

# Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2011

## Current Population Reports

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### INTRODUCTION

This report focuses on the child support income that custodial parents reported receiving from noncustodial parents living elsewhere, and other types of support, such as health insurance and noncash assistance.<sup>1</sup> The most recent data in this report are from the Child Support Supplement (CSS) to the April 2012 Current Population Survey (CPS). The report provides demographic information about custodial parents as of 2012, as well as about child support and other income or program data for the 2011 calendar year.<sup>2</sup> It also shows trends over the past 18 years by comparing data collected from the 1994 April CPS and subsequent biennial surveys. (See the text box “Limitations of the Data” for additional survey information.) The estimates from the April 2012 CPS-CSS use new population controls based on the results from the 2010 Census.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- An estimated 14.4 million parents lived with 23.4 million children under 21 years of age while the other parent(s) lived somewhere else.
- About 18.3 percent of custodial parents were fathers.

<sup>1</sup> The custodial parent is the parent with whom the child(ren) lived during the survey interview when their other parent(s) lived outside the household. There may also be equal joint- or split-custody arrangements of children between parents, sometimes also known as shared or coparenting. In these types of arrangements, child support may or may not be exchanged between parents.

<sup>2</sup> The population represented (the population universe) is the civilian noninstitutionalized population living in the United States, 15 years of age or older, who have their own children under 21 years old living with them while the other parent lives outside the household.

- More than one-quarter (28.1 percent) of all children under 21 years of age in families lived with only one of their parents while the other parent lived elsewhere. About half (50.6 percent) of all Black children lived in custodial-parent families.
- Most custodial parents had one child (56.8 percent).
- The proportion of custodial mothers with incomes below poverty (31.8 percent) was about twice as high as that for custodial fathers (16.2 percent).
- About half (48.9 percent) of all custodial parents had either legal or informal child support agreements, and custodial mothers were more likely to have agreements (53.4 percent) than custodial fathers (28.8 percent).
- About three-quarters (74.1 percent) of custodial parents who were due child support in 2011 received either full or partial payments, including 43.4 percent who received full payments.
- Over half (56.3 percent) of custodial parents with joint-custody arrangements received full child support payments, and 30.7 percent received full payments when there was no contact between the child and the child's noncustodial parent(s).
- About 62.3 percent of the \$37.9 billion in child support due in 2011 was reported as received, averaging \$3,770 per year per custodial parent who was due support.

## Limitations of the Data

Since child support can be ordered by a court in some states until a child is 21 years old or completes college, this report covers parents' own children under 21, rather than applying the Census Bureau's usual definition of children as those under 18 years of age. Some children living with neither biological parent, such as those living with grandparents or foster parents, may also be eligible to receive child support but are not part of the universe in the CPS child support supplement.

Substantial changes made to the April CPS supplement in 1994 do not allow comparisons between these data and CPS data collected before that year. These changes included refining the screening of potential respondents, restructuring the questionnaire to accommodate computerizing the survey, revising terminology that refers to types of child support agreements or awards, increasing the detail in questions about the amount of child support due, including overdue child support (back support), and adding new questions on pass-through payments (child support collected for public assistance recipients by a state enforcement office, some of which passes through to recipients). The amount of child support payments received by recipients of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), formerly known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), is likely underreported because some states retain some or all child support collected on behalf of children of custodial parents. Some households in the April CPS supplement sample also participated in the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) to the 2012 CPS, where additional information, such as income and health insurance coverage in the preceding year, was also collected and matched to the respondent.

Additional information and detailed tables are available via the Internet at the child support page on the Census Bureau's Web site at [www.census.gov/people/childsupport/](http://www.census.gov/people/childsupport/).

- The average child support payment accounted for two-thirds (66.7 percent) of the mean annual personal income for custodial parents below poverty who received full child support.
- Over half (56.7 percent) of custodial parents received some type of noncash support from noncustodial parents on behalf of their children.

## CUSTODIAL PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

In the spring of 2012, an estimated 14.4 million parents (who are referred to as custodial parents in this report) lived with 23.4 million children under 21 years of age while the other parent lived

somewhere else (Table 1).<sup>3</sup> The 23.4 million children living with their custodial parent represented over one-quarter (28.1 percent) of all 83.4 million children under 21 years old living in families.<sup>4</sup> The proportion of Black children in families who lived with their custodial parent while their other parent(s) lived outside their household (50.6 percent) was more than twice as large as the proportion of White

children (24.0 percent).<sup>5</sup> Among children of other races—including American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, or Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander—17.2 percent lived in custodial-parent families. About 30.3 percent of Hispanic children, who may be of any race, lived with their custodial parent.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The estimates in this report (which may be shown in text, figures, and tables) are based on responses from a sample of the population and may differ from actual values because of sampling variability or other factors. As a result, apparent differences between the estimates for two or more groups may not be statistically significant. All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level unless otherwise noted.

<sup>4</sup> A family is a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family. Beginning with the 1980 Current Population Survey, unrelated subfamilies (referred to in the past as secondary families) are no longer included in the count of families, nor are the members of unrelated subfamilies included in the count of family members.

<sup>5</sup> Federal surveys now give respondents the option of reporting more than one race. Therefore, two basic ways of defining a race group are possible. A group, such as Black, may be defined as those who reported Black and no other race (the race-alone or single-race concept) or as those who reported Black regardless of whether they also reported another race (the race-alone-or-in-combination concept). The body of this report (text, figures, and tables) shows data for people who reported they were the single race White, the single race White and not Hispanic or Latino, the single race Black, and the single race Other that includes American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. Use of the single-race populations does not imply that it is the preferred method of presenting or analyzing data. The U.S. Census Bureau uses a variety of approaches. See Detailed Table 12 at [www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html](http://www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html) for a listing of custodial parents by racial group.

<sup>6</sup> See Detailed Table 11 at [www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html](http://www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html).

Table 1. **Comparison of Custodial Parent Population and Those With Child Support Awarded, Due, and Received: 1993–2011**  
 (Numbers in thousands as of spring of the following year: Parents living with own children under 21 years of age whose other parent is not living in the home. Amounts in 2011 dollars. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf))

Item	1993		1995		1997		1999		2001		2003		2005		2007		2009		2011		
	Number	Standard error	Number	Standard error	Number	Standard error	Number	Standard error	Number	Standard error	Number	Standard error	Number	Standard error	Number	Standard error	Number	Standard error	Number	Standard error	
<b>All Custodial Parents</b>																					
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,690</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>13,715</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>13,949</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>13,529</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>13,383</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>13,951</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>13,605</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>13,743</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>13,672</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>14,440</b>	<b>293</b>	
Awarded child support	7,800	219	7,967	232	7,876	231	7,945	232	7,916	219	8,376	225	7,802	218	7,428	213	6,914	205	7,057	208	
Percent	57.0	1.2	58.1	1.2	56.5	1.2	58.7	1.2	59.1	1.2	60.0	1.2	57.3	1.2	54.0	1.2	50.6	1.1	48.9	1.1	
Due child support	6,688	204	6,958	217	7,018	218	6,791	215	6,924	205	7,256	210	6,809	204	6,375	197	5,897	190	6,262	196	
Average child support due (in dollars)	5,489	130	5,960	155	5,796	127	6,418	184	6,408	299	6,242	114	6,433	141	5,803	124	6,244	164	6,052	136	
Average child support received (in dollars)	3,583	132	3,927	133	3,862	120	3,767	111	4,014	161	4,279	165	4,197	122	3,638	108	3,811	226	3,771	122	
Received any child support	5,070	178	5,269	190	5,282	190	5,005	185	5,119	177	5,548	184	5,259	180	4,864	173	4,174	160	4,641	169	
Percent	75.8	1.2	75.7	1.2	75.3	1.2	73.7	1.2	73.9	1.2	76.5	1.2	77.2	1.2	76.3	1.2	70.8	1.2	74.1	1.2	
Received full amount of child support	2,466	125	2,945	142	3,240	149	3,066	145	3,093	138	3,290	143	3,192	140	2,986	136	2,428	123	2,716	130	
Percent	36.9	0.9	42.3	1.0	46.2	1.1	45.1	1.1	44.7	1.1	45.3	1.1	46.9	1.1	46.8	1.1	41.2	1.0	43.4	1.0	
Not awarded child support	5,889	192	5,747	198	6,074	203	5,584	195	5,466	183	5,576	185	5,803	189	6,315	197	6,759	203	7,383	212	
<b>Custodial Mothers</b>																					
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,505</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>11,607</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>11,872</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>11,499</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>11,291</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>11,587</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>11,406</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>11,356</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>11,237</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>11,797</b>	<b>266</b>	
Awarded child support	6,878	207	7,123	220	7,080	219	7,150	220	7,110	208	7,436	213	7,002	207	6,463	199	6,174	197	6,297	196	
Percent	59.8	1.2	61.4	1.2	59.6	1.2	62.2	1.2	63.0	1.2	64.2	1.2	61.4	1.2	56.9	1.2	54.9	1.2	53.4	1.2	
Due child support	5,913	192	6,224	206	6,342	208	6,133	204	6,212	195	6,516	199	6,131	194	5,551	184	5,278	180	5,588	185	
Average child support due (in dollars)	5,561	144	6,061	170	5,822	134	6,482	196	7,356	330	6,330	122	6,521	150	5,821	133	6,288	173	6,115	145	
Average child support received (in dollars)	3,648	146	3,976	139	3,886	129	3,873	119	4,271	169	4,377	180	4,217	128	3,639	115	3,882	249	3,862	131	
Received any child support	4,501	168	4,742	180	4,802	181	4,578	177	4,639	169	5,018	176	4,754	171	4,253	162	3,723	152	4,182	161	
Percent	76.1	1.2	76.2	1.2	75.7	1.2	74.6	1.2	74.7	1.2	77.0	1.2	77.5	1.2	76.6	1.2	70.5	1.2	74.8	1.2	
Received full amount of child support	2,178	118	2,674	136	2,945	142	2,818	139	2,815	132	2,948	135	2,900	134	2,615	127	2,217	117	2,438	123	
Percent	36.8	0.9	43.0	1.0	46.4	1.1	45.9	1.1	45.3	1.1	45.2	1.1	47.3	1.1	47.1	1.1	42.0	1.0	43.6	1.0	
Not awarded child support	4,627	170	4,484	175	4,792	181	4,349	172	4,181	160	4,151	160	4,404	165	4,893	173	5,063	176	5,499	184	
<b>Custodial Fathers</b>																					
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,184</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>2,108</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>2,077</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>2,030</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>2,092</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>2,364</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>2,199</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>2,387</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>2,435</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>2,643</b>	<b>128</b>	
Awarded child support	922	77	844	76	796	74	795	74	807	71	940	77	800	71	965	78	740	68	760	69	
Percent	42.2	1.0	40.0	1.0	38.3	1.0	39.2	1.0	38.6	1.0	39.8	1.0	36.4	0.9	40.4	1.0	30.4	0.8	28.8	0.8	
Due child support	775	70	733	71	676	68	658	68	712	67	740	68	678	65	825	72	619	62	674	65	
Average child support due (in dollars)	4,943	268	5,095	290	5,539	394	5,824	508	5,362	321	5,467	273	5,639	397	5,683	312	5,873	498	5,527	367	
Average child support received (in dollars)	3,098	285	3,524	469	3,651	337	2,783	269	3,660	518	3,420	342	4,022	419	3,626	320	3,208	433	3,015	308	
Received any child support	569	60	527	60	479	58	427	54	480	55	530	58	505	56	611	62	451	53	459	53	
Percent	73.4	1.2	71.9	1.2	70.9	1.2	64.9	1.2	67.4	1.2	71.6	1.2	74.5	1.2	74.1	1.2	72.9	1.2	68.1	1.2	
Received full amount of child support	288	43	270	43	295	45	248	42	278	42	342	46	292	43	371	48	211	36	279	42	
Percent	37.2	0.9	36.8	0.9	43.6	1.0	37.7	0.9	39.0	1.0	46.2	1.1	43.1	1.0	45.0	1.1	34.1	0.9	41.4	1.0	
Not awarded child support	1,262	90	1,263	93	1,281	94	1,235	92	1,285	89	1,422	160	1,399	93	1,422	94	1,695	103	1,883	108	

Note: All child support income amounts are adjusted to reflect 2011 dollars using the CPS-U-RS. For more information on the CPI, go to [www.bls.gov/cpi/cpiirsdc.htm](http://www.bls.gov/cpi/cpiirsdc.htm). Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1994 to 2012.

## DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The majority of custodial parents (81.7 percent) were mothers, and 18.3 percent were fathers, proportions that were not statistically different from those in 1994.<sup>7</sup>

The distribution of custodial parents by marital status differed between mothers and fathers. About 43.5 percent of custodial mothers were currently divorced or separated and 37.1 percent had never been married. The remaining mothers consisted of 18.3 percent who were currently married (50.6 percent of whom were divorced but remarried) and 1.1 percent who were widowed.<sup>8</sup> Custodial fathers were more likely than custodial mothers to be divorced or separated (55.1 percent) and less likely to have never married (25.7 percent).

The age of custodial mothers has increased over the past 18 years. In 1994, one-quarter (25.4 percent) were 40 years or older. By 2012, the proportion had grown to over one-third (39.1 percent). The proportion of custodial mothers under 30 years of age decreased from 30.9 percent in 1994 to 24.0 percent by 2012.<sup>9</sup>

The educational level of custodial mothers has also increased during this period. In 1994, 22.2 percent of custodial mothers had less than

<sup>7</sup> See Detailed Table 4 and tables for all years at <[www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html](http://www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html)>.

<sup>8</sup> The current marital status of widowed includes custodial parents who have children from a previous marriage that ended in divorce or from a previous nonmarried relationship and their custodial children are not from their deceased spouse.

<sup>9</sup> The proportion of custodial mothers who were 40 years or older in 1994 (25.4 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion of custodial mothers who were under 30 years of age in 2012 (24.0 percent).

a high school education, and 17.1 percent had at least an associate's degree. By 2012, the proportion of custodial mothers who had not graduated from high school decreased to 15.6 percent, and the proportion with at least an associate's degree increased to 30.4 percent.<sup>10</sup>

Under half (47.8 percent) of custodial mothers were non-Hispanic White, more than one-quarter were Black (27.5 percent), and 21.4 percent were Hispanic. Custodial fathers were more likely than custodial mothers to be non-Hispanic White (60.6 percent), less likely to be Black (16.3 percent), and the proportion who were Hispanic (18.8 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion of custodial mothers who were Hispanic.<sup>11</sup>

While the majority of custodial parents had one child (56.8 percent), custodial mothers were more likely than custodial fathers to have two or more children living with them in 2012 (45.3 percent and 33.7 percent, respectively).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The proportion of custodial mothers with at least an associate's degree in 1994 (17.1 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion of custodial mothers with less than a high school education in 2012 (15.6 percent).

<sup>11</sup> The proportion of custodial mothers who were Hispanic (21.4 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion of custodial fathers who were Black (16.3 percent), both of which were not statistically different from the proportion of custodial fathers who were Hispanic (18.8 percent). Hispanics may be any race and in this report data for Hispanics overlap slightly with data for the Black population. Based on the 2012 CPS April supplement, 7.2 percent of Black custodial parents were Hispanic. Data for the separate American Indian and Alaska Native populations and the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander population are not shown in this report because of their small sample size.

<sup>12</sup> See Detailed Table 4 at <[www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html](http://www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html)>.

## POVERTY

The poverty level for custodial-parent families declined between 1993 (33.3 percent) and 2001 (23.4 percent) (Figure 1). The 2011 poverty rate of all custodial-parent families (28.9 percent) was higher than 2001 and about twice that of the total population (15.0 percent).<sup>13</sup>

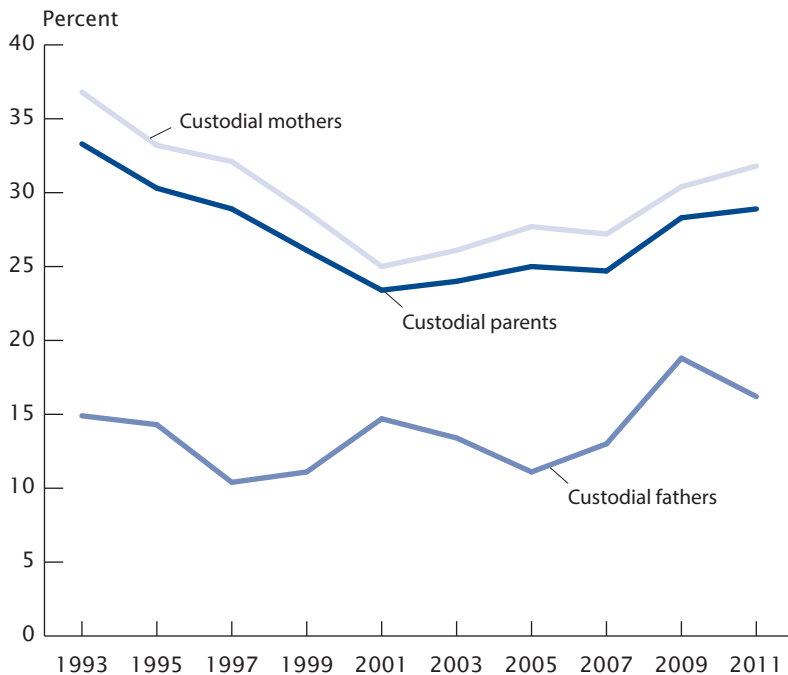
Poverty rates varied greatly among types of custodial-parent families. The poverty rate of custodial-mother families in 2011 (31.8 percent) was about double the poverty rate for custodial-father families (16.2 percent). Some of the highest poverty rates (about 57 percent) were found among custodial-mother families in which the mother had less than a high school education, participated in one or more public assistance programs, or had three or more children.<sup>14</sup> Families in which custodial mothers had full-time, year-round employment or who had a bachelor's degree or higher tended to have much lower levels of poverty (10.0 percent and 9.3 percent, respectively).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Carmen DeNavas-Walt, Bernadette D. Proctor, and Jessica C. Smith, U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports*, P60-243, Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2011, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Estimates for poverty for the total population are from the 2012 ASEC, for which information on the source of data and accuracy of the estimates is available at <[www.census.gov/hhes/www/p60\\_243sa.pdf](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/p60_243sa.pdf)>.

<sup>15</sup> The poverty rate of custodial mothers with full-time, year-round employment (10.0 percent) was not statistically different from the rate for mothers with a bachelor's degree or higher (9.3 percent). See Detailed Table 4 at <[www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html](http://www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html)>.

Figure 1.  
**Poverty Status of Custodial Parents: 1993–2011**



Note: For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf)>.  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1994 to 2012.

## EMPLOYMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

The level of full-time, year-round employment for custodial mothers decreased from 52.3 percent in 2001 to 47.0 percent in 2011. Full-time, year-round employment also decreased for custodial fathers during this period, from 71.7 percent to 65.9 percent. For custodial-parent families below poverty in 2011, about 15.1 percent were employed full-time, year-round and about half (49.0 percent) were not employed (Figure 2).

The rate of participation in at least one public assistance program has increased for custodial

parents in the last few years.<sup>16</sup> Among custodial mothers, 34.9 percent received at least one form of public assistance in 2007. By 2011, this proportion had increased to 42.9 percent. Custodial fathers were less likely than custodial mothers to participate in at least one public assistance program in 2011 (23.3 percent). Specifically, receipt of benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly referred to as food stamps, increased from 23.5 percent in

<sup>16</sup> Public assistance program participation includes those receiving at least one of the following: Medicaid, food stamps, public housing or rent subsidy, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or general assistance. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), more commonly known as the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, replaced the AFDC program with the TANF program.

2007 to 34.3 percent for custodial mothers in 2011.<sup>17</sup>

## CHILD SUPPORT AGREEMENTS AND CUSTODY

Approximately half (48.9 percent) of all 14.4 million custodial parents had a court order or some type of agreement to receive financial support from the noncustodial parent(s) in 2012 (Table 2). The majority (88.8 percent) of the 7.1 million parents with agreements were reported by the custodial parent as formal legal agreements—established by a court or other government entity—while 11.2 percent were informal agreements or understandings.<sup>18</sup>

The percentage of custodial mothers who had child support agreements or awards in 1994 was 59.8 percent and increased to 64.2 percent in 2004.<sup>19</sup> Between 2004 and 2012, the percentage declined to 53.4 percent. The percentage of custodial fathers with child support agreements or awards was 28.8 percent in 2012. Historically, the proportion of custodial fathers with awards has been lower than that of custodial mothers.

<sup>17</sup> The proportion of custodial mothers who received at least one form of public assistance in 2007 (34.9 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion of custodial mothers who received SNAP in 2011 (34.3 percent). The proportion of custodial fathers who received at least one form of public assistance in 2011 (23.3 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion of custodial mothers who received SNAP benefits in 2007 (23.5 percent).

<sup>18</sup> An informal agreement is any written or verbal agreement or understanding that was never approved or ordered by a court or a government agency and is generally considered not legally binding. See Detailed Table 9 at <[www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html](http://www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html)>.

<sup>19</sup> The proportion of custodial mothers with agreements in 2004 (64.2 percent) was not statistically different from the estimates for 2000 (62.2 percent) and 2002 (63.0 percent).

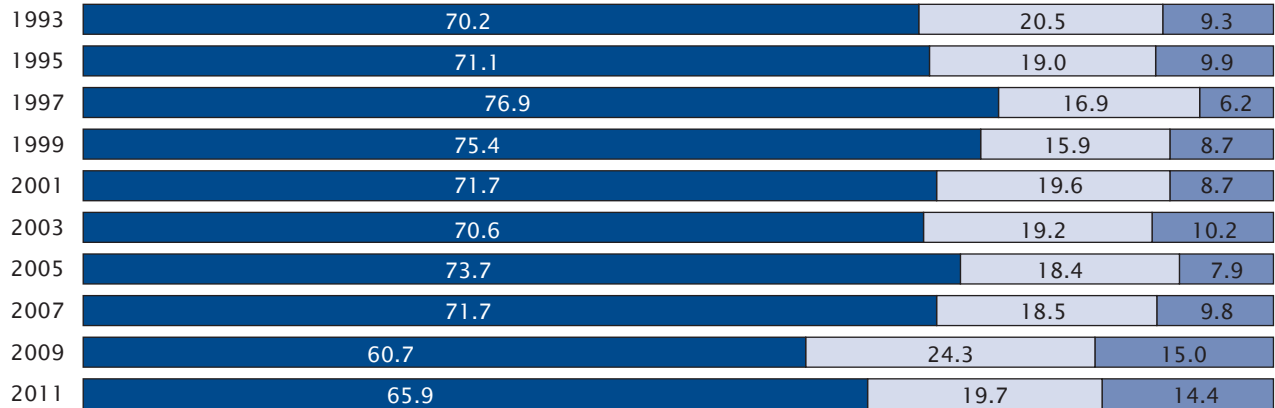


Figure 2.  
**Employment Status of Custodial Parents by Gender and Poverty Status: 1993–2011**

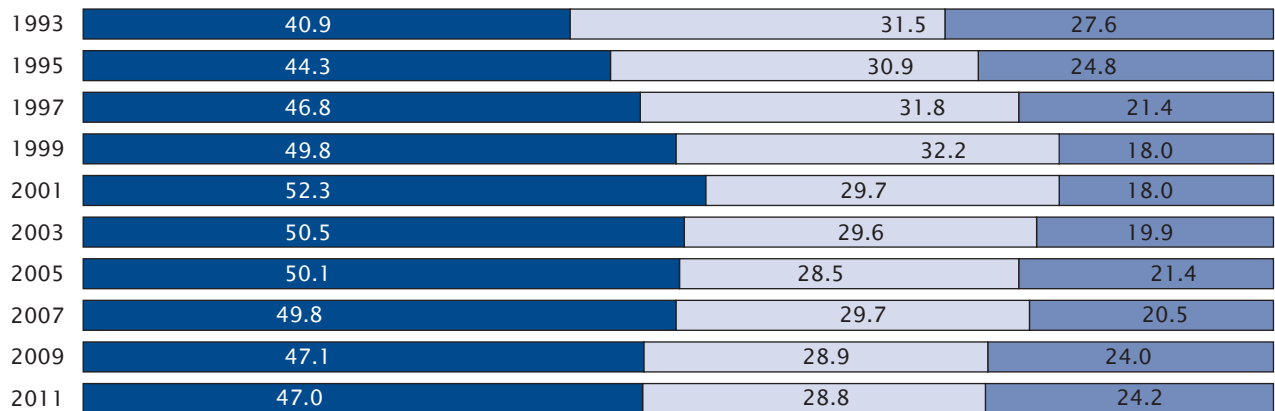
(In percent)

■ Full-time, year-round      □ Part-time or part-year      ■ Did not work

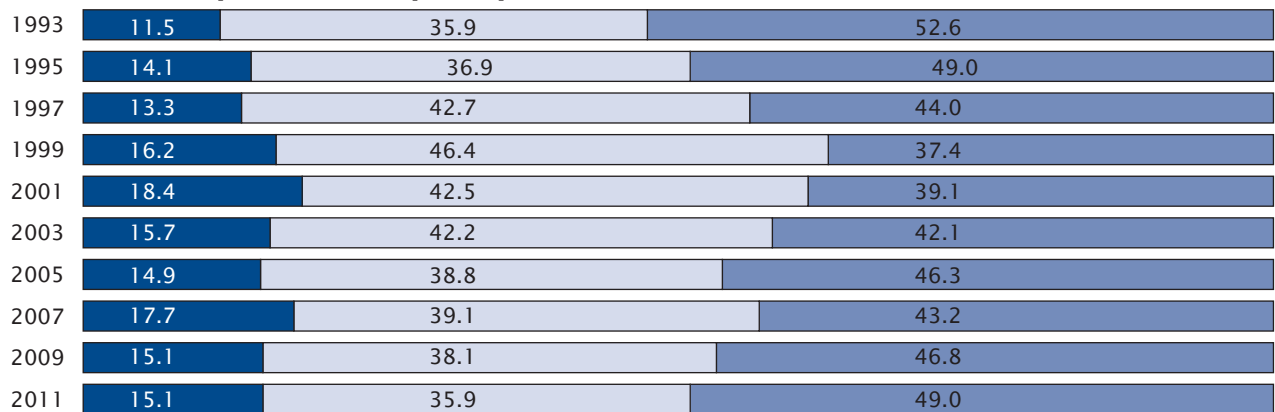
**Custodial fathers**



**Custodial mothers**



**Custodial parents below poverty**



Note: For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1994 to 2012.

Table 2.

## Demographic Characteristics of Custodial Parents by Award Status and Payments Received: 2011

(Numbers in thousands, as of spring 2012. Parents living with own children under 21 years of age whose other parent is not living in the home. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf))

Characteristic	With child support agreements or awards											
	Total	Total	Percent	Due child support payments in 2011								
				Total	Average due (in dollars)	Average received (in dollars)	Percent received	Received all payments		Did not receive payments		
								Total	Percent	Total	Percent	
<b>All Custodial Parents</b>												
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>14,440</b>	<b>7,057</b>	<b>48.9</b>	<b>6,262</b>	<b>6,052</b>	<b>3,771</b>	<b>62.3</b>	<b>2,716</b>	<b>43.4</b>	<b>1,621</b>	<b>25.9</b>	
Standard error .....	293	208	1.1	196	136	122	1.2	130	1.0	100	0.7	
<b>Sex</b>												
Male .....	2,643	760	28.8	674	5,527	3,015	54.6	279	41.4	216	32.0	
Female .....	11,797	6,297	53.4	5,588	6,115	3,862	63.2	2,438	43.6	1,405	25.1	
<b>Age</b>												
Under 30 years .....	3,083	1,313	42.6	1,170	4,090	2,063	50.4	428	36.6	368	31.5	
30 to 39 years .....	5,315	2,818	53.0	2,575	6,220	3,705	59.6	1,070	41.6	625	24.3	
40 years and over .....	6,041	2,926	48.4	2,517	6,791	4,633	68.2	1,219	48.4	627	24.9	
<b>Race and Ethnicity<sup>1</sup></b>												
White alone .....	9,829	5,257	53.5	4,664	6,158	3,895	63.3	2,046	43.9	1,167	25.0	
White alone, not Hispanic .....	7,244	4,030	55.6	3,585	6,257	4,159	66.5	1,642	45.8	821	22.9	
Black alone .....	3,677	1,390	37.8	1,265	5,442	3,309	60.8	532	42.1	340	26.9	
Hispanic (any race) .....	3,021	1,378	45.6	1,202	6,086	3,147	51.7	450	37.4	386	32.1	
<b>Current Marital Status<sup>2</sup></b>												
Married .....	2,630	1,431	54.4	1,276	5,611	3,388	60.4	546	42.8	326	25.5	
Divorced .....	4,772	2,669	55.9	2,404	6,811	4,435	65.1	1,164	48.4	559	23.3	
Separated .....	1,813	804	44.3	666	6,017	3,947	65.6	327	49.1	153	23.0	
Never married .....	5,060	2,076	41.0	1,857	5,438	3,131	57.6	652	35.1	564	30.4	
<b>Educational Attainment</b>												
Less than high school diploma .....	2,183	917	42.0	800	5,048	2,536	50.2	291	36.4	268	33.5	
High school graduate .....	4,557	2,101	46.1	1,809	5,924	3,570	60.3	765	42.3	525	29.0	
Less than 4 years of college .....	5,072	2,707	53.4	2,425	5,891	3,563	60.5	1,040	42.9	569	23.5	
Bachelor's degree or more .....	2,628	1,332	50.7	1,228	7,212	5,281	73.2	621	50.6	259	21.1	
<b>Selected Characteristics</b>												
Family income below 2011 poverty level .....	4,180	1,992	47.7	1,707	5,448	3,273	60.1	676	39.6	466	27.3	
Worked full-time, year-round .....	7,289	3,518	48.3	3,160	6,258	3,777	60.4	1,406	44.5	802	25.4	
Public assistance program participation <sup>3</sup> .....	5,675	2,749	48.4	2,389	5,368	3,180	59.2	954	39.9	693	29.0	
With one child .....	8,209	3,543	43.2	3,149	5,458	3,155	57.8	1,349	42.8	832	26.4	
With two or more children .....	6,231	3,513	56.4	3,113	6,653	4,394	66.0	1,367	43.9	788	25.3	
Child had contact with other parent in 2011 .....	9,313	4,855	52.1	4,322	6,314	4,257	67.4	2,120	49.1	988	22.9	
Child had no contact with other parent in 2011 .....	5,127	2,202	42.9	1,940	5,467	2,689	49.2	596	30.7	632	32.6	
Joint physical or legal custody .....	3,527	2,081	59.0	1,847	6,859	4,957	72.3	1,040	56.3	323	17.5	

<sup>1</sup> Includes those reporting one race alone and not in combination with any other race.

<sup>2</sup> Excludes 165,000 with marital status of widowed.

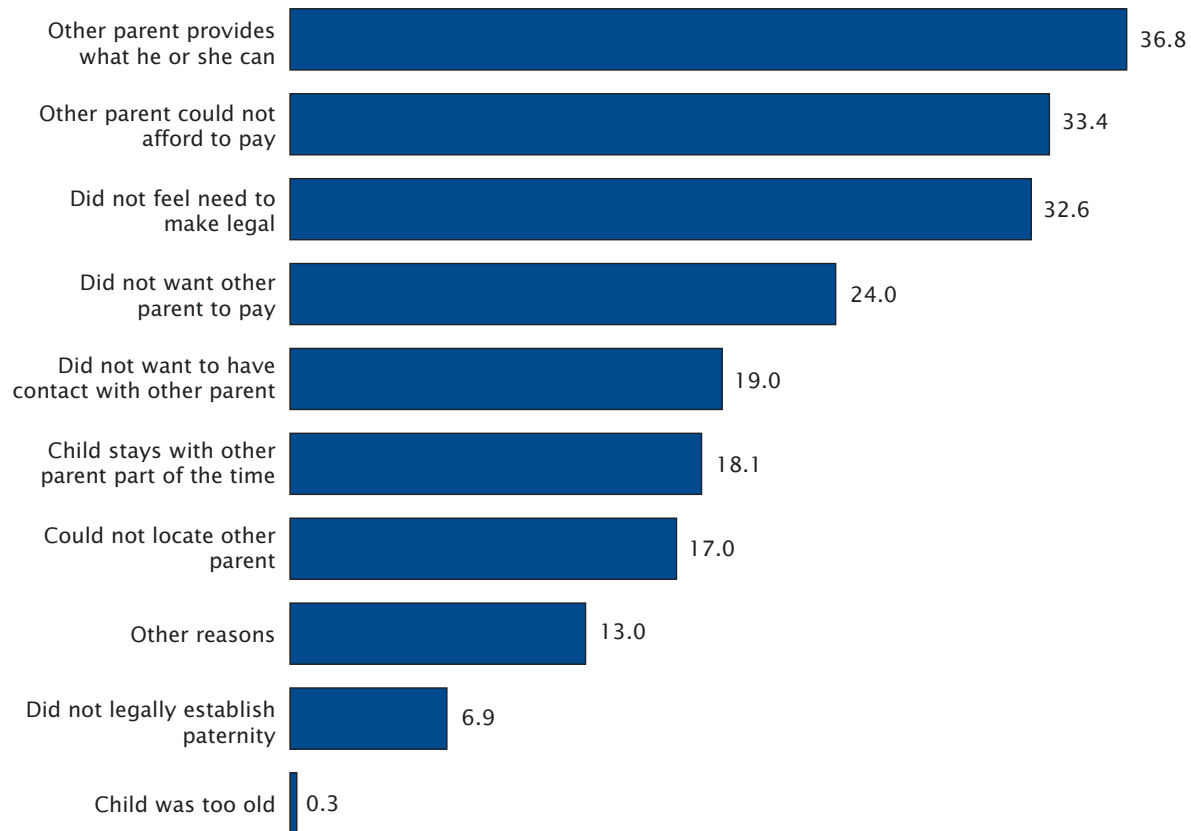
<sup>3</sup> Received either Medicaid, food stamps, public housing or rent subsidy, TANF, or general assistance.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 2012.

Figure 3.

**Reasons No Legal Agreement Established for Custodial Parents: 2012**

(In percent)



Note: Universe is 7.9 million custodial parents without agreements or with informal agreements; excludes those with pending agreements. The total exceeds 100 percent because respondents could list more than one reason. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf)>. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 2012.

Child support award rates varied by other demographic custodial-parent characteristics. Custodial parents who were under 30 years of age, Black, never married, or had less than a high school education tended to have lower rates of child support awards or agreements (Table 2). Custodial parents who were non-Hispanic White, divorced, married, lived with two or more children from a noncustodial parent in 2012, or had joint physical or legal custody in 2011 had higher rates of child support agreements or awards.

Among custodial parents who had some type of agreement or award for child support in 2011, about half (51.2 percent) consisted of situations where the noncustodial parents were considered to have visitation privileges with their children, but did not have shared legal or physical custody of their children. An additional 29.5 percent included some type of joint-custody situation (physical and/or legal), and 19.3 percent consisted of neither noncustodial parental visitation nor any type of joint custody.

When the 7.9 million custodial parents without any type of legal

agreement and those with informal agreements were asked why a legal child support agreement was not established, the reason cited most often was that the other parent(s) provided what he or she could for support (36.8 percent). Other primary reasons given were that the other parent(s) could not afford to pay child support and that the custodial parents did not feel the need to go to court or get legal agreements (about 33 percent each, Figure 3).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Respondents could choose more than one reason why a formal legal agreement was not established.



## Child Support Paid

In 2010, the CPS ASEC began asking a series of additional questions about a variety of topics in order to develop a Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) to serve as an additional indicator of economic well-being. Included were questions that asked respondents if they had children living elsewhere and how much child support they paid during the previous calendar year.

Analysis of these data shows that a weighted 2.9 million respondents reported paying an annual mean average of about \$6,580 in child support for their children during 2011. These payments may have been paid directly to the custodial parent, or to the state child support enforcement agency, which, depending on the state, may have passed all, some, or none of these payments on to the custodial parent. The number of child support payers was lower and the amount paid was higher in the 2012 CPS ASEC than in the 2012 CPS-CSS.

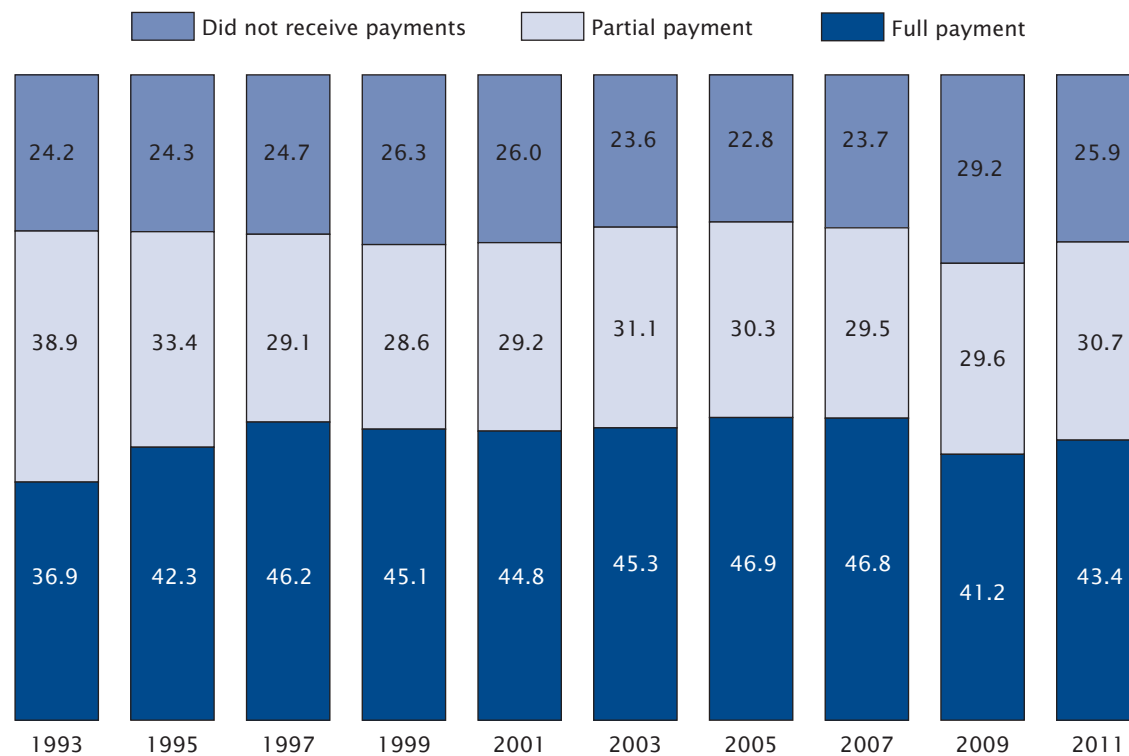
For additional information about the SPM and the data collected, please see <[www.census.gov/hhes/povmeas/methodology/supplemental/research.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/povmeas/methodology/supplemental/research.html)>

## CHILD SUPPORT RECEIPT

Of the 7.1 million custodial parents with child support agreements or awards, 6.3 million (88.7 percent) were due child support payments in 2011. The remaining 800,000 custodial parents with child support agreements or awards were not due child support payments because either the child(ren) was too old, the noncustodial parent(s) had died, the family lived together part of the year before the interview, or some other reason. Nine of every 10 custodial parents (89.2 percent) who were due child support were mothers (Table 2).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> The proportion of custodial parents with agreements due child support (88.7 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion of custodial parents due support who were mothers (89.2 percent).

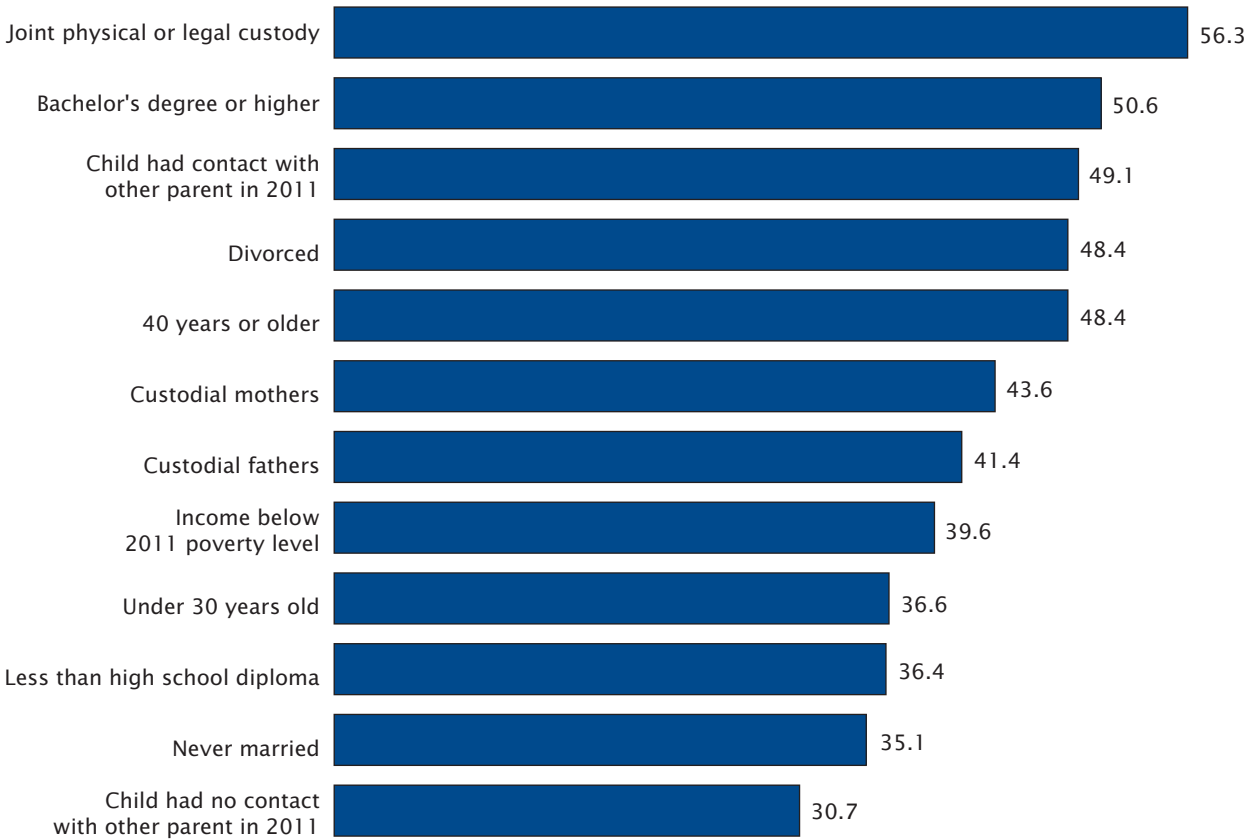
Figure 4.  
**Custodial Parents Receiving Full, Partial, or No Child Support Payments Due: 1993–2011**  
(In percent)



Note: For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf)>.  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1994 to 2012.

Figure 5.  
**Custodial Parents Due Child Support Who Received Full Amount, by Selected Characteristics: 2011**

(In percent)



Note: Total exceeds 100 percent because respondents could list more than one type. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf)>. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 2012.

About three-quarters (74.1 percent) of custodial parents who were due child support in 2011 received either full or partial child support payments. Approximately 43.4 percent of custodial parents due support received all payments they were due, and 30.7 percent received some, but not all, child support payments due. Approximately one-quarter (25.9 percent) of custodial parents due child support received no payments from their children's noncustodial parent(s) (Figure 4).

For the 1.7 million custodial parents below the poverty level and due child support in 2011, 39.6 percent received all support that was due, an increase from 26.4 percent in 1993.

Except for gender, where the proportion of custodial mothers who received full payments in 2011 (43.6 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion of custodial fathers receiving full payments (41.4 percent), the receipt of full child support due differed by the demographic characteristics

of the custodial parent.<sup>22</sup> In 2011, some of the lowest rates of receiving all child support that was due belonged to custodial parents who were under 30 years old (36.6 percent), had less than a high school education (36.4 percent), had never been married (35.1 percent), or whose child had no contact with

<sup>22</sup> The proportion of all custodial parents below poverty who received full child support in 2011 (39.6 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion of custodial mothers who received full child support payments in 2011 (43.6 percent) nor the proportion of custodial fathers who received full payments in 2011 (41.4 percent).

the noncustodial parent(s) (30.7 percent). These rates were not statistically different from each other (Figure 5).

Custodial parents who had at least a bachelor's degree (50.6 percent), whose child had contact with their noncustodial parent(s) (49.1 percent), who were divorced (48.4 percent), or were 40 years or older (48.4 percent) had some of the higher rates of receiving all child support payments that were due in 2011. More than half (56.3 percent) of custodial parents with joint physical or legal child custody situations received the full child support that was due from the non-custodial parent(s).<sup>23</sup>

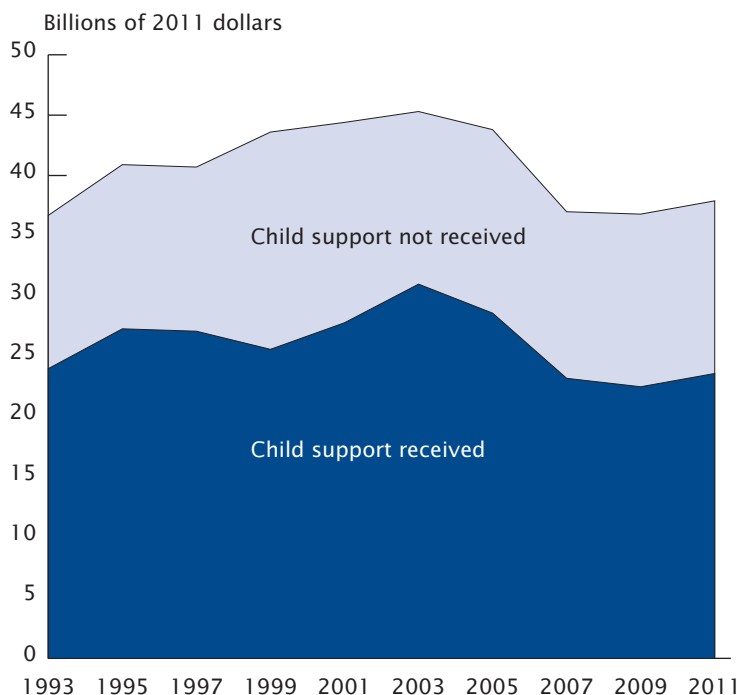
### AMOUNT OF CHILD SUPPORT RECEIVED

In 2011, the 6.3 million custodial parents who were due child support under the terms of legal awards or informal agreements were due an annual mean average of \$6,050, or approximately \$500 per month. The median amount of child support due in 2011 was \$4,800, meaning half of custodial parents were due less than that amount and half of them were due more. Among custodial parents who had agreements for child support, a total of \$37.9 billion in child support payments was due in 2011.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> All rates of receiving full child support among the groups in this paragraph were not statistically different from each other except for custodial parents whose child had contact with their noncustodial parent (49.1 percent), custodial parents who were divorced (48.4 percent), and custodial parents who were 40 years or older (48.4 percent), which were all statistically different from the proportion of custodial parents with joint legal or physical custody who received full support in 2011 (56.3 percent).

<sup>24</sup> See Detailed Table 1 at <[www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html](http://www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html)>.

Figure 6.  
**Average Aggregate Child Support Received and Not Received for Child Support Due: 1993–2011**



Note: For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf)>.  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 1994 to 2012.

The mean annual amount of child support received by custodial parents who were due support payments in 2011 was \$3,770, or about \$315 per month. The median annual amount of child support received was lower, \$2,400. About one-quarter (26.4 percent) of custodial parents due support received \$5,000 or more in annual child support payments. A total of \$23.6 billion of child support due was reported as received, or about 62.3 percent of the \$37.9 billion that was due. The 2011 proportion and amounts were not statistically different from 1993, when \$24.0 billion of the \$36.7 billion (65.3

percent) of child support due was reported as received (Figure 6).<sup>25</sup>

In 2011, custodial mothers received \$19.5 billion of the \$31.7 billion in support that was due (63.2

<sup>25</sup> Overall, custodial parents reported receiving \$25.5 billion directly from the noncustodial parent for support of their children in 2011, which included \$1.9 billion received by 659,000 parents without current awards or agreements. The \$23.6 billion received by custodial parents due support in 2011 was not statistically different from the \$24.0 billion received by custodial parents with agreements and due support in 1993. Custodial parents receiving child support without current awards include those with awards for children past the age of eligibility for payments, those with awards officially starting after 2011, and those with no legal awards or informal arrangements. These parents received a mean average of \$2,880 in annual child support in 2011, an amount not statistically different from the mean child support received by custodial parents due child support in 2011 (\$3,770). Amounts from 1993 are in 2011 CPI-U-RS adjusted dollars.

percent), and custodial fathers received \$2.0 billion of the \$3.7 billion that was due (54.6 percent). These proportions of child support received by mothers and fathers were not statistically different from each other.

## CHILD SUPPORT AND INCOME

The mean annual amount of child support received by the 4.6 million custodial parents who received at least some of the support they were due (\$5,090) represented 16.1 percent of their mean annual personal income in 2011 (\$31,520). Child support represented 10.2 percent of income for the 1.9 million parents who received part of the full support they were due and 19.8 percent for the 2.7 million custodial parents who received all child support that they were due. The poverty rates among these groups were not statistically different from each other (about 24 percent).

Child support represented a higher proportion of income for some lower income parents. For example, among custodial parents below the poverty level who received full payments, the mean average child support received in 2011 represented two-thirds (66.7 percent) of their mean annual personal income.<sup>26</sup>

The mean personal 2011 income for the 1.6 million custodial parents who had support agreements but received no child support payments was \$29,630, and among the 7.4 million custodial parents with no support agreements, the mean personal income was \$31,690, amounts not statistically different from each other.

<sup>26</sup> See Detailed Tables 4, 5, and 6 at <[www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html](http://www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html)>.

## HEALTH INSURANCE

Of the 7.1 million custodial parents who had child support awards or agreements in 2011, 52.4 percent of their agreements specified who was to provide health insurance for their children. In 41.7 percent of these 3.7 million agreements, the noncustodial parent provided the health insurance coverage.<sup>27</sup> Among the 2.8 million custodial parents with agreements where health insurance was not included in the child support award, 13.7 percent received health care coverage for their children from the noncustodial parent(s). For the 7.4 million custodial parents without a child support agreement, 17.8 percent had health insurance coverage for their children through the noncustodial parent(s). Overall, approximately 3.2 million noncustodial parents provided some type of health insurance for their children in 2011.<sup>28</sup>

## NONCASH CHILD SUPPORT

In 2011, 56.7 percent of all custodial parents received at least one type of noncash support, such as gifts or coverage of expenses, from the noncustodial parent(s) for their children. Custodial fathers were more likely than custodial mothers to receive some type of noncash child support, especially when there was no agreement in place.

<sup>27</sup> Health insurance coverage could be through a health maintenance organization, a regular insurance policy, or some other plan. In many states, one or both parents could be obligated in a child support agreement to carry health insurance for their children. If the custodial parent is required to carry the coverage, the noncustodial parent(s) may be required to contribute toward the cost of family coverage.

<sup>28</sup> See Detailed Table 8 at <[www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html](http://www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html)>. The number of custodial parents with child support agreements or awards in 2011 (7.1 million) was not statistically different from the number without agreements (7.4 million).

About 64.8 percent of custodial fathers and 53.8 percent of custodial mothers without agreements received some noncash support.<sup>29</sup>

The most common type of noncash support received was gifts for birthdays, holidays, or other occasions (53.5 percent), followed by clothes (36.6 percent), food or groceries (27.3 percent), medical expenses other than health insurance (16.5 percent), and full or partial payments for child care or summer camp (8.0 percent, Figure 7).<sup>30</sup>

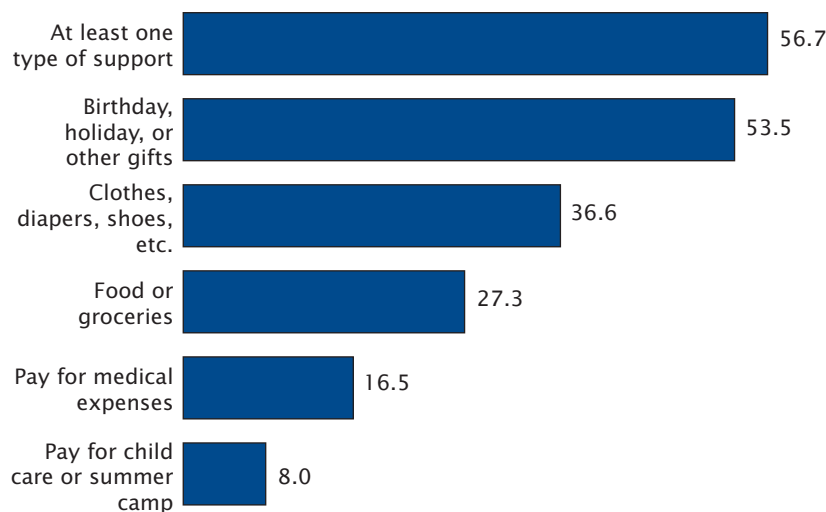
## CONTACT WITH GOVERNMENT FOR ASSISTANCE

In 2012, 26.1 percent of all custodial parents had ever contacted a child support enforcement office (IV-D office), state department of social services, or other welfare or TANF office for child support-related assistance. This was a decrease from 1994, when 42.2 percent of custodial parents contacted a government agency for help. In addition, the total number of individual contacts for related assistance decreased 22.5 percent during this time, from 13.0 million to 10.1 million. Contacts were made for many reasons, and the reasons provided most frequently were to collect child support that was due and to establish a legal agreement or court award (about 25 percent each), to obtain welfare or public assistance (17.1 percent),

<sup>29</sup> The proportion of all custodial parents receiving at least some noncash support in 2011 (56.7 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion of custodial mothers without agreements who received at least some noncash support (53.8 percent).

<sup>30</sup> The total of percentages exceeds 100 because more than one type of noncash support may have been received. See Detailed Table 10 at <[www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html](http://www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detailedtables.html)>.

Figure 7.  
**Noncash Support Received by Custodial Parents: 2012**  
 (In percent)



Note: Total exceeds 100 percent because respondents could list more than one type. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see <[www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf)>. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, April 2012.

and to locate the noncustodial parent(s) (11.7 percent).<sup>31</sup>

### SOURCE OF THE DATA

The population represented (the population universe) in the Child Support Supplement to the April 2012 Current Population Survey is the civilian noninstitutionalized population living in the United States. The institutionalized population, which is excluded from the population universe, is composed primarily of the population in correctional institutions and nursing homes (94 percent of the 4.0 million institutionalized people in Census 2010). Approximately

<sup>31</sup> The proportion of custodial parents contacting a governmental agency for assistance in collecting child support due (26.0 percent) was not statistically different from the proportion contacting to establish a legal agreement or court award (24.4 percent). See Detailed Table 2 at <[www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detaileddetails.html](http://www.census.gov/people/childsupport/data/detaileddetails.html)>.

0.3 percent of all children under 21 years old were institutionalized in Census 2010.

The estimates in this report are from the 1994 through 2012 April biennial supplements to the CPS. The Census Bureau conducts the April supplement, sponsored in part by the Office of Child Support Enforcement of the Department of Health and Human Services. Data from the April 1992 and earlier supplements are not directly comparable with data from 1994 and later years because of changes made to the questionnaire (see the text box “Limitations of the Data” for more detail). Because of changes made to the allocation procedures, data for custodial parents due and receiving child support were revised starting with the April 1994 survey. Reported estimates

may differ from those published previously due to these changes.

### ACCURACY OF THE ESTIMATES

Statistics from sample surveys are subject to sampling error and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level. This means the 90 percent confidence interval for the difference between estimates being compared does not include zero. Nonsampling error in surveys may be attributed to a variety of sources, such as how the survey was designed, how respondents interpret questions, how able and willing respondents are to provide correct answers, and how accurately answers are coded and classified. To minimize these errors, the Census Bureau employs quality control procedures in sample selection, the wording of questions, interviewing, coding, data processing, and data analysis.

The CPS weighting procedure uses ratio estimation whereby sample estimates are adjusted to independent estimates of the national population by age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. This weighting partially corrects for bias due to undercoverage, but biases may still be present when people who are missed by the survey differ from those interviewed in ways other than age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. How this weighting procedure affects other variables in the survey is not precisely known. All of these considerations affect comparisons across different surveys or data sources.

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Further information on the source of the data and accuracy of the estimates, including standard errors and confidence intervals, can be found at [www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/techdoc/cps/cpsmar12.pdf) or by contacting Stephen Clark of the Demographic Statistical Methods Division via e-mail at

[dsmd.source.and.accuracy@census.gov](mailto:dsmd.source.and.accuracy@census.gov).

### **MORE INFORMATION**

Detailed tabulations, related information, and historic data are available on the Internet at the child support page on the Census Bureau's Web site at

[www.census.gov/people/childsupport](http://www.census.gov/people/childsupport).

For additional questions or comments, contact Timothy Grall at 301-763-3189 or via e-mail at [Timothy.Scott.Grall@census.gov](mailto:Timothy.Scott.Grall@census.gov).





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