Child Support Reform and the Welfare of U.S. Children

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A National Survey of
FAMILIES
and
HOUSEHOLDS
Child Support Reform and the Welfare of U. S. Children

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Abstract

Legislative reforms try to improve the economic welfare of children who live with single mothers by increasing the amount of money that nonresident fathers contribute in child support. Child support reforms may also affect noneconomic aspects of children's welfare by increasing how frequently fathers and children see each other and by increasing the amount of conflict between parents. This paper investigates the associations among child support payments, visits, and parental conflict to describe the potential effects of child support reforms on other aspects of children's lives after separation. This investigation sets the stage for an examination of the effects of payments, visits, and conflict on three aspects of children's welfare: aggressive behavior, whether children repeated a grade in school since their parents separated, and mother's report of how well the child's life is going. The analysis uses data from the 1987-88 National Survey of Families and Households, and relies on reports of mothers who live with minor children to describe the family experiences of children who live apart from their fathers. Consistent with previous findings, fathers who pay more child support also visit their children more frequently. Frequency of visits increases parental conflict for some types of families, and conflict increases children's aggressive behavior. The findings also suggest that child support payments have a net positive, direct effect on children's school progress by diminishing the chance that they repeat a grade in school. Therefore the potential benefits of reforms that increase child support payments must be balanced against the costs to children of increased exposure to parental conflict.
Introduction

Approximately half of U.S. children born in the 1980s will spend time in a single parent household; in the vast majority of cases, these households are maintained by women (Bumpass and Sweet, 1989; Bianchi, 1996; Sweet and Bumpass, 1987). The economic disadvantages of living with a single mother are well-known (Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1986; Hoffman and Duncan, 1988; Weitzman, 1985). A growing body of evidence suggests that children also suffer from the loss of both parents' time and attention (Dornbusch et al., 1985; Hetherington, Cox, and Cox, 1982; Stetsberg, 1987; McLanahan, Astove, and Marks, 1988; Thomson, 1989; Furstenberg et al., 1983; Seltzer and Bianchi, 1988). The financial and emotional hardships experienced by children who grow up in single-mother households have long-term consequences for their welfare. Compared to children from two-parent families, those with single parents are more likely to have behavioral problems in school and engage in delinquent behavior, more likely to drop out of school, and less likely to go to college (Hetherington, Cox, and Cox, 1979; Matsueda and Heimer, 1987; McLanahan, 1985; Sandefur, McLanahan, and Wojtkiewicz, 1989; Kein and Beller, 1988). The disparities between the welfare of children in single- and two-parent households are well-documented for children in a variety of race-ethnic groups (Sandefur, McLanahan, and Wojtkiewicz, 1989; McLanahan and Bumpass, 1988). Furthermore, mother's remarriage does not, by itself, diminish many of the disadvantages of separation from children's biological father (Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1990).

The Family Support Act of 1988 attempts to ameliorate the economic costs to children of living in a single-parent household by establishing more effective policies for enforcing child support obligations. In addition to the economic benefits to children, these child support reforms may affect other aspects of children's well-being. This paper presents preliminary evidence about the potential effects on children's welfare of these child support reforms. The research reported here is part of a larger collaborative project with Sara McLanahan in which we are investigating the consequences of child support policies for children. The paper has
five parts. The first section argues that the child support components of the Family Support Act are likely to affect more children and to be more enduring reforms than other components of the Act. The second section develops hypotheses about the effects on children's welfare of improved child support collections. The next two sections of the paper present results from a preliminary investigation of the relationships between child support payments, parental conflict, and the welfare of minor children. The paper ends with a discussion of the findings and an elaboration of concerns for a more complete critical evaluation of the Family Support Act reforms.

The Family Support Act of 1988

The Family Support Act of 1988 (FSA) assumes that both mothers and fathers should work for pay and that both parents should contribute to the financial support of their children, whether or not they live together (William T. Grant Foundation, 1989). The Act attempts to achieve these goals through both universalist and particularist strategies. The FSA improves access to education and training for jobs in the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Program (JOBS) and strengthens guidelines for establishing child support awards and collecting child support payments. The JOBS provisions are particularist in their focus on the employment opportunities of mothers who receive welfare.\(^1\) The child support provisions, on the other hand, are universalist in their application to all children who live apart from one of their parents.\(^2\) Approximately twice as many children a year are potentially eligible to receive child support from a nonresident parent as the number of children who receive welfare (Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1990: footnote 3). Thus, although the child support provisions have received less attention in the political debate about the FSA, these

\(^1\)The JOBS provisions are designed primarily to improve mothers' employment prospects. However, five states will pilot employment programs for fathers as well. [See Blank (1989) and Farenstenberg (1989) for more information on these programs and their potential consequences for children and their families.]

\(^2\)The child support provisions focus on the behavior of nonresident parents, whether they are fathers or mothers. As noted above, most nonresident parents are fathers.
provisions are likely to affect the welfare of more children than the JOBS provisions. In addition, the child support reforms in the FSA continue a long-term trend toward increasing parental responsibility for child support, while the work reforms are comparatively new and are more politically controversial (Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1990). As a result, the FSA child support provisions are likely to affect a large number of children in a wide variety of family circumstances.

For the past several years my own research has focused on relationships between parents and children who live apart. Central to this research is the question of how nonresident parents' economic investments in children or child support payments are associated with other aspects of parental involvement such as spending time with children or visiting them. In this paper, I build on my earlier work by examining the consequences of these two aspects of parental involvement for children's social and emotional welfare.

Effects of Child Support Reforms on Children's Well-Being

The principal foci of the child support reforms are to increase the number of children who are covered by a child support award (i.e., a legal obligation specifying the amount of money the nonresident parent should provide for the children's support) and to improve the collection of child support payments. For children born outside of marriage, establishing a child support award first requires that paternity be adjudicated. A complete evaluation of the effects on children of the FSA child support reforms should examine each of these outcomes separately. In this preliminary research, I examine only the relationship between the amount of child support actually paid and children's well-being.

Concern with children's economic welfare motivates the FSA emphasis on increasing the number of nonresident parents who pay support and the amount that they pay. Much of the

3This is not to say that the well-being of children whose families receive welfare is less important or deserving of attention than the well-being of children potentially eligible for child support. Children whose families receive AFDC may be especially vulnerable to the economic disadvantages of family disruption and living with single parents. The child support reforms of the FSA affect children on AFDC as well as those who do not receive AFDC.
research cited above shows that economic disadvantages account for many of the negative effects on children of living with a single mother. Increasing child support payments may also affect other aspects of children's relationships with nonresident fathers. Fathers who pay child support are more likely to visit their children and to participate in other ways in children's lives (Seltzer, forthcoming; Furstenberg et al., 1983). In addition, the amount of child support fathers pay also increases the amount of time they spend with children (Seltzer, Schaeffer and Charng, 1989). The relationship between paying support and spending time with children persists after taking into account parents' education, how far away the two households are, remarriage, and a variety of other social and demographic characteristics. Thus, by increasing child support contributions, the FSA may also increase the amount of time and attention fathers devote to their children in other households.

To date, evidence about the impact of nonresident fathers' participation in childrearing on children's welfare is mixed. Data from clinical studies suggest that a strong relationship with both parents enhances children's emotional security and adjustment (Hess and Camara, 1979; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Lund, 1987; Hetherington, Cox, and Cox, 1978). National survey data show that when fathers pay support, children have fewer behavioral problems, but these same data show no effect of fathers' visits on a variety of aspects of children's behavior and emotional adjustment (Furstenberg, Morgan, and Allison, 1987).

Conflict between parents may diminish potential benefits of paternal involvement with children after separation. A study of recent divorces in California suggests that parental conflict persists well after divorce for a significant proportion of families (Maccoby, Depner, and Mnookin, 1990). Similarly, parents of children born outside of marriage may disagree about childrearing. Parental conflict either within or outside of marriage distresses children, hampering their school performance and emotional adjustment (Rutter, 1971; Hetherington et al., 1982; Zill, 1978; Emery, 1982; Peterson and Zill, 1986). By encouraging fathers to spend more time with their children after divorce or a nonmarital separation, the FSA may also increase children's exposure to conflict, thus reducing the benefits to children's welfare.
Preliminary Investigation of Child Support and Children's Well-Being

This section presents the data and conceptual framework I am using to examine the relationship between child support payments and children's well-being. I use data from a nationally representative sample to describe the effects of child support payments, father's contact with children, and parental conflict on three aspects of children's welfare. The analysis uses information from a cross-sectional sample of families divorced or maritally separated in the 10 years before the FSA was enacted to provide a baseline picture of the effects of child support practices on child well-being. Obviously a more complete evaluation of the effects of the FSA on children requires information from families subject to the more rigorous support enforcement strategies incorporated in the Act. Critical to an evaluation of the reform is evidence about whether fathers who voluntarily contribute financially to children's support differ in significant ways (e.g., visiting patterns, conflict with the mother,

4Parents in families in which nonresident fathers maintain ties with their children after separation often avoid conflict by limiting their contact with each other (Furstenberg and Nord, 1985). When possible, they communicate through their children. The small amount of contact parents have even in families where both parents maintain an active role in the children's lives may, to some extent, limit children's exposure to conflict. However, when fathers pay more support, they want to influence how that money is spent (Weiss and Willis, 1985), and so the FSA may increase fathers' incentive to communicate with the children's mother. Children may also suffer from parents' conflict and disagreements even though parents do not communicate directly with each other, as when one parent complains to the children about the other parent's behavior.

5Although the FSA may increase children's exposure to conflict by increasing contact between parents, components of the Act may also work to decrease conflict. The FSA requires the development and application of more universal criteria for allocating and administering child support awards and payments. The use of uniform standards for determining child support awards should limit parents' ability to negotiate about child support arrangements; child support will be determined by State administrative agents rather than by individual parents or their attorneys. As a result, parents may have fewer disagreements about financial matters. The net effect on exposure to conflict of increased contact between parents and decreased conflict about administratively-determined child support awards and payments may result in no change in children's exposure to parental conflict.
values and childrearing practices) from fathers who contribute child support as a result of more rigorous child support enforcement.

Data

The analysis uses data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), a probability sample of adults living in households in the United States in 1987-88. The full sample includes over 15,000 respondents and had a response rate of approximately 74%. The sample design oversampled Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, single-parent families, families with stepchildren, cohabiting couples, and persons who had married recently. Sample weights are available to compensate for the unequal probabilities of sample selection. For additional information about the study design, see Sweet, Bumpass, and Call (1988).

The results reported here are from 386 cases in which the respondents were mothers of children under 18 who had a father living in another household. Children were defined as household members if they resided with the mother for at least six months of the year. As noted above, the most common arrangement is for children to live with their mothers after parents' separation (Sweet and Bumpass, 1987; Bianchi, 1990). The unit of analysis is the family, as represented by the mother's report. The NSFH data only include information on children's progress in school and their social and psychological well-being when children are household members. Thus, a disadvantage of these data is the absence of information about children's welfare from nonresident fathers. However, both internal and external evaluations of data quality suggest that the NSFH sample of resident mothers is more representative of families in which children live apart from their father than the sample of nonresident fathers.

6The National Survey of Families and Households was funded by a grant from the Center for Population Research of the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (HD-21009). The survey was designed and carried out at the Center for Demography and Ecology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison under the direction of Larry Bumpass and James Sweet. The field work was conducted by the Institute for Survey Research at Temple University.

7It exclude cases with missing data on key variables of interest, including whether or not the child was born in a marriage, the amount of child support paid, and father's income in the year before divorce. I also excluded cases in which the mother did not know where the father lived.
(Sweet and Bumpass, 1989; Seltzer, forthcoming). In addition, resident mothers’ reports about child support payments are more accurate compared to official records of payments than nonresident fathers’ reports (Schaeffer, Seltzer, and Klawitter, 1989).

The analysis focuses on children in families in which the parents were divorced or maritally separated within the past 10 years because the data include information on fathers’ income for this subsample. Father’s income is central to studies of child support because it indexes father’s ability to make financial contributions. The absence of information about father’s income is a disadvantage in other analyses of the effects of child support on child well-being (e.g., Furstenberg et al., 1987; Seltzer, forthcoming). In addition, much of the debate about the effects of new child support and custody rulings focuses on divorced families rather than families in which children were born outside of marriage. Wherever possible, I have replicated the analyses reported here for the full sample of children regardless of whether or not their parents were married. The text describes any discrepancies between the results for these two samples.6

6Approximately 40% of the weighted sample are families in which the child was born outside of marriage. Nonmarital births include those born to never married mothers, before, between, or after marital separations. Among children in single-mother households, the percentage of nonmarital children is higher for a cross-sectional sample than would characterize a recent cohort’s lifetime experience because of the relative timing of the two types of transitions into single-mother households. Divorce and marital separation occur throughout childhood so a cross-sectional sample includes some children who will eventually, but have not yet, experienced their parents’ marital disruption. Transitions to a single-mother household because a child was born outside of marriage occur at birth (by definition in this analysis). Therefore a cross-section of children over-represents the full cohort experience of the percentage of children who live in single-mother households because the children were born outside of marriage.

The unweighted number of cases for the sample of all children, regardless of parents’ marital status or number of years since separation is 1267. The same restrictions on missing data were used to define both samples (i.e., divorced in the past 15 years and the more inclusive sample of marital and nonmarital children with a nonresident father).
Measuring Children's Welfare

The analysis uses three indicators of children's noneconomic welfare. All of the NSFH questions about children's welfare come from parents' reports. The survey included a small number of questions about all minor children in the household and a more extensive set of questions about a randomly selected minor child. Whenever possible, the NSFH used the same questions for children of all ages. In some instances, however, the question wording was altered to take account of age differences in the degree to which certain questions are appropriate. Therefore each of the three indicators of children’s welfare used in this analysis is available for a slightly different sample of children.

The first measure is an ordinal index of aggressive behavior. The index is available for children at least one year old. It is only available for cases in which the child was the randomly selected child for the child well-being sequence. The index is constructed as the sum of mothers' reports about how often during the three months before the interview the following statements were true about the child's behavior: he/she "loses temper easily" and "bullies, or is cruel or mean to others." Responses were scored on a three-point scale with the categories: often true, sometimes true, not true. High values indicate more aggressive behavior. The index ranges in value from 2 - 6.

The second measure of children's welfare is a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not the child repeated a grade in school after the parents' separation. This indicator is only valid for children who are five years old or older and who have ever been enrolled in school, but it is available for all minor children in the household.

The last indicator of children's welfare is a dichotomous variable constructed from mothers' responses to the question: "All things considered, is (CHILD'S) life going: very well, fairly well, not so well, not well at all?" In this analysis, the indicator distinguishes between responses of "very well" and all other responses. As with the other measures of children's welfare, the item is scored so that a higher score indicates problems. In this instance, the

Preliminary measurement analyses show that these two items measure a common underlying aspect of children's behavior (Thomson, 1990).
higher score indicates that the child's life is not going very well from the mother's point of view. This measure is available for children of all ages who were identified as the referent child for the child well-being sequence in the questionnaire.

An obvious weakness of these measures of child welfare is the extent to which they reflect mother's perceptions of children's behavior and emotional adjustment which may reflect the mother's own psychological well-being as well as the child's. Mothers' and children's reports about children's conduct problems and feelings are more likely to coincide when they describe problems at school and academic performance than in other areas such as how often the child feels upset (Young, 1983). In the absence of direct evidence about the degree to which the NSFH measures of children's welfare reflect children's characteristics rather than mother's characteristics, I suspect that the measure of whether the child has repeated a grade in school is more reliable than the measures of antisocial behavior and how well the child's life is going, respectively.

All three of the zero-order correlations between the measures of children's well-being are positive, ranging in value from .10 to .20 for the unweighted data and .10 to .16 for the weighted data.

Measuring Paternal Involvement

The analysis focuses on three aspects of fathers' involvement after separation: the amount of child support paid, frequency of visits, and the amount of conflict between parents about several aspects of childrearing. The NSFH data provide more complete information about the amount of child support paid than is commonly available in sources like the March-April Current Population Survey. The NSFH includes information about support paid as the result of a legal agreement about child support as well as about other financial contributions the father provides for the children's support. The NSFH questions about child support ask about support paid for all of the children in the family. In contrast, the question about fathers' contact with children asks about the frequency of visits with a randomly selected child in the sibling. Responses to questions about child support payments and visiting refer
to behavior in the 12 months before the survey. Frequency of visits is measured by the question: "During the past 12 months, how often did [CHILD] see [his/his] father? Was it: (1) not at all, (2) about once a year (3) several times a year (4) one to three times a month (5) about once a week (6) several times a week?"

Conflict between parents is an index constructed as the sum of mothers' responses to six questions about disagreements. "How much conflict do you and [CHILD'S] father have over each of the following issues? Where [CHILD] lives; How (he/she) is raised; How you spend money on [CHILD]; How he spends money on [CHILD]; His visits with [CHILD]; His contribution to [CHILD'S] support." Response choices included: (1) none, (2) some, (3) a great deal. Scores on the index range from 0 (no conflict about any of the issues) to 18 (a great deal of conflict about all of the issues). A strength of the NSFH data is that questions about conflict were asked of all mothers, whether or not they had face-to-face or telephone contact with the children's father in the past year.

The Model

Figure 1 depicts the causal relationships examined in this analysis. The analysis treats child support payments and frequency of visits as the result of parents' economic resources, how far away from each other the two parents live, and other social and demographic characteristics. The figure shows that child support payments and visits are not causally related. Spending money on children and spending time with them are complementary activities. The more child support the father contributes, the more time he is likely to spend with his children. Thus, paying support and visiting children may be positively related even if paying does not "cause" visiting or vice versa. (See Seltzer, Schaeffer, and Chang (1989) for explication of this point.) The analysis takes into account this complementary relationship

In later stages of the analysis we expect to examine more carefully the measurement properties of these questions about conflict. For a subset of cases, we have information about how friendly/unfriendly the two parents are. Preliminary investigation shows that when "unfriendliness" is substituted for parental conflict, the results for the effects of parents' conflict and father's involvement on children's welfare are substantially the same as those reported in the tables below.
by allowing paying support and visiting to be related to each other even after their common dependence on parents’ economic resources and geographical location are taken into account. In statistical terms, the model allows for correlated residuals in the payments and visits equations.

Figure 1 about here.

Parents’ conflict is a function of the amount of child support paid as well as the frequency of contact between the nonresident father and child. Although the NSFH data are cross-sectional and therefore inadequate for estimating causal relationships, I am using the data to simulate the effects of increased child support collections. The results of the analysis should be interpreted cautiously. For example, in the discussion above, I hypothesized that increased payments would increase conflict between parents. However, in these cross-sectional data, the direction of causation may be the reverse. Compared to those who do not get along, fathers who get along well with their children’s mother may pay more support because they agree with the mother. Thus, the quality of parents’ relationship with each other may “cause” child support payments rather than the reverse.

Finally, children’s welfare is a function of the three aspects of paternal involvement, child support payments, visits, and conflict, as well as family background.

The analyses reported here control for children’s race/ethnic group, age, and sex. In subsequent stages of this research, we will examine age and sex differences in the effects of paternal involvement on children. The discussion which follows emphasizes the relationships among the three child support-related variables and children’s welfare. Other research examines the effects of family background on children’s welfare (e.g., Thomson, McLanahan, and Hanson, 1990) and the determinants of child support and visiting patterns (Seltzer, forthcoming).

The Selection Problem: Voluntary Payments vs. Coerced Payments

Can data from families in which fathers voluntarily contribute child support be used to anticipate the effects of requiring payments from unwilling contributors? This question iden-
tifies the most important problem of anticipating the effects of more rigorous and inclusive child support enforcement programs based on studies with data restricted to families who were not exposed to the reforms. The selection argument says that in the absence of strict enforcement laws, nonresident fathers who do pay child support are more highly committed to their children and have much less intense conflict with the children's mother than fathers who do not pay. If this is true, data from voluntary contributors will overestimate the direct benefits of child support payments on children's well-being as well as any indirect effects of payments on well-being through more frequent visits and less intense parental conflict. The NSFH data do not include information about the degree to which child support payments are involuntary (e.g., paid directly from the father to the mother vs. collected through withholding in response to delinquency) or mother's reliance on lawyers or child support enforcement agencies to help collect child support. There are, however, statistical procedures that may be used to evaluate the extent to which selection processes account for an association between two outcomes (e.g., see Manski et al., 1990). I have not yet tried these approaches, but in a later stage of this investigation we will use these statistical procedures to evaluate selection effects. For now, it is important to treat cautiously the preliminary results reported in this paper because they may provide too optimistic a picture of the potential benefits of the FSA for children's noneconomic welfare.

Analysis

The parameters for the analyses of child support payments, visits, conflict, and children's aggressive behavior are estimated using regression analysis. Parameters for the effects of child support and background on grade repeats and the quality of children's lives are estimated using probit techniques because the outcomes are dichotomous (Aldrich and Nelson, 1984). All of the results for the child support payments and visiting equations come from HOTZTRAN (Avery and Hotz, 1985). A combination of LIMDEP (Greene, 1989) and HOTZTRAN was used to obtain estimates for the multivariate analyses summarized in the tables below.
Results

Dimensions of Paternal Involvement: Zero-Order Relationships

Table 1 provides information about child support payments, visiting patterns, and conflict for the subsample of families divorced in the past 10 years. The data show higher levels of child support payments and more frequent visits than would characterize all children who live apart from their fathers. The table shows that nearly 70% of fathers paid some child support in the past year. My earlier work with these data shows that for divorced families separated more than 10 years, only 54% paid any support in the past year (Seltzer, forthcoming: Table 4). Similarly, fathers and children separated in the past 10 years see each other more frequently than families separated for longer periods. Table 1 shows that almost 90% of nonresident fathers saw their child at least once during the past year whereas my earlier work shows that for those separated more than 10 years, only 70% saw their children at least once (Seltzer, forthcoming: Table 4). However, even among those separated more recently, less than a third of nonresident fathers see their children once a week (31.2%).

Table 1 about here.

Most recently divorced mothers report little or no conflict with the children’s father about child support, custody, or visitation. Two-thirds of the sample say they have no or very little conflict. However, a significant minority, 34.3%, report moderate or high levels of conflict.

The bottom panel of Table 1 shows the relationships between paying child support, contact with children and parental conflict. As in previous research, paying support is associated with maintaining contact with children (Furstenberg et al., 1983; Seltzer, forthcoming). Fathers who do not pay child support are less likely to have contact with children than those who make at least some financial contribution. The contrast between those who pay nothing and those who pay some support is statistically significant (19.5% vs. 7.1%,
$F = 5.80, p = .02)$. However, the association between the amount of child support paid and maintaining contact is inconsistent.

The association between paying child support and conflict between parents suggests that the more support nonresident fathers pay, the more likely the parents are to have conflict. Again the relationship between the amount of support paid and conflict is inconsistent although the contrast between not paying support and paying at least $3600 is quite marked. When fathers pay no support, nearly 58% of mothers report at least some conflict (100% - 42.3%) compared to 70% who report conflict when fathers pay $3600 or more a year in child support (100% - 30.4%). Fathers who visit their children more frequently are also more likely to report conflict than those who do not visit their children. The table shows that 32% of fathers who visit their children at least weekly have no conflict with the children's mother while 69% of fathers who never visit the children are conflict-free. These data provide preliminary evidence that fathers may limit their involvement with children after separation to avoid conflict with their former spouse. The data are consistent with anecdotal reports from divorced fathers who say that they stopped spending time with their children because of disagreements with the children's mother (Lewin, 1990). In the aggregate, these data support the belief that policies that encourage more frequent visits between fathers and children may also increase children's exposure to parental conflict. The results below, however, show that the positive association between visitation and conflict varies in magnitude and statistical significance across subsamples.

**Paternal Involvement and Children's Well-Being: Zero-Order Associations**

Table 2 shows the zero-order association between children's welfare and paternal involvement. The first panel of the table shows mean differences in child welfare by the amount of child support fathers paid in the past year. Child support payments have little effect on any of the three measures of children's welfare. However, the contrast between children whose fathers paid no support and those whose fathers paid at least $3600 generally favors children whose fathers paid support. For example, the mean score on the aggressive behavior index is
3.41 for children whose fathers did not pay support and 3.11 for those whose fathers paid the highest amount of support. Similarly, 16.5% of children whose fathers did not pay support in the past year had repeated a grade in school compared to 5% of those whose fathers paid at least $3600 in the previous year. There is virtually no difference on the final measure, how well the child’s life is going, between children whose fathers do not pay any child support and those who receive at least $3600 in support annually (.46 vs .47).

Table 2 about here.

The results for the relationship between children’s welfare and visiting are less consistent. More frequent contact with their father is generally associated with more aggressive behavior and an increased chance that the child’s life is not going very well, but contact is associated with a lower probability of repeating a grade in school. For both aggressive behavior and mother’s reports that the child’s life is not going well, there is a very slight improvement in well-being (i.e., a decline in the problem score) when children see their fathers at least weekly compared to those who see their fathers 1 to 3 times a month. Because the results in Table 2 do not control for other factors which affect children’s well-being, the results may reflect the confounding effects of time since separation or parental conflict. However, the overall pattern of increased problems when fathers visit more frequently is consistent with findings from a Colorado study of preschoolers that also showed a positive association between children’s contact with their father and aggressive behavior (Hodges, Wechsler, and Bailantine, 1979). This may be another instance in which the direction of causation is reversed. Fathers may spend more time with children when the children “need” them, and aggressive behavior is one indication of children’s need for more attention.

Finally, parental conflict also increases children’s aggressive behavior and the probability that the child’s life is not going well. In both instances there is a monotonic association between children’s problems and the level of conflict between parents. Neither zero-order association is statistically significant, although the contrast between no conflict and any conflict on children’s aggressive behavior approaches statistical significance (3.10 vs. 3.44,
$F = 3.51, p = .06)$. Parental conflict is not associated with children's grade repeats.

### Paying Support and Visiting Children: Multivariate Results

Table 3 summarizes the results showing the relationship between paying support and visiting children. The table shows both the zero-order association between the two continuous variables and the net association, controlling for family background. The multivariate analysis provides results that are generally consistent with the zero-order relationships in Table 1. Nonresident fathers who pay more support also visit their children more frequently. This relationship persists after taking into account variation in father's income, mother's education, geographical proximity of the two parents' households, and a variety of other family and child characteristics. The positive association between paying support and visiting children is statistically significant in all of the subsamples examined for this analysis. These results suggest that if fathers who pay support now are similar to those who would pay support under the more rigorous enforcement policies of the PSA, the child support reforms are likely to increase the amount of time that nonresident fathers spend with their children.

Table 3 about here.

### Effects of Paying Support and Visiting on Conflict: Multivariate Results

The top panel of Table 4 summarizes the results from the analysis of parental conflict. Neither amount of child support nor frequency of visits has a statistically significant effect on conflict once father's income, mother's education, geographical location, and various demographic characteristics are taken into account. Table 4 shows the partial coefficients for the regression of parental conflict on child support and visits for each subsample. Although some of the parameters is statistically significant, in each case the more child support nonresident fathers pay, the less conflict there is between parents. In two of the three analyses, the coefficient for payments is significant at $p < .10$ for a one-tailed test. Frequency of visits has a consistently positive effect on conflict, but none of the coefficients approaches statistical significance, even by a generous criterion.
These findings suggest that when fathers pay more child support, parents are less likely to have conflict about such things as custody, how money is spent on the children, and visitation. However, the measure of conflict used here is the mother's report of disagreements. Presumably the more money mothers receive in child support, the less likely they are to instigate conflict with the children's father about not paying or paying little child support. In contrast, when nonresident fathers pay more support, they may report higher levels of conflict because they may be reluctant to give their ex-wives control over money the fathers would prefer to spend directly on children (Weiss and Willis, 1985). The absence of information from both parents in the family is a disadvantage to the NSPH data as well as many other national data sources on relationships between parents and children who live apart.

An alternative explanation for the negative effect of payments on parental conflict is that parents' ability to cooperate and trust each other on childrearing matters increases child support payments which, in turn, account for reports of agreement about postdivorce childrearing. Because these data are cross-sectional, they cannot be used to determine the causal association between the two outcomes.11

Overall, these results provide preliminary evidence that the attempts by the FSA to increase child support payments will not increase conflict among divorced parents. The analysis suggests that although nonresident fathers would spend more time with their children as a result of more effective enforcement of child support obligations, increasing the frequency of visits does not increase parental conflict, once other aspects of family background are taken into account. However, because the fathers in this analysis pay support voluntarily (i.e., in the absence of the FSA reforms), the selective character of the sample may mean that the

11However, preliminary investigations of the effects of child support payments on conflict controlling for the frequency of arguments in the year before the parents separated show that the effects of child support on conflict are substantially the same net of conflict at an earlier date. While these are retrospective reports of conflict between ex-spouses, these data provide a more complete picture of the association between child support and conflict than has been available from most national data sources.
findings overestimate the benefits and underestimate the costs of the reforms for paternal involvement.

Effects on Well-Being of Child Support, Visits, and Conflict: Multivariate Results

The bottom panel of Table 4 shows the net effects of child support payments, visits, and conflict on the three measures of children’s well-being. Once conflict between parents is taken into account, child support payments have no effect on child well-being. Conflict, on the other hand, diminishes children’s well-being. Parental conflict increases children’s aggressive behavior and mothers’ perception that the child’s life is not going very well. However, conflict does not directly affect the probability that children will repeat a grade in school. The deleterious effects of parental conflict on children’s behavior and overall adjustment is consistent with results from studies cited earlier of children who live with both parents as well as those who have experienced a separation. As stated above, there is no evidence in my analysis, however, to suggest that improved child support enforcement would increase conflict between divorced parents.

Group Differences in the Effects of Child Support

Although this paper emphasizes the subsample of families for whom information about father’s income is available, I have also begun an investigation of the effects of child support for the welfare of children using a more broadly defined sample. The effects of fathers’ involvement on children’s welfare may differ for those married separately or divorced in the past 10 years compared to families in which children’s parents did not marry. Fathers of children born outside of marriage are less likely to pay support and less likely to visit their children than former married fathers, even after taking into account other social and demographic differences between the two groups (Seltzer, forthcoming).

Although levels of paternal involvement are lower for fathers of children born outside of marriage, we know little about whether the consequences of involvement are different for
children born in and outside of marriage. To investigate this question, I conducted parallel analyses of the determinants of the effects of child support payments and contact with children on parental conflict and of the effects of all three aspects of paternal participation on children’s welfare. These analyses contrasted the experiences of recently divorced families (i.e., those represented in Tables 1-4 above) with families in the entire sample, regardless of parents’ marital status when the referent child was born and regardless of duration of separation. I used the same set of control variables for both analyses: distance between parents’ households, mother’s education, whether the separation occurred in the past year, child’s age and sex, and race/ethnicity. The results show that regardless of sample definition, child support payments do not affect the amount of conflict between parents.12 That the amount of child support paid does not affect parental conflict for this more inclusive sample, further supports the conclusion that the child support reforms in the FSA are unlikely to harm children by exposing them to additional conflict.

The two samples do differ, however, in the effects of frequent contact on conflict between parents. Although contact has no effect on conflict for the sample of recent divorces, it does increase conflict significantly for the full sample. That the findings differ for the two 12This differs from the results shown in Table 3 for the effects of payments on conflict when father’s income is taken into account. Father’s income increases conflict between parents, net of other factors (including child support payments). Fathers with higher incomes are also likely to have higher educations and higher status occupations. Their greater resources may enable them to more easily monitor their children’s lives after separation. They may also be more adept at communicating to the children’s mother any disagreements they have with the way the mother is raising the children. Father’s income increases the likelihood of joint legal custody (Selizer, in press), and this may also increase his voice in childrearing after divorce.

From the mother’s point of view, mothers may report more conflict when the children’s fathers have higher incomes, regardless of how much child support the fathers actually pay. The more money the father has, the more mothers may want them to contribute to child support. Previous research shows that fathers with higher incomes owe a smaller proportion of their incomes in child support than do fathers with low incomes (Garfinkel and Wong, 1987). Therefore, the mother may express greater dissatisfaction with the father’s behavior when he has a higher income because she thinks he has more money to share with his children than he is contributing.
samples suggests that the effects on conflict of contact with children may depend on the
type of conflict. Remember that fathers in the full sample have much less
frequent contact with their children than fathers in the recently divorced sample. If the
effects of contact or conflict are nonlinear, this would be consistent with findings from
other research that suggests that very frequent and infrequent contact depend on different
relationships (Seltzer and Bianchi, 1988). Frequent and infrequent contact may also
engender different types of conflict. For example, fathers who have less contact with their
children may have more disagreements about child support payments and how the mother
spends child support while fathers who visit their children frequently may disagree more with
the mother about where the children live and how they are being raised. We will examine
nonlinearities in contact and disaggregate the various types of parental conflict in later sections
of this research.

The real question, through, is whether the effects on children’s well-being of support
payments, contact, and parental conflict are the same for the two samples. The data show
general consistency in the negative effects of conflict on children’s welfare. For both samples,
conflict increases children’s aggressive behavior and the likelihood that mothers report that
the children’s lives are not going well. Similarity within and between samples in the findings
for aggressive behavior and mother’s report that the child’s life is not going very well may
occur because mothers who observe children acting out and having trouble controlling their
temper interpret this behavior as a sign that the child’s life is not going well. Parental
conflict does not affect children’s chances of having repeated a grade since their parents
separated.

Contrary to expectations, father’s contact with children also increases children’s aggres-
sive behavior. This effect is only statistically significant for the larger sample, but the
sign of the coefficient is also positive in the smaller sample of recently divorced families.
As noted above, the positive association between contact and children’s aggressive behavior
may reflect fathers’ increased involvement with children when the children require additional
attention. Fathers, mothers, or the children themselves may initiate this increase in contact. Alternatively, children who spend more time with their fathers may behave somewhat more aggressively as the result of their greater exposure to a male role model (e.g., see Tavris and Wade, 1984). 13

Finally, child support payments appear to have a net benefit for children's school performance, controlling for contact and conflict. Children whose fathers pay more support are less likely to repeat a grade in school than those whose fathers pay less. However, this effect characterizes the full sample, but not the sample of recent divorces. The negative effect of child support payments on grade repeats in the full sample persists controlling for mother's household income from sources other than child support. This suggests that fathers' economic contributions to children may be important for symbolic and social reasons in addition to the financial benefits of child support.

Summary of Results and Discussion

This study provides evidence that attempts to increase child support payments through the FSA may affect other aspects of children's welfare in addition to improving their economic well-being. Child support may enhance children's school performance directly by improving their economic security. My findings also suggest a small positive effect of child support on children's welfare beyond the economic benefits, perhaps because fathers who pay support are also likely to engage in other practical aspects of childrearing such as helping with homework or enforcing rules that encourage better study habits.

Child support has an indirect effect on children's welfare as well. My findings show that when fathers pay more support, there is less conflict between parents about how to raise

13 The finding of a positive association between contact with father and aggressive behavior controls for whether the child is a boy or girl. Although previous research shows that boys are more likely to behave aggressively than girls (Tavris and Wade, 1984), in this analysis I find that boys are, on average, less likely to act out controlling for other factors. The sex difference, however, is not statistically significant. We will examine whether the effects of contact with father differ for boys and girls in later stages of the analysis.
children. This is important because conflict has a strong, reasonably consistent negative effect on children's welfare, although it seems to be more harmful when children's well-being is measured by mothers' reports about problem behaviors than when well-being is measured by school performance (i.e., grade repeats). The effects on well-being of fathers' contact with children are mixed. My results are generally consistent with Furstenberg et al.'s (1987) finding that fathers' involvement does not affect children's welfare. However, I find some evidence that higher levels of contact with fathers are associated with more distress among children, controlling for the amount of conflict between parents. Given the limitations of these data, I cannot distinguish between instances in which fathers spend more time with their children in response to children's behavior problems and actual negative effects on children of nonresident father's involvement with them. This is clearly an avenue for additional research.

Finally, I find that increased contact with fathers may also have an indirect negative effect on children by increasing exposure to conflict. The positive association between contact and conflict varies across subsamples, suggesting that paternal contact may increase conflict under some conditions, but not others. For example, contact may increase conflict when parents do not have a long history of negotiating about childrearing, such as parents who bore their children outside of marriage and did not spend some time rearing them in the same household (compared to when parents were married to each other). In addition, parents who choose to live with their children, even if only for a short time, may be more interested in coordinating children's involvement with both parents compared to parents who have never lived together. A next step in this research is to examine more systematically the differences

11If contact with nonresident fathers does increase children's problems, the mechanism accounting for children's behavioral difficulties may be the strain of being exposed to two households with two sets of rules. When parents do not cooperate about inconsistencies in these rules, the strain may cause children to act out more frequently (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). The strains of dual-parenting arrangements may also increase mothers' perceptions that their children are acting out more frequently because the mother is experiencing strain, not necessarily because the children are.
in child support practices and the well-being of children born in and outside of marriage.

Another important group difference that we will examine in later stages of this research is whether or not child support and postseparation child-rearing practices differ for blacks and whites. Although the analyses reported here control for mean differences in paternal involvement, I have not yet examined whether the effects on children's behavior and emotional adjustment of child support and visiting practices differ by race. I do not expect the FSA to have different effects on black and white children. Black nonresident fathers may already contribute significant informal assistance to their children's mothers because of the importance of kin ties in black communities and black fathers' closer geographical proximity to the children's household compared to white fathers (Stack, 1974; Hogan, Hao, and Parish, 1990; Seltser, forthcoming; Mott, 1990). This suggests that stronger enforcement of formal child support contributions (e.g., improved establishment and collection of child support awards) through the FSA may simply encourage black fathers to change from making informal to formal transfers without altering their total investments in children. However, this discussion is speculative. A more complete evaluation of race differences in current child support practices and anticipated consequences of the reforms requires explicit consideration of the various components of the FSA, including paternity adjudication, establishment of awards, and collection procedures.

Obviously the combined goals of describing the current effects of child support on children's noneconomic welfare and of predicting the effects of the FSA child support reforms are much more ambitious goals than could be fully addressed one paper, even by an analysis more polished than this one. Rather than devote more attention to variables omitted from my analysis and other problems of revising or modifying the statistical approaches used here, I prefer to consider briefly two conclusions suggested by my analysis thus far. First, my results suggest that the FSA may have benefits for children's noneconomic welfare. The positive effect of child support payments on children's progress in school (i.e., the finding that payments decrease the chance of repeating a grade) shows that the FSA may enhance
an important aspect of child well-being. The benefits of increased child support payments on school performance are probably underestimated in this analysis because the analysis does not consider the longer term effects on performance of children's higher standard of living as a result of more reliable and higher child support payments.

Second, my findings also show that increased paternal participation may have costs for children by exposing them to more conflict, and conflict diminishes children's emotional welfare and social adjustment. Although my analysis is hampered by the difficulty of reliably measuring children's psychological well-being, the problems of selection suggest that the data underestimate the potential negative effects of the FSA on children. The FSA child support reforms are likely to increase payments among families with higher levels of parental conflict than are observed in these data on "voluntary" payers. Social researchers must develop theoretical and empirical models that focus on the question: Do the economic benefits to children of increased child support contributions outweigh the emotional and psychological costs of increased exposure to parental conflict? This may require more creative use of measurement and data collection strategies to enable a direct comparison of diverse aspects of child well-being. One of the problems with current approaches is that researchers use a variety of indicators of children's well-being, but cannot easily compare results across indicators. We may need to develop models that use a common metric to enable us to compare such outcomes as children's scores on aggressive behavior indices with scores on academic achievement tests. Nevertheless, ultimately, we cannot avoid the value judgments inherent in deciding whether improving children's economic welfare and progress in school is worth some emotional trauma for children and their parents.
References


per No. 893-89, University of Wisconsin, Madison.


Thomson, Elizabeth. 1990. Personal communication, June.


Figure 1
Schematic Diagram of the Effects of Child Support on Child Well-Being

- Child Support
- Visits
- Family Background
- Conflict
- Child Well-Being
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Support Payments in Past Year*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.01 - $599.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$600 - $1199.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1200 - $2399.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2400 - $3599.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3600 or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For Those Who Pay Any Support:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Visits in Past Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once - several times a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 3 times a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict about Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(table continued)
### Table 1, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships Between Payments, Visits, and Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Support in Past Year*</th>
<th>% with No Visits</th>
<th>% with No Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.01 - $999.99</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500 - $1199.99</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1200 - $2399.99</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2400 - $3599.99</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3600 or more</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Visits in Past Year</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>69.2**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once - several times a year</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 3 times a month</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week or more</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Distributions use weighted data. Unweighted number of cases is 390. Totals may deviate slightly from 100% due to rounding error.

Source: National Survey of Families and Households (1987-88), children of formerly married parents who were separated or divorced in the past 10 years. Reports from resident mothers.

*Annualized for those separated less than 12 months.

**p < .05.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator of Child Well-Being:</th>
<th>Aggressive Behavior</th>
<th>Repeat a Grade</th>
<th>Life Not Going Very Well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>.442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>.304</td>
<td>.498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unweighted N</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Child Well-Being by Child Support**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aggressive Behavior</th>
<th>Repeat a Grade</th>
<th>Life Not Going Very Well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.165</td>
<td>.459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$01 - $599.99</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$600 - $1199.99</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>.479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1200 - $2399.99</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2400 - $3399.99</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>.474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3600 or more</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.468</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Frequency of Visits in Past Year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aggressive Behavior</th>
<th>Repeat a Grade</th>
<th>Life Not Going Very Well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>.152</td>
<td>.407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once - several times a year</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 3 times a month</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>.456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week or more</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.436</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conflict about Children**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aggressive Behavior</th>
<th>Repeat a Grade</th>
<th>Life Not Going Very Well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>.427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>.395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>.120</td>
<td>.481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>.515</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Distributions use weighted data.*

*Source: National Survey of Families and Households (1987-88), children of formerly married parents who were separated or divorced in the past 10 years. Reports from resident mothers.*

*Annualized for those separated less than 12 months.*
Table 3
Zero-Order and Partial Correlations between Child Support Payments and Frequency of Visits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample for Analysis of:</th>
<th>Aggressive Behavior</th>
<th>Repeat a Grade</th>
<th>Life Not Going Very Well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( \rho ) (zero-order)</td>
<td>.236** (8.39)</td>
<td>.300** (9.71)</td>
<td>.235** (8.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \rho ) (partial)</td>
<td>.153** (5.20)</td>
<td>.185** (5.56)</td>
<td>.156** (5.31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: t-statistics in parentheses. Analysis for \( \rho \) (partial) controls for father’s income, distance between parents’ households, mother’s education, number of months separated, child’s age in years, whether child is a boy, and child’s race/ethnicity. Parameters are from regressions estimated with correlated errors.

Source: National Survey of Families and Households (1987-88), children of formerly married parents who were separated or divorced in the past 15 years. Reports from resident mothers.

**\( p \leq .025 \) for a one-tailed test.
Table 4

Summary of Net Effects of Child Support and Visits on Conflict and Children's Well-Being

| Regression Parameters for Effects of Child Support Payments and Visits on Parental Conflict |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Analysis Sample for:                        |                                             |                          |
|                                             | Aggressive Behavior                        | Repeat a Grade           | Life Not Going Very Well |
| Child support payments (00's)               | -.005                                      | -.004                    | -.005                    |
|                                             | (-1.45)                                    | (-1.03)                  | (-1.33)                  |
| Frequency of visits                         | .059                                       | .010                     | .068                     |
|                                             | (.614)                                     | (.097)                   | (.704)                   |

| Effects on Children's Well-Being of Child Support, Visits, and Parental Conflict |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
|                                                                                  | Aggressive Behavior#                        | Repeat a Grade@          | Life Not Going Very Well@ |
|                                                                                  | Child support payments (00's)               |                          |                          |
|                                                                                  | -.001                                      | -.002                    | .001                     |
|                                                                                  | (-.830)                                    | (-.293)                  | (.394)                   |
|                                                                                  | Frequency of visits                         |                          |                          |
|                                                                                  | .033                                       | -.085                    | -.004                    |
|                                                                                  | (.798)                                     | (.893)                   | (.083)                   |
|                                                                                  | Parental conflict                          |                          |                          |
|                                                                                  | .077**                                     | .021                     | .061**                   |
|                                                                                  | (3.48**)                                   | (.416)                   | (2.18)                   |

Note: t-statistics in parentheses. Analysis controls for father's income, distance between parents' households, mother's education, number of months separated, child's age in years, whether child is a boy, and child's race/ethnicity.

Source: National Survey of Families and Households (1987-88), children of formerly married parents who were separated or divorced in the past 10 years. Reports from resident mothers.

#Regression coefficients.

@Probit coefficients.

**p ≤ .025 for a one-tailed test.
Mailing address:
Center for Demography and Ecology
University of Wisconsin
1180 Observatory Drive, Room 4412
Madison, WI 53706-1393
USA