, the evaluation found that the state's noncustodial EITC disproportionately benefitted white males and those who owe support for only one child.

Revising the SNAP ABAWD Rule

As discussed in a previous section, SNAP recipients ages 18 through 49 who are not disabled are subject to a time limit on benefit receipt unless they are either working at least 20 hours per week or are participating in a state employment program for those hours. The time limit is three months in a 36-month period, though it is possible to earn additional months of benefits through work.

The SNAP ABAWD (able-bodied adults without dependents) rule is sometimes called a work requirement. However, there is generally no obligation on the part of states to engage unemployed ABAWDs in an employment or job preparation program.[152] Therefore, under this rule, unemployed recipients in states that do not offer employment services to ABAWDs are simply removed from the rolls. (The rule was suspended in 2009 and 2010 by ARRA for this reason; there are also waivers of the rule for states and areas with high unemployment.)

The welfare reforms of the 1990s combined both making work pay (in terms of the EITC) with conditioning receipt of assistance on work or job preparation. Unlike SSI and TANF, SNAP provides economic assistance to adults who do not live with children, some of whom are noncustodial parents. In fact, that low-income men in families without children generally do not receive economic assistance is one of the reasons they have not been subject to mandatory work requirements (similar to the requirements for low-income single mothers who receive cash assistance).

In FY2011, there were an estimated 4.5 million SNAP recipients aged 18 through 49 who were not disabled. Of this number, 57% (2.6 million) were men. From SNAP data, it is not possible to determine how many of these men are noncustodial parents. However, the presences of men in SNAP provides policymakers with the opportunity to condition receipt of aid for an unemployed ABAWD on participation in a job preparation activity—an opportunity is forgone when an ABAWD is removed from the SNAP benefit rolls without an opportunity to participate in work or employment activities.

One policy option would be to require unemployed ABAWDs to participate in work or job preparation activities, reducing or ending benefits only when such a recipient refuses to participate in activities. This could be a requirement on individuals or it could be implemented through a state participation standard (such as the one in TANF) to require states to engage a share of ABAWDs in activities. The policy could also be for all ABAWDs or targeted specifically on noncustodial parents. However, such a policy might require additional funding for employment and training activities for SNAP ABAWDs.

[152] States that pledge to serve all ABAWADs at risk of losing benefits under the three-month limit receive a share of $20 million in extra SNAP employment and training funds.

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Child Support Arrearage Reduction Strategies[153]

Large child support arrearages result in millions of children receiving less than they are owed in child support, reduced cost-effectiveness of the CSE program, and a perception that the CSE program does not consider the financial situation of low-income noncustodial parents, many of whom may be in dire economic situations. There is widespread agreement that preventing the build-up of unpaid child support through early intervention rather than traditional enforcement methods is essential to the future success of the CSE program.[154] Some commentators point out that such a proactive approach to addressing the huge accumulation of child support arrearages may help many low-income children whose parents are unemployed or underemployed.[155]

A state may have a number of objectives for reducing child support debt, including increasing the income of a custodial family and offering a noncustodial parent a "clean slate" to improve future employment and child support outcomes.[156] Research from the University of Wisconsin suggests that reduction of large child support debts may increase child support payments.[157]

The current strategic plan for the OCSE proposes the following procedures for reducing high child support arrearages:

- Update child support guidelines regularly and simplify child support order modification.
- Modify orders to ensure that child support obligations stay consistent with the noncustodial parents' ability to pay.
- Use automation to detect non-compliance as early as possible and contact noncustodial parents soon after a scheduled child support payment is missed.
- Update child support guidelines to recognize modern family dynamics and realities (e.g., shared custody, incomes of custodial parents, etc.).
- Consider creative ways to promote regular payment of current support, even if it means "compromising" uncollected child support arrearages, to bring the noncustodial parent back to consistently paying current child support payments.[158]

With regard to the last proposal, in an effort to reduce or eliminate child support debt some states use debt compromise, a process whereby a state forgives a portion or all of the child support debt

[153] Most of the information in this section was taken from CRS Report R40499, *Child Support Enforcement and Ex-Offenders*, by Carmen Solomon-Fears.

[154] HHS, ACF, OCSE, "The National Child Support Enforcement Strategic Plan FY2005-2009," 2004, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/pubs/2004/Strategic_Plan_FY2005-2009.pdf. (Hereinafter, HHS, ACF, OCSE, "The National Child Support Enforcement Strategic Plan FY2005-2009.")

[155] Elaine Sorensen and Helen Oliver, "Policy Reforms are Needed to Increase Child Support from Poor Fathers," The Urban Institute, April 2002.

[156] HHS, "State Use of Debt Compromise to Reduce Child Support Arrearages," Office of Inspector General, October 2007.

[157] Maria Cancian, Carolyn Heinrich, and Yiyoon Chung, "Does Debt Discourage Employment and Payment of Child Support? Evidence from a Natural Experiment," University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty, Discussion Paper no. 1366-09, July 2009.

[158] HHS, ACF, OCSE, "The National Child Support Enforcement Strategic Plan FY2005-2009."

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owed to the state by the noncustodial parent in exchange for the noncustodial parent's participation in specified employment, training, or other activities.[159]

Federal law permits the use of federal TANF, including Emergency Contingency funds, and state MOE funds, to pay a benefit to a noncustodial parent to reduce or pay off child support arrearages owed to a family.[160] It is important to note that the federal share of such debt is still owed to the federal government. In order for the federal portion of the child support debt to be compromised or eliminated, Congress would have to pass legislation to that effect.

It has also been recommended that Congress revise consumer protection limits with respect to garnishment of child support. CSE officials can garnish as much as 65% of a noncustodial parent's wages toward the payment of child support debt.[161] For low-income noncustodial parents who are unemployed or underemployed, this practice may increase the difficulty of securing and maintaining housing, transportation, and employment that are necessary for making future child support payments.[162]

Other recommendations of policymakers and observers are specifically related to incarcerated parents and include[163] (1) enabling courts to consider an individual's obligations to his or her children at the time of sentencing;[164] (2) prohibiting incarceration from being defined as "voluntary unemployment" (a term used to describe someone who has chosen not to work),[165]

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[159] HHS, Office of Inspector General, "State Use of Debt Compromise to Reduce Child Support Arrearages," October 2007.

[160] The ACF cautions that as a matter of prudent use of TANF or MOE funds, it would be inadvisable, although it is technically permissible, to use such funds to pay debts unless both parties (i.e., the custodial and noncustodial parent) are needy. HHS, "Questions and Answers on the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act)," ACF, 2009, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/recovery/tanf-faq.htm#_child_support.

[161] Most child support is collected through payroll withholding. Under the Consumer Credit Protection Act (15 USC 1673(b)), 50%–65% of a parent's disposable earnings may be deducted from the noncustodial parent's paycheck. At the same time, a separate court or probation officer could require that an individual dedicate 35% of his or her income toward the combined payment of fines, fees, surcharges, and restitution. Such a situation could encourage a person to return to the behavior and illegal activities that resulted in the person's incarceration in the first place. In other words, aggressive collectors representing distinct agencies could end up contributing to a person's failure to meet his or her financial obligations and, by extension, their revocation of probation or parole.

[162] Marguerite Roulet, "Financial Literacy and Low-Income Noncustodial Parents," Center for Family Policy and Practice," June 2009.

[163] The proposed Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2009 (S. 1309 and H.R. 2979) from the 111th Congress would have prohibited a state from considering a period of incarceration as voluntary unemployment in determining or modifying a noncustodial parent's child support obligation. It also would require states to temporarily suspend the child support obligation and any interest on the child support obligation during the period a noncustodial parent is incarcerated. However, it would require the state to provide the custodial parent with an opportunity to request that the child support obligation continue on the basis that the noncustodial parent has sufficient income or resources to continue to make child support payments during the noncustodial parent's period of incarceration. In addition, the bills would require states to review, and if appropriate, reduce the balance of child support arrearages permanently assigned to the state in cases where the noncustodial parent (1) does not have the ability to pay the arrearages, (2) did not seek a modification during his or her incarceration, and (3) will be more willing (because of the adjustment) to pay current child support payments consistently and on time. Finally, it must be determined that it is in the best interest of the child for the state to make such a reduction.

[164] Federal law prioritizes child support obligations above all other debts owed to the state, including restitution, and court and prison fines, fees, and surcharges. The proposed provision would allow judges, when ordering that an individual pay fees to reimburse the state for the costs of his or her incarceration, to reduce this order by the amount of the individual's child support obligations.

[165] Some judges have ruled that incarcerated parents are responsible for their disadvantaged financial circumstances (continued...)

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thereby allowing a noncustodial parent's child support order to be modified when he or she enters prison;[166] and (3) requiring states to automatically modify (or forgive) child support orders of noncustodial parents who are in prison (during the prison-intake process), only for the length of their prison sentence, unless the custodial parent objects because the inmate has income and/or assets that can be used to pay child support.[167]

Although many custodial parents agree to a certain extent that some noncustodial parents are "dead broke" rather than "deadbeats," they contend that the states and the federal government need to proceed with caution in lowering child support orders for low-income noncustodial parents. They argue that child support is a source of income that could mean the difference between poverty and self-sufficiency for some families. They emphasize that lowering the child support order is likely to result in lower income for the child. They argue that even if a noncustodial parent is in dire financial straits, he or she should not be totally released from financial responsibility for his or her children. Others agree, and argue that policymakers, when considering policies related to reducing the child support obligations of prisoners, must also consider equity issues related to the treatment of low-income noncustodial parents who may be unemployed as opposed to being in prison. They assert that it is sending the wrong message to unilaterally lower payments of persons who have broken the law and not make similar allowances for law-abiding citizens who are unemployed.[168]

It has also been suggested that it may be more expedient for Congress to mandate some of the child support arrearage remedies outlined in the OCSE FY2005-2009 Strategic Plan and elsewhere, rather than wait for states to develop individual remedies that only apply to the state that implements the policy.

Federal Matching Funds for CSE Access and Visitation Programs

The CSE Access and Visitation Grant program acknowledges and reflects the sentiment that healthy families need more than just financial support. According to OCSE, the CSE Access and Visitation Grant program, with its annual appropriation of $10 million (in aggregate to the 54 jurisdictions—the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands), has been able to provide access and visitation services to over 500,000 noncustodial parents and their families since the program became operational in FY1998.

The CSE Access and Visitation Grant program has been a separate line item in the CSE budget account since its enactment as part of P.L. 104-193 (the 1996 welfare reform law). The Obama Administration's FY2012 and FY2013 budgets proposed that funding for the CSE Access and Visitation Grant program remain at $10 million annually. But, they also proposed to include

(...continued)

that resulted from their criminal activities because imprisonment is a foreseeable result of criminal behavior. In contrast, other judges have refused to equate incarceration with voluntary unemployment and have argued that incarcerated parents rarely have any actual job prospects or potential income and cannot alter their employment situation. (Source: Jessica Pearson, "Building Debt While Doing Time: Child Support and Incarceration," 2004.)

[166] In states that classify incarceration as "voluntary unemployment," a person's child support order may not be modified when he or she enters prison or jail.

[167] Jessica Pearson, "Building Debt While Doing Time: Child Support and Incarceration," 2004.

[168] Jennifer L. Noyes, "Review of Child Support Policies for Incarcerated Payers," Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison, December 2006.

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access and visitation activities as core components of the CSE program (available for regular 66% federal matching funds). According to an FY2013 budget document:

> The budget provides $580 million over ten years to support increased access and visitation services and integrates these services into the core child support program. As a first step in facilitating a relationship between non-custodial parents and their children, the proposed initiative would update the statutory purposes of the Child Support program to recognize the program's evolving mission and activities that help parents cooperate and support their children. The proposal also requires states to establish access and visitation responsibilities in all initial child support orders, just as custody arrangements are typically settled at the same time divorces are finalized. The proposal also would encourage states to undertake activities that support access and visitation, while implementing domestic violence safeguards, which are a critical component of this new state responsibility. These services will not only improve parent-child relationships and outcomes for children, but they will also result in improved collections. Research shows that when fathers are engaged in the lives of their children, they are more likely to meet their financial obligations. This creates a double win for children—an engaged parent and financial security.[169]

Some child advocates assert that the CSE Access and Visitation Grant program should be incorporated into the CSE program and receive 66% federal matching funds like other CSE program components. They contend that the existing funding structure of the program cannot meet the demand for program services. They argue that the importance of having noncustodial parents involved in their children's lives is a legitimate reason for adding an access and visitation component to the CSE program. According to one state report:

> Without increased funding support, courts and communities will continue to be limited in the number of families served, hours of service delivery will remain stagnant, expansion to accessibly located sites and facilities will be impossible, waiting lists continue to be unavoidable, providers will not have the multilingual capacity to serve the diverse populations, and low-income families and families in rural counties will continue to be underserved.[170]

They note that the establishment of the CSE Access and Visitation Grant program reflected Congress' awareness that child well-being is positively affected when noncustodial parents become more responsible and involved with their children. They maintain that the demand for access and visitation services outpaces the resources available for the program. They contend that funding limitations restrict the amount of services and the scope of available services.[171]

Other commentators contend that during the current economic crisis, funding priorities for the CSE program should remain on services related to paternity establishment, and establishment and enforcement of medical and child support orders. They assert that now is not the time to mandate additional core services to the CSE program.

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[169] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Administration for Children and Families, Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees, Fiscal Year 2013," p. 273.

[170] Judicial Council of California (Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children and the Courts), "Ten Years of Access to Visitation Grant Program Services (Fiscal Years 1997–2007)," A Report to the California Legislature, March 2008, p. iv.

[171] Ibid., p. 36.

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Job Training, Workforce Support, and Education

Current job training and workforce programs and education programs are generally not targeted to noncustodial parents, and only some focus on low-income individuals. Select job training and workforce programs for youth and other workforce models may be promising in helping noncustodial parents find work and ensuring that disadvantaged young people are adequately prepared for the financial responsibilities of a family. Further, given the association of higher educational attainment with higher wages, noncustodial parents and young people transitioning to adulthood can benefit from education programs that target disadvantaged groups.

Job Training and Workforce Programs

The adult job training and workforce programs authorized under WIA generally do not include income or barriers to employment as part of the eligibility criteria (with the exception of the Ex-Offender program). Having such criteria could concentrate resources on the most underserved adult workers. Congress could look to existing youth programs authorized under WIA as a model for targeting select populations. Nearly all of the youth served in the programs are low-income[172] and face barriers to employment, such as having dropped out of school. Half or more than half of the participants are male. These programs are also distinct from the adult programs in that many of the youth receive job training. As noted previously, the majority of participants in the WIA Adult program receive only job search assistance.

A separate approach would be to provide more-targeted workforce development services to the most disadvantaged males. The Reintegration of Ex-Offenders program has received increased funding in recent years (except that funding was decreased in FY2011). One option for providing additional service to men trying to re-enter the labor force is to continue funding this program and move it from a demonstration project (authorized by Section 171 of WIA) to a permanent part of WIA. A rigorous analysis of a re-entry program in New York City is being undertaken now by MDRC, a social policy research organization. Depending on the findings of that evaluation, specific program elements could be put into a permanent re-entry program under WIA, alongside permanent programs for other groups, such as Native Americans, and low-income youth. Another option is to provide funding for transitional jobs programs. The FY2010 budget included language indicating that the Department of Labor encouraged grantees to offer programs with a transitional jobs component, described further below. If transitional jobs programs are effective at reintegrating ex-offenders into the labor force, DOL could add these as an allowable activity under the formula grants for adult workers.

Overall, little is known about the effectiveness of federal job training programs in meeting the goals of WIA. In FY2011 and FY2012, Congress provided funding for the Department of Labor's Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) to evaluate innovative workforce strategies. FY2012 funding

[172] Low-income individual means an individual who (1) receives, or is a member of a family that receives, cash payments through a federal, state, or local income-based public assistance program; (2) received an income, or is a member of a family that received a total family income (excluding unemployment compensation and certain other payments), for the six-month period prior to applying for youth employment and training activities, that, in relation to family size, did not exceed the higher of the poverty line, for an equivalent period, or 70% of the lower living standard income level, for an equivalent period; (3) is a member of a household that receives SNAP benefits (or has been determined to be eligible for SNAP within the six-month period prior to applying for youth employment and training activities); (4) qualifies as a homeless individual, as defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act; or (5) is a foster child on behalf of whom state or local government payments are made.

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for the WIF was $50 million. WIF funds are competitively awarded to states and partnerships to improve employment and training services. The WIF emphasizes that services should be delivered more efficiently and achieve better outcomes, particularly for vulnerable populations.[173]

One of the youth workforce programs authorized under WIA, Job Corps, has been rigorously evaluated and has shown impacts on family formation. Mathematica, a policy research organization, tracked the outcomes of youth in the Job Corps program from 1994 through 2006. During the first two years of the study, eligible youth were randomly assigned to the program group (permitted to enroll in Jobs Corps) or a control group (not permitted to enroll). Survey data were collected at baseline, and at 12, 30, and 40 months after the youth were randomly assigned. Mathematica issued a series of reports about youth outcomes and the benefits and costs of the program. Earlier reports found that Job Corps had several positive outcomes on youth in education and employment and was cost-effective despite its high costs. Mathematica's follow-up report in 2006 analyzed the longer-term impacts of the program based on earnings and employment rates through 2004 and updated findings from the benefit-cost analysis.[174] The study found that Job Corps increased the education and job training that participants received both inside and outside the program by about 1,000 hours (equivalent to training in a regular 10-month school). In turn, youth improved their literacy and numeracy skills, and youth were more likely to obtain a GED and vocational certificates. The program also generated employment and earnings gains initially, but not in the long run. Except among the oldest students (those ages 20 through 24), there were no longer-term program impacts on earnings. Mathematica also found that the costs to society exceed the benefits for the program. Specifically, the costs exceeded the benefits by approximately $10,300 per participant. However, the benefits exceeded costs for youth ages 20 through 24 by about $17,000 per participant.

More recently, Mathematica has examined the effects of the program on the likelihood of marriage for its participants (low-income women and men ages 20 through 28 at the time of the study). The study found that Job Corps increases the likelihood of marriage for female participants. According to the study, the positive effects of marriage may reflect "the benefits of women's economic independence as well as the 'good-catch' effect in the marriage market." The study found that employment and earnings were associated with men's likelihood of marriage as well; however, researchers determined that much of this association related to unobserved individual characteristics that make men more likely to be successful in both the marriage and labor markets. In other words, Job Corps influenced the marriage outcomes of women but not men. [175]

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[173] U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, *Budget Justification of Appropriation Estimates for Committees on Appropriations, FY2013*, p. TES-60, http://www.dol.gov/dol/budget/2013/PDF/CBJ-2013-V1-04.pdf. (Hereinafter, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, *Budget Justification of Appropriation Estimates for Committees on Appropriations, FY2013*.)

[174] Peter Z. Schochet, John Burghardt, and Sheena McConnell, *National Job Corps Study and Longer-Term Follow-Up Study: Impact and Benefit-Cost Findings Using Survey and Summary Earnings Records Data, Final Report*, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., August 2006, http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/FullText_Documents/National%20Job%20Corps%20Study%20and%20Longer%20Term%20Follow-Up%20Study%20-%20Final%20Report.pdf.

[175] Because participants were randomly assigned to the program, researchers could determine the effects of the program on employment and earnings and then look at the program's impact on the likelihood of marriage. Random assignment allows researchers to control for the possibility that family status and unobserved traits (e.g., personal abilities, temperament, responsibility, etc.) may make certain individuals more likely to be successful in the labor market.

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Subsidized Employment

Subsidized employment aims to support individuals who cannot find jobs in the labor market. These efforts may be beneficial for disadvantaged populations, including noncustodial parents. One approach to subsidized employment provides what are referred to as transitional jobs to workers with multiple barriers to employment. Transitional jobs programs are similar to other subsidized employment models, except that they focus on very hard-to-employ populations and they use subsidized work experience to prepare workers for regular unsubsidized jobs.[176] These programs also provide some form of case management and job placement services to help participants find permanent jobs, among other approaches. Participants can be placed individually in transitional jobs, often with nonprofit organizations or government; in work crews with other participants under the supervision of the transitional jobs program; or with the transitional jobs program, which may be a social enterprise that sells a product or service. Two examples of transitional jobs programs that serve TANF recipients and ex-offenders:

- The Community Jobs Program in Washington is a statewide program targeting TANF recipients, with the state TANF agency contracting with nonprofit organizations to administer the program. Participants work 20 to 30 hours per week for up to nine months, primarily at nonprofit and government agencies. They may also participate in educational activities. The contracting organizations identify work sites and provide intensive case management.
- The Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) in New York City serves parolees by providing a four-day pre-employment class before they are placed on a work crew that is supervised by CEO staff. The crews do maintenance and repair work under contract to city and state agencies. Participants work four days per week and are paid the minimum wage. On the fifth day, participants meet with job coaches and job developers and attend supplemental activities, such as fatherhood groups. Participants work with a CEO "job developer" to find a permanent position.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2010 (P.L. 111-117) included reserved funding under the WIA's Pilots and Demonstrations authority for the Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration. This demonstration provided $39.9 million for projects that support short-term, subsidized work experience and case management services for low-income or unemployed non-custodial parents and ex-offenders. The goal was to assist participants in becoming economically self-sufficient through placement into long-term unsubsidized employment. DOL is evaluating the program to determine its impacts on employment and earnings of transitional jobs compared to receiving referral to services elsewhere.[177]

Other studies of transitional jobs programs, including an evaluation of CEO, show promising results on certain outcomes such as recidivism and TANF receipt, although the programs have not necessarily led to sustained increases in employment.[178] Given these limitations, some have

[176] For further information, see Dan Bloom, *Transitional Jobs: Background, Program Models, and Evaluation Evidence*, MDRC, February 2010, http://www.mdrc.org/publications/553/abstract.html.

[177] U.S. Department of Labor, "U.S. Labor Department announces nearly $40 million for Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration programs," press release, June 23, 2011; and U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, *FY 2013 Congressional Budget Justification, Training and Employment Services*, p. 131.

[178] Ibid.

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proposed alternative models of subsidized employment, including the following: make changes to transitional jobs programs, such as providing longer subsidized positions or more opportunities for occupational skills training; adopt other subsidized employment models altogether, such as providing financial incentives for hard-to-employ workers to find and keep regular jobs; and adopt models that place participants directly into the job market, with positions that provide on-the-job training (one demonstration of an on-the-job training program for noncustodial parents whose children were on welfare had difficulty finding slots for participants and ultimately led to few gains).[179]

Work Requirements for Noncustodial Parents

There is a provision of child support enforcement law that requires states to establish procedures to require non-paying noncustodial parents of children in families receiving TANF assistance to participate in mandatory work programs.[180] One policy option would be to expand this provision, establishing a mandatory work requirement for non-paying noncustodial parents, similar to work requirements for custodial parents receiving TANF assistance. Where the requirement is made mandatory for custodial parents receiving cash assistance by a cut or elimination of their welfare check, the requirement for noncustodial parents would be made mandatory through the threat of jail for noncompliance.[181]

The work requirement could be seen as eliminating the inequity in current policy that requires work for low-income custodial parents but not noncustodial parents. Work requirements for non-paying noncustodial parents can be seen as addressing a lack of basic work discipline, just as it was seen as addressing similar issues with custodial parents on TANF assistance.

There are several issues with imposing a new work requirement on noncustodial parents. First, there is no funding source that is currently dedicated to cover the costs of enforcing such a requirement. The allowable uses of child support matching funds can be expanded to include reimbursing states for their expenditures to enforce the requirement, but that would impose a new federal budgetary cost. New funds can also be provided for this purpose through the TANF program, but if they are new funds they also entail a federal budgetary cost. Existing TANF funds can be used for this purpose; however, because of the block grant nature of TANF, using funds for new work programs for noncustodial parents would require cutting back on other TANF expenditures.

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[179] Ibid, pp. 41-45.

[180] Professor Lawrence Mead, of New York University, has written articles and testified before Congress advocating work requirements for non-paying, noncustodial parents. See Lawrence M. Mead, "Why We Need Work Programs for Fathers," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, vol. 29, no. 3 (Summer 2010), pp. 610-616.

[181] All CSE jurisdictions have civil or criminal contempt-of-court procedures. Thus, if a court orders a noncustodial parent to pay his or her past-due child support and the noncustodial parent fails to do so, that parent would be in contempt-of-court and subject to jail time. Moreover, there are federal criminal penalties associated with the willful failure to pay a past-due child support obligation to a child who resides in another state and that has remained unpaid for longer than a year or is greater than $5,000. States have a lot of discretion on whether or not to use certain collection methods and when to use such methods. Generally, incarceration is the last option states use. Most states use the jail option sparingly because it "punishes" both the custodial family and the "delinquent" noncustodial parent. States realize that if a person is in jail, it is less likely that the person will be able to pay child support. Thus, it is usually the threat of jail, rather than jail per se, that results in child support payments.

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Moreover, if there were a universal work requirement for noncustodial parents, questions would be raised about what obligations the federal government or states would have if jobs were not available. A recent discussion of this proposal stated that such a requirement would probably mean that a job would have to be guaranteed, albeit on a time-limited basis.[182] Providing a job guarantee to this population also raises equity issues. Such a guarantee is not available to other men, including those who work and pay their child support. Such a guarantee is also not a part of the work requirements for custodial parents receiving TANF cash assistance.

Education Programs

Some education programs and initiatives have been particularly effective for disadvantaged groups, though none have targeted noncustodial parents. Still, some of these efforts have had beneficial impacts on family formation. In addition, they have proven to be effective at keeping young people in school, even if for the short-term. They include an education model, known as career academies, which integrate career and technical education into high school curricula, and services to community college students who are low-income. Given that evaluations of these programs show promising results, policymakers might consider expanding or replicating them.

A study by MDRC, a social policy research organization, examined the effects of the career academies model on marital status, as well as other family formation outcomes. Career academies are career and technical education programs that combine academic and technical curricula for high school students around a career theme such as health, business, or finance. The study tracked the outcomes of students who were randomly assigned to career academies in nine low-income high schools from the time they entered high school until eight years after their scheduled graduation. Alumni of the career academies were just as likely as non-academy alumni to graduate from high school or college; however, they earned more than the non-academy alumni and were more likely to live independently with children and a spouse or partner. In total, one-third of the members of the academy group were living with their children and a spouse or partner, compared to 27% of their peers. This difference represents a 23% increase in two-parent households over the rates for the non-academy group. In addition, 50.8% of the academy alumni were custodial parents, compared to 43.9% of non-academy alumni. Both of these impacts are statistically significant. [183]

Other efforts in education have focused on students who are in community college and may be at risk of dropping out. MDRC has conducted evaluations of community college programs that provide an enhanced set of services to diverse low-income students.[184] MDRC's national demonstration, called Opening Doors, has tested interventions designed to increase persistence and raise academic achievement among these students. The students were randomly assigned to the program group or control group. One of the Opening Doors sites, Kingsborough Community College, used small learning communities in which groups of students took courses together and their instructors were expected to coordinate assignments and periodically meet to review the

[182] Ibid.

[183] James J. Kemple, *Career Academies: Long-Term Impacts on Labor Market Outcomes, Educational Attainment, and Transitions to Adulthood*, Manpower Development Research Corporation (MDRC), June 2008, http://www.mdrc.org/publications/482/overview.html.

[184] For information about these interventions and other interventions in higher education, see Thomas Brock, "Young Adults and Higher Education: Barriers and Breakthroughs to Success," *The Future of Children*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Spring 2010).

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students' progress. Students assigned to the small learning communities were mostly 17 to 27 years old, low-income, and racially and ethnically diverse. Researchers found that they were more likely than the students in the control group to feel integrated at school, be engaged with fellow teachers and instructors, pass and earn more credits during their first semester, and to take and pass an English skills assessment test that was required for graduation. After four semesters, the young people in the communities had more credits.

Recent proposals have sought to expand efforts like Opening Doors. A bill that passed the House in the 111th Congress would have provided competitive grants to eligible states to implement the "systematic reform" of community colleges by carrying out programs and policies that were shown to be effective.[185] Priority for grants under this section would be for states focusing on serving low-income nontraditional students, dislocated workers, or students who are veterans and do not have a bachelor's degree.

Encouraging States to Serve Noncustodial Parents in TANF

Though TANF already permits states to provide both financial assistance and other benefits and services to noncustodial parents, few such parents are on the assistance rolls and there is little information on other benefits and services available to noncustodial parents. The flexibility afforded to states under TANF provides an opportunity for them to use their TANF funds in innovative and creative ways to address the needs of disadvantaged noncustodial parents.

Under the current structure of TANF, it is difficult to compel a state to use its funds for any specific benefit or service that can be theoretically provided with the block grant. This would run counter to the overall purpose of TANF of state flexibility in serving disadvantaged families with children. However, it is possible to encourage and prod states to consider using TANF for a specific benefit or service, such as aiding noncustodial parents.

Congress could require states to address whether and how it will use TANF to serve noncustodial parents as part of the TANF state plan. The state plan is a document that states must submit once every three years as a condition of receiving block grant funds. The state plan is also subject to public comment. HHS does not approve the content of the state plan; its role is to certify that the state has submitted a "complete" plan and is thus eligible to receive its block grant. Requiring that states address a plan element relating to serving noncustodial parents could put this issue on the agenda of state policymakers. Community-based organizations and other groups would also have the ability to comment on the state's plan for serving noncustodial parents under TANF.

Another potential means of prodding states to consider serving noncustodial parents is to require that they report on the number of noncustodial parents who receive various TANF benefits and services. The idea here too is that by requiring the state to address how it serves noncustodial parents, the issue becomes more visible for state policymakers. Further, information on how much a state serves noncustodial parents under TANF could aid community-based organizations and other groups in providing input to state policymakers on uses of TANF funds.

[185] The bill was H.R. 3221, the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2009.

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Increasing the Age for Youth Employment and Training Services

Another set of policy options could focus on redefining the population of youth for purposes of program eligibility. The current move from adolescence to adulthood has become longer and more complex.[186] Youth of the 1950s were more likely to follow an orderly path to adulthood. They generally completed their education and/or secured employment (for males), including military service, which was followed by marriage and parenthood in their early 20s. (This was not true for every young person; for example, African Americans and immigrants in certain parts of the country faced barriers to employment.) Unlike their postwar counterparts who had access to plentiful jobs in the industrial sector, youth today must compete in a global, information-driven economy. Many more youth now receive vocational training or enroll in colleges and universities after leaving high school. Changed expectations for women have contributed to their increased college attendance, which now exceeds that of men.[187] During the period of transition, young adults cycle between attending school, living independently, and staying with their parents. A study of support to 19- to 22-year-olds, based on data from 2005 through 2009, found that just over 60% of these young adults receive some form of financial assistance, including help with paying bills (42.2%), tuition assistance (34.7%), providing personal vehicles (23.0%), and paying rent (21.5%). The average value of all assistance to young adult children, reported in 2009 dollars, was $7,490. Higher income families provided more support to their children. Young adults whose parents were in the top quartile of family income ($15,449) received support seven times as large as the assistance provided by parents in the bottom quartile ($4,471).[188]

Disadvantaged young people often face barriers to enrolling in school or maintaining a job, and many cannot rely on financial support from their families. This, in turn, could affect their ability to provide for their own children and make meaningful contributions to society. Federal programs for disadvantaged youth recognize that adolescence is no longer a finite period ending at age 18 or even age 21. Recently, Congress temporarily extended the age of eligibility, from 21 to 24, for youth participating in the WIA Youth Activities program as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (P.L. 111-5). In the accompanying conference report for the bill (H.Rept. 111-16), Congress stated, "the age of eligibility for youth services provided with the additional funds is extended through age 24 to allow local programs to reach young adults who have become disconnected from both education and the labor market." This temporary expansion could be made permanent, as proposed by recent legislation. Other youth programs authorized under WIA, Job Corps, and YouthBuild enable young people up to the age of 24 to enroll in the program.

Extending the age of youth for purposes of eligibility for federal programs can provide vulnerable young people with supports as they enter into adulthood. Several of the WIA programs discussed above, such as Job Corps and YouthBuild, include support services such as transportation, housing, and child care that can assist young people with staying in school and engaging in work. Yet not all federal programs (e.g., TANF) with a similar mission have the same emphasis on work and school or provide additional support to young people after age 21. Young people receiving

[186] Wayne G. Osgood et al., eds., *On Your Own Without a Net: The Transition to Adulthood for Vulnerable Populations,* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 4-6.

[187] Claudia Goldin, Lawrence F. Katz, and Ilyana Kuziemko, "The Homecoming of American College Women: The Reversal of the College Gender Gap," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 20, no. 4, Fall 2006.

[188] Patrick Wightman, Robert Schoeni, and Keith Robinson, "Familial Financial Assistance to Young Adults," National Poverty Center Work Paper Series #12-10, May 2012, http://npc.umich.edu/publications/working_papers/?publication_id=239.

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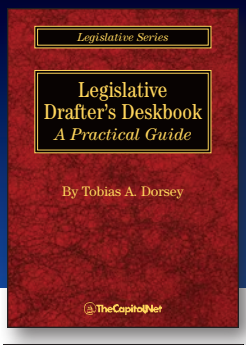

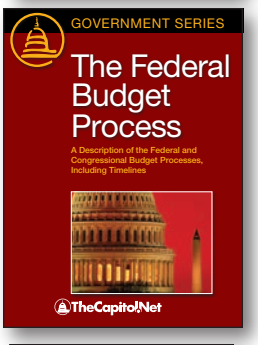

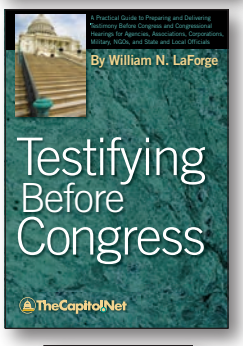

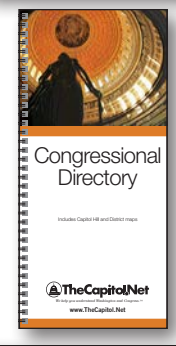

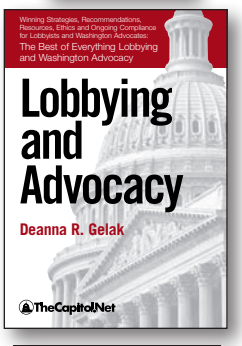

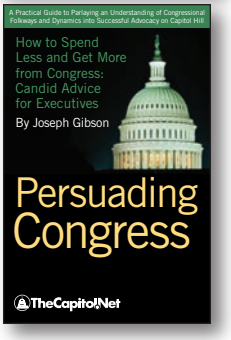

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TANF can count education and training toward the participation requirements, whereas those over the age of 21 must work. Despite recent efforts to coordinate TANF with the WIA Youth Activities program, youth in TANF are defined as individuals under the age of 21. And, notably, the age extension in the Youth Activities program was temporary—lasting only until June 30, 2011.

Concluding Remarks

Although social science research and analysis acknowledge the importance of the father in improving the well-being of his children, federal welfare programs have to varying degrees minimized, undervalued, or overlooked the role of fathers in the lives of children. In addition, other federal programs and/or systems that include many men on their rolls (such as employment and training programs and the criminal justice system) have not fully addressed the unique needs and circumstances of fathers, particularly those that do not have custody of their children.

According to some estimates, about half of all children who are currently under age 18 will spend or have spent a significant portion of their childhood in a home without their biological father. Currently, about one-third of all children live in families without their biological father present.

Given widespread agreement that both parents influence the well-being of their children, it may be that the next era of welfare reform will seek to alter and/or revise federal programs to reflect the importance of fathers to their children's well-being by reducing some of the program barriers faced by low-income men who are participants in the programs. Moreover, federal programs could more directly affect the status of low-income fathers by systematically targeting noncustodial fathers for employment and supportive services to enable those men to make significant positive impacts on the well-being of their own biological children and other children with whom they may interact.

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