

Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2003

Issued July 2006

Consumer Income

P60-230

Current Population Reports

By
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This report focuses on the child support income that custodial parents reported receiving from noncustodial parents living in other households, as well as other support, such as health insurance and noncash assistance.¹ The most recent

data in this report are from the Child Support Supplement to the April 2004 Current Population Survey (CPS), which provides information about the amount of child support received during the 2003 calendar year. The report also shows some of the latest 10-year trends by comparing data collected from the 1994 April CPS and subsequent biennial surveys. (See Text Box 1 for additional

¹ The custodial parent is the parent with whom the child(ren) lived during the survey interview when the other parent lived outside the household, although there may be a joint- or split-custody arrangement.

Text Box 1

Since, in some states, child support can be ordered by a court until a child is 21 years old or completes college, this report specifically describes the parents' own children under 21, rather than the definition usually used by the U.S. Census Bureau of children under 18 years of age. Some children living with neither biological parent, such as those living with grandparents or foster parents, may also be eligible for child support but are not included in this report.

Some households in the sample also participated in the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) to the 2004 CPS, where additional supplemental information, such as income and health insurance coverage in the preceding year, was also collected. Changes made to the April CPS supplement in 1994 do not allow comparisons between these data and CPS data collected before that year. These changes included refining the screening of potential respondents, restructuring

the questionnaire to accommodate computerizing the survey, revising terminology that refers to types of child support agreements or awards, increasing the detail in questions about the amount of child support due, including overdue child support (back support) in the amount of child support due, and adding new questions on pass-through payments (child support collected for public assistance recipients by a state enforcement office, some of which passes through to recipients). The amount of child support payments to recipients of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), formerly known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), is likely underreported because some states retain some or all child support collected on behalf of children of custodial parents.

Additional information and detailed tables are available via the Internet at www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/childsupport.html.

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survey information and notes on limitations of the data.²⁾

Custodial Parents and Their Children

In the spring of 2004, an estimated 14.0 million parents had custody of 21.6 million children under 21 years of age while the other parent lived somewhere else.³ Five of every six custodial parents were mothers (83.1 percent) and 1 in 6 were fathers (16.9 percent). The number of custodial parents, as well as their distribution by sex, was not statistically different from 10 years earlier (Table 1). Overall, 26.7 percent of all 81.0 million children under 21 years old living in families lived in a custodial-parent family. Among Black children in families, one-half (49.7 percent) lived with their custodial parent in 2004.⁴

Demographic Characteristics

The distribution of custodial parents by marital status differed by sex. Less than one-third (30.5 percent) of custodial mothers had never been married. The remaining ever-married mothers included 45.9 percent who were currently

divorced or separated, 21.8 percent who were currently married (most of whom were divorced but remarried), and 1.7 percent who were widowed. Custodial fathers were less likely than custodial mothers to report they had never married (19.7 percent), more likely to be divorced or separated (56.4 percent), and as likely to be currently married (23.1 percent).⁵

The age of custodial mothers rose between 1994 and 2004. In 1994, one-quarter (25.4 percent) were 40 years or older. By 2004, this proportion had grown to over one-third (36.8 percent).

Over half (53.8 percent) of custodial mothers were non-Hispanic White, about one-fourth (26.8 percent) were Black, and 15.1 percent were Hispanic.⁶ Custodial fathers

⁵ The proportion of custodial fathers who were never married (19.7 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion who were currently married (23.1 percent) or from the proportion of custodial mothers who were currently married (21.8 percent).

⁶ Federal surveys now give respondents the option of reporting more than one race. Therefore, two basic ways of defining a race group are possible. A group such as Black may be defined as those who reported Black and no other race (the race-alone or single-race concept) or as those who reported Black regardless of whether they also reported another race (the race-alone-or-in-combination concept). The body of this report (text, figures, and tables) shows data for people who reported they were the single race White and not Hispanic and people who reported the single race Black. Use of the single-race populations does not imply that it is the preferred method of presenting or analyzing data. The Census Bureau uses a variety of approaches. See Detailed Table 12 at www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/detailedtables.html for a listing of custodial parents by racial group.

Because Hispanics may be any race, data in this report for Hispanics overlap slightly with data for the Black population. Based on the 2004 CPS April supplement, 3.1 percent of Black custodial parents were Hispanic. Data for the American Indian and Alaska Native population and the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander population are not shown in this report because of their small sample size in the April 2004 CPS.

were more likely than custodial mothers to be non-Hispanic White (67.7 percent) and less likely to be Black (18.8 percent) or Hispanic (9.4 percent).⁷

Most custodial parents (57.0 percent) had one child, but custodial mothers were more likely than custodial fathers to have two or more children living with them in 2004 (44.4 percent and 35.9 percent, respectively).⁸

Employment and Public Program Participation

The level of full-time, year-round employment increased among custodial parents from 45.6 percent to 53.9 percent between 1993 and 2003. Over one-quarter (27.9 percent) of custodial parents were in the labor force working part-time or part-year and 18.2 percent did not work in 2003.

Custodial mothers were more likely than custodial fathers to work part-time, and their full-time, year-round employment rate increased from 40.9 percent in 1993 to 50.5 percent in 2003. The full-time, year-round employment rate for custodial fathers was 70.6 percent, approximately the same level as in 1993 (Figure 1).

Overall, rising employment rates of custodial parents were accompanied by declines in rates of participation in public assistance programs, which fell from 40.7 percent to 30.3 percent between

⁷ The proportion of custodial mothers who were Hispanic (15.1 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion of custodial fathers who were Black (18.8 percent).

⁸ See Detailed Table 4 at www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/detailedtables.html.

² The population represented (the population universe) is the civilian noninstitutionalized population living in the United States, 15 years of age or older, who have their own children under 21 years old living with them, while the other parent lives outside the household.

³ The estimates in this report (which may be shown in text, figures, and tables) are based on responses from a sample of the population and may differ from actual values because of sampling variability or other factors. As a result, apparent differences between the estimates for two or more groups may not be statistically significant. All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90-percent confidence level unless otherwise noted.

⁴ See Detailed Table 11 at www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/detailedtables.html.

Table 1.
Award Status and Child Support Reciprocity for Custodial Parents Due Child Support by Sex of Custodial Parent: 1993–2003

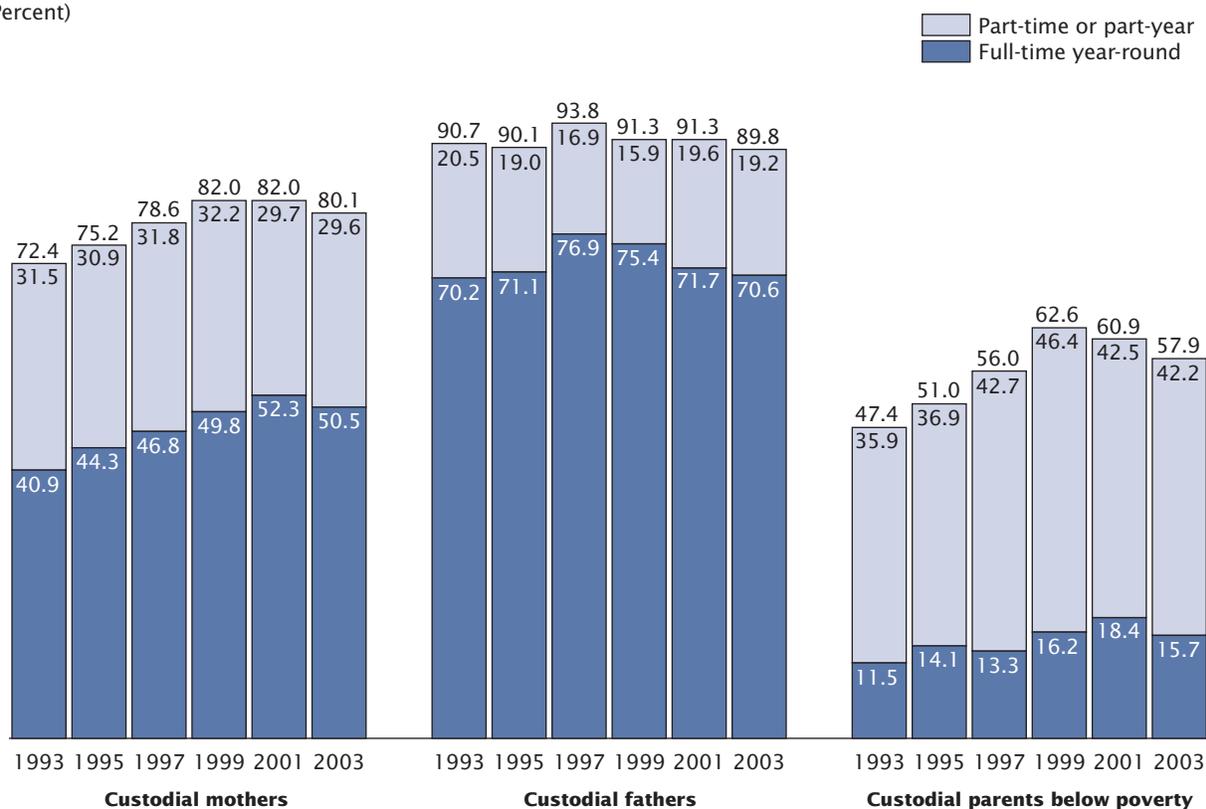
(Numbers in thousands as of spring of the following year. Parents living with own children under 21 years of age whose other parent is not living in the home. Amounts in 2003 dollars)

Award status and child support reciprocity	1993		1995		1997		1999		2001		2003	
	Number	Standard error										
ALL CUSTODIAL PARENTS												
Total	13,690	286	13,715	301	13,949	303	13,529	299	13,383	282	13,951	288
Awarded child support	7,800	219	7,967	232	7,876	231	7,945	232	7,916	219	8,376	225
Percent	57.0	1.1	58.1	1.1	56.5	1.1	58.7	1.1	59.1	1.1	60.0	1.0
Due child support	6,688	204	6,958	217	7,018	218	6,791	215	6,924	205	7,256	210
Average child support due ¹	\$4,489	\$107	\$4,875	\$127	\$4,741	\$104	\$5,249	\$150	\$5,242	\$244	\$5,104	\$93
Average child support received ¹	\$2,922	\$108	\$3,212	\$109	\$3,159	\$98	\$3,081	\$91	\$3,284	\$132	\$3,499	\$135
Received any child support	5,070	178	5,269	190	5,282	190	5,005	185	5,119	177	5,548	184
Percent	75.8	1.3	75.7	1.4	75.3	1.4	73.7	1.4	73.9	1.3	76.5	1.2
Received full amount of child support	2,466	125	2,945	142	3,240	149	3,066	145	3,093	138	3,290	143
Percent	36.9	1.5	42.3	1.6	46.2	1.6	45.1	1.6	44.7	1.5	45.3	1.5
Not awarded child support	5,889	192	5,747	198	6,074	203	5,584	195	5,466	183	5,576	185
CUSTODIAL MOTHERS												
Total	11,505	264	11,607	278	11,872	281	11,499	277	11,291	260	11,587	264
Awarded child support	6,878	207	7,123	220	7,080	219	7,150	220	7,110	208	7,436	213
Percent	59.8	1.2	61.4	1.2	59.6	1.2	62.2	1.2	63.0	1.1	64.2	1.1
Due child support	5,913	192	6,224	206	6,342	208	6,133	204	6,212	195	6,516	199
Average child support due ¹	\$4,548	\$118	\$4,958	\$139	\$4,763	\$110	\$5,301	\$160	\$6,017	\$270	\$5,176	\$100
Average child support received ¹	\$2,984	\$119	\$3,252	\$114	\$3,178	\$105	\$3,167	\$97	\$3,494	\$138	\$3,579	\$147
Received any child support	4,501	168	4,742	180	4,802	181	4,578	177	4,639	169	5,018	176
Percent	76.1	1.4	76.2	1.4	75.7	1.4	74.6	1.5	74.7	1.4	77.0	1.3
Received full amount of child support	2,178	118	2,674	136	2,945	142	2,818	139	2,815	132	2,948	135
Percent	36.8	1.6	43.0	1.6	46.4	1.6	45.9	1.7	45.3	1.6	45.2	1.5
Not awarded child support	4,627	170	4,484	175	4,792	181	4,349	172	4,181	160	4,151	160
CUSTODIAL FATHERS												
Total	2,184	118	2,108	121	2,077	120	2,030	118	2,092	114	2,364	121
Awarded child support	922	77	844	76	796	74	795	74	807	71	940	77
Percent	42.2	2.7	40.0	2.8	38.3	2.8	39.2	2.8	38.6	2.7	39.8	2.5
Due child support	775	70	733	71	676	68	658	68	712	67	740	68
Average child support due ¹	\$4,043	\$219	\$4,168	\$237	\$4,531	\$322	\$4,763	\$415	\$4,386	\$263	\$4,471	\$223
Average child support received ¹	\$2,534	\$233	\$2,883	\$384	\$2,986	\$275	\$2,276	\$220	\$2,994	\$424	\$2,797	\$280
Received any child support	569	60	527	60	479	58	427	54	480	55	530	58
Percent	73.4	4.0	71.9	4.4	70.9	4.6	64.9	4.9	67.4	4.4	71.6	4.1
Received full amount of child support	288	43	270	43	295	45	248	42	278	42	342	46
Percent	37.2	4.4	36.8	4.7	43.6	5.0	37.7	5.0	39.0	4.6	46.2	4.6
Not awarded child support	1,262	90	1,263	93	1,281	94	1,235	92	1,285	89	1,424	160

¹ All child support income amounts are adjusted to reflect 2003 dollars using the CPI-U-RS. For more information on the CPI, go to <www.bls.gov/cpi/cpirsdc.htm>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1994–2004.

Figure 1.
Employment Status of Custodial Parents by Sex: 1993–2003
 (Percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1994–2004.

1993 and 2003.⁹ The proportion of custodial mothers receiving only TANF/AFDC fell from 25.6 percent to 8.4 percent between 1993 and 2003, reaching a low of 6.3 percent in 2001.

Poverty

The proportion of custodial parents and their children living below the poverty level declined from 33.3 percent in 1993 to 23.4 percent in

2001. Between 2001 and 2003, it was statistically unchanged (24.0 percent) (Figure 2). Poverty levels varied among custodial-parent groups. While the poverty rate of custodial mothers fell from 36.8 percent in 1993 to 26.1 percent in 2003, it remained higher than the poverty rate among custodial fathers, 13.4 percent. Custodial parents who did not work or who were participants in public assistance programs had poverty rates of about 55 percent in 2003. Young (under 30 years of age), Black, or never-married custodial parents also tended to have higher rates of poverty (approximately 38 percent) than the complement members of their respective demographic groups. Custodial parents with

full-time, year-round employment had a poverty rate of 7.0 percent.¹⁰

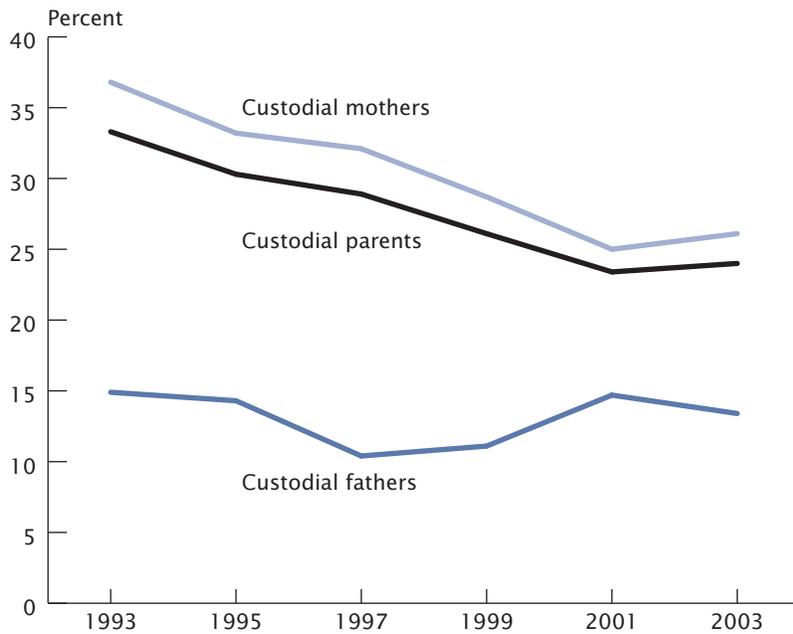
Agreements and Awards

Of the 14.0 million custodial parents in 2004, 8.4 million (60.0 percent) had some type of agreement or court award to receive financial support from the noncustodial parent for their children, an increase of 7.4 percent from 7.8 million in 1994. The majority of these agreements (7.7 million) were reported by the custodial parent as legal (established by a court or other government entity), while 700,000

⁹ Public assistance program participation includes receiving at least one of the following: Medicaid, food stamps, public housing or rent subsidy, TANF/AFDC, or general assistance. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), more commonly known as the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, replaced the AFDC program with the TANF program.

¹⁰ See Detailed Table 4 at www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/detailedtables.html.

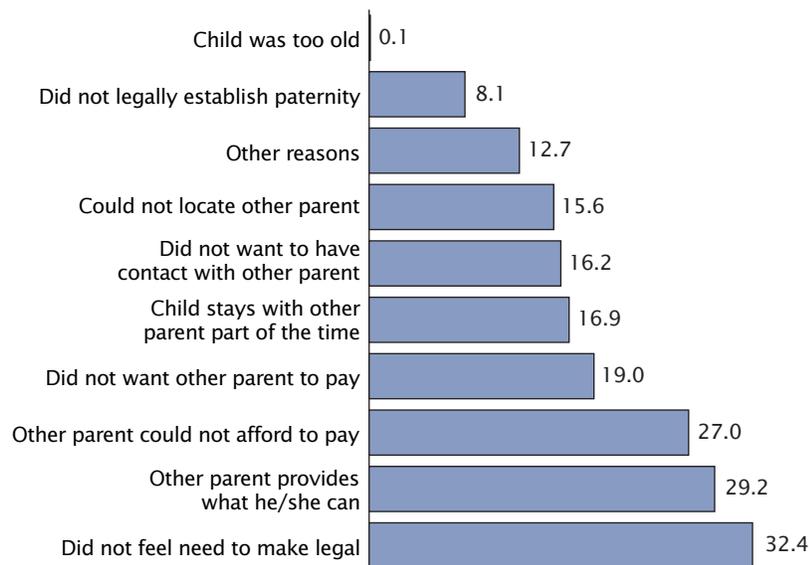
Figure 2.
Poverty Status of Custodial Parents: 1993–2003



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1994–2004.

Figure 3.
Reasons No Legal Agreement Established for Custodial Parents: 2004

(Percent)



Note: Universe is 5.9 million custodial parents without agreements or with informal agreements; excludes those with pending agreements. Total exceeds 100 percent because respondents could list more than one reason.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 2004.

were nonlegal, informal agreements or understandings.¹¹

When custodial parents without any agreements and those with informal agreements were asked why a legal agreement was not established, the reasons most often cited were that they did not feel the need to go to court or get legal agreements (32.4 percent), the other parent provided what he or she could for support (29.2 percent), and they felt the other parent could not afford to pay child support (27.0 percent) (Figure 3).¹²

The percentage of custodial mothers who had child support agreements or awards increased from 59.8 percent in 1994 to 64.2 percent in 2004. The proportion of custodial fathers who had child support agreements or awards was lower than that of custodial mothers in 2004 (39.8 percent) and was statistically unchanged from 10 years earlier.

Award rates varied based on other demographic characteristics of the custodial parent. Some of the lowest rates of child support agreements (56 percent or less) were found among custodial parents who were never married, separated, Black, Hispanic, had less than a high school education, or

¹¹ A nonlegal agreement is any written or verbal agreement or understanding that was never approved or ordered by a court or a government agency. The number of custodial parents with a child support agreement or award in 1994 (7.8 million) was not statistically different from the number of custodial parents with legal agreements in 2004 (7.7 million).

See Detailed Table 9 at www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/detailedtables.html.

¹² The proportion who did not feel the need to go to court or get legal agreements (32.4 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion who stated the other parent provided what he or she could for support (29.2 percent), and the latter was not statistically different from the 27.0 percent who felt the other parent could not afford to pay child support.

Table 2.
Demographic Characteristics of Custodial Parents by Award Status and Payments Received: 2003

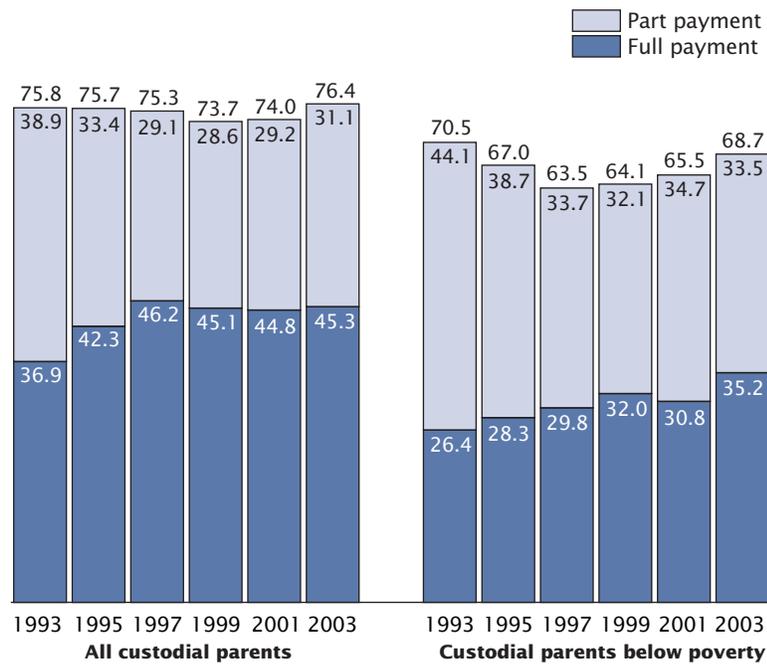
(Numbers in thousands, as of spring 2004. Parents living with own children under 21 years of age whose other parent is not living in the home)

Characteristic	With child support agreements or awards									
	Total	Total	Percent	Due child support payments in 2003						
				Total	Average due (dollars)	Average received (dollars)	Received all payments		Did not receive payments	
				Total			Total	Percent	Total	Percent
ALL CUSTODIAL PARENTS										
Total	13,951	8,376	60.0	7,256	5,104	3,499	3,290	45.3	1,708	23.5
Standard error	288	225	1.0	210	93	135	143	1.5	103	1.2
Sex										
Male	2,364	940	39.8	740	4,471	2,797	342	46.2	210	28.4
Female	11,587	7,436	64.2	6,516	5,176	3,579	2,948	45.2	1,498	23.0
Age										
Under 30 years	3,296	1,888	57.3	1,653	3,872	1,964	503	30.4	423	25.6
30 to 39 years	5,118	3,260	63.7	2,894	5,024	3,815	1,347	46.5	766	26.5
40 years and over	5,538	3,228	58.3	2,710	5,941	4,097	1,439	53.1	519	19.2
Race and Ethnicity										
White alone	9,601	6,048	63.0	5,313	5,243	3,840	2,595	48.8	1,048	19.7
White alone, non-Hispanic	7,837	5,184	66.1	4,576	5,396	3,943	2,266	49.5	830	18.1
Black alone	3,554	1,852	52.1	1,547	4,607	2,104	522	33.7	532	34.4
Hispanic (any race)	1,977	975	49.3	832	4,320	3,782	371	44.6	246	29.6
Current Marital Status										
Married	3,075	2,035	66.2	1,875	4,876	3,301	880	46.9	377	20.1
Divorced	5,023	3,309	65.9	2,865	5,768	4,196	1,486	51.9	610	21.3
Separated	1,632	880	53.9	682	5,093	3,035	282	41.3	183	26.8
Never married	4,005	2,037	50.9	1,736	4,245	2,801	609	35.1	505	29.1
Educational Attainment										
Less than high school diploma	2,200	1,208	54.9	988	3,826	3,682	404	40.9	326	33.0
High school graduate	5,123	3,078	60.1	2,685	4,740	2,781	1,101	41.0	714	26.6
Less than 4 years of college	4,589	2,849	62.1	2,541	5,275	3,608	1,199	47.2	493	19.4
Bachelor's degree or more	2,039	1,241	60.9	1,042	6,836	4,910	586	56.2	176	16.9
Selected Characteristics										
Family income below 2003 poverty level	3,343	1,964	58.7	1,689	4,248	2,548	594	35.2	530	31.4
Worked full-time, year-round	7,523	4,480	59.6	3,904	5,364	3,667	1,965	50.3	856	21.9
Public assistance program participation ¹	4,229	2,520	59.6	2,157	4,224	2,742	776	36.0	595	27.6
With 1 child	7,958	4,409	55.4	3,787	4,610	3,074	1,689	44.6	863	22.8
With 2 or more children	5,994	3,967	66.2	3,469	5,643	3,964	1,601	46.2	846	24.4
Child had contact with other parent in 2003	9,269	5,931	64.0	5,200	5,255	3,914	2,686	51.7	906	17.4

¹Public assistance program participation includes receiving at least one of the following: Medicaid, food stamps, public housing or rent subsidy, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or general assistance.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 2004.

Figure 4.
Custodial Parents Receiving Part or Full Child Support Payments Due by Poverty Status: 1993–2003
 (Percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1994–2004.

had one child. Award rates were about 8 percentage points lower 10 years earlier for custodial parents who were never married, separated, or for those without a high school diploma. Higher rates of child support awards or agreements (about two-thirds) were found in custodial-parent groups who were either currently married, divorced, or lived with two or more children of an absent parent in 2004.¹³

Child Support Receipt

Of the 8.4 million custodial parents with child support agreements or awards, 7.3 million (86.6 percent) were due child support payments

¹³ See Detailed Table 4 at www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/detailedtables.html.

in 2003.¹⁴ Nine of every ten (89.8 percent) custodial parents due child support were mothers and 1 in 10 (10.2 percent) were fathers.

Among parents due child support, 76.5 percent received at least some payments directly from the noncustodial parent, a proportion statistically unchanged since 1993. This included 45.3 percent who received the full amount due, an increase from 36.9 percent 10 years earlier but unchanged since 1997. The other 31.1 percent received some but not all payments that were due in 2003, a

¹⁴ The remaining 1.1 million custodial parents with child support agreements or awards were not due child support payments because either the child or children were too old, the noncustodial parent had died, the family lived together part of the year before the interview, or some other reason.

decrease from 1993, when 38.9 percent received less than full child support payments.¹⁵

For the 1.7 million custodial parents below the poverty level and due child support in 2003, two-thirds (68.7 percent) received child support. This included 35.2 percent who received all support that was due and a proportion not statistically different (33.5 percent) who received less than the full amount of child support due (Figure 4).

Receipt of full child support due differed by demographic group. About one-third of never-married custodial parents received all child support that was due. A similar proportion of custodial parents in each of the following groups received full child support: those who were Black, those less than 30 years of age, and those in poverty. Approximately 52 percent of divorced custodial parents received all child support that was due. Full support was also received by similar proportions of custodial parents who had at least a college degree or were 40 years of age or older. The proportions of custodial mothers (45.2 percent) and custodial fathers (46.2 percent) who received full payments in 2003 were not statistically different from each other (Figure 5).¹⁶

¹⁵ The proportion of custodial parents due child support who received all payments in 1993 (36.9 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion receiving less than full payments that year (38.9 percent).

¹⁶ The proportion of custodial fathers who received full payments (46.2 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion of divorced custodial parents (51.9 percent) and custodial parents 40 years and older (53.1 percent) who received full payments.

Custody and Visitation

A majority (83.4 percent) of the 7.3 million custodial parents due child support payments in 2003 had arrangements for joint child custody or visitation privileges with the noncustodial parent. About 79.2 percent of these parents with either joint custody or visitation arrangements received at least some child support payments. The proportion of custodial parents receiving any child support ranged from 76.2 percent for those with visitation-only arrangements to 85.9 percent for those having both joint custody and visitation arrangements. Of the custodial parents due child support who did not have either joint custody or visitation arrangements, 62.5 percent received child support payments.

For the 6.7 million custodial parents without any agreements, or with agreements but not due child support, 69.5 percent had arrangements with the noncustodial parent for visitation privileges or some type of shared custody.¹⁷

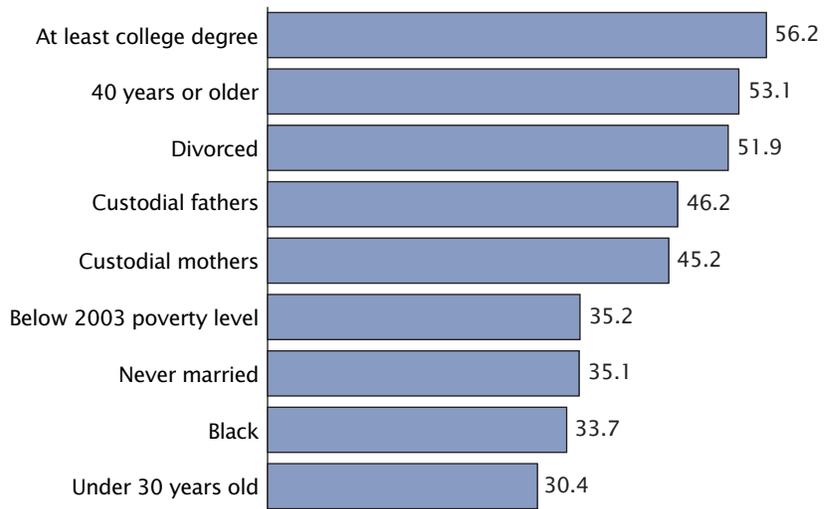
Amount of Child Support Received

In 2003, the 7.3 million custodial parents who were due child support under the terms of agreements or current awards were due an average of \$5,100, an aggregate of \$37.0 billion in payments due. Of this amount, \$25.4 billion (68.6 percent) was reported as received, averaging \$3,500 per custodial-parent family that was due support. This was an increase from 1999, when \$20.9 billion of the \$35.6 billion in child support

¹⁷ See Detailed Table 9 at www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/detailedtables.html.

Figure 5.
Custodial Parents Due Child Support Receiving Full Amount by Selected Characteristics: 2003

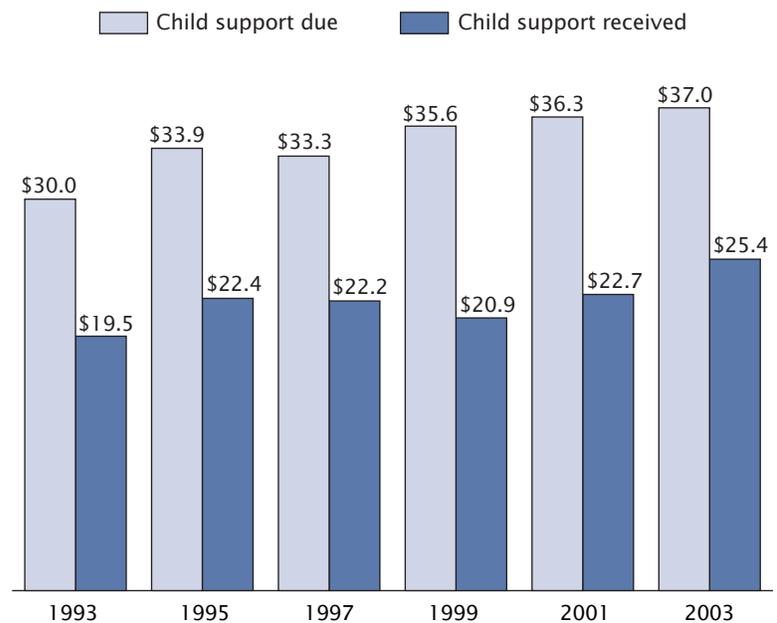
(Percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 2004.

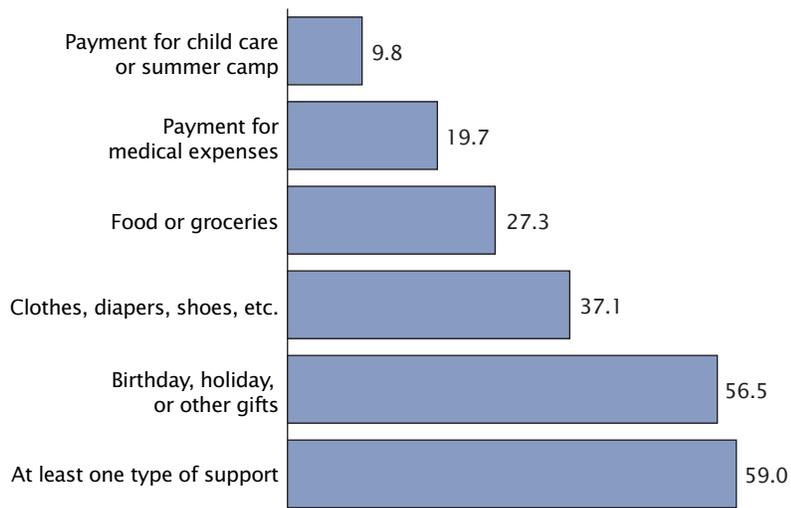
Figure 6.
Aggregate Child Support Due and Received for Custodial Parents Due Child Support: 1993–2003

(In billions of 2003 dollars)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1994–2004.

Figure 7.
Noncash Support Received by Custodial Parents: 2003
 (Percent)



Note: Total exceeds 100 percent because respondents could list more than one reason.
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 2004.

due (58.7 percent) was reported as received (Figure 6).¹⁸

The average amount of support received in 2003 was 19.7 percent higher, in real terms, than in 1993. The average amount of child support due increased by 13.7 percent during this same time. In 2003, custodial mothers received \$23.3 billion of the \$33.7 billion in support that was due (69.1 percent), and custodial fathers received \$2.1 billion of the \$3.3 billion that was due (62.6 percent), proportions that were not statistically different.¹⁹

Overall, custodial parents reported receiving \$26.6 billion directly

¹⁸ All child support income amounts are adjusted to reflect 2003 dollars using the CPI-U-RS. "Real" refers to comparisons of income after adjusting for inflation. The adjustment is based on percentage changes in prices between earlier years and 2003 and is computed by dividing the annual average Consumer Price Index (CPI) for 2003 by the annual average for earlier years. For more information on the CPI, see <www.bls.gov/cpi/cpirsdc.htm>.

¹⁹ See Detailed Table 1 at <www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/detailedtables.html>.

from the noncustodial parent for support of their children in 2003, which included \$1.2 billion received by parents without current awards or agreements.²⁰

Child Support and Income

The average amount of child support received by the 5.5 million custodial parents who received at least some of the support they were due (\$4,600) represented 16.0 percent of their average income in 2003 (\$28,600). Child support represented 9.2 percent of income for the 2.3 million parents who received less than full support due and 19.3 percent for the 3.3 million custodial parents who received all child support due. Child support represented a higher

²⁰ Custodial parents receiving child support without current awards include those with awards for children past the age of eligibility for payments, those with awards officially starting after 2003, or those with no awards (no legal or nonlegal awards). They represented 500,000 custodial parents and received an average of \$2,300 in child support in 2003.

proportion of income for many lower income groups. For example, among custodial mothers below the poverty level who received any payments, the average child support received (\$3,700) represented one-half (49.5 percent) of their average income.²¹

The average 2003 income for the 1.7 million custodial parents who received no child support payments was \$23,400, an increase in real terms of 17.8 percent from their average income 10 years earlier. Among the 5.6 million custodial parents with no support agreements, the average individual income was \$28,100 in 2003, an increase of 45.4 percent from their income in 1993.²²

Health Insurance

Of the 8.4 million custodial parents who had child support awards or agreements in 2003, 55.7 percent of the agreements specified who was to provide health insurance for their children. In 46.5 percent of these 4.7 million agreements, the absent parent provided the health insurance coverage.²³ Among the 3.0 million custodial parents with agreements where health insurance was not included in the child support award, 11.3 percent received health care coverage for their children from the noncustodial parent.

²¹ The average child support received by custodial parents who received at least some support due (\$4,600) was not statistically different from the average support received by custodial mothers below poverty who received any payments (\$3,700).

²² See Detailed Tables 4, 5, and 6 at <www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/detailedtables.html>.

²³ Health insurance coverage could be through either a Health Maintenance Organization, regular insurance policy, or some other plan. In many states, one or both parents could be obligated in a child support agreement to carry health insurance for their children. If the custodial parent is required to carry the coverage, the noncustodial parent may be required to contribute toward the cost of family coverage.

For the 5.6 million custodial parents without a child support agreement, 15.7 percent had health insurance coverage for their children through the noncustodial parent. Overall, approximately 3.4 million noncustodial parents provided some type of health insurance for their children.²⁴

Noncash Child Support

Over half of all custodial parents (59.0 percent) received at least one type of noncash support, such as gifts or coverage of expenses, on behalf of their children. Custodial parents with a child support agreement or award were more likely than those without awards to receive noncash support (61.8 percent and 54.6 percent, respectively).

The most common type of noncash support was gifts for birthdays, holidays, or other occasions (56.5 percent), followed by clothes (37.1 percent), food or groceries (27.3 percent), medical expenses other than health insurance (19.7 percent), and full or partial payments for child care or summer camp (9.8 percent) (Figure 7).²⁵

Contact With Government for Assistance

In 2004, 31.3 percent (4.4 million) of all custodial parents had ever contacted a child support enforcement office (IV-D office), state department of social services, or other welfare or TANF office for child support-related assistance. This was a decrease of 24.5 percent

from 1994, when 42.2 percent of custodial parents contacted a government agency for help. In addition, the total number of individual contacts for related assistance decreased 15.9 percent during this time, from 13.0 million to 10.9 million. Contacts were made for many reasons, but the most likely were to collect child support that was due (28.6 percent), to establish a legal agreement or court award (22.8 percent), to obtain welfare or public assistance (14.6 percent), and to locate the noncustodial parent (13.3 percent).²⁶

Source of the Data

The population represented (the population universe) in the Child Support Supplement to the April 2004 CPS is the civilian noninstitutionalized population living in the United States. The institutionalized population, which is excluded from the population universe, is composed primarily of the population in correctional institutions and nursing homes (91 percent of the 4.1 million institutionalized people in Census 2000).

Most estimates in this report are from the 1994 through 2004 April biennial supplements to the CPS. The Census Bureau conducts the April supplement sponsored, in part, by the Office of Child Support Enforcement of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Data from the April 1992 and earlier supplements are not directly comparable to data from 1994 and later years because of

changes made to the questionnaire (see Text Box 1 for more detail). Because of changes made to the allocation procedures, data for custodial parents due and receiving child support were revised starting with the April 1994 survey. Reported estimates may differ from those published previously due to these changes.

Accuracy of the Estimates

Statistics from sample surveys are subject to sampling error and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and are significant at the 90-percent confidence level. This means the 90-percent confidence interval for the difference between estimates being compared does not include zero. Nonsampling error in surveys may be attributed to a variety of sources, such as how the survey was designed, how respondents interpret questions, how able and willing respondents are to provide correct answers, and how accurately answers are coded and classified. To minimize these errors, the Census Bureau employs quality control procedures in sample selection, the wording of questions, interviewing, coding, data processing, and data analysis.

The CPS weighting procedure uses ratio estimation whereby sample estimates are adjusted to independent estimates of the national population by age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. This weighting partially corrects for bias due to undercoverage, but biases may still be present when people who are missed by the survey differ from those interviewed in ways other than age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. How this weighting procedure affects other variables in the

²⁴ See Detailed Table 8 at www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/detailedtables.html.

²⁵ Total of percentages exceeds 100 because more than one type of noncash support may have been received.

See Detailed Table 10 at www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/detailedtables.html.

²⁶ The proportion of custodial parents seeking assistance to obtain welfare or public assistance (14.6 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion contacting an agency to locate the noncustodial parent (13.3 percent). See Detailed Table 2 at www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/detailedtables.html.

survey is not precisely known. All of these considerations affect comparisons across different surveys or data sources.

Further information on the source of the data and accuracy of the estimates, including standard errors and confidence intervals, can be found at <www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/source03.pdf> or by contacting

Jana Shepherd of the Demographic Statistical Methods Division via e-mail at <dsmd.source.and.accuracy@census.gov>.

More Information

Detailed tabulations, related information, and historic data are available on the Internet at the Child Support page on the Census Bureau's Web site at

<www.census.gov/hhes/www/childsupport/childsupport.html>.

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