

**Policy Reforms are Needed to Increase
Child Support from Poor Fathers**

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Views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not reflect the opinions of the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders.

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Executive Summary

Welfare reform in 1996 was predicated on the notion that both parents should financially support their children, regardless of where they live or their poverty status. This meant placing greater emphasis on work for custodial parents and strengthening child support enforcement for nonresident parents. Although this approach has been quite successful — it has reduced welfare dependency, increased employment among single mothers, and increased child support collections — it has not worked for the 2.5 million nonresident fathers who are poor and do not pay child support. Most of these fathers are the fathers of children on welfare. In order for child support to be an important source of income for these children, Congress and state governments need to develop a strategy that makes it possible for poor nonresident fathers to pay child support.

Any strategy to increase child support to children on welfare needs to include employment services for poor nonresident fathers. These fathers face many of the same employment barriers and economic hardships as poor custodial mothers. Less than 10 percent have a full-time, year-round job, only half of them are working at any one time. Among those who are not working, half indicate that poor health is the reason for not working. Among those who do work, their median earnings is a mere \$5,000 per year.

In 1996, Congress understood that some nonresident parents would need work-oriented services, but its actions did not go far enough. It mandated that states have procedures that allow courts to order noncustodial parents into work activities if they were behind in their child support, but it did not specify how states were expected to pay for this mandate. As a consequence, most states have not implemented it. Congress may want to consider remedying

this problem by establishing a block grant to states for the purpose of providing work-oriented programs for delinquent noncustodial parents with children on TANF.

It is also important to recognize that one million nonresident fathers are poor and still pay child support, but many of these fathers' child support orders appear excessive. One quarter of these fathers are paying more than 50 percent of their gross income in child support; among non-poor fathers, only 2 percent pay this much. A number of factors are contributing to high child support orders for poor fathers relative to their income, but two practices appear to be aggravating the situation and should be examined — setting high default orders and establishing child support orders retroactively.

Finally, poor nonresident fathers are unlikely to receive income support programs, such as Medicaid and Food Stamps, yet over half of these fathers have no health insurance and many worry about a lack of food. In other words, these parents are expected to work and contribute to their children, but the government looks the other way when they meet their responsibility to their children and are poor. By not investing in these parents, we short change their children who are often on welfare and could benefit from their fathers' potential earnings. We suggest extending Medicaid eligibility to nonresident fathers who pay their child support and improve their food stamp coverage in order to send the right message — poor parents who do right by their children will be helped with their medical insurance and nutritional needs.

These three policy improvements directed at poor nonresident fathers — employment services for those who do not pay child support, income supports for those who do, and realistic child support orders — are necessary to ensure that poor children have the support of both parents.

I. Introduction

The primary aim of welfare reform in 1996 was to reduce welfare dependency by promoting work among custodial parents and collecting child support among noncustodial parents. It directed states to implement “work first” employment strategies for welfare recipients and required states to meet strict work participation rates among their welfare clients. For nonresident parents, it dramatically strengthened child support enforcement. This approach has been tremendously successful. Welfare caseloads are down, employment rates among single mothers are up, and child support collections are up. Nonetheless, five years later most poor children who live apart from their fathers cannot count on their financial support. Their fathers tend to be poor, just as they are.

This paper documents the barriers that poor nonresident fathers face in paying child support and outlines a strategy to overcome these barriers and support poor fathers who pay child support. It uses data from the 1999 National Survey of America’s Families to describe these fathers.¹ This survey is one of the few surveys conducted in the late 1990s that identifies nonresident fathers. It is a large, nationally representative survey of the civilian, noninstitutionalized population under age 65. Nearly 3,000 individuals self-identify as nonresident fathers in this survey. We reweight the data so that they offer a more accurate portrait of all nonresident fathers, not just those who self-identify. (See the Appendix for an explanation of this process.)

II. How Many Nonresident Fathers are Poor?

In 1998, one out of three nonresident fathers lived in a family with income below the poverty threshold for that family size, or their personal income was below the poverty threshold

¹ For information on NSAF, go to www.urban.org and search National Survey of America’s Families.

for a single person.² Throughout this paper, we refer to these 3.5 million fathers as poor. We use this broader definition of poverty because child support orders reflect nonresident parents' personal income. Thus, we identify fathers who have low personal incomes as well as those who are officially poor.

That same year, the same number of custodial mothers, 3.5 million, met the official definition of poverty. Although we do not know how many poor custodial mothers had a child(ren) with a poor nonresident father, we can be relatively certain that most of them did. Thus, in order to decrease child poverty through increased child support, we must address the low incomes of poor nonresident fathers.

III. How Different are Poor Nonresident Fathers from those who are Not Poor?

As we show below, poor nonresident fathers are quite different from other nonresident fathers in a number of ways. We begin by examining their child support payments.

Child Support Payments

Not surprisingly, most poor nonresident fathers do not pay child support, while most non-poor nonresident fathers do. In 1999, 30 percent of poor fathers and 72 percent of non-poor fathers paid child support. Furthermore, when poor fathers pay child support, the amount that they pay is generally substantially less than that of non-poor fathers. For example, the median amount of child support paid by poor fathers in 1999 was \$2,000, compared to \$4,200 for non-poor fathers.

Examining child support payments as a percent of income, however, yields a very different pattern between poor and non-poor fathers. Poor fathers devote considerably more of

² The poverty threshold for a single person under age 65 in 1998 was \$8,840.

their personal income to child support than non-poor fathers. In 1999, more than one quarter of poor fathers who paid child support spent 50 percent or more of their personal income on child support, while only 2 percent of non-poor fathers spent that much. In contrast, half of non-poor fathers spent less than 14 percent of their personal income on child support, while only one tenth of poor fathers spent that little of their income on child support.

Table 1. Child Support Characteristics of Nonresident Fathers

Characteristics	Poor	Not Poor
Percent Who Paid Child Support	30%	72%
Among those who Paid:		
Median Amount Paid	\$2,000	\$4,200
Percent Who Paid:		
50% or more of income	28%	2%
36 – 49% of income	22%	13%
14 — 35% of income	40%	35%
1 — 13% of income	10%	50%

Source: Authors' analysis of the 1999 National Survey of America's Families.

Demographic Characteristics

Poor fathers are also noticeably different from non-poor fathers on a number of demographic characteristics. While the majority of poor fathers are black (43 percent) or Hispanic (19 percent), the majority of non-poor fathers are white (63 percent). Poor fathers are younger than non-poor fathers, with nearly one third of them under age 30. This figure is almost twice that for non-poor fathers.

Patterns of marital status also differ between the two groups. While nearly half of non-poor fathers are currently married, less than one third of poor fathers have a wife. Instead, poor fathers are more likely to have never married. Thirty six percent of them fit this category, twice the percentage of non-poor fathers who have never married.

The educational attainment of poor fathers is strikingly different from that of non-poor fathers. Forty one percent of poor fathers do not have a high school diploma, double the rate for non-poor fathers. Furthermore, non-poor fathers are three times as likely as poor fathers to have attended school beyond twelfth grade.

Incarceration is also an issue for many poor fathers. We estimate that 16 percent of poor fathers are institutionalized, most of whom are in prison. Since we have little information on the behavior of these fathers and their circumstances are very different from the non-incarcerated population, we exclude this group from subsequent calculations of employment, economic hardships, and use of government services.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Nonresident Fathers

Characteristics	Poor	Not Poor	Characteristics	Poor	Not Poor
Age Distribution			Marital Status		
Under 30	32%	17%	Currently Married	29%	44%
30-39	41%	45%	Divorced/Separated	35%	37%
40 and more	27%	38%	Never Married	36%	18%
Race/Ethnic Composition			Educational Attainment		
Hispanic	16%	13%	Not a High School Grad	41%	20%
Black	43%	21%	High School Grad Only	47%	50%
White	38%	63%	Some College	9%	17%
Other	2%	3%	College Degree or More	3%	13%

Source: Authors' analysis of the 1999 National Survey of America's Families

Employment Characteristics

Poor fathers are considerably less likely to work than non-poor fathers, even excluding those who are incarcerated. In 1999, about half of poor fathers were working at the time of the survey, while 92 percent of non-poor fathers were working. Just over half of poor fathers who were not working at the time of the survey indicated that the main reason they were not working

was because of a disability or poor health. In contrast, one quarter of non-poor fathers gave this answer for not working.

Not surprisingly, the earnings of poor fathers are considerably lower than that of non-poor fathers. In 1998, the median earnings of poor working fathers was \$5,000, compared to \$28,080 for non-poor fathers. That year, 92 percent of non-poor fathers worked full time, and 72 percent work full-time and full-year. In contrast, only 34 percent of (non-incarcerated) poor fathers worked full time, and only eight percent work full-time/full-year. Forty-one percent did not work the entire year.

Table 3. Employment Characteristics of Nonresident Fathers

Characteristics	Poor	Not Poor
Work This Year		
Percent Working	49%	92%
Main Reason Not Working		
Disabled/III	54%	25%
Retired	0%	5%
Going to School	8%	3%
Taking Care of Family	2%	3%
Can't Find Work	19%	26%
Just Lost Job	7%	20%
Other	10%	18%
Worked Last Year		
Full-time	34%	92%
Full-time/Year-round	8%	72%
Worked Intermittently	51%	26%
Did Not Work	41%	2%
Median Earnings Last Year	\$5,000	\$28,080

Note: Incarcerated fathers are not included in this table

Source: Authors' analysis of the 1999 National Survey of America's Families

Visitation Patterns

Despite these stark differences between poor and non-poor nonresident fathers, they are quite similar in one way: they both have a fair amount of contact with their youngest nonresident

child. (The NSAF only asks nonresident fathers about their contact with their youngest nonresident child.) Approximately one in four poor and non-poor fathers indicate that they have not seen their youngest nonresident child in the past 12 months (excluding incarcerated fathers). At the other extreme, 36 percent of poor fathers and 38 percent of non-poor fathers indicate that during the past 12 months they have seen their youngest nonresident child at least once a week.

Table 4. Visitation Characteristics of Nonresident Fathers

Characteristics	Poor	Not Poor
At least Once a Week	36%	38%
1-3 Times a Month	11%	20%
At most once a Month	24%	18%
No Visits	27%	23%

Note: Incarcerated fathers are not included in this table

Source: Authors' analysis of the 1999 National Survey of America's Families.

IV. Need for and Use of Income Support Programs and Employment Services

Income support programs and employment services provide for the basic needs of poor families and help the disadvantaged build skills that will help them become self-sufficient. While our initial look at poor nonresident fathers (vs. non-poor nonresident fathers) suggests that they are likely candidates for such services, these services have traditionally been targeted at poor custodial mothers. Therefore, in this section we compare indicators of need and frequency of use between poor (non-incarcerated) nonresident fathers and poor custodial mothers.

Poor Nonresident Fathers Face Serious Employment Barriers and Economic Hardships

Poor nonresident fathers face serious barriers to work. Many of the barriers that they face are similar to those faced by poor custodial mothers. Low levels of education are a common barrier encountered by both mothers and fathers; 40 percent of poor fathers and 38 percent of

poor mothers lack a high school degree. Lack of recent work experience is another large obstacle to employment, and again fathers and mothers are similarly affected: 41 percent of poor fathers and 35 percent of poor mothers have not held a job in the past 12 months. Finally, one quarter of poor nonresident fathers and one fifth of poor custodial mothers have a health condition that limits their ability to work.

One employment barrier that affects poor fathers considerably more than poor mothers is incarceration. As noted above, 16 percent of poor nonresident fathers are institutionalized, most of whom are in prison. (This sizable population is not included in the barriers discussed above or in table 5). While in prison, fathers can not earn much, if any, income and their child support payments are minimal or absent. Once they leave, their work prospects will not improve that much. Their criminal records and interrupted labor force participation make these men unattractive to prospective employers.

Employment barriers are confounded by other conditions that indicate economic distress among poor (non-incarcerated) nonresident fathers. For example, half of them report worrying about or having problems affording food at some point during the previous year, a strikingly high rate and only slightly lower than that reported by poor custodial mothers (62 percent). Difficulties paying for housing are less common, but nonetheless 28 percent of poor fathers were not able to pay their housing costs during the past year, compared to 38 percent among poor mothers. Telephone service was not available at some point in the past 12 months in 35 percent of the homes of poor fathers and 38 percent of the homes of poor mothers.

Over half of poor nonresident fathers lack health insurance. Their uninsured rate is considerably higher than that of poor custodial mothers, one third of whom were uninsured in 1999. Not having health insurance leaves these fathers vulnerable to unattended health

problems that could inhibit their ability to work. As noted above, one quarter of these fathers already have health problems that limit their work effort.

Table 5. Employment Barriers and Economic Hardships

	Poor Fathers	Poor Mothers
Employment Barriers		
No High School Degree	40%	38%
No Work Last Year	41%	35%
Health Limits Work	25%	21%
Economic Hardships		
Face Food Insecurity	52%	62%
Can't Pay for Housing	28%	38%
Lack Phone Service	35%	38%
Lack Health Insurance	55%	33%

Note: Incarcerated fathers are not included in this table

Source: Authors' analysis of the 1999 National Survey of America's Families.

Changes in Income Support Programs and Employment Services Since 1996

In 1996, Congress fundamentally altered its cash assistance program, but left other elements of the social safety net, such as food stamps and Medicaid, relatively unchanged for poor custodial mothers. It eliminated Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), a 60-year-old open-ended entitlement to cash assistance for poor families and replaced it with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), a block grant program to states. It also set time limits on how long a family could receive welfare, mandated a “work-first” approach to employment services, and imposed strict work participation rates on states.

The 1996 reforms did not dramatically alter poor nonresident fathers' access to income support programs. Their access was severely limited prior to 1996 and it remains limited today. Nonresident fathers were not eligible for AFDC unless they met the eligibility requirements, which included living with their children. Their eligibility for cash assistance under TANF has not changed. The federal government did rule that states could provide non-cash assistance to

nonresident fathers under the TANF program and some states have begun to offer employment services to them using TANF funds.

Poor nonresident fathers are not eligible for Medicaid unless they are disabled. Their access to this program has not changed since 1996. In contrast, Medicaid eligibility for custodial mothers is based on income, not disability status. Furthermore, Congress has given states greater flexibility to expand the Medicaid program since 1996 so that it can reach more custodial families.

Food stamp eligibility was both curtailed and expanded for nonresident fathers in 1996. Congress restricted food stamp eligibility to 3 months over any 3-year period for “able-bodied” adults between the ages of 18 and 49 who did not live with their own children and worked less than 20 hours per week. On the other hand, they expanded the amount of food stamps that nonresident fathers could obtain by allowing them to deduct their child support payments from their income when determining their food stamp allotment.

Since 1996, changes have also occurred in the field of employment services. As noted above, Congress called for a “work first” approach for TANF recipients. It also allocated \$3 billion in 1997 to the Welfare-to-Work program, with the intent to help the hardest-to-serve welfare recipients and noncustodial parents find and keep work. That same year Congress replaced the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) with the Work Investment Act.

Congress also included a mandate in the PRWORA of 1996 that required states to allow courts to order noncustodial parents into work activities as defined in TANF if they were behind in their child support and had children receiving TANF. However, Congress did not specify a funding source for this mandate. Hence, most states have not implemented it. We discuss this provision in greater detail in the next section of the paper.

Use of Income Support Programs and Employment Services

In 1999, about one quarter of poor custodial mothers received TANF and nearly half of them received Food Stamps or Medicaid. As expected, poor nonresident fathers are much less likely to participate in these programs than poor custodial mothers. In 1999, 20 percent of poor nonresident fathers received food stamps, less than half the rate among poor custodial mothers. That same year, 15 percent of poor nonresident fathers received Medicaid and 8 percent received TANF. Both of these figures are about one-third the rate of receipt among poor custodial mothers.

Despite the increased emphasis on employment services in the late 1990s, only one fifth of poor mothers reported receiving any of the following: a government-provided job, job training, job search classes, or vouchers for education or training (table 6). In comparison, only 6 percent of poor fathers used one or more of those services. Thus, both poor custodial mothers and poor nonresident fathers are unlikely to receive employment services, but poor custodial mothers are three times as likely to receive them as poor nonresident fathers.

Table 6. Enrollment in Means-Tested and Employment-Oriented Programs

Characteristics	Poor fathers	Poor mothers
Program Participation		
TANF	8%	24%
Food Stamps	20%	45%
Medicaid	15%	44%
Employment-Oriented Services		
Received Job Search Assistance or Training	6%	20%

Note: Incarcerated fathers are not included in this table
 Source: Authors' analysis of the 1999 National Survey of America's Families.

V. What Policy Changes Are Needed?

Our research shows that poor nonresident fathers need their child support orders to reflect their ability to pay and that most need employment-oriented services. Furthermore, many could benefit from receiving Food Stamps and Medicaid. Below, we discuss how policies can change to meet these needs.

Poor Nonresident Fathers Need Realistic Child Support Orders

The federal and state governments need to take a serious look at why child support orders tend to be high relative to the income of poor nonresident fathers. We find that one in four of these fathers who pay child support are paying more than half of their income in child support. A number of factors are contributing to high child support orders, some of which we discuss below.³

A default order is established if a father (or his representative) does not show up in court for a hearing in which his child support order is set. Federal law requires that child support orders reflect the earnings capacity of the noncustodial parent. However, if the father does not show up to establish his earnings capacity, many states allow courts to set default orders at the minimum basic standard of adequate care, which reflects the needs of the custodial family rather than the nonresident fathers' ability to pay. In California, for example, if a noncustodial parent's income is unknown, courts are instructed to presume an income in an amount that results in a support order that equals the minimum basic standard of adequate care, which was \$423 a month for a single child in 2001.⁴ In contrast, if a father shows up in court and has a net disposable

³ Another report on this issue is from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General (2000).

⁴ California Family Code, Section 17400 (d) (2).

income of \$1,000 per month, he would be expected to pay at most \$250 a month for a single child in California.⁵

Many states set child support orders for unmarried parents back to the date of the birth of the child, even if no action was taken to establish paternity until much later. If states choose to backdate child support orders, federal law requires them to set orders according to the states' child support guidelines. But if the father does not show up at his court hearing when the order is set, courts will set a default order and impute an income for him back to the date of the child's birth and set the child support order accordingly.

States may also charge nonresident fathers the costs associated with the birth of their child if Medicaid paid for these expenses. Again, these costs do not depend on the fathers' ability to pay. The Medical Child Support Working Group, established by Congress to identify ways to improve the medical child support system, has already recommended abolishing this practice, which should be considered by Congress.⁶

These practices result in large arrears that poor fathers cannot pay. Child support arrears now total over \$80 billion. The average case with back support owes \$8,487 in arrears. Much of these arrears are owed to state governments because the father's children were on welfare while it accrued. Some states have begun to reduce the large child support debt owed to state governments by establishing limited amnesty programs that forgives this debt as long as noncustodial fathers participate in work activities and pay their current child support obligations for an extended period. These kinds of experiments could be encouraged by Congress.

⁵ Judicial Council of California (2001).

⁶ Medical Child Support Working Group (2000).

Poor Nonresident Fathers Who Do Not Pay Child Support Need Employment Services

Poor nonresident fathers need employment services to help them meet their financial obligation to their children. Many face the same employment barriers as poor custodial mothers, including low levels of education and little work experience. Their personal income is barely enough to support themselves, making it difficult to support children living elsewhere.

While Congress has recognized that some nonresident fathers are poor and need employment services, its actions to date have not been strong enough. States have procedures that allow courts to order delinquent noncustodial parents to seek work if they report that unemployment is the reason for not paying child support, but the courts have no way to verify compliance with this order and no authority to order more comprehensive employment services. As part of PRWORA, Congress attempted to remedy this problem by mandating that states allow courts to order noncustodial parents into work activities as specified under TANF if they are behind in their child support and have children on TANF. However, Congress did not allocate federal funding to implement this mandate.

Although most states have not implemented the 1996 mandate to provide noncustodial parents with work activities if they are behind in their child support payments, some states have.⁷ Georgia is an excellent example of a state-wide initiative in this area.⁸ The State Child Support Enforcement Office works with the Superior Courts to channel noncustodial parents who are not paying their child support into training and employment services. The training and employment services are provided by the Department of Technical and Adult Education. The program relies on state TANF and title XX funding.

⁷ State and Local Initiatives Database—www.slid.org.

⁸ For more information on Georgia's Fatherhood Program, see www.cse.dhr.state.ga.us

This type of program is similar to the programs offered by the Parents' Fair Share (PFS) Demonstration Project, which operated in the mid-1990s and was evaluated by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC). PFS programs were designed to help unemployed noncustodial parents with children on welfare to find employment and pay their child support. MDRC found that these programs succeeded in meeting their primary aim — they increased child support payments.⁹ These gains were largely the result of PFS uncovering fair amounts of existing employment among nonresident parents referred to the program, but that should not detract from the basic finding that these programs increased child support payments.

In order to ensure that the 1996 PRWORA mandate is implemented, Congress may want to establish a block grant program to states that funds work activities for noncustodial parents who are behind in their child support payments and have children receiving TANF. We recommend that this block grant be administered by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement since all of these fathers are clients of state child support enforcement programs and the primary aim of the block grant is to increase child support payments.

Poor Nonresident Fathers Who Pay Child Support Need Food Stamps and Health Insurance

This research shows that poor nonresident fathers need better access to food stamps and health insurance so that their basic nutritional and health needs are met. In 1999, poor nonresident fathers were half as likely to participate in the Food Stamp Program and one third as likely to participate in Medicaid as poor custodial mothers. We recommend that the government take positive steps to ensure that poor nonresident fathers are able to meet their nutritional and health needs *if* they pay their child support. Just as the government helps poor custodial mothers

⁹ Miller and Knox (2001).

meet their nutritional and health needs while they support their children, the government should extend this assistance to poor nonresident fathers who pay child support.

In order to achieve this objective, the federal government will need to extend Medicaid eligibility to indigent nonresident parents who pay their child support. The Food Stamp program already extends eligibility to this population, but its outreach could be improved. To that end, the federal government may want to allow state child support programs to work with the Food Stamp program to ensure that poor nonresident fathers who pay child support are receiving food stamps.

VI. Lets Make it Possible for Poor Children to Receive Support from Both Parents

It is time to recognize that some nonresident fathers need help to make it possible for them to support their children. We expect poor custodial parents to work and support their children. In return, we provide them with income and work supports to get the job done. But poor children need both of their parents' financial and emotional support and most of their fathers are poor. Therefore, it is time to develop a system of employment services and income supports for poor nonresident fathers.

Appendix: Developing Weights for Nonresident Fathers

Several steps, described below, are involved in reweighting the data on nonresident fathers. The general idea behind reweighting these data is to create a set of weights that reflects the entire population of nonresident fathers rather than those who self-report as nonresident fathers. Nonresident fathers who self-report are quite different from those who are not represented in household survey data. In general, they have higher incomes and are more likely to pay child support than those who do not self-report. Thus, a more accurate picture of nonresident fathers emerges when the data are reweighted.

The first step in reweighting the data is to ascertain how many men are not represented in the NSAF as a result of coverage issues— institutionalization, the census undercount, or being in the military. This is accomplished by first estimating the total number of men between the ages of 18 and 49 who are missing from the NSAF for these reasons. We choose an upper age of 49 because we expect that nearly all nonresident fathers absent from the NSAF for these reasons would be under the age of 50. We used the U.S. Census Bureau’s 1999 national population estimates to calculate the number of men ages 18-49 who are institutionalized or serving in the military. Our estimates of the number of men missing from the NSAF as a result of the census undercount are derived from Census Bureau estimates of the percentage of the total population undercounted in the 1990 census (Hogan and Robinson 1993). All of our estimates are made for three age groups (18-29,30-39, and 40-49) and three race or ethnicity groups (black non-Hispanic, Hispanic, and other).

Once we have estimated the number of men ages 18-49 who are excluded from the NSAF for each of the above reasons, we then estimate the percentage of these men who are nonresident fathers. We use data from the Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities

conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice in 1997 to estimate the percentage of institutionalized men who are nonresident fathers. Since there are no data on the fatherhood characteristics of the undercounted population we assume that they are similar to those of unmarried institutionalized men. We assume that the percentage of excluded military men who are nonresident fathers is the same as the percentage of men in the NSAF who are identified as nonresident fathers.

Once we have identified how many nonresident fathers are underrepresented in the NSAF as a result of coverage issues, our second task is to make educated assumptions about the characteristics of these missing nonresident fathers. Undercounted nonresident fathers are assumed to resemble nonresident fathers who do not pay child support and are “poor” as we defined this term in the paper (i.e. they have family income below the official poverty threshold based on their family size or have personal income below the poverty threshold for a single individual). We made this assumption because ethnographic research shows that the undercounted tend to be exceedingly poor relative to the counted (de la Puente 1993). Institutionalized nonresident fathers are assumed to resemble nonresident fathers who are “poor” and do not pay child support, except that we go on to assume that they have no income and do not work. We assume that nonresident fathers in the military resemble nonresident fathers of the same age group and race or ethnicity as those identified in the NSAF.

Once we have estimated how many nonresident fathers are missing from the NSAF — as result of the undercount, institutionalization, and being in the military—and have made assumptions about their characteristics, we estimate the number of fathers who are missing in the NSAF as a result of underreporting. We assume that the total number of nonresident fathers equals the number of custodial mothers by race or ethnicity and payment status and subtract the

number of nonresident fathers who are in the survey or who are missing as a result of coverage issues (within each race or ethnicity and payment status). The difference, or residual, is attributed to underreporting of nonresident fatherhood. We assume that these fathers do not pay child support and they have an age distribution similar to that of mothers and a poverty distribution similar to that of fathers who self-identify in the NSAF.

In our final step, we add the number of fathers who self-report in the NSAF to the number of fathers missing from the survey and align these number to the number of custodial mothers within the three age categories and race/ethnicity categories described above (the age categories for the mothers are 18-27, 28-37, and 38-47 to take into account that women are typically about two years younger than the fathers of their children).

The entire process leads to a set of new weights that are applied to the nonresident fathers in the survey. The reweighted data are then expected to reflect the entire population of nonresident fathers, including those who are undercounted, institutionalized, in the military, or underreporting their nonresident fatherhood.

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