In-Kind Support from Nonresident Fathers: A Population-Level Analysis

Jennifer B. Kane,[1] Lenna Nepomnyaschy,[2] Irwin Garfinkel,[3] & Kathryn Edin[4]

[1]Department of Sociology, Pennsylvania State University,
University Park, PA 16802, jab826@psu.edu.

[2]School of Social Work, Rutgers University,
New Brunswick, NJ 08901, lennan@ssw.rutgers.edu.

[3]School of Social Work, Columbia University,
New York, NY 10027, ig3@columbia.edu.

[4]Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University,
Cambridge, MA 02138, kathy_edin@hks.harvard.edu.

Abstract

Prior research on child support payments and policies have focused primarily on formal and informal cash payments, yet recent research highlights a third type: in-kind support. Very few studies have moved beyond estimating the prevalence of in-kind support to quantifying the amount provided, leaving policymakers and researchers with very little information on which to evaluate the relative magnitude of these payments or their comparative effect on child well-being. This study addresses this gap by capitalizing on a unique data source: the Time, Love, and Cash among Couples with Children (TLC3) study, which is a qualitative subsample of the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study (FF). This study (1) quantifies in-kind payments in the TLC3 subsample, (2) uses multiple imputation to extrapolate these estimates to the entire FF sample, (3) examines the relative contribution of in-kind support provided at the national-level, and (4) compares these estimates across various groups of children.

Introduction

Today, approximately one-quarter of all children in the US reside with one parent (usually the mother) and have a living nonresident parent (usually the father). Children in single-parent families are much more likely to be poor, more likely to experience material hardship, and are at higher risk for a variety of negative outcomes. Through their financial contributions, nonresident fathers can potentially ameliorate some of these disadvantages and improve their children's well-being. Prior research has documented the importance and positive impact of child support contributions from nonresident fathers on children's educational, cognitive, physical, and emotional well-being (Amato & Gilbreth 1999).

However, most of these studies have only examined the impact of fathers' cash contributions on their children's household, and most often through the formal child support system alone. Though only about one-third of children in single parent families receive formal child support, nearly 60% receive some type of in-kind support (Grall 2007), which is defined as the contribution of goods, services, or any other non-cash support. Studies of low-income and unmarried parents reveal that in-kind support is particularly important for these families (Edin, 1995; Edin & Lein 1997; Garasky, Peters, Argys, Cook, Nepomnyaschy, & Sorenson 2007; Garasky, Stewart, Gunderson & Lohman 2010; Grall 2007; Waller & Plotnik 1999; Waller & Plotnick 2001) given the substantial barriers that low-income fathers often face in terms of finding and keeping stable employment due to low levels of education, histories of incarceration, and high levels of neighborhood unemployment (Waller & Plotnick 1999; Edin & Lein 1997; Waller & Plotnick 2001; Lewis, Garfinkel, & Gao 2007; Sinkewicz & Garfinkel 2009; Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel in press).

A number of recent studies point to the importance of in-kind support from nonresident fathers in improving the economic circumstances of their children (Garasky, Stewart, Gunderson, & Lohman 2010; Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel in press). While it is now recognized that in-kind support is an important resource for children, there is very little understanding of how much in-kind support is actually provided. This is because few national datasets ask resident mothers to quantify the in-kind support that they receive. In most surveys, mothers are asked whether and how often fathers make any type of in-kind contribution. In a few surveys, mothers are asked about specific types of in-kind support that may be provided, such as food, clothes, or gifts. However, none of these questions allow researchers to estimate a dollar amount of support in order to understand the relative magnitude of non-cash contributions.

Contributions of This Study

This paper will take a unique approach to addressing this gap in the literature by utilizing data from a recent qualitative study, Time, Love, and Cash among Couples with Children (TLC3), and applying them to a population-based sample in the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (Fragile Families). The TLC3 study performed repeated in-depth interviews with 75 couples nested within the larger Fragile Families study. One section of the qualitative interviews was designed to itemize the type, frequency, and amount of child support contributions that mothers received from nonresident fathers. An innovative feature of these data is that mothers were asked not only about cash contributions (such as formal and informal support), but also about non-cash or in-kind contributions. As a result we are able to estimate the dollar amount of *total* in-kind support as well as the dollar amount provided through a variety of channels including clothes, gifts, food, toys, diapers, and other contributions. These data therefore present a unique opportunity to (1) quantify the amount of in-kind support among this

sample of women, and (2) situate these findings within a nationally representative sample of unmarried couples with children.

The following questions guide our analyses:

1) Within the TLC3 sample, how much in-kind support do mothers receive from nonresident fathers across the following categories: clothes, food, diapers, toys/gifts, and other contributions?
2) When this information is used to extrapolate in-kind support provision across the entire sample of Fragile Families couples, how does this inform our understanding of in-kind support provision at the national-level?
3) What is the relative contribution of in-kind support to the total amount of child support provided (formal, informal, and in-kind) at the national-level, and how does this differ across various groups of children?

Data and Methods

Fragile Families is a panel study of nearly 5,000 children born in large urban areas in the US between 1998 and 2000, with a 3 to 1 oversample of children born to unmarried parents. The data are representative of all births in US cities with populations greater than 200,000 during those years. Baseline interviews were conducted at the child's birth and families have been followed up when children were 1, 3, 5, and 9 years old. The TLC3 data consists of repeated in-depth interviews with 48 unmarried and 27 married couples (75 couples in all) around the time of the birth of the focal child, and again when children were 1, 2 and 4 years old. This study pools data from the latter three TLC3 interviews.

Analytic Subsample

Among the 75 couples, our analysis focuses on 55 mothers who reported having at least one nonresident father of their children (the other 20 reported only a resident father). Mothers discussed child support payments for all of their children (not just for the focal child) and as a result our analysis spans contributions made to dependent children of all ages. In addition, since we pool estimates from three waves of data, our analytic subsample consists of 216 cases at the child-level (91 of which represent children that appear twice in the dataset). It is also important to note that the TLC3 subsample was subject to an income restriction: couples had to report less than $75,000 in earnings in the prior year for inclusion in the study. The average annual earnings for the subsample were $22,500 in the year prior to the baseline interview (England & Edin 2007) and as a result, we characterize the subsample as "low-income."

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of the TLC3 analytic subsample. These data support the disadvantaged nature of our subsample. The average level of education for mothers and nonresident fathers is a high school diploma and the average age at first birth is younger than the national average (18 years of age for mothers and 20 years of age for fathers). About 40% of nonresident fathers are unemployed and 23% of employed fathers hold a job in the informal economy. The vast majority of couples are no longer romantically involved (94%) and over three fourths of mothers have formed a new romantic relationship.

Variable Construction and Analytic Strategy

In the Fragile Families data, mothers were asked at each wave about how often (often, sometimes, rarely, or never) the father provided the following items for the child: food (and formula at the 1-year survey), toys, clothes (and diapers at the 1 and 3-year surveys), medicine, or any other non-cash items. In the TLC3 data, mothers were asked similar questions: if fathers provided various types of goods (clothes/shoes, diapers/wipes, formula, food, gifts, school

supplies, daycare, and other items) and how often (daily, weekly, twice a month, once in a while, monthly, etc.). Unlike the survey data however, the qualitative interviews prompted the mothers to provide the market value of each item—which provides the basis for our analysis. When a market value was not provided, we relied on amounts that were commonly reported across the entire subsample. For example, a package of Pampers—the most common type of diapers—cost an average of $16 per pack at the time of the interviews, formula ran about $40 per month, clothes for an infant or toddler cost around $6 per item, clothes for a school age child cost around $10 per item, sneakers ranged between $25 and $50 depending on the age of the child, and a coat or jacket ranged between $20 and $50—again, depending on the age of the child.

Our analysis will group the responses from the TLC3 data into categories that match the responses from the Fragile Families data for both the type and amount of support provided (such as clothes, food/formula, diapers, toys/gifts, and "other") as well as the frequency with which it was provided (such as often, sometimes, rarely and never). We will then employ multiple imputation techniques using a comprehensive set of variables that have been found in prior research to impact fathers' provision of support (including characteristics of mothers, fathers, and children, as well as city and state economic and policy measures) to extrapolate findings from the subsample of mothers in the TLC3 data to the entire sample of mothers in the Fragile Families data. Because the TLC3 data has information on children at different ages, we will be able to impute these findings for different waves in the Fragile Families data.

We will then examine the results of the multiple imputation models, comparing dollar values in the Fragile Families data and TLC3 subsample for (1) the total amount of in-kind support received and (2) the amount received in each category. Finally, we will compare the relative magnitudes of different types of support received (formal support, informal support, and

in-kind support) and the dollar amount of total support received across different groups of children.

Preliminary Findings

Preliminary results from the TLC3 data reveal that 25% of support is provided through in-kind contributions (see Table 2). Just under half of children receive some type of support—formal, informal, and/or in-kind—and each child receives an average of $70 per month in total support. In-kind support is more prevalent than either formal or informal in these data (31% vs. 21% and 12% respectively) and is provided on a more frequent basis, although the most substantial amounts of support are provided through formal court orders. On average, nonresident fathers pay $18 per month per child of in-kind support versus $11 of informal and $41 of formal support.

Consistent with prior research (Grall 2007; Garasky et al. 2010; Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel in press), preliminary analysis from the TLC3 subsample suggests that clothes, toys/gifts, and food were the most commonly provided types of in-kind support and that the greatest amount of in-kind support is provided in the form of clothes, food, and other contributions.

Conclusion and Next Steps

In this paper, we extend these preliminary analyses by extrapolating results from the TLC3 study to the Fragile Families national sample using multiple imputation models. We will use these estimates to (1) examine whether similar patterns emerge at the national level and (2) compare the amount of in-kind support provided and the total amount of child support provided across various groups of children. When complete, this study will produce the first population-based estimates of the amount of in-kind support received from nonresident fathers, and most

importantly will allow us to estimate the dollar amount of total support received. These findings will contribute greatly to our understanding of the circumstances of children living in single parent families. Additionally, these estimates will be shared with other researchers and will be used by this team to explore the impact of the amount of in-kind support provided on various indicators of child well-being, as well as on the effect of child support enforcement and other public policies and contextual factors on the provision of in-kind support.

References

Amato, P.R. & J.G. Gilbreth. (1999). Nonresident Fathers and Children's Well-being: A Meta-Analysis. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 61, 557-73.

Edin, K. J. (1995). The Myths of Dependence and Self-Sufficiency: Women, Welfare, and Low-Wage Work. Focus, 17(2), 2-10.

Edin, K. & L. Lein. (1997). Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Garasky, S., S.D. Stewart, C. Gunderson & B.J. Lohman. (2010). Toward a Fuller Understanding of Nonresident Father Involvement: An Examination of Child Support, In-Kind Support, and Visitation. Population Policy & Research Review, 29(3), 363-393.

Garasky, S., E. Peters, L. Argys, S. Cook, L. Nepomnyaschy & E. Sorenson. (2007). Measuring Support to Children by Nonresident Fathers. In S. Hofferth & L. Casper (Eds.), Handbook of Measurement Issues in Family Research (pp. 399-426). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Grall, T. (2007). Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2005. Current Population Reports #P60-234, U.S. Census Bureau.

Lewis, C.E., I. Garfinkel, & Q. Gao. (2007). "Incarceration among Unwed Fathers."Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 34(3), 77-94.

Nepomnyaschy, L. (2007). Child Support and Father-Child Contact: Testing Reciprocal Pathways. Demography, 44(1), 93-112.

Nepomnyaschy, L. & I. Garfinkel. (2007). Child Support Enforcement and Fathers' Contributions to Their Nonmarital Children. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing Working Paper #2006-09-FF.

Nepomnyaschy, L. & I. Garfinkel. In press. "Child Support Enforcement and Fathers' Contributions to Their Nonresident Children." Social Service Review.

Nepomnyaschy, L. & I. Garfinkel. In press. "Nonresident Father Involvement and Children's Material Hardship." Social Service Review.

Sinkewicz, M. & I. Garfinkel. (2009). "Unwed Fathers' Ability to Pay Child Support: New Estimates Accounting for Multiple-Partner Fertility." Demography, 46(2), 247-263.

Waller, M.R. & R. Plotnick. (1999). Child Support and Low-Income Families: Perceptions, Practices, and Policy. San Francisco, CA: Public Policy Institute of California.

Waller, M.R. & R. Plotnick. (2001). Effective child support policy for low-income families: Evidence from street level research. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 20(1), 89-110.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (Child-Level), TLC3 Analytic Subsample

	Minimum	Maximum	% or Mean	Std. Deviation
Demographics				
Mother's Age	18	38	24.64	5.30
Father's Age	18	40	26.25	5.13
Mother's Race				
non-Hispanic Black	0	1	0.75	
Hispanic	0	1	0.20	
non-Hispanic White	0	1	0.06	
Father's Race				
non-Hispanic Black	0	1	0.73	
Hispanic	0	1	0.25	
non-Hispanic White	0	1	0.02	
Mother's Education	3	9	4.27	1.50
Father's Education	0	9	3.99	1.49
Mother's Age at First Birth	13	30	18.65	3.77
Father's Age at First Birth	15	32	20.04	3.53
Father's Employment Status (*1 = employed*)	0	1	0.61	
If Yes, Father Employed in Formal Labor Market (*1 = yes*)	0	1	0.77	
If Yes, Father Employed in Informal Labor Market (*1 = yes*)	0	1	0.23	
Child's Gender (*1 = male*)	0	1	0.50	
Child's Age	0.17	18	6.73	4.01
Mother-Father Relationship				
Mother-Father Relationship Status (*1 = not romantic*)	0	1	0.94	
Mother is Repartnered	0	1	0.77	
Number of Years Since Mother-Father Relationship Dissolution	0	17	4.66	3.61
Visitation				
Amount of Visitation with Nonresident Father per Month (hours)	0	88	7.29	16.68
Frequency of Visitation	0	6	1.75	2.23

Table 2. Child Support Provision (Child-Level), TLC3 Analytic Subsample

	Minimum	Maximum	% or Mean	Std. Deviation
Child Support and Visitation				
Any child support provided (*1 = yes*)	0	1	0.47	
Total amount of child support provided	0	$929.47	$69.74	143.94
Formal Support				
Any Provided? (*1 = yes*)	0	1	0.21	
Amount Provided per Month	0	$822.80	$40.71	111.55
Frequency Provided	0	6	0.91	1.84
Informal Support				
Any Provided? (*1 = yes*)	0	1	0.12	
Amount Provided per Month	0	$440.00	$11.34	46.44
Frequency Provided	0	6	0.42	1.24
In-Kind Support				
Any Provided? (*1 = yes*)	0	1	0.31	
Amount Provided per Month	0	$569.17	$17.69	77.94
Frequency Provided	0	6	1.18	1.87
Type of In-Kind Support Provided				
Clothes	0	$75.00	$2.27	8.33
Diapers	0	$20.00	$0.37	2.39
Food	0	$88.00	$2.88	10.43
Toys/Gifts	0	$20.00	$0.83	2.64
Other	0	$550.00	$11.35	75.27