

# The Impact of the Georgia Fatherhood Program on Employment and Wages

Stacey R. Bloomer  
Theresa A. Sipe

**ABSTRACT.** The purpose of this quantitative study is to examine the impact of a job-training program, the Georgia Fatherhood Program (GFP), on the employment levels and wages of low-income, noncustodial parents. A pretest/posttest design was created to compare GFP participants to a similar comparison group. The results of the research indicate that GFP participants experienced a significant increase in employment, and gained wages similar to the employed comparison group. However, repeated measures analysis revealed that previously employed GFP participants did not significantly increase their wages. The data suggest that the job-training program may be most beneficial to those individuals who are unemployed at the time of enrollment. Recommendations for future research are presented. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2003 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

**KEYWORDS.** Fatherhood, noncustodial parents, job training, wages

As recent reform policies have moved welfare from continuous to temporary assistance, states have increasingly looked to child support as a permanent method of improving the economic status of single-parent families. These child support policy changes have been enacted in an attempt to increase the income of single parents, thereby decreasing

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Stacey R. Bloomer, MS, and Theresa A. Sipe, PhD, are affiliated with Georgia State University.

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poverty rates and assuaging the negative impact single parenthood has on children (Wolk & Schmahl, 1999). The socioeconomic status (SES) of noncustodial parents and corresponding support payments are critical for children living in single-parent homes for two primary reasons. First, the SES and work behavior of fathers is linked to parental involvement and frequency of parent-child interaction (Danzinger & Radin, 1990; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). Second, payment of child support is a means by which children can be spared the deleterious consequences of poverty, including behavioral, emotional, and academic problems (Dawson, 1991; Downey, 1994; McLeod & Shanahan, 1993).

The benefits of child support are numerous; however, one of the determinants of child support is income level. Research has shown that annual income is positively related to the amount of child support awarded, as well as how much support is paid (Sonenstein & Calhoun, 1990). There have been very few research studies about programs aimed at increasing the SES levels of noncustodial fathers to enable them to pay child support. Research regarding the effects of job training programs on employment and wage levels of the underemployed has shown that some training programs have positively affected income levels for low-income groups (Bassi & Ashenfelter, 1986; Orr, Bloom, Bell, Doolittle, Lin, & Cave, 1996). Particularly for training programs that are targeted to specific populations, a pattern of positive effects exists. For example, long-term AFDC recipients and ex-drug addicts who received job training and placement showed increased earnings in a study by Blank (1994). Also, unemployed women experienced a positive impact in their earnings after enrolling in a federal job-training program, suggesting that individuals with the least attachment to the labor market benefit the most from job-training programs (Bassi, 1987; Bloom, 1987). With 28% of all children (19.8 million) under the age of 18 living with only one parent (www.census.com, 2001), investigating and understanding programs that can improve the socioeconomic status of noncustodial parents and the lives of their children is important. The purpose of this study is to add to the literature of job-training programs by examining a statewide program that is specifically designed for noncustodial parents.

### ***PROGRAM DESCRIPTION***

One of these programs, called the Georgia Fatherhood Program (GFP), provides education and job training to over 3,000 men annually.

The Georgia Office of Child Support Enforcement created the GFP as a work-initiative demonstration project for noncustodial parents in 1997. The program was expanded statewide in 1998. While the overall goal of the GFP is to increase levels of child support payments, the focus of this article is to examine the impact of GFP enrollment on participant employment levels and wages.

The GFP has several components, including life skills training, job placement, short-term training programs such as truck driving training, and long-term training such as heating and air-conditioning repair. All participants enroll in life skills training and job placement. However, each individual GFP experience varies depending upon the number and types of program components participants choose to attend. NCPs can be referred to the program if they have a child support order or child support arrearage, if they do not have a high school diploma or GED, if they are unemployed or underemployed, or if their child support agent feels they will benefit from the program. The program is conducted at each of Georgia's 36 technical colleges as well as a limited number of contracting service providers.

This study explores three primary research questions regarding the Georgia Fatherhood Program and its effects on the socioeconomic status of fathers. First, does enrollment in the GFP lead to a significant improvement in the employment level of those enrolled in the program when compared to a similar non-participant group? Second, do the types of jobs gained by previously unemployed GFP participants result in comparable hourly wages to those not enrolled in the program? Finally, does the GFP lead to significantly higher wages for participants who were employed prior to enrolling in the program in comparison to non-participants?

## ***METHOD***

### ***Participants***

A convenience sample of low-income, noncustodial fathers was selected for this study. Subjects had to meet the following criteria: Fathers were noncustodial parents and had a court order to pay child support. Data were collected for both participant and non-participant groups at pretest (August-December 1999) and posttest (January-June 2000).

The Georgia Fatherhood Program is located at technical colleges throughout the state of Georgia. Therefore, three separate locations for

data collection were chosen to provide urban, semi-urban, and rural representation of potential participants in the GFP. Participants were asked to fill out a survey that captured employment status, hourly wage, and other descriptive characteristics. All subjects signed informed consent forms to volunteer for the study. A survey identification number identified the subjects so that the information gathered would remain confidential.

The participant group was composed of noncustodial parents enrolling in the Fatherhood Program at technical colleges in the aforementioned areas. Fathers attending the Georgia Fatherhood Program orientation were asked to participate in the study, prior to receiving their orientation. Participants were not paid at pretest since the data were collected during the regular course of the orientation, before treatment began.

The non-participant group comprised noncustodial parents who were court ordered to pay child support and had appointments at child support enforcement offices or at court. Fathers waiting in court or at child support offices to discuss their cases were asked to fill out the survey as they waited. The non-participant group was paid \$10 to complete the survey at pretest.

For the posttest, both participant and non-participant subjects were contacted by mail or phone. The posttest survey was administered at scheduled times and locations, and subjects were paid \$25 to participate. In addition, individual appointments to complete the survey were offered to those who could not participate during the scheduled times.

There were 251 noncustodial parents involved in the pretest, 148 fathers were in the participant group, and 103 fathers were in the non-participant group. Since this study focuses on changes in employment levels and wages, subjects who did not return for the posttest were not included in the final sample. One hundred and twenty-three fathers returned for the posttest, 76 subjects were in the participant group, and 47 were in the non-participant group. Therefore, the posttest completion rate was 52% for the participant group, and 46% for the non-participant group.

The sample was predominantly African American for both groups (see Table 1). Although the participant group had slightly lower levels of education than the non-participant group, and also had more experience in jail, chi-square analyses revealed that these differences were not significant (see Tables 1 and 2). However, only 30% of the participant group was employed at the pretest, in comparison to 80% of the non-

TABLE 1. Sample Demographics

Race	Participants		Non-participants	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Hispanic	1	1.3	0	0
White	8	10.5	7	14.9
African American	65	85.6	39	83.0
Missing	2	2.6	1	2.1
Total	76	100.0	47	100.0
Note: $\chi^2(2, n = 120) = 1.093, p = .579$ .				
Education				
Did not finish high school	27	35.5	8	17.0
High school grad/has GED	28	36.8	25	53.2
More than high school	20	26.4	12	25.5
Missing	1	1.3	2	4.3
Total	76	100.0	47	100.0
Note: $\chi^2(2, n = 120) = 5.316, p = .070$ .				
Employment Status				
Yes	23	30.3	37	78.7
No	53	69.7	9	19.1
Missing	0	0	1	2.1
Total	76	100.0	47	100.0
Note: $\chi^2(1, n = 122) = 28.861, p < .001$ .				

participant group, which was statistically significant  $\chi^2(1, n = 122) = 28.861, p < .001$ . This low participant employment number was expected, since the GFP directly targets individuals who are unemployed or are experiencing underemployment. If employed, participants were asked to give their hourly wage. The average wage of subjects in both groups at pretest is presented in Table 3.

## RESULTS

Before the results to research questions are presented, first the attrition rate for the pretest sample must be addressed. An attrition rate that results in a final sample group different from the original pretest group would affect the ability to generalize the results presented to the general population of GFP participants. In order to investigate the scope of this potential problem, chi-square analyses were conducted for the charac-

TABLE 2. Incarceration Experience

Incarceration: All types	Participants		Non-participants	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	52	68.4	27	57.5
No	19	25.0	16	34.0
Missing	5	6.6	4	8.5
Total	76	100.0	47	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2(1, n = 114) = 1.374, p = .241$ .

Incarcerated: Child support nonpayment	Participants		Non-participants	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	24	31.6	10	21.3
No	51	67.1	35	74.5
Missing	1	1.3	2	4.2
Total	76	100.0	47	100.0

Note:  $\chi^2(1, n = 120) = 1.324, p = .250$ .

TABLE 3. Pretest and Posttest Mean Wages for Previously Employed Participants

	Participants			Non-participants		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Pretest	8.2521	1.7395	19	8.6522	2.0861	27
Posttest	8.6100	2.4763	19	9.8767	3.4775	27

teristics of race, education, employment status, all types of incarceration, and incarceration specifically for child support nonpayment ( $p < .05$ ). These analyses revealed no significant differences for any of the categories (see Tables 7 and 8). Therefore, although the attrition rate was high, the two groups are comparable, and thus the results reported are representative to GFP participants outside of the final sample.

The first research question investigated whether enrollment in the GFP led to a significant gain in employment for participants, and determined if non-participants experienced a similar gain. Crosstabulations were conducted, and the McNemar test, an inferential test of frequencies (Huck & Cormier, 1996), compared pretest and posttest employment ( $\alpha < .05$ ). There were gains in employment for both program participants and non-participants. As seen in Table 4, the participant

TABLE 4. Employment Crosstabulations

Group		Posttest Employment			
		Yes		No	
Participant		<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
Pretest Employment	Yes	20	(26.3)	3	(3.9)
	No	30	(39.5)	23	(30.3)
Non-part.					
	Yes	35	(76.1)	2	(4.3)
	No	4	(8.7)	5	(10.9)

Note: One non-participant missing employment information for pretest: not included in crosstabulations.

group moved from an employment rate of only 30% to an employment rate of 66% at posttest. In comparison, the non-participant group moved from an employment level of 80% to 85%. The McNemar Test revealed that gains in employment were significant for the participant group only ( $n = 76, p < .001$ ).

The second research question examined the posttest wages of previously unemployed program participants and the employed non-participant group (Table 5). When wages were compared using an independent-samples t-test, the posttest wages of previously unemployed GFP participants did not differ significantly from that of the employed non-participants ( $t = -0.412; p = .681$ ). Previously unemployed fathers who enrolled in the GFP reported a mean hourly wage of \$9.75 ( $SD = 2.96, n = 27$ ) at posttest, in comparison to the employed non-participant wage of \$10.08 ( $SD = 3.46, n = 40$ ).

Finally, a repeated measures analysis was used to investigate the remaining research question, if GFP enrollment resulted in higher wages for previously employed NCPs in the participant group when compared to previously employed NCPs in the non-participant group. The within-subjects factor corresponds to time (pretest to posttest), and the mean wage of the participant and non-participant group is the between-subjects factor (Table 6).

Both groups did report a gain in wages. The wages of participants improved \$0.36, and the wages of non-participants increased by \$1.22 (see Table 3). However, enrollment in the Fatherhood Program did not lead to a statistically significant gain in wages for NCPs employed on entry to the program when compared to NCPs not in the program. The only significant factor in the repeated measures analysis was time, as wages rose significantly from pretest to posttest for both groups (see Table 6).

TABLE 5. Comparison of Posttest Wages of Previously Employed Participants Using a t-Test

Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>df</i>
Participant	27	9.75	2.96	-0.412	0.681	65
Non-Participant	40	10.08	3.46			

TABLE 6. Summary of Repeated-Measures ANOVA for Pretest and Posttest Wages

Effect	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Subjects					
Group	1	15.491	15.491	1.360	.250
Error	44	501.136	11.389		
Within Subjects					
Time	1	13.961	13.961	6.730	.013
Time X Group	1	4.187	4.187	2.018	.162
Error	44	91.273	2.074		

## DISCUSSION

The results indicate that for this selected sample, participants in the Fatherhood Program experienced statistically significant gains in employment levels. A significant gain in employment was not found for a similar, non-participating, comparison group. Interestingly, enrollment in the GFP assisted men who were previously unemployed gaining jobs with wages that were comparable to the non-participant group.

However, enrollment in the program for those who were previously employed did not lead to a significant increase in wages when compared to the non-participant group. Although not statistically significant, the gain in wages for those not enrolled in the GFP was \$0.86 more an hour than the increase for GFP participants. There are two potential explanations for the previously employed participant group not showing a gain in wages as large as the non-participant group. One possibility is that this program benefits the most those who are unemployed. This would support previous research on job training programs. Bassi and Ashenfelter (1986) as well as Orr et al. (1996) found that training

TABLE 7. Final Sample and Attrition Group Demographics

Race	Participants*				Non-participants**			
	Final Sample		Attrition Group		Final Sample		Attrition Group	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Hispanic	1	1.3	0	0	0	0	1	1.8
White	8	10.5	16	22.2	7	14.9	7	12.5
African American	65	85.6	55	76.4	39	83.0	47	83.9
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.8
Missing	2	2.6	1	1.4	1	2.1	0	0.0
Total	76	100.0	72	100.0	47	100.0	56	100.0
*Note: $\chi^2(2, n = 145) = 4.440, p = .109$ .								
** Note: $\chi^2(3, n = 102) = 1.781, p = .619$ .								
Education								
Did not finish high school	27	35.5	39	54.2	8	17.0	15	26.8
High school grad/has GED	28	36.8	21	29.2	25	53.2	31	55.3
More than high school	20	26.4	12	16.6	12	25.5	9	16.1
Missing	1	1.3	0	0.0	2	4.3	1	1.8
Total	76	100.0	72	100.0	47	100.0	56	100.0
*Note: $\chi^2(2, n = 147) = 5.123, p = .077$ .								
** Note: $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 2.224, p = .329$ .								
Employment Status								
Yes	23	30.3	24	33.3	37	78.7	38	67.9
No	53	69.7	47	65.3	9	19.1	18	32.1
Missing	0	0	1	1.4	1	2.1	0	0.0
Total	76	100.0	72	100.0	47	100.0	56	100.0
*Note: $\chi^2(1, n = 147) = .211, p = .646$ .								
** Note: $\chi^2(1, n = 102) = 2.053, p = .152$ .								

programs benefit the most disadvantaged, whereas those already in the employment market did not have significant gains in wages. However, another possibility is that participants had lower wages because they were still in training at posttest; the long-term training programs would go beyond the six-month posttest date. Therefore, some participants may have not yet experienced their improvement in hourly wage at the time of the posttest. Follow-up participant wage information two years after program orientation would help determine if participants in training experience a wage increase.

TABLE 8. Final Sample and Attrition Group Incarceration Experience

Incarceration: All types	Participants*				Non-participants**			
	Final Sample		Attrition Group		Final Sample		Attrition Group	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	52	68.4	57	79.2	27	57.5	43	76.8
No	19	25.0	12	16.7	16	34.0	12	21.4
Missing	5	6.6	3	4.1	4	8.5	1	1.8
Total	76	100.0	72	100.0	47	100.0	56	100.0
*Note: $\chi^2(1, n = 140) = 1.782, p = .182$ .								
** Note: $\chi^2(1, n = 98) = 2.801, p = .094$ .								
Incarcerated: Child support nonpayment								
Yes	24	31.6	18	25.0	10	21.3	10	17.9
No	51	67.1	49	68.0	35	74.5	44	78.5
Missing	1	1.3	5	7.0	2	4.2	2	3.6
Total	76	100.0	72	100.0	47	100.0	56	100.0
*Note: $\chi^2(1, n = 142) = .448, p = .503$ .								
** Note: $\chi^2(1, n = 99) = .209, p = .648$ .								

There are two main limitations to the scope of this study, which relate to the size of the final sample as well as the scope of research questions. First, there was a large attrition rate from pretest to posttest. The chi-square analyses of the pretest attrition group and the final sample revealed that there were no significant differences between the two groups. However, complete data were not available for all employment and wage variables. Wage data at posttest were available for only 27 subjects in the participant group and 40 subjects in the non-participant group. Furthermore, only 19 individuals in the participant group and 27 subjects in the non-participant group had both pretest and posttest wage data available for repeated measures analysis. The small amount of complete pretest and posttest wage data limits the extent to which the results of the repeated measures wage analysis can be generalized to the general GFP population.

In addition, power of the repeated measure analysis is affected by the small sample size. Although post hoc analysis revealed that the power level was satisfactory for the within-subjects factor of time (power = .72), the power for the between-subjects factor of group was very low (power = .207). With a larger sample size and correspondingly higher power, it is likely that a significant difference in wage gains for the par-

ticipant and non-participant groups would have been detected, with the non-participant group showing higher wage gains in a six-month period. The existence of this hypothesis reemphasizes the need for follow-up information. Participant wage data on a larger sample with complete data would help investigate the wage gains previously employed GFP participants experience once they have completed training, and how these gains measure against a comparison group.

The second limitation of this study is understanding the extent to which the Georgia Fatherhood Program has an impact on the economic and emotional status of child support recipients. The focus of this study is the financial impact of the GFP on employment and wages; corresponding analyses on the economic and emotional outcomes for children are beyond the scope of the research presented. Child support data were not available at the time this study was conducted. However, such data would enhance the results reported in this study, and could assess program ability to achieve its goal of increased child support payments. It is important to note that the increase in employment shown in this study does not necessarily mean that there is a corresponding increase in child support payments. It would be premature to generalize about the benefits to families of the Georgia Fatherhood Program until child support payment information is collected and analyzed.

The invaluable information child support data could provide regarding the effectiveness of the GFP provides direction for future research. In addition to child support information, there are many other areas that could enhance the research presented here. First, more detailed information on the outcomes of specific types of training components would demonstrate which programs are most effective. Although all participants enroll in life skills training and job placement, the experience of each GFP participant varies based upon the types of training opportunities they select. Thus it is possible that a specific type of training has a different impact on employment and wages. Second, information describing employment history and length of employment for both the participant and non-participant groups over time would assist in determining if enrollment in the Fatherhood Program leads to more stable long-term employment. Also, more information about the employment barriers noncustodial parents face needs to be gathered and analyzed. The identification of barriers would promote better understanding of the types of services required to assist individuals out of unemployment.

The research presented here demonstrates that noncustodial parents are able to move into the labor market, despite having previously expe-

rienced very low levels of employment. Before men in this study enrolled in the GFP, they were required to pay child support, but nonetheless had an overall employment rate of only 30%. The services offered through this program led this group of men to more than double their employment rate. In addition, the types of jobs gained were comparable in wages to a comparison group. Although the need for additional data is clear, these results support the continuation of funding for job-training programs for the economically disadvantaged. Assisting fathers with their employment needs is an essential step in the promotion of self-sufficiency and the family.

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