Let’s Stay in Touch

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Failing Our Fathers

Confronting the Crisis of Economically Vulnerable Nonresident Fathers
The Bottom Line

- If the 1980s were the decade of the Deadbeat Dad and
- The 1990s, the decade of the Deadbroke Dad
- The 2020’s should be the decade in which we recognize that there is a broad swath of dads in the middle about which little attention is paid
- These fathers make up to $40,000 annually, when they are working, which was most of the time before the recession
  - They are much larger and more diverse population than the “disadvantaged fathers” in the minds of most people who are concerned about fathers at all.
  - They are major targets of the expansion of health care reform
  - Major part of the expansion of the EITC to fathers, which many policymakers contemplated before the recession,
    - To provide the same support to working and near poor families as the federal EITC provides to single mothers and their children
  - And they need help to if we are reduce poverty and increase opportunity for the children in poor and near poor, families many of whom include one or two working parents.
Until quite recently, policies on fatherhood have focused primarily on nonresident fathers because a really important book *Making Fathers Pay*, which was published in 1979, popularized the idea of the Deadbeat Dad, a father who drove his family into poverty by leaving and taking his money with him.

This idea helped to galvanize support for the nation’s efforts, begun just 4 years earlier, to close the gaps between incomes available to children in single and two-parent families by collecting more child support from nonresident fathers.

More specifically, the Federal Office Of Child Support was created in 1974 to bolster and coordinate state child support enforcement efforts.

Oddly, our commitment to child support enforcement began at roughly the same time that we began a 40 year period during which

- Average male wages stagnated
- Wage of men with below average earnings fell and then recovered.
- Rates of childbearing outside of marriage rose, especially among cohabiting parents
FIGURE 6
CUMULATIVE CHANGES IN REAL HOURLY WAGES OF MEN, BY INCOME PERCENTILE, 1979–2012

FIGURE 4B
PERCENTAGE OF BIRTHS TO UNMARRIED WOMEN
BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 1970–2010

Source: Centers for Disease Control, National Vital Statistics Reports.
FIGURE 4C
CHANGES IN WOMEN'S FAMILY STRUCTURE AT AGE 35, 1970–2010

Race/Ethnic Consequences

- These trends in wages and children’s living arrangements manifest themselves in distinct race/ethnic patterns
- Black children
  - Rarely grow up in two-parent families and
  - Are the first to experience nonresident fatherhood
- Hispanic and white children
  - Are much more than likely than black children to live in two-parent families, but
  - They experience nonresident fatherhood as they get older
- Asian children (whose parents marry and stay married)
  - They tend to live in two-parent families, but many of these families
    - Are led by fathers with low wage, so
    - Family incomes are low
Long Term Trends and Two-Parent Families

- Long term trends in men’s wages have increased and diversified vulnerable nonresident fatherhood, but
- depressed the growth of wages of all fathers without college degrees, including fathers in two-parent families, and
- depressed the incomes of all families with children:
  - including families led by two-parents without college degrees
  - especially if they are cohabiting.
FIGURE 9

Note: The CPS changed the phrasing of the educational attainment question in 1992, which accounts for that year’s sudden drop among the less-than-high-school group.
Income by Parents Education for Families with Children from the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Survey

Figure 3: Household Income ($2010) by Education and Child's Age/Year

- College +
- Some Col./Assoc.
- HS
- <HS

Child's Age/Year:
- (1999-2001)
- (2003-2006)
- (2007-2010)
Figure 7: Household Income ($2010) by Race/Ethnicity, Relationship Status and Child's Age/Year

- White
- Married
- Hispanic
- Cohabiting
- Black
- Single
Children in Poverty and Lacking Opportunity Have Parents

- From all race and ethnic groups, who
  - are mostly unmarried, but often cohabiting at least when their children are young
  - have stagnant family incomes
Their Fathers are

- Mostly men without college degrees who have difficulty supporting their children and sustaining their families.
  - Some become nonresident fathers who must support their children living elsewhere
    - African Americans are initially over-represented here, but
    - Whites and Hispanic fathers join this group as children get older
  - Others remain resident fathers with below-average wages, who are working so hard to sustain their families that they have little time to spend with their children.
  - Hispanic, Asian, and White fathers are over-represented here
Policy and Practice for
Nonresident Fathers
How Many Nonresident Fathers are Vulnerable..

- According to the NSFG there are 7.5 million nonresident fathers in America, about 5.3 million earned no more than $40,000 (NSFG).
- According to another data source that relies on CPS data (TRIM3) there are 9.5 million nonresident fathers, but only about 40% have child support orders.
- Only 40% of nonresident fathers paid all the child support they owed; but among nonresident fathers making up to $40,000 only 33% paid all the child support they owed.
- We think of this group earning up to $40,000 as vulnerable because most are poorly educated, fully employed, and they have to choose among poverty, near-poverty or supporting their children.
### Annual Income and Expenditures among Non-Custodial Fathers, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$20,000</th>
<th>$30,000</th>
<th>$40,000</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Earnings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-resident children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Support</td>
<td>(3,400)</td>
<td>(5,000)</td>
<td>(5,100)</td>
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<td><strong>Taxes &amp; Credits</strong></td>
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<td>Federal Taxes</td>
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<td>State Taxes</td>
<td>(26)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Taxes</td>
<td>(60)</td>
<td>(79)</td>
<td>(90)</td>
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<td><strong>Expenses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>(10,975)</td>
<td>(11,927)</td>
<td>(13,578)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>(4,355)</td>
<td>(5,556)</td>
<td>(6,664)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>(3,850)</td>
<td>(4,446)</td>
<td>(5,199)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>(2,352)</td>
<td>(2,794)</td>
<td>(2,933)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apparel</td>
<td>(1,023)</td>
<td>(1,196)</td>
<td>(1,317)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Care Products &amp; Services</td>
<td>(364)</td>
<td>(403)</td>
<td>(450)</td>
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<td><strong>Net disposable income</strong></td>
<td>(6,354)</td>
<td>(7,954)</td>
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**NOTE:** Expenditures for the thresholds shown were calculated as the linear interpolation of the CES reported averages for the income classes just below and above the threshold shown.
Bi-Partisan Consensus

- Besides collecting child support, our efforts to ensure that children have a minimally adequate standard of living have virtually ignore the role of men, economically vulnerable nonresident fathers.
- “Improving family life in America requires that we more effectively help disconnected men and women gain their footing in the labor market that we help nonresident fathers financially contribute to and participate in their families.”
- We have bipartisan agreement on this fact.
- This basic consensus emerged the recommendation to
EXPAND EITC For Childless, including NCP’

- Pres. Obama to Congressman Paul Ryan.
  - Such a policy change might
    - reverse declines in earnings and labor force participation, but also promote family stability
    - Reduce the imbalance between the support we provide for poor single mothers and the very modest support we provide for nonresident fathers in the same economic position;
      - For example, a single mother with two children working 30 hours a week at an eight dollars hour per job is likely to receive
        - close to $6000 from snap $5000 for the EIT C $7000 to the child tax credit and health care coverage also worth about $4000.
        - Additional support could be provided through child support school lunch and breakfast child care subsidies and so on.
      - By contrast a nonresident father working the same job in living in the same area is likely to receive only $1600 annually from snap on a $79 from the federal EIT C and some help with health insurance depending upon where he lives.
  - To the extent that such supports are intended not only to increase parents capacity to care for children but also to his this imbalance absolutely no sense. With regard to our goal of enabling both parents to contribute to support their children.
Identify More Effective Responsible Fatherhood Programs

- provide employment training services and partner with child support enforcement agencies to help nonresident fathers better understand your obligations and to fulfill them.

- Prior demonstration programs such as Parents Faire Share and partners for fragile families have improved employment earnings and child support payments among participants however the gains were modest and in many instances evaluations were not very rigorous.

- Programs such as the comprehensive CSPED program which is currently operating in eight states, and funded by the office of Child support enforcement provide good examples based upon past experience upon which to follow.
Reform the Process for Setting and Collecting Child Support from Low Income Fathers

- It's increasingly clear that child-support obligations of many men who became nonresident fathers before they were financially capable of supporting their children far exceed their ability to pay, and that this change is little as these men mature.
- Father's are obligated to pay such a large share their income in child support that they can meet their full obligations only by skipping on rent utilities transportation and

- These excessively high obligations may pose a disincentive to work and doing so may undermine the effectiveness of our proposal concerning a more generous childless worker EIT C.
- Support is another area right for reform, because the penalties that may induce higher income fathers to pay the child-support only result in mounting debts among fathers with limited ability to pay.
Summary

- In short the best way to provide consistent financial support for children with nonresident fathers is to:
- increase employment and earnings;
- Set more readable child support orders;
- Make it easier to reduce orders when unemployment, imprisonment or other circumstances make it impossible for them to pay what they were ordered to pay when they are working.
To Help Working-Poor Among Vulnerable Fathers Need

- An NCP_EITC more generous than programs in NY and Washington, DC
  - Use of a generously interpreted self support reserve to enable them to meet the full compliance criteria.
- Allow temporary modifications while attending community college to help them achieve wage growth overtime.
- Lower fees for modifications and modification conferences with non-TANF, custodial mothers
- Higher means test for participation in Assets for Independence
  - Because they their employment wills stabilize, even at lower wages, after the recession, they can take advantage of matched savings
  - Tie participation to child savings accounts and arrears compromise arrangements with non-TANF custodial mothers.
- Expand access and visitation and access to keep them in the game.
Let’s Continue the Conversation

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Policy and Practice for Resident Fathers
Evolution of Fatherhood Policy & Practice

• Policymakers first connected fatherhood policy and practice with
  • welfare reform’s efforts to reduce the gap between children in single-parent and two-families from 1967-1974
  • Reducing teen pregnancy in the 1980s
• During this early phase cohabitation had not yet become a significant force in children's living arrangements.
  • most children in single-parent families had divorced or never married parents;
  • divorce framed the way policymakers thought about this problem
    • Volition was the presumed reason fathers failed to support their children, so penalties were required to force payments.
• A second generation of fathering policy and practice emerged because long term welfare recipients were the children of teen mothers and mostly teenage fathers
  • Since requiring teenaged boys to pay was infeasible, primary and secondary pregnancy prevention programs were extended from girls to boys as well.
Two discoveries altered these early efforts.

- Many nonresident fathers did not pay child support because they were jobless (dead broke) not heartless (deadbeat).
  - Policy & Practice
    - distinguished between deadbeat and dead broke dad and used penalties to increase payments among deadbeats (child support) and
    - the threat of penalties to induce dead broke dads to participate in employment services so that
    - they could find jobs and pay child support, under the threat of similar penalties (responsible fatherhood).
- Teen dads were disproportionately Black and Hispanic
Time, Race/Ethnic Patterns and the Evolution of Fatherhood Policy and Practice

- Since teen, dead broke dads, and incarcerated fathers were disproportionately black and Latino were disproportionately black and Hispanic
  - Responsible fatherhood policy & practice came first and focused largely on the needs of African Americans
  - Teen fatherhood programs came second and focused largely on the needs of blacks and Hispanics.
  - Recent recognition of explosion in incarceration among black and Hispanic males has led to bringing programs inside the prison walls

- Consensus that the wages of all men without college degrees have stagnated, brought pressure to provide assistance to fathers in two-parent families, mostly cohabiters, who are struggling to sustain their families, and contribute to their children's development.
  - Resident fatherhood policy & practice has been last to emerge and has been focused on Hispanics, Whites, and more recently, Asian and Native American fathers.
  - Because of low earnings their families have low incomes and experience stress due to hardship.
    - Their children are in Head Start, or Child Welfare Services, where
    - Fathers can be trained to reduce the impact of stress and promote child development.
  - Coincidence of residence fatherhood and race/ethnicity has required practitioners, if not policy makers, to pay attention to the role of culture (e.g., machismo, familia among Hispanic families and mutual cooperation among kin and collectivism among Asian families)
The initial focus on child support and responsible fatherhood, which pre-dated emphasis on evidence-based practice means that:

- few fatherhood programs have benefit from small scale RCT’s and
- little is known about how to increase the benefits children derive from the limited time their (resident or nonresident) fathers spend with them.

More specifically, we know little about:
- What efforts vulnerable fathers make to stay in contact with their children,
- What barriers they face in making these efforts,
- How these efforts may contribute to child's health and well-being, and
- How these contributions might be increased.