

The Story Behind the Numbers

The Impact of Nonmarital Birth Data on the Child Support Enforcement Program's Performance

This "Story Behind the Numbers" focuses on differences between nonmarital birth data submitted by the States to the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) on the OCSE 157 Report. Also highlighted are nonmarital birth data published by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) and the relationship of NCHS published data to the statewide paternity establishment percentage and IV-D program performance.

Background Information

The Child Support Performance Incentive Act of 1998 (CSPIA) re-emphasized the importance of establishing paternity for children born out of wedlock by authorizing the payment of incentives to State IV-D programs based on their paternity establishment performance. IV-D programs are permitted to choose one of two alternative measures: IV-D Paternity Establishment Percentage (PEP) or statewide PEP.

The IV-D PEP examines the total number of children in the IV-D caseload born out of wedlock with paternity established or acknowledged compared to the total number of children in the IV-D caseload who were born out of wedlock. The statewide PEP defines its numerator and denominator as follows:

- ♦ *Numerator* — the total number of minor children born out of wedlock for whom paternity has been established or acknowledged during the fiscal year (FY);
- ♦ *Denominator* — the total number of children born out of wedlock during the preceding fiscal year.

The United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) administers this State IV-D performance incentive program through OCSE. IV-D programs submit their performance data annually on the OCSE 157 Report within thirty days of the end of a Federal Fiscal Year. IV-D programs may submit a revised OCSE 157 Report no later than three months after the end of the Federal Fiscal Year. In addition to incentives offered for IV-D performance, States are assessed

penalties for not making progress toward and maintaining certain PEP targets.

Differences Between OCSE and NCHS Counts of Nonmarital Births

State vital statistics agencies provide nonmarital birth data to both State child support agencies that report statewide PEP and NCHS. In turn, State child support agencies use the information to complete their OCSE 157 Reports. Although both start from the same data source (i.e., the State vital statistics agency), there are differences between these two counts of nonmarital births. Three issues in particular appear to be responsible for almost all of the differences:

- ♦ *Counting births by State of occurrence vs. State of mother's residence.* In reporting their statewide PEP denominators, IV-D programs count all nonmarital births occurring within their jurisdictions, regardless of the State of mother's residence; that is, births are counted in the jurisdiction where the baby was born. However, NCHS has typically published nonmarital births categorized by State of mother's residence, that is, in the State where the mother lives. This means that if a mother was a resident of Iowa and gave birth to a nonmarital child in a hospital across the State line in neighboring Nebraska, NCHS would report that nonmarital birth for Iowa, but the Nebraska IV-D agency would report the nonmarital birth on its OCSE 157 Report.
- ♦ *Differences in reporting period.* IV-D programs' OCSE 157 Reports generally reflect data for the Federal Fiscal Year, although some States report by State fiscal year or calendar year. NCHS publishes data for the calendar year.
- ♦ *A shorter time to report data after the close of a reporting period tends to lead to more unreported data.* IV-D programs must report the most recent fiscal year's nonmarital birth data within thirty days of the end of the Federal Fiscal Year. However, since the fiscal year crosses two calendar years, the State vital statistics agencies will not have received all of the nonmarital birth records before the deadline to submit the OCSE

