

Children Receiving Child Support

DEFINITION

Children receiving child support is the percentage of non-custodial parents in the Rhode Island Child Support Enforcement System who pay child support on time and in full. The percentage does not include cases in which paternity has not been established or cases where the non-custodial parent lacks a court order because he/she cannot be located. Court orders for child support require establishment of paternity first.

SIGNIFICANCE

The receipt of child support payments can significantly improve the economic status of a child growing up in a family with a non-resident parent. Child support is an essential source of financial support for low-income families, often making up a significant portion of their income.¹ Nationally, approximately 59% of custodial parents had child support agreements in 2002.²

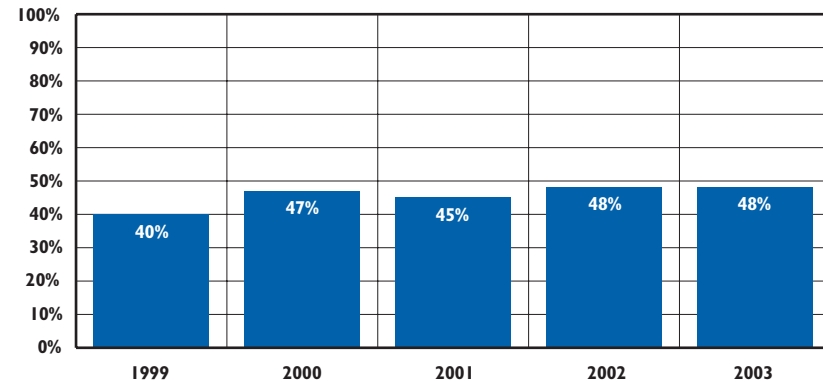
The goal of the child support system is to collect money from non-custodial parents so that their children can have adequate financial security as they grow up.³ To collect child support on behalf of a child, the non-custodial parent must be identified, located and provided with due process, paternity must be established, and a support order must be entered.⁴

The failure of a non-custodial parent to pay child support has significant economic consequences for the custodial parent and for the child. Nationally, children who live with custodial parents who do not receive child support payments are more than one and a half times as likely to live in poverty as children whose families receive child support payments in full.⁵ In the U.S., low-income mothers, Black or Hispanic mothers, never-married mothers, and mothers with less than a college education are least likely to receive the child support due under court order.⁶

Even when there is a child support order in place, child support payments tend to be low and unreliable. Low-income non-custodial parents often experience low wages and high rate of joblessness, making it difficult to fulfill their child support obligations.⁷ Non-custodial parents often encounter the same barriers to employment that many low-income parents face, including lack of education and limited work experience.⁸ Research shows that providing education and job training that increases non-custodial parents' ability to pay child support also increases parental contact with their children.⁹



Non-custodial Parents with Court Orders Who Pay Child Support On Time and In Full, Rhode Island 1999 – 2003



Source: Rhode Island Department of Administration, Division of Taxation – Child Support Enforcement, 1999 - 2003.

- ◆ In 2003 in Rhode Island, 48% of the non-custodial parents under court order paid child support on time and in full, compared to 40% in 1999.¹⁰
- ◆ As of December 2003, there were 94,436 Rhode Island children in the State's Child Support Enforcement System.¹¹ Of these, 21,261 (23%) had not yet had paternity established and therefore were not yet eligible for a child support award.¹²
- ◆ As of December 31, 2003, the amount of past due court-ordered child support in Rhode Island totaled \$167 million.¹³
- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2000, 54,648 children lived in a household headed by a single mother.¹⁴ Of the Rhode Island families headed by a single female, 32% received child support or alimony payments in 2000, compared to 36% nationally.¹⁵
- ◆ Reasons that parents do not have legal court orders in place for child support include not feeling the need to make agreements legal, knowing that the other parent could not afford to pay, and not wanting to have contact with the other parent.¹⁶



Child Support and the Family Independence Program

- ◆ Research suggests that welfare recipients receiving child support are more likely to leave welfare for work, remain off welfare and have income above the federal poverty line.¹⁷
- ◆ In Rhode Island as of December 2003, 14,727 (56%) of the 26,188 children enrolled in the Family Independence Program were in the Child Support Enforcement System and had paternity established.^{18,19}
- ◆ In 2003, the average child support obligation to children enrolled in FIP was \$243 per month, as compared to an average child support obligation of \$311 per month for non-FIP families.²⁰
- ◆ Research suggests that child support “pass-through programs” encourage paternity establishment, higher payments by low-income parents and cooperation by TANF recipients.^{21,22} In Rhode Island, the first \$50 of child support paid on time each month on behalf of a child receiving FIP cash assistance goes to the custodial parent caring for the child and the remainder goes to the state. An average of 3,100 Rhode Island families enrolled in FIP each month received the \$50 child support pass-through in 2003.²³



Medical Child Support

- ◆ Rhode Island General law, Title 15 Chapter 29, requires that any child support order issued by the family court require any parent owing a duty of support to a child to obtain health insurance coverage for the child when insurance is available at either parent’s place of employment at reasonable cost.²⁴
- ◆ Rhode Island defines reasonable cost for health coverage as 5% of the gross monthly income of the individual providing the coverage.²⁵ If the cost of health coverage is 5% or lower, the non-custodial parent is ordered to obtain and/or maintain the coverage.
- ◆ If the cost of providing coverage exceeds 5% of the non-custodial parent’s gross income, the court will order the non-custodial parent to pay 5% of his/her gross income as a cash medical order, in addition to the weekly child support order. If the child receives RIte Care or RIte Share, the state will retain the medical order to defray the cost of coverage. If the custodial parent pays for private insurance, the weekly cash medical order is sent to the custodial parent.²⁶

References for Indicator

^{1,8,9,17,21} Legler, Paul. (January 2003). *Low-Income Fathers and Child Support: Starting Off on the Right Track*. Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation

^{2,5,6,16} *Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2001*. (October 2003). Washington DC: US Census Bureau.

^{3,4} *Fact Sheets: Child Support Enforcement Program*. (July 2002). Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families.

⁷ Miller, C. and V. Knox. (2001). *The Challenge of Helping Low-Income Fathers Support Their Children*. New York, NY: The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

^{10,11,12,13,18,19,23} Rhode Island Department of Administration, Division of Taxation – Child Support Enforcement, December 1999-2003.

¹⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000.

¹⁵ *KIDS Count Data Book: State Profiles of Child Well-Being 2003*. (2003). Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

²⁰ Rhode Island Department of Human Services InRhodes Database, December 2003.

²² *Developing Innovative Child Support Demonstrations for Non-Custodial Parents*. (January 1998). Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

^{24,26} Rhode Island Law, Title 15, Chapter 29, Section 1, 15-5-16.2 (2).

²⁵ Rhode Island Family Court, Administrative Order. See Methodology, pg 133.