

Custodial Parents and Child Support Receipt

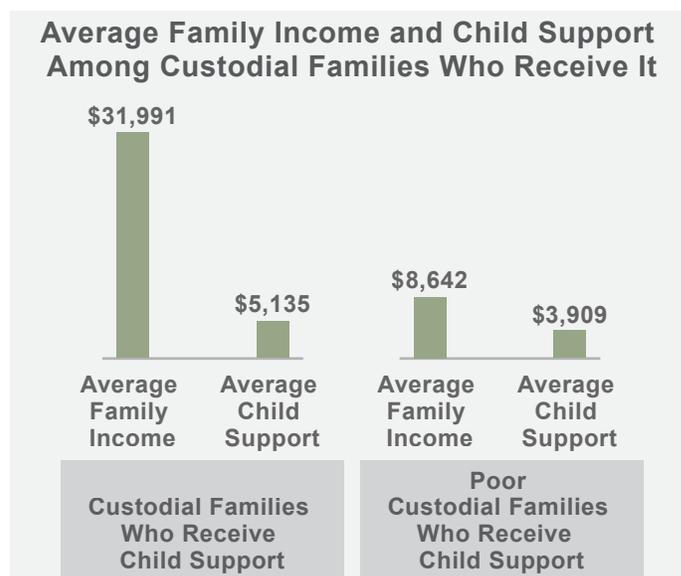
The Story Behind the Numbers Fact Sheet Series takes a closer look at child support program data. This series presents the results of data analyses to better understand program performance and caseload trends. Through deeper understanding of the story behind the numbers, the series aims to inform policy and practice and strengthen program outcomes.

*This fact sheet focuses on data reported in a recent U.S. Census Bureau report entitled, **Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2009**.¹ The data reported are estimated based on a biennial survey of custodial parents, the **Child Support Supplement to the Current Population Survey, March/April 2010**.² This supplement is co-sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement. While we have very detailed information on the IV-D caseload, there is no national source of information for total (IV-D and non-IV-D) child support recipients and total amount of child support received. We rely on nationally representative surveys such as this one to provide information on the total child support population. It is important to note that this survey includes both IV-D and non-IV-D families, but does not include households where children are living with someone other than their biological parent (e.g. aunt, uncle, grandparents).*



Child Support is an Important Source of Income for Families

Child support is an important source of income for custodial families, especially for those who live below the poverty line. For all families who received child support in 2009, the average amount received was \$5,135 and their average yearly income was \$31,991. For families below the poverty level who received child support in 2009, the average amount received was \$3,909 and their average yearly income was \$8,642. Thus, average child support represented 45 percent of the average income for custodial parents below poverty who received child support, compared with 16 percent for all custodial parents.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Child Support Supplement to the Current Population Survey, March/April 2010*

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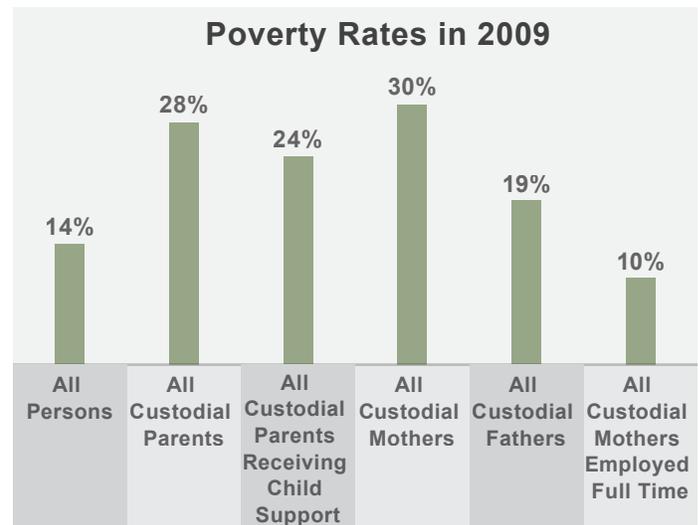
Child Support Receipt and Orders Decrease

The census report shows that child support receipt was down in 2009 as might be expected due to the recent recession that ended in June 2009. However, the census report is showing much larger negative effects than we saw in the IV-D caseload based on the administrative data reported by the states. This may be because the census report captures all custodial parents regardless of whether they are receiving IV-D services.

According to the census report, the percentage of custodial parents due child support who report receiving any child support payments declined from 76 percent in 2007 to 71 percent in 2009. Similarly, the percentage of custodial parents who report receiving the full amount of child support due also declined according to the census report between 2007 and 2009. Just 41 percent of custodial parents received the full amount of child support due, down from 47 percent in 2007. Finally, according to the census report, of the amount of child support due in 2009 (\$35.1 billion), 61 percent was reported as received, down from 63 percent in 2007.

On the other hand, state administrative data for the IV-D caseload show that 71 percent of cases with orders had collections in both 2007 and 2009. In the IV-D program, the percent of current support collected increased from 61 to 62 percent between 2007 and 2009. Over 60 percent of custodial parents who are eligible for child support receive IV-D services. Approximately half of custodial parents in the IV-D program are below 150 percent of poverty.

The proportion of all custodial parents reporting a court order or some type of agreement to receive financial assistance from the noncustodial parent was 51 percent in 2009, down from 54 percent in 2007. This statistic contrasts with administrative data reported by the states that shows 79 percent of IV-D cases have orders established, and this figure was essentially the same in 2007. In the census survey, the two reasons most often cited for not having a legal agreement was that they did not feel the need to make it legal, and that the custodial parent felt that the other parent provides what he or she can.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Child Support Supplement to the Current Population Survey, March/April 2010*

Number of Custodial Parents Falling Below Poverty Line Increases

According to the census report, there was an increase in the number of custodial parents below the poverty line in 2009. The report found that 28 percent of all custodial parents had incomes below poverty in 2009, which is about twice the rate for the total population. This is an increase from 2007 when the poverty rate for custodial parents was 25 percent.

The census report shows that the poverty rate varied among custodial-parent groups. For example, 30 percent of custodial mothers were in poverty as compared to 19 percent of custodial fathers. Some of the highest poverty rates occurred among custodial mothers who had less than a high school degree (59 percent), custodial mothers with three or more children (52 percent), and custodial mothers under 30 years of age (44 percent). While custodial mothers who worked full time year-round (10 percent) and custodial mothers who had a bachelor's degree or higher (8 percent) had some of the lowest poverty rates.

In addition to reduced rates of child support payments, increased levels of unemployment have likely contributed to the number of custodial parents living below the poverty line. According to the report, the level of full-time, year-round employment increased among custodial parents from 46 percent to 55 percent between 1993 and 1999, and then had no statistically significant changes until 2009 when full-time, year-round employment by custodial parents dropped to 50 percent.

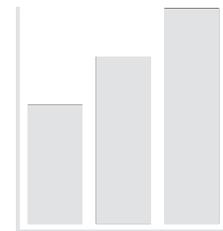
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The report also provides estimates of participation in government assistance programs. In addition to decreases in full-time employment and child support receipt among custodial parents, the rate of participation in at least one public assistance program increased from 32 percent in 2007 to 38 percent in 2009. Custodial mothers were twice as likely to participate in at least one public assistance program (41 percent) as custodial fathers (21 percent).

These statistics reinforce the essential role that child support services can play in helping low-income families, especially during an economic downturn like the one we just experienced in 2009. Parents in the child support program tend to have lower incomes than those who do not receive child support services and are particularly vulnerable to economic downturns. Because of their relatively low incomes, when families in the IV-D program receive child support, it represents a larger percent of their family income than it does for custodial families outside of the program.

For More Information

Address questions and comments about this child support fact sheet to Dennis Putze at dennis.putze@acf.hhs.gov.



References

1. U.S. Census Bureau, *Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2009*, www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p60-240.pdf.
2. U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, March/April 2010 Match File: Child Support Supplement*, www.census.gov/aptd/techdoc/cps/cpsmarapr10.pdf.

