

Child Support Report

OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT



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NCSEA Conference in August 8



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Child Support Enforcement



Father's Day 2011



In honor of Father's Day, the Child Support Report is pleased to offer three personal essays on fatherhood from leaders in the field, along with several perspectives on the child support program from state child support directors and researchers.

Lifting the 'Deadbeat' Veil Off of Today's Fathers

By **Kenneth Braswell**, Executive Director
Fathers Incorporated



As a child growing up in a single-mother household in Brooklyn, I rarely contemplated or talked about the reality of not having a father in our home. To me, the things we had to adjust to because of poverty were just part of our everyday lives. Seeing several generations of boys wearing the same pair of sneakers was normal for my community.

Thus each day our family was met with new adventures and challenges. Nothing in our consciousness sounded an alarm that something might actually be wrong or missing in this place we called home. Yet for me and the scores of friends in my neighborhood unable to develop a clear definition of fatherhood, we, quite frankly, just simply survived. The fact that our families were above or less than 200 percent of the poverty level had no relevance and the absence of my father no consequence, so I thought.

My mom never had a bad thing to say about my father. In fact, even at times when she seemed to be discouraged by her inability to provide all the things we desired she maintained her dignity and never let us see or feel the frustration of raising her children alone. Heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali once said, while visiting Africa and speaking of its people, that even in their poverty he saw a dignity in their spirit that was undeniable. That was my mom.

My father had seven sons; I never lived with any of my six brothers. While my father showed every ability and desire to be a nurturing and responsible father to my six brothers, I unfortunately was never privileged. As a result, I was one of the millions of children in the United States who woke up each morning without my biological father in the home. Today, these children represent 24 million and growing (disproportionately in Black and Latino families).

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I don't know if I would describe my father as a deadbeat dad; nor do I think my mother would. Clearly, he was able to be a father. More importantly, he was able to exhibit a level of responsibility. But what about me (why me?) and the question we all struggle with: What is a deadbeat dad?

The definition of a deadbeat dad is elusive; however it starts with a man's ability to be financially responsible—yet won't. It's not when fathers desire to be involved and can't. These primarily Black and Brown low-income fathers face high unemployment, low educational attainment, incarcerated backgrounds, inadequate housing, poor health, and other social issues that serve as barriers for these fathers to be financially engaged.

Don't think for one minute that we let fathers off the

hook from being actively involved with their children because they don't have a job. A child should never be used as a pawn or placed in the middle of a dysfunctional relationship by either parent. I do however bring attention to the societal view, size, and importance of the obstacle. In many cases, the struggle of a man to pay child support does not make him a deadbeat dad. Therefore, it is not the inability that should make you angry about these dads, but the unwillingness of those dads that draw the media's attention and focus.

So, can I call my dad a deadbeat? Probably not, however, he was irresponsibly absent, as I once was and as most of these men are; willingly and unwillingly.

Contact the author, Kenneth Braswell, Sr., of *Fathers Incorporated*, at kenneth.braswell@gmail.com.



Wanting to be a Father



By Albert M. Pooley, President
*Native American Fatherhood
and Families Association*

I was raised by two loving parents who shared with me the cultures and traditions of the southwest Native Americans. My mother was Navajo and my father was Hopi. They were proud of their heritage and determined to raise children with values from our culture. As a child I was close to both parents, but I had a special relationship with my father. His attitudes about work, life, and being a parent had a profound impact on my life. As a result of his example, I wanted to be a father when I grew up.

My father taught that family is at the heart of Native American cultures, and there is no other work more important than fatherhood and motherhood. Devoted fathers use their loving influence on their children and families to lead. I believe we each have the opportunity to experience joy when we extend our best efforts in bringing fairness, peace and love to our families. Understanding happiness begins at home, and children learn to care and love as they were cared for and loved. It is not difficult to head in the right direction when we put our families first. It only becomes difficult when we are convinced that other things, interests, and occupations are more important than our families. The direction we set needs to be a major concern because our children are following right behind us.

Spending time with our children throughout all stages in their lives will influence and refine our attitudes as

fathers. In so doing, our children become real to us and we become real to them. We become in tune with one another as family members. This will increase our desire to be the very best father possible. When a father recognizes the critical role he plays in family, he understands the importance of serving family. He is then able to accurately direct, guide, lead and inform when others have been the antithesis of those qualities.

Strengthening our family must be a priority. It costs very little money but requires effort. We need to recognize that children learn and are influenced by many voices and from many places. It is the responsibility of a father to build true and honest relationships with his children. We recognize that fathers must take the lead in making the necessary adjustments to head in a positive direction with correct information based on proven principles. We need to be a forward-thinking and forward-moving people. We cannot live or dwell on the past, rather, we must truly understand the past to see, plan and work toward a richer and better future. To honor past generations, we must improve upon the present. This is accomplished through strong fathers and mothers who lift their families and others by positive example and compassion at all times.

Today's children starve for affection, recognition, and leadership from fathers. Listen to the words of our forefathers in being more dedicated and devoted to family, and our sons will also say, "I want to be a father like you when I grow up."

Contact the author, Albert M. Pooley, at the *Native American Fatherhood and Families Association*, apooley@aznaffa.org, 480-833-5007.

Spreading the Message on Our Commitment to Fatherhood



The child support program is one of the few government programs that systematically reach men, and the only one to do so in their roles as fathers. Because the program serves so many children—a quarter of all children and half of all poor children—and *both* their parents throughout childhood, it is uniquely

positioned to connect men to a range of resources to help them be the fathers they want to be.

Across the country, child support programs are finding innovative new ways to help fathers provide for their children. State and local child support agencies have engaged in outreach, referral, case management and other activities in partnership with fatherhood, workforce, veterans, reentry, and asset-building programs to increase the ability of parents to support their children. They are working to engage fathers in the lives of their children, to increase noncustodial parent employment, to improve family relationships, and to address family violence prevention.

The OCSE “bubble chart” promotes the child support program’s vision for a more holistic family-centered approach to service delivery. Our collaborations with other public agencies and community organizations in the six domains of the bubble chart are enhancing the success of our program’s fundamental mission to reinforce the responsibility of parents to support their children when they live apart and to encourage fathers and mothers to be involved in their children’s lives.

OCSE reconfirms our commitment to fatherhood issues through participation in a range of federal interagency initiatives, including six listed in the sidebar on this page.

This month, the *Child Support Report* also brings you voices of fathers—leaders of three national organizations—who discuss their views on fatherhood. Four other articles look at research and state perspectives about unwed parents in our program. Several highlight the need for more services that target fathers across the country and point out efforts that are showing signs of success. All of the articles—plus another (*on page 8*) about a North Carolina county partnership with the local library—demonstrate the child support program’s obligation to speak out about our commitment to fatherhood issues.

We have a long way to go, but our collaborative work at every level of government and with community organizations strengthen our important message that the child support program is here to help parents, children, and families.

Happy Father’s Day to all!

Federal Interagency Initiatives

- The White House Interagency **Responsible Fatherhood Workgroup**, led by the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, is working to increase awareness of the importance of fathers in the lives of their children and to integrate fathers into family services throughout the government.
- The HHS Incarceration and Reentry Work Group is part of the **Federal Interagency Reentry Council**, which has partnered 18 federal departments and agencies to leverage resources for reentry, remove barriers to reentry, and clarify federal policies. (Take a look at the Council’s interactive [map](#) for major federal reentry initiatives and active reentry grants in each state.)
- The **Child Support and Fatherhood Initiative**, part of President Obama’s FY 2012 budget, proposes continuous emphasis on program outcomes and efficiency, and provisions to help further encourage fathers to take responsibility for their children and to promote strong and safe family relationships.
- The Department of Labor’s Transitional Jobs Initiative is funding grants to support transitional job programs, as well as other activities and services, to increase the workforce participation of low-income, hard-to-employ populations, specifically noncustodial parents and ex-offenders (who may or may not be noncustodial parents) reentering their communities.
- The Homeless Veteran’s Project partners HHS, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the American Bar Association to work with homeless veterans and their families to address challenges (such as old fines, child support debts, and other legal judgments) that compromise their ability to move into permanent housing.
- As part of the National Partnership for Action to End Health Disparities, HHS released two **strategic plans** to reduce health disparities and achieve health equity in the Nation.

Brightening the Souls of Children



By James C. Rodriguez, CEO/President
Fathers & Families Coalition of America

Tonight many children will go to bed without a father in their home, with estimates of up to 30,000,000 children in the United States living apart from their biological father. Living apart from a father or mother may not always be unhealthy; however, more than a third of these children will not see their father in the next year.

Research shows that children from fatherless homes without male involvement or role models have increased barriers to success. In America, 1 out of every 3 children lives apart from his or her father; 41 percent of children are born out of wedlock; 1 out of every 4 children are in the child support program; 44 percent of children living with a single mother were poor in 2009; and 7.5 million children have a parent in jail or under correctional supervision, with minority children disproportionately affected by father imprisonment.

And yet, fathers brighten the soul of their child.

Changing Latino Families Need More Services

For Latinos, the strength of family or *familismo* has declined with the increase of acculturation into mainstream society and an increase in the number of young Latinas as single mothers. The number of single-headed Latina households grew tremendously from the 1960s through the 1990s. In addition, Latinas are having children at a younger age than all other populations.

We also know that Latinos are not graduating from high school at the rates to move out of poverty as compared to other men of color. These young fathers are still in the developmental stage, and to negotiate the transition into parenthood with limited social, peer, family, and professional support can be a challenge.

In 2001, the Census reported that more than 1 out of 5 Latino children under 18 had never seen their biological father.

How do we navigate poverty, increased birth rates, increased father absence, low educational attainment rates, and other barriers in Latino households? We need to adopt a new model of engaging the many young Latino fathers who need increased supportive services to be better prepared as parents and stay involved in their child's life.

Low-income men of color raised in fragile families need mentoring and role models to promote responsible

fathering. We need more men to mentor our youth before they become parents to help them understand the pitfalls of life and surround them with positive influences.

My father left my mother, sisters, and me, and like many Latinos, I was forced to find my way into adulthood and fatherhood without my father as a role model. However, I was fortunate to have other “fathers” in my village—my barrio, my neighborhood—as I connected with positive male role models who guided me away from many dangers that attack inner-city Latinos.

Reducing Barriers to Father Involvement

Many of the programs serving families today continue to face barriers to father involvement, including the perception of parents who believe the purpose of the child support agency is for enforcement only and not as a bridge to assist in co-parenting and equal access to their children.

We can help to reduce barriers to father involvement by changing the common perception that father involvement is associated only with financial contribution, especially when the over-representation of men of color are unemployed, laid off, incarcerated, or undereducated. We can help these fathers understand that the value of a father taking his child to school and being present emotionally and physically can be more critical than how much he pays in child support.

While not taking away from the importance of mothers, if policy and practice in family court systems promote co-parenting, the quality of father-child relationships would improve among nonresident fathers and may reduce the negative consequences we see in children from fatherless families. We must also examine effective laws and policies and introduce innovative strategies to foster father involvement.

Through my experiences as a son, young father, single-father, and then co-parenting father, and from my observations both professionally with Latino fathers and in my family and communities, I believe we first need to understand the cultural stereotypes of *familismo* to develop effective services. We need to understand all cultures in American society.

In addition, knowing more about the impact on the child when the father is absent—in Latino and all families—may enable researchers and practitioners to develop better prevention strategies for helping children and families.

Contact the author, James C. Rodriguez, at the *Fathers and Families Coalition of America*, james.rodriguez@fathersandfamiliescoalition.org or 602-254-5081.

Unmarried Parents: a Growing Trend in the Child Support Caseload

By Debra Pontisso
OCSE



When I became a mother in 1990, I joined the 1.2 million women who gave birth to a child outside of marriage. At the time, 28 percent of all live births in the United States were to unmarried women—a record high and up from 18.4 percent a decade before.

Fast-forward almost two decades to 2009, when an estimated 41 percent, or 1.7 million, of all live births were to unmarried parents—another record high (“Births: Preliminary Data for 2009,” National Center for Health Statistics).

How the United States Compares

The trend in births to unmarried women in the United States reflects that of most developed countries, with levels at least doubling or tripling between 1980 and the mid-to-late 2000s.

For example, in 2007, well over half of births to Icelandic, Swedish and Norwegian women were to unmarried women. On the other hand, in the United States, the percentage of out-of-wedlock births (41 percent in 2009) is higher than in Ireland (33 percent), Germany and Canada (30 percent), Spain (28 percent), Italy (21 percent), or Japan (2 percent). (“Changing Patterns of Nonmarital Childbearing in the United States,” May 2009, and “Births: Preliminary Data for 2009.”)

Impact on State Child Support Caseloads

Unwed parents soon may comprise the majority of the national child support caseload. As of 2007, six states (Connecticut, Iowa, Michigan, New Hampshire, Virginia and Texas) estimated that more than half of their child support cases involved unwed parents.

While having a child outside of marriage may not hold the same social stigma as it did nearly two decades ago, the challenges faced by unwed parents—particularly younger parents—may be more complicated in today’s economy. State child support collection rates also could be affected by the large percentage of unwed parents in the states’ caseloads (e.g., when parents have child support cases with more than one partner, or lower wages).

The child support program’s plans for ensuring pathways to success for unwed parents in the child support caseload, through family-centered and family strengthening services, are a critical step in the right direction.

Comparison of Births to Unmarried Women in the U. S.

	1990 Data	2009 Data (preliminary)
Total U.S. births	4.1 million	4.1 million
Total births to unwed mothers	1.2 million (28%)	1.7 million (41%)
Non-Hispanic White	443,000 (17%)	641,000 (29%)
Black	455,300 (67%)	475,700 (72%)
American Indian or Alaska Native	20,900 (54%)	31,800 (65%)
Asian or Pacific Islander	18,700 (13%)	43,200 (17%)
Hispanic	218,500 (37%)	531,500 (53%)

Table Prepared by Debra Pontisso (OCSE) and Stephanie Ventura (Director of the Reproductive Statistics Branch, HHS National Center for Health Statistics)

General Observations of the Data

The chart above shows:

- Continued growth in the percentage of total births to unmarried women.
- An increase in the percentage of births to unmarried women in all racial categories, with the greatest increase among Hispanics, followed by Whites and American Indians or Alaska Natives.
- Unmarried births among Black women remained high and an overwhelming majority of Black children were born to unmarried mothers in 2009.

Teen Pregnancy Rates Down

Nationally, the number of births to teen mothers (age 15-19) in 2009 declined for a second year in a row after a brief increase in 2007. A new [Child Trends](#) analysis shows that between 2007 and 2008, the teen birth rate decreased for 28 states, increased for 9 states, and remained the same for 13 states.

Virginia: Out-of-Wedlock Births Influence Customer Behavior



By Nick Young, Director
*Virginia Department of Child Support
Enforcement*

The Virginia Department of Child Support Enforcement has seen dramatic changes in its caseload in recent years, a likely reflection of increasing numbers of births to unmarried women and births to married women outside of marriage.

In 1995, more than 29 percent of children in Virginia were born out of wedlock, and the percentage has risen steadily over the years. In 2009, nearly 36 percent of all births in the state were out of wedlock. Of our caseload (about 341,500 cases), 64.5 percent involve children born out of wedlock.

We have found that the increasing numbers of out-of-wedlock births reflect trends in customer attitudes and behavior. For example, staff at our Roanoke district office (serves the City of Roanoke), as well as Roanoke County and surrounding areas, reports a trend for women ranging in age from 18 to 24 to give birth to children out of wedlock, even more than for younger teenagers.

Our caseworkers have noted that the mothers in many cases are not cooperative in providing the information to establish paternity because they remain on friendly terms with the fathers and want to protect these men's identities. According to caseworker Dorothy Fralin in the Roanoke office, "A good number of these custodial parents feel that marriage is taboo or 'old school.'"

Anecdotally, the Roanoke staff has also noticed an increase in the number of married women who have

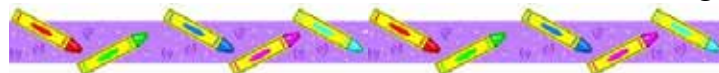
children with other men while remaining married to their husbands. These women have told DCSE workers that they simply do not have the money to pay for a divorce, so the husband and wife go their separate ways without ever attending to the legalities.

Caseworker Fralin noted that, although this sort of situation does not affect the out-of-wedlock birth rate (because the child is born to a married mother), it does lead to considerable delays in finally establishing paternity for the children of such couples because it is necessary to "disestablish" paternity for the legal father before taking action to establish paternity for the biological father.

Lisa Mongan, a supervisor in the Roanoke office, says "there seems to be a growing acceptance of young women having children out of wedlock, and it appears that what they see adults doing around them is going to reflect in their own behaviors and attitudes."

Virginia encourages the formation and maintenance of two-parent families through its Family Strengthening Initiative. As part of the initiative, Virginia is developing stronger ties with its sister agencies and local partners and exploring the development of a family support center and feasibility of incorporating financial literacy to underscore the mutual investment all parties have in building strong, intact families. Through its In-hospital Paternity Program, Virginia is expanding its outreach program to encourage stable families through early intervention and bonding between fathers and their children—with the ultimate goal of reducing out-of-wedlock births and promising brighter futures for children.

Contact Director Young at nick.young@dss.virginia.gov.



Iowa: Relationship Challenges and Child Support Outcomes



Carol Eaton, Director
Iowa Child Support Recovery Unit

More than 37 years of experience in Iowa has shown us that children of unwed parents are less likely to receive child support or will receive lower amounts. However, collections are higher when fathers have an emotional connection to their children, and collections improve when relationships between unwed parents improve.

Data has shown that divorced parents are more consistent in their child support payments, possibly

because they have bonded relationships with their children, understand financial requirements for maintaining a household, and have less reliable earnings, on average. Unmarried parents show less consistent payment patterns.

In state fiscal year 2010, cases in which the child was born to married parents show the average support collected was \$334 per month and the rate of current support received was about 75 percent. For cases in which the child was born outside of marriage, the average support collected was \$155 and the rate of current support was about 65 percent.

Families are struggling as a result of lost or reduced employment. More noncustodial parents are seeking to modify their child support orders to be more in line with their ability to pay, and they may need referrals to job programs.

Unwed parents need information on how child support works, what constitutes a reasonable order, the benefits of father involvement and its impact on financial support, and options to get help with parenting plans and visitation. Most unwed parents lack custody or visitation orders, and an increasing number of fathers are asking about visitation while establishing child support orders. There is a gap in the availability and accessibility of affordable legal assistance services. Typically, services that directly target

and involve fathers are missing or nonexistent.

Also missing from Iowa communities are services that build healthy relationship skills between parents. By improving the establishment of paternity and improving fathers' relationships with both their children and the mothers, we can see an increase in financial support.

We see a growing need for the child support program to work with customers as individuals to effectively provide services during these difficult economic times. The complexities for unwed parents pose additional challenges for the child support program already struggling to maintain current levels of service under tight budget constraints.

Contact Director Eaton at Ceaton@dhs.state.ia.us.



When the American Dream Looks Different



By Dr. Hillard Pouncy
Woodrow Wilson School of Public Policy
Princeton University

Earlier this year, Cassandra Dorius, a demographer at the University of Michigan, reported to the annual meeting of the Population Association of America that more than a quarter of American mothers with two or more children had their children with different men, resulting in more complex families. Dorius' preliminary study estimates that this trend affects 59 percent of Black mothers, a third of Hispanic mothers, and a quarter of White mothers.

In press reports, Dorius commented, "We tend to think of women with multiple-partner fertility as being only poor, single women with little education and money, but, in fact, at some point, most were married, and working, and going to school, and doing all the things you're supposed to do to live the American dream."

What should a child support enforcement system that is already seeing a more challenging and complex caseload (*described on page 5*) expect as these demographic trends continue? As custodial and noncustodial parents alike go their separate ways to have new children with new partners who likely already have children as well, will they reduce their expectations of each other for their once common children? Will the role and financial inputs of noncustodial parents diminish over time?

A second set of possibilities assumes a very different trajectory for couples that re-partner and form new families. We term this one the "baby father" trajectory, and here, no matter how couples re-partner, the

noncustodial parents' obligation to a common child is unceasing. Even in cases where a mother or father forms a new blended family through marriage, the "baby father" code bestows permanent obligations upon the common child's noncustodial parent. By the unwritten rules of the "baby father" code, a new blended family will never become a self-contained, nuclear family. The child of a previous partner remains the previous parent's responsibility. To the extent, this "baby father" code is real and becomes more dominant, it will increase the necessity for an expansion in roles played by the child support enforcement system.

Take the case of access and visitation, for example. In the former scenario, couples with kids re-partner in ways that yield new nuclear households. As these couples go their separate ways, their access and visitation needs will atrophy. In the latter, "baby father" scenario—especially in cases where couples have had kids through non-marriage—the need for the access and visitation services that divorce courts perform when married couples break up will be increased. This is a role now at the periphery of the child support enforcement system. If the "baby father" trajectory becomes real, lasting, and dominant, the child support enforcement system's access and visitation role will move to the center.

For the moment, this discussion we are having is just a policy "thought experiment." And usually the polar positions staked out in a thought experiment never pan out. The future likes the muddled middle. Still, it is better to be prepared than surprised.

Contact Dr. Pouncy at hillard.pouncy@gmail.com.



Join the President's Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative

The goal of the **President's Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative** is to encourage individuals, especially fathers, to be positive role models and mentors not only for their own children but for all the children in their lives and communities. Fathers, mothers, and all role models are invited to join the initiative at fatherhood.gov/initiative.



Hear Commissioner Turetsky and state child support directors speak at the National Child Support Enforcement Association conference, Aug. 1 - 3 in Atlanta. Learn about communication and social media, technology solutions, working with employers, collaborative partnerships, and more. Register for the conference on the NCSEA website.

Bridging Parents to Employment in Mecklenburg County, NC

By Tana Calloway
Social Services Manager

Mecklenburg County Child Support Enforcement
Department

Noncustodial parents in Mecklenburg County, NC, who are seeking job opportunities, can visit the Child Support Enforcement Department to get help with their search—from inside the Career Cruiser van. The Cruiser is parked at the office on the first Monday of each month, through June, thanks to collaboration between the Child Support Enforcement Department, the Charlotte/Mecklenburg Library, and Job Link, an office in the state's Department of Commerce that offers employment and training services.

As in most cities, the Charlotte/Mecklenburg County library system is a vital resource for those seeking employment via internet job postings. The child support department researched opportunities the library could offer to its unemployed and underemployed noncustodial parents and found that not only could it assist with job seeking at the local branch—it could bring the branch (the Cruiser) to the child support office!

“One of the department's goals is to keep our clients informed of resources in the community and as often as possible to act as the bridge to connect the two,” says Director Joan Kennedy.

For this initiative, the department sought feedback from the noncustodial parents, which “led us to believe the main reason they are not current on their support may be due to unemployment and underemployment,”

says Kennedy. “Through this collaboration, the child support department has found a way to help noncustodial parents pay their court-ordered child support by reducing barriers to employment. The collaboration has proven to be a viable job-seeking resource for our customers.”

For further information, contact Tana Calloway at Tana.Calloway@mecklenburgcountync.gov or 704-432-9207.



Inside the Career Cruiser

Child Support Report



Child Support Report is published monthly by the Office of Child Support Enforcement, Division of Consumer Services. We welcome articles and high-quality digital photos. We reserve the right to edit for style, content, and length. Contents are for informational purposes only; no official endorsement of a practice or individual by the Department of Health and Human Services or the OCSE is intended. You are welcome to reprint articles; please identify *Child Support Report* as the source.

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