THE ONE HUNDRED BILLION DOLLAR MAN

The Annual Public Costs of father absence

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the costs of father absence

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about the authors

Steven L. Nock

Steven Nock passed away on January 20, 2008, shortly after completing this report. He was a Commonwealth Professor, Professor of Sociology, and Director of the Marriage Matters project at the University of Virginia. He earned his Ph.D. at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst in 1976.

Mr. Nock authored books and articles about the causes and consequences of change in the American family. He has investigated issues of privacy, unmarried fatherhood, cohabitation, commitment, divorce, and marriage. His most recent book, *Marriage in Men's Lives*, won the William J. Good Book Award from the American Sociological Association for the most outstanding contribution to family scholarship in 1999.

He focused on the intersection of social science and public policy concerning households and families in America.

Mr. Nock taught courses on the family at the introductory and advanced undergraduate, and advanced graduate levels. He won the 1991-1992 All-University Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award.

His latest research was the Marriage Matters project, which examines the legal innovation known as Covenant Marriage in Louisiana, Arizona, and Arkansas.

This report is dedicated to the memory of Steven L. Nock

Christopher J. Einolf

Chris Einolf received a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Virginia in 2006. In addition to sociology of the family, Dr. Einolf studies charitable giving and volunteering. In the fall of 2008, he will begin a position as Assistant Professor in the School of Public Service at DePaul University.

About National Fatherhood Initiative

National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), founded in 1994, works in every sector and at every level of society to engage fathers in the lives of their children. NFI is one of the leading producers of research on the causes and consequences of father absence, public opinion on family issues, and trends in family structure and marriage. NFI's flagship research publication, *Father Facts*, is the leading source of fatherhood information and statistics for the press, public policy experts, and government officials. NFI's *Pop's Culture: A National Survey of Dads' Attitudes on Fathering* and *With This Ring: A National Survey on Marriage in America* are two of the most comprehensive national surveys that have been published in recent years on American attitudes towards fatherhood and marriage. NFI's national public service advertising campaign promoting father involvement has generated television, radio, print, Internet, and outdoor advertising valued at over $500 million. Through its resource center, FatherSOURCE™, NFI offers a wide range of innovative resources to assist fathers and organizations interested in reaching and supporting fathers. Through its "three-e" strategy of educating, equipping, and engaging, NFI works with businesses, prisons, churches, schools, community-based organizations, hospitals, and military installations to connect organizations and fathers with the resources they need to ensure that all children receive the love, nurture, and guidance of involved, responsible, and committed fathers.

executive summary

This study, the first of its kind, provides an estimate of the taxpayer costs of father absence. More precisely, it estimates the annual expenditures made by the federal government to support father-absent homes. These federal expenditures include those made on thirteen means-tested antipoverty programs and child support enforcement, and the total expenditures add up to a startling $99.8 billion.

1 Father absence has risen greatly in the last four decades.

Between 1960 and 2006, the number of children living in single-mother families went from 8 percent to 23.3 percent, and 34 percent of children currently live absent their biological father.

2 Father absence contributes to family poverty.

In 2003, 39.3 percent of single-mother families lived in poverty, but only 8.8 percent of father-present families lived in poverty. Some, but not all, of the poverty of single-mother families is a result of father absence.

- This is the first study to date* to estimate the cost of father absence to U.S. taxpayers via federal expenditures on programs to assist single-mother families.

** To the best of the authors' knowledge as of June, 2008.*

3 The Federal Government spent at least $99.8 billion providing assistance to father-absent families in 2006.

$99.8 billion is the amount the Federal government spent on thirteen means-tested benefit programs and on child support enforcement for single mothers. These programs include the Earned Income Tax Credit, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), child support enforcement, food and nutrition programs, housing programs, Medicaid, and the State Children's Health Insurance Plan (SCHIP).

4 The $99.8 billion cost is a conservative estimate, as it leaves out 3 significant, but hard to measure, sources of costs:

- Federal benefits programs that benefit whole communities, or that benefit individuals regardless of income.
- Indirect costs related to the poor outcomes of children of single-mother families, such as greater use of mental and physical health services, and a higher rate of involvement in the juvenile justice system.
- Long-term costs in reduced tax income due to the lower earnings of children of single-parent families, and long-term costs due to the higher incarceration of children of single-parent families.

5 Because single mothers differ from married mothers in a number of ways that contribute to poverty,

it is difficult to determine how much of the $99.8 billion in expenditures is a *direct* consequence of father absence versus a consequence of the other factors that contribute to the poverty of single-mother homes. However, since father absence has become so widespread and there are $99.8 billion worth of *direct* costs to taxpayers associated with it, policymakers should devote more attention to reducing father absence.

6 Further research is needed to more thoroughly calculate both the direct and indirect costs

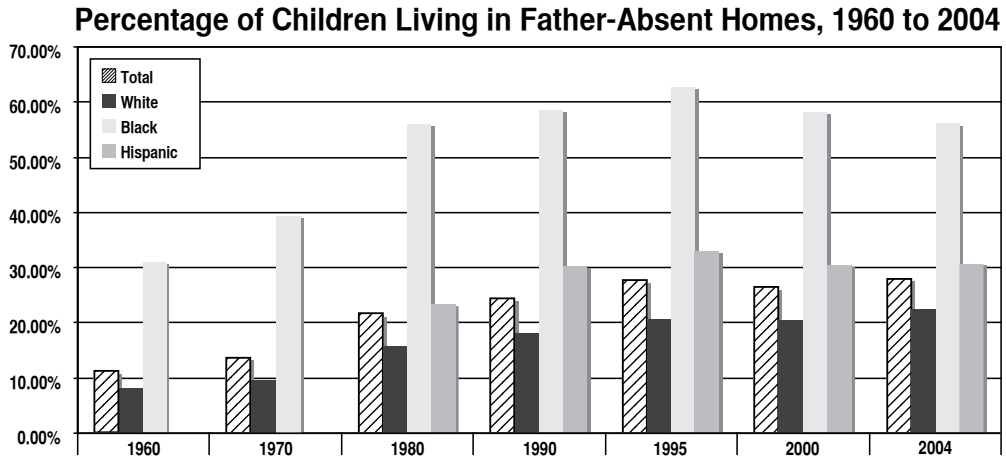
(such as increased use of mental health services and higher incarceration rates for children from father-absent homes) that result from father absence. These costs may be significant and could be used to better inform policymakers of specific policy recommendations for combating father absence.

introduction

In 1960, about one in thirteen children in American under age 18 (8.0 percent) lived with his or her mother and no father. In 2006, the fraction was one in four (23.3 percent).[1] Furthermore, 34 percent of children live absent their biological father.[2] Today, half of all children[3], and 80 percent of African American children, can expect to spend at least part of their childhood living apart from their fathers.[4] This dramatic increase in the living arrangements of children is part of a larger demographic revolution that has attracted extensive interest and research. The short story is that in the course of about half a century, many of the foundational patterns of children's living arrangements have been altered. In almost all cases, those changes involve growing impermanence for children, fewer adults, greater chances of poverty, and weak inter-generational connections. A profound change in the order of events in the lives of adults is the primary reason. Adults now marry much later than they did forty years ago, and many forgo marriage in favor of informal, usually temporary cohabiting relationships. The result is predictably high rates of births to single women (currently about 34 percent of births), and births to cohabiting couples, some of whom subsequently marry, some of whom separate. Add these to the high divorce rate in America, and the statistics cited above are much more understandable.[5]

To help place the changing patterns of children's living arrangement in historical perspective, the following graph (Figure 1) shows the percentage of American children (under age 18) living in homes absent a biological, step, or adoptive father. As the chart indicates, the past 40 years has seen a meteoric rise in the overall fraction of children living with a mother only, although it has leveled off in very recent years.[6]

FIGURE 1. Percentage of Children Living in Father-Absent Homes, 1960 to 2004



[1] U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007. Households and Families, Historical Statistics, Table CH1. http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/ch1.csv

[2] U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005. The Living Arrangements of Children: 2001. Kreider, Rose, and Fields, Jason.

[3] Bumpass, L.L. and J.A. Sweet. "Children's Experience in Single-Parent Families: Implications of Cohabitation and Marital Transitions." *Family Planning Perspectives*, 21 (1989): 256-260.

[4] "Report of Final Natality Statistics, 1996." *Monthly Vital Statistics Report 46, no. 11, Supplement* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, June 30, 1998); see also, "Turning the Corner on Father Absence in Black America: A Statement from the Morehouse Conference on African-American Families," Atlanta, GA: Morehouse Research Institute & Institute for American Values (June 1999): 4.

[5] Andrew J. Cherlin, 2005, "American Marriage in the Early Twenty-First Century," *The Future of Children* 15(2):33-55. http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/03_FOC_15-2_fall05_Cherlin.pdf. For a discussion of the changing order of cohabitation, birth, and marriage, see Larry Wu and Kelly Musik, 2007, "Stability of Marital and Cohabiting Unions Following a First Birth," CCPR-019-06, California Center for Population Research, online resource: http://www.ccpr.ucla.edu/ccprwpseries/ccpr_019_06.pdf.

[6] U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007, Current Population Reports, Annual Household and Economic Supplements, Table CH-2. http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam.html.

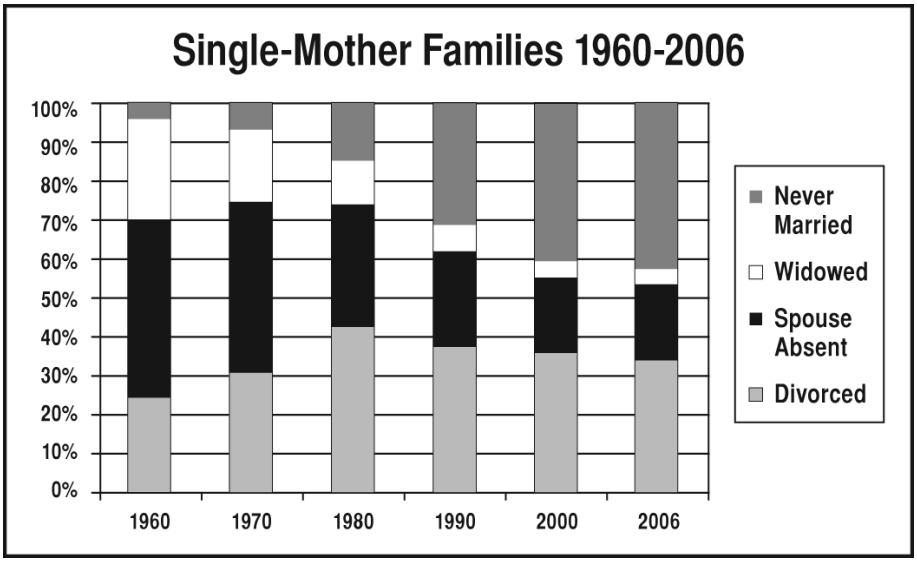
father absence: the causes & costs

Given the changing living arrangements of children, it is not surprising that much concern in recent years has focused on the possible effects of father absence in children's lives. This literature is large and growing. Our objective in this report is to tackle a related topic. We ask, ***"How much money does father absence cost U.S. taxpayers?"***

By "father absence," we refer to families where a biological, adoptive, or stepfather does not live in the same household with his children. Fathers may be either fully or partially absent from family life. Fathers may be fully absent because of their death, their incarceration, or their abandonment of their families. The category of partially absent fathers includes fathers who live in a different household due to divorce or separation. It also includes fathers who were never married to and no longer live with their children's mother, but who maintain some contact with their children. In most respects, therefore, a study of father absence is also a consideration of female-headed families.

The most common reasons for father absence today are divorce, out-of-wedlock births, and incarceration. In the past, widowhood accounted for a greater proportion of father-absent households than today, but currently widows make up only 3.6 percent of female-headed families. The following table (Figure 2) traces the changing composition of mother-headed households in America since 1960.[7] Most evident is the growth of never-married mother households and the decline in widowed-mother households. Single-mother households with absent husbands are a declining, yet significant fraction of single-mother households. Some such families are formed when a father is incarcerated. In all likelihood, the reason for the single-mother family matters in terms of the associated need for assistance from others. Divorce, for example, may not cause the same level of economic distress as unmarried motherhood, because divorced fathers pay more child-support than never-married fathers.[8]

FIGURE 2. Single-Mother Families 1960-2006



[7] U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2006, Current Population Reports, Table CH-5, "Children Under 18 Years Living With Mother Only, by Marital Status of Mother." http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/ch5.csv.

[8] Meyer, D., and Judi Bartfield. "Patterns of Child Support Compliance in Wisconsin." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60 (May, 1998): 309-318.

The first question is how father absence, *per se*, might have any predictable costs. Beyond the extensive and difficult-to-measure emotional costs that events such as a divorce, a separation, or a series of impermanent relationships involving one or several different men may have for a child's development, we are focused solely on the financial costs. These arise largely as a result of a lack of income to sufficiently provide for a child and mother. The absence of a father often means a loss of his income. As we show later in this report, most scientists who have investigated the implications of family structure (especially single-mother households) have shown that the negative outcomes seen for children from father-absent homes can be attributed primarily, but not exclusively, to the lower average incomes enjoyed by such families.

The effect of father absence on family income is well-documented and strong. In 2003, 39.3 percent of single-mother families lived in poverty, but only 8.8 percent of father-present families lived in poverty.[9] In 2005, the median household incomes of married couples with children and single-mothers were $65,906 and $27,244, respectively. [10]

However, since some absent fathers are themselves poor, their presence would not lift all poor single-mother families out of poverty. A series of studies, using advanced statistical methods, have estimated how many families would leave poverty if more fathers were present with their children. Thomas and Sawhill (2002) estimated that 65.4 percent of single-mother families would leave poverty if marriage rates returned to 1971 levels. Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan (2002) estimated that 46.5 percent of unwed single mothers would leave poverty if they were married to the father of their children. Thus, while the exact number of single-mother families that would leave poverty is unknown, the best available studies suggest that a large percentage would no longer be living in poverty if the father of their children were present and contributing his income to the household budget.[11]

Higher levels of poverty are strongly related to greater use of federal means-tested programs by single-mother families. These include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, food stamps, school lunch, Head Start, and public housing. Also, the majority of the federal funding for child support enforcement goes towards enforcement of payments from absent fathers to custodial mothers.

Since single mothers are much more likely than married mothers to live in poverty, they rely on various government assistance programs much more than married parents, and use government means-tested benefit programs at a higher rate than two-parent families. The cost to the government of funding these programs is substantial. Some of the costs created by father absence, therefore, are related to provision of services through means-tested programs. One should keep in mind, however, that not all of this cost is a direct result of father absence, as single mothers differ from married mothers in many other ways. For example, single mothers are less educated, have lower-paying jobs, and come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, on average, than married

[9] 2004 Green Book, G-38.

[10] U.S. Census Bureau, 2006, *Current Population Reports*, P60-231; and Internet site http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032006/faminc/new01_000.htm.

[11] Adam Thomas and Isabel Sawhill, 2002, "For Richer or for Poorer: Marriage as an Antipoverty Strategy," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 21(4): 587–99; Wendy Sigle-Rushton and Sara McLanahan, 2002, "For Richer or Poorer?: Marriage as Poverty Alleviation in the United States." *Population* 57(3): 509-528.

mothers. These factors contribute to the high rate of poverty among single mothers independent of the absence of a father in the household.

We are not able to provide direct estimates for many costs generated by father-absence that do not appear until later in life (e.g., long-term costs of increased incarceration of children from such families, poorer health, etc.). Nor are we able to estimate the costs to states and localities. This report provides estimates of the direct costs (in expenditures) to the federal government for households in which there is no father. As such, it is a conservative low-bound estimate of total costs. To our knowledge, this is the first study to date to estimate the cost of father absence to U.S. taxpayers via federal expenditures. We rely on the existing published literature on the effects of father absence on poverty and other measurable outcomes.

The direct costs of father absence.

Fourteen major federal government programs provide assistance to households based on their income level. These programs are the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), child care subsidies for women in TANF, federal funding for child support enforcement, Supplemental Security Insurance for low-income disabled children, food stamps, subsidized school breakfasts and lunches, the Women's, Infants and Children nutrition program (WIC), Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Plan (SCHIP), Head Start, heating and energy assistance, public housing, and Section 8 rental subsidies.

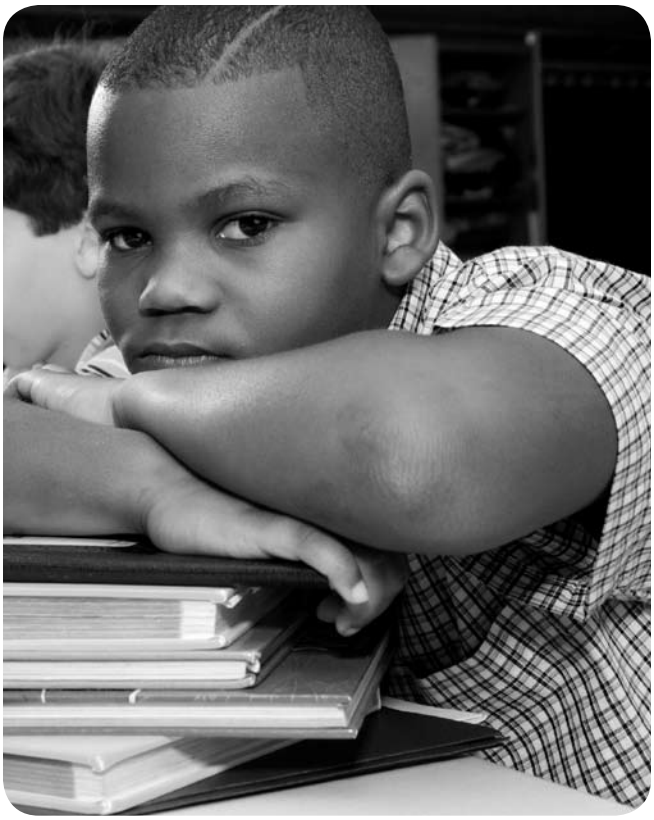
Children of single mothers pay their *own* costs for the absence of a father, as well. Such children do less well in school than children of two-parent families, have more emotional and behavioral problems, have worse physical health, are more likely to use drugs, tobacco, and alcohol, and are more likely to become delinquent; teenage girls in single-mother households are more likely to become pregnant, and teenage boys in single-mother households are more likely to become teen fathers. In the long run, adults who grew up in single-mother households attain lower levels of education, earn less, are more likely to be incarcerated, are more likely to have out-of-wedlock births, and are more likely to be divorced. These events are, themselves, also associated with higher demands on collective resources. Therefore, father absence has both immediate and long-term costs. We are only able to consider the immediate costs. By doing so, our estimates are considerably lower than would be obtained by adding the two.

The indirect costs of father absence.

While the absence of a father creates many problems for mothers and children, not all of these problems carry a financial cost to the government. Other problems do carry costs, but ones which are difficult or impossible to calculate purely in dollar terms. While the cost of father absence estimated in this paper is high, it is only a fraction of the total cost to the government, and an even smaller fraction of the total cost to society.

Some of what most would regard as negative outcomes of father absence are emotional, and are difficult to quantify in dollar terms. In the event of a divorce, for example, the stress that divorce and abandonment places on mothers, the feelings of loss that father absence places on children, the absence of emotional support from fathers, and the risks to the physical and emotional health of divorced fathers are examples of such costs. In the long run, children from single-mother families may feel anger or resentment towards their fathers, or may have weak adult relationships with their fathers. They are also more likely to have relationship difficulties as adults and get divorced. While a significant source of suffering, these negative effects do not carry a financial cost by themselves.

There are also consequences of father absence that have implied indirect consequences for government programs. The literature on this subject is extensive, and there is a debate over the degree to which government support of single-mother families would be affected even if the fathers were present.[12] Overall, however, children of fatherless families use mental health services at a higher rate than children of two-parent families, have more behavior problems at school, and are more likely to enter the juvenile justice system. They do less well at school, and schools may have to make additional efforts to educate them. Their higher use of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco, and their poorer physical and mental health, may cause them to use medical services more than children of two-parent families.



In the long run, the negative effects on child development may cause children from fatherless families to incur costs as adults. Children of single-mother families have lower educational attainment and lower wages, which translates into lower tax revenue and higher use of government services. Children of father-absent families are more likely to be incarcerated. Children of father-absent families are less likely to care for their fathers when they become elderly, and the government takes on some of the cost of caring for these men.

What this study measures and how.

Calculating the indirect costs of father absence is extremely complex, and requires many untested assumptions. Such an effort is beyond the scope of our study. Maynard (1996) and Hoffman (2006) calculated some of the indirect costs of teen pregnancy, but their studies involved a team of researchers who spent hundreds of hours doing original research.[13] Calculating these indirect costs will be left to future studies.

The most obvious effect of father absence is the effect it has on household income, and the corresponding increase in single-mother households' use of means-tested benefit programs. The best overall aggregate estimate available is that 20.1 percent of single mothers would leave poverty if marriage rates returned to what they were in 1970.[14]

[12] For a review of this debate, see Paul R. Amato,2005, "The Impact of Family Formation Change on the Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Well-Being of the Next Generation," *Future of Children* 15(2): 75-96.

[13] Rebecca Maynard, ed., 1996, Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy (Washington, DC: Urban Institute); and Saul Hoffman, 2006, *By the Numbers: the Public Cost of Teen Childbearing* (Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy).

[14] Thomas and Sawhill, 2002 (note 9).

In a comprehensive review of federal programs that have assisted children over the last three decades, a recent report by the Urban Institute lists over one hundred programs.[15] Some of these programs are no longer in existence. Others provide services to whole communities, not individual households, and a change in the poverty structure of single parent families would not affect the amounts these programs spend. There are fourteen programs for which eligibility is determined by the income level of the household. If more single mothers were married and had the father's income as part of the household income, the government would be able to spend less on these means-tested programs.

Few of these fourteen programs provide services only to single-mother households. Rather they assist families of various compositions, including those without children. The Appendix (page 14) lists sources and calculation methods for how much each program spends on single-mother households alone. Figure 3, on the following page, lists the name of each federal means-tested program that provides benefits to single-mother families, and the total cost to the government of providing those benefits to single-mother families.

The basic logic we followed was to first determine the total federal expenditures on a particular program. We then determined the fraction of program participants who are in fatherless homes (sometimes this was done for households, sometimes for individuals). This fraction (or multiplier) was then used to arrive at an estimate of the total program costs that go to fatherless households.

Children of fatherless families ...have more behavioral problems at school.

[15] Adam Carasso, Eugene Steuerle, and Gillian Reynolds, 2007, *Kids' Share 2007: How Children Fare in the Federal Budget* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute).

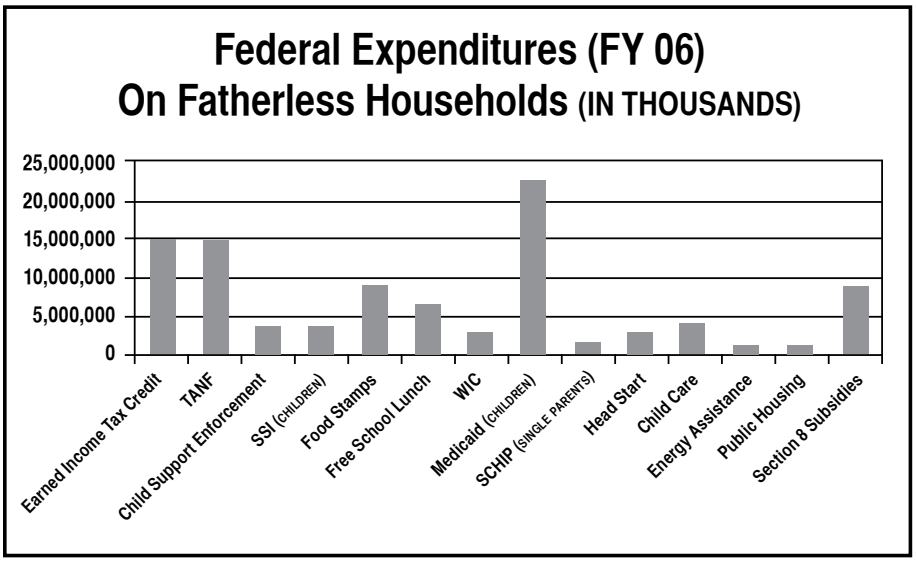
FIGURE 3.
Annual Spending by Public Programs for Fatherless Families in FY 2006

Total Expenditures (FY 2006) for Fatherless Households			
Program Type and Name	**Total Program Budget (IN MILLIONS)**	**Percent Father-Absent Families**	**Cost of Services to Father-Absent Families (MILLIONS)**
INCOME SUPPORT:			
Earned Income Tax Credit	$36,166	41.0	$14,828
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families	$17,140	87.5	$14,998
Child Support Enforcement	$4,268	89.5	$3,820
Supplemental Security Income (CHILDREN)	$6,948	56.3	$3,912
NUTRITION:			
Food Stamps	$34,745	26.8	$9,312
School Lunch	$9,665	69.2	$6,688
Women, Infants, and Children	$5,363	55.2	$2,960
HEALTH:			
Medicaid (CHILDREN)	$31,900	71.0	$22,649
SCHIP (SINGLE-PARENTS)	$4,539	35.0	$1,589
SOCIAL SERVICES:			
Head Start	$6,851	48.2	$3,302
Child Care	$4,981	87.5	$4,358
HOUSING:			
Energy Assistance	$3,160	37.0	$1,169
Public Housing	$3,564	37.0	$1,319
Section 8 Rental Subsidies	$24,037	37.0	$8,894
TOTAL:	**$193,327**		**$99,798**

SOURCES. All program expenditures are from the 2007 or 2008 Federal Budget of the United States (for FY 2006 expenditures). All multipliers (percentage female-headed households) are explained and cited in the Appendix (page 14).

Our tabulations indicate that the federal government spent **$99.8 billion** in fiscal year 2006 for direct services for fatherless households. The largest areas of expenses were Medicaid ($22.6 billion), TANF ($15.0 billion), and EITC ($14.9 billion). Health care for father-absent households was $24.2 billion, about 4.7 percent of the $516 billion the federal government spent in FY 2006 on Medicare, Medicaid, and SCHIP (see Figure 4 below). The total spent on federal means-tested benefits programs for single-mother households (all programs except SCHIP, Medicaid, child support enforcement, and SSI) amounted to $50.0 billion, about one-fifth of the $250 billion the federal government spent on safety net programs in FY 2006. The $99.8 billion spent directly on assistance to single-mother households amounted to nearly 4 percent of the total FY 2006 federal budget of $2.7 trillion.[16]

FIGURE 4. Federal Expenditures (FY 06) on Fatherless Households



Developmental outcomes for children and long-term costs.

The negative outcomes of children from single parent families follow them into adulthood. Government programs are likely to be involved at varying states of these young adults' lives. We cannot estimate the prevalence of such involvement, of course. However, we outline the main themes that are more likely to characterize the development of young adults who lived in fatherless homes than those who lived with two biological parents. These are important to recognize because a more comprehensive accounting of the costs of fatherlessness would need to factor these into the findings.

Children of fatherless families are less likely to attend college, are more likely to have children out of wedlock, and are less likely to marry; those who do marry are more likely to divorce. While these negative outcomes have primarily emotional and social costs, many long-term outcomes also have a financial cost. Children from single-mother households earn less as adults than children from two-parent families. Children from single-mother households are more likely to be poor as adults and use government services. They are more likely to be incarcerated, and their incarceration poses a steep cost to federal and state governments.

While the immediate, short-term costs of father absence are high, the long-term costs are likely to be much higher. However, the current state of knowledge of these costs is not adequate to estimate these costs, even as an approximation. Future researchers may wish to approach this subject. Maynard (1996) and Hoffman (2006) have used sophisticated methods to estimate the long-term public costs of teen pregnancy, and their methods form a good model for researchers who wish to estimate the long-term public costs of father absence.[17]

[16] Matt Fiedler, 2007, "Where Do Our Tax Dollars Go?" Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, accessed December 2007 from http://www.cbpp.org/4-10-07tax2.htm.1

[17] See note 26.

Reduced income:
The research on whether children raised in fatherless households go on to earn less than others has not reached consensus. Children from single-parent families tend to earn less than children from intact families, and their reduced income would make them higher users of government services. However, there is much disagreement over the causes and extent of these differences. Some researchers found no consistent and statistically significant differences in adult earnings once background factors are accounted for.[18] Others have found differences for some gender and racial groups but not others.[19] While the cost to government in lost tax revenue through reduced earnings is potentially large, the research to date is too incomplete and inconsistent to draw any conclusions about the existence or size of this cost.

Divorce and single parenthood:
Children from divorced families are more likely to be divorced themselves.[21] Adult daughters of divorced families are more likely to have an out-of-wedlock birth.[22]

Mental health and emotional well-being:
Children of divorced families are more likely to suffer from mental health and emotional problems in adulthood.[23]

Less likely to care for parents in old age:
Children of divorced parents are less likely to have close relationships as adults with their fathers,[24] are less likely to give or receive financial assistance to and from their fathers,[25] and are less willing to let a sick or aging father live with them.[26]

Adult criminal activity and incarceration:
Adult children of single-mother families are more likely to be incarcerated, even when a wide range of other factors of their families of origin and social status are statistically controlled.[20]

Children from divorced families are more likely to be divorced themselves.

[18] Grogger and Ronan 1995 (note 17); Kevin Lang and Jay L. Zagorsky, 2001, "Does Growing Up With A Parent Absent Really Hurt?" *Journal of Human Resources* 36(2): 253-273.

[19] Paul R. Amato and Bruce Keith, 1991, "Separation from a Parent during Childhood and Adult Socioeconomic Attainment," *Social Forces* 70: 187–206; Mary Ann Powell and Toby L. Parcel, 1999, "Effects of Family Structure on the Earnings Attainment Process: Differences by Gender," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 59: 419-433.

[20] Cynthia C. Harper and Sara S. McLanahan, 2004, "Father Absence and Youth Incarceration," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 14(3): 369-397.

[21] Paul R. Amato, 1996, "Explaining the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58: 628-640; Amato and Booth, 1997 (note 11); Larry L. Bumpass, Theresa C. Martin, and James A. Sweet, 1991, "The Impact of Family Background and Early Marital Factors on Marital Disruption," *Journal of Family Issues* 12: 22–42; Jay D. Teachman, 2002, "Childhood Living Arrangements and the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64: 717–29; J. S. Tucker, H. S. Friedman, J. E. Schwartz, M. H. Criqui, C. Tomlinson-Keasey, D. L. Wingard, and L. R. Martin, 1997, "Parental Divorce: Effects on Individual Behavior and Longevity," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 73: 381-191; Nicholas H. Wolfinger, 2000, "Beyond the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce: Do People Replicate the Patterns of Marital Instability They Grew Up With?" *Journal of Family Issues* 20: 1061-1086.

[22] Lawrence Wu, 1996, "Effects of Family Instability, Income, and Income Instability on the Risk of a Premarital Birth." *American Sociological Review* 61: 386-406.

[23] Paul R. Amato and Juliana M. Sobolewski, 2001, "The Effects of Divorce and Marital Discord on Adult Children's Psychological Well-Being," *American Sociological Review* 66: 900–21.

[24] Amato and Sobolewski, 2001 (note 35).

[25] Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., Saul D. Hoffman, and Laura Shrestha, 1995, "The Effect of Divorce on Intergenerational Transfers: New Evidence," *Demography* 32(3): 319-333.

[26] Frances K. Goldscheider and Leora Lawton, 1998. "Family Experiences and the Erosion of Support for Intergenerational Coresidence," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60: 623-632.

conclusion

This study found that U.S. taxpayers pay $99.8 billion each year in federal services to fatherless households. While this is a large amount of money, it represents only a fraction of the total cost of father absence to society. Given the size of this cost, policy efforts to promote father involvement, marital stability, and father payment of child support appear to be justified. While *specific* policy recommendations or policy interventions are beyond the scope of this study, it is hoped that by calling attention to the costs of father absence, this study will encourage further research, debate, and recommendations on this critical public issue.

While single-mother families receive a much larger amount of federal benefits than two-parent families, it is not certain how much of this difference can be attributed to father absence. Single mothers differ from married mothers in many respects, which further increase their reliance on federal means-tested benefits programs. On average, single mothers are less educated than married mothers, are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, live in worse neighborhoods, have fewer job skills, are in worse physical and mental health, are more likely to be unemployed, and are more likely to be members of a minority group. All of these differences are associated with poverty, and explain the use of benefits programs independent of any effect of father absence.

Accordingly, while it is not possible to estimate the exact amount of anti-poverty spending that would be saved if fathers remained with their families, available data suggest that it may be substantial. The best available estimates suggest that 65.4 percent of single-mother families would leave poverty if marriage rates returned to 1971 levels, and that 46.5 percent of unwed mothers would leave poverty if they married the fathers of their children. While a reduction of this size in the number of single-mother families would be unrealistic, the data suggest that even a small reduction in the number of father-absent families would bring a large savings in federal anti-poverty spending.

Fatherlessness is a complex phenomenon produced by many circumstances and situations. Some are related to choices people make about fertility, marriage, and cohabitation. But others are the result of unexpected events, illnesses, or incarceration. Each produces a household structure lacking a father. But in all likelihood, the dynamics of these differing types of households vary in important ways. For some, fatherlessness is a relatively temporary arrangement, while for others a lifestyle. Some non-resident fathers are active in the lives of their children, while others are either unable or unwilling to be involved in their children's lives. In fact, 30 percent of children living apart from their fathers have no contact with their father at all, and an additional 31 percent have in-person, phone, or letter contact with their fathers less than once per month.[27] Additionally, not all fatherless households include mothers who want to live with the other parent (and vice-versa).

Given the persistence of this household structure, we must now turn our attention to rigorous research designed to uncover the reasons for the varying types of fatherless families. It is very likely that fatherlessness has different meanings and implications for those of differing social classes. For example, we do not yet understand why some immigrant groups typically arrive in intact families only to see high rates of fatherlessness in subsequent generations. The wide racial, ethnic, and social class differences observed in fatherlessness should be the basis of questions for the next generation of research on this topic.

[27] Stewart, Susan D. "Nonresident Parenting and Adolescent Adjustment: The Quality of Nonresident Father-Child Interaction." *Journal of Family Issues*, 24 (March 2003): 217-244.

appendix: cost calculations

1. State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP):

35 percent of the expenditures on SCHIP go to single-parent households (not necessarily single-mother) households. Without evidence to pro-rate this statistic, we used the 35.0 percent unchanged for our estimates.

Source: "Congressionally mandated evaluation of the State Children's Health Insurance Program." Final Report to Congress, October 26, 2005. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Secretary, Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

2. Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC):

We relied on research by Bruce D. Meyer, 2007, "Welfare, The Earned Income Tax Credit, and the Labor Supply of Single Mothers, its Effects, and Possible Reforms." Paper presented at the "From Welfare to Work" conference organized by the Economic Council of Sweden, May 7, 2007. His tabulations showed that 41 percent of EITC recipients live in fatherless households.

3. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF):

TANF provides cash assistance to families living below the poverty line. It has strict work requirements and a time limit. It replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) after the 1996 welfare reform legislation. The most recent TANF report with data on female-headed household is the Fifth Annual Report, which uses FY 2001 data. It estimates that 87.5 percent of TANF recipients are non-widowed single mothers.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance. 2004. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families: Fifth Annual Report to Congress. Accessed on-line, December 2007, at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/annualreport5/.

4. Supplemental Security Income (SSI):

SSI provides cash assistance to low-income elderly, blind, and disabled persons. Only a minority of SSI recipients are children, but they account for $6,832 million. The most recently available source for the percentage of child SSI recipients living in single-mother families is Rupp et al. (2005-2006), based on data from a large 2001-2002 survey of SSI recipients. They estimate that 56.3 percent of SSI children live in female-headed households. See also, 2007 Annual Report of the SSI Program, Table IV.C2.

Sources: Rupp, Kalman, Paul S. Davies, Chad Newcomb, Howard Iams, Carrie Becker, Shanti Mulpuru, Stephen Ressler, Kathleen Romig, and Baylor Miller. 2005/2006. "A Profile of Children with Disabilities Receiving SSI Benefits: Highlights from the National Survey of SSI Children and Families." Social Security Bulletin *66(2): 21-36.*

5. Food Stamps:

Of the 26.7 million people, living in 11.7 million households, who received food stamps in FY 2006, 3,526,000 were headed by a single female. The average monthly benefit was $297 for single-mother households, and the average period that single-mother households received benefits was 8.9 months. From this, one can calculate the total yearly benefit for single-mother households at 3,526,000 * 297 * 8.9 = 9,320,275,800, or $9.3 billion. This is about one quarter of the total food stamp budget.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Analysis, Nutrition, and Evaluation. Characteristics of Food Stamp Households: Fiscal Year 2006*, FSP-07-CHAR, by Kari Wolkowitz. Project Officer, Jenny Genser. Alexandria, Virginia: 2007.*

6. Child Nutrition (school lunch):

Any child at a participating school may purchase a meal through the National School Lunch, School Breakfast, and Special Milk programs. Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals, for which students can be charged no more than 40 cents. (For the period July 1, 2007, through June 30, 2008, 130 percent of the poverty level is $26,845 for a family of four; 185 percent is $38,203.) According to the USDA, 69.2 percent of the children who participate in the free school lunch program live in single-mother households.

Source: Constance Newman and Katherine Rawlston, 2007, "Profiles of Participants in the National School Lunch Program: Data From Two National Surveys." United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, Economic Bulletin #17. An electronic report available at www.ers.usda.gov, downloaded December 2007.

7. WIC:

The Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides food, health care referrals, and nutrition education to pregnant women and mothers of children up to five years of age. Services are provided to women in households at or below 185 percent of poverty level. The most recent data available show that 55.2 percent of WIC recipients live in father-absent households.

Source: Bureau of the Census, 1995, "Statistical Brief: Mothers who Receive WIC Benefits: Fertility and Socioeconomic Characteristics." Accessed December 2007 at www.census.gov/apsd/www/statbrief/sb95_29.pdf. See also Nancy R. Burstein, Mary Kay Fox, Jordan B. Hiller, Robert Kornfeld, Ken Lam, Cristofer Price, and David T. Rodda, 2000, WIC General Analysis Project: Profile of WIC Children. *Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture. Accessed 12/07 at www.fns.usda.gov/oane.*

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8. Medicaid:

SOURCE: Table 4A: Mothers 15 to 44 Years by Medicaid Participation Status, Age, and Family Characteristics: 2001, www.census.gov/population/socdemo/fertility/p70-102/Table4A.xls. Internet release date: November 9, 2005

9. Head Start:

90 percent of Head Start recipients are poor; the other 10 percent are disabled. The most recent survey of family composition of Head Start households (2003 data) found that 53.6 percent of Head Start households have a father absent. This was very similar to the 52.2 percent of families with a father absent in the 2000 data. So 53.6 percent of 90 percent of the head start budget is for children in poor single-mother families, or 48.2 percent of the total.

Source: Zill, Nicholas, Alberto Sorongon, Kwang Kim, and Cheryl Clark. 2006. Faces 2003 Research Brief: Children's Outcomes and Program Quality in Head Start. *Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Accessed 12/07 at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/faces/reports/research_2003/research_2003.pdf.*

Nearly 4 out of 10 of the households using public housing…are female-headed households with children.

10. Child Care and Development Block Grant, Child Care Entitlement to States:

These programs provide funding for child care programs for adults enrolled in TANF to support their efforts to find employment. Eligibility for these programs is directly related to enrollment in TANF, so we use the TANF estimate of 87.5 percent of recipients being female heads of household.

11. Public Housing and Section 8 Rental Assistance:

Public housing refers to units owned by the government, which are rented to low-income families at a very low rate, usually a percentage of the family's income. The Section 8 program provides low-income individuals and families with rental vouchers, and also pays for a percentage of a family's rent in privately owned rental units designated for low-income families. Thirty-seven percent of the households using public housing and Section 8 rental assistance are female-headed households with children.

Source: Public and Indian Housing Resident Characteristics Report, November 2007. At http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/systems/pic/50058/rcr/, accessed 12/07.

12. Low-Income Heat and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP):

There are no data on how many recipients are female-headed households, so we use the same 37.0 percent estimate from the public and section 8 housing.









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