

**Interactions of the Child Support and Child Welfare Systems:  
Child Support Enforcement after Family Reunification**

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### INTRODUCTION

When children are removed from parental care and placed into foster care or other out-of-home care by the child welfare system, the preferred outcome is for the children to be reunified with their family, once the issues which led to the removal have been addressed.<sup>1</sup> Child welfare agencies are interested in supporting the success of these reunifications and deterring re-entry of the children into foster care, and there has been substantial research into the post-reunification monitoring and services that can contribute to that success. But, while many of these families are also participants in the child support system, there has been much less research examining how interactions with child support may relate to successful reunifications. This partly reflects the separate objectives and administrative management of the two government-run systems, as well as the technical difficulty of merging and jointly analyzing administrative data from the two systems. The present report is one of a series that utilizes a unique set of merged state administrative data to examine the interactions of families with both the child welfare and child support systems in Wisconsin. A previous report examined the use and consequences of child support for families before and during an out-of-home placement (OHP);<sup>2</sup> in this report we consider the role of child support in families after children have been reunified.

Families coming into contact with the child protective services system are also frequently served by the child support system.<sup>3</sup> Two distinct factors account for the high probability of families' dual participation in these systems. First, children living in single-parent families are overrepresented in the child welfare system (Sedlak and Broadhurst, 1996; Sedlak et al., 2010). Since these children live apart from one of their parents, usually their father, they are generally demographically eligible for child support services. Second, federal and state policies call for parents whose children are placed in substitute

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<sup>1</sup>Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272).

<sup>2</sup>Cancian et al. (2012a).

<sup>3</sup>For an analysis of multiple program participation patterns in Wisconsin, including participation in the child support enforcement system and the child welfare system, see Cancian and Han (2010).

care to be referred to child support enforcement so that parents may offset some of the costs of substitute care. Child support initially ordered from nonresident to resident parents may be redirected to offset substitute care costs, and new orders may be established for pre-placement resident and nonresident parents to cover the costs of care. In addition, pre-placement arrears owed to the resident parent may also be assigned to offset the costs of care.<sup>4</sup>

In our first report, we examined Wisconsin mothers living with children who had absent fathers and who had one or more of their children removed from the home. We found that in the month before removal, 47 percent were owed child support by at least one father. During the out of home placement, 34 percent had orders established for the father to pay for substitute care, and 21 percent had orders established for the mother herself to pay for substitute care. Not all orders had payments made, but 21 percent of mothers were receiving child support payments (at an average amount of \$389/month in months with a payment) before the removal, during the removal 25 percent had father(s) paying for substitute care (average of \$220/month in months with a payment), and 16 percent of mothers were themselves paying for substitute care (average of \$217/month in months with a payment).

Thus, in Wisconsin, a large proportion of resident mother families with a child placed in substitute care do interact with the child support system either before or during an OHP, and the resulting income transfers can be substantial. These child support orders and payments have potential consequences for the progression of the child welfare case.

The potential effects of child support payments on parents and families that include children in an OHP vary depending on who is making a payment and where the payment is directed. Consider the situation for our sample, in which the mother is the pre-placement resident parent and the father(s) is nonresident. The redirection of support initially ordered from father(s) to mother, as well as any new order for payments from the mother, are both designed to offset the costs of OHP. They can also be expected to reduce the economic resources available to the mother. To the extent that poverty or other

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<sup>4</sup>For a discussion of policy related to referral of families with children in OHP to child support enforcement, see Chellew et al., 2012.

resource limitations contributed to the initial OHP (see Yang, 2010, for a review), reducing resources in this way may increase barriers to reunification and permanency. In contrast, if families engaged in child welfare services also receive child support services that lead to new orders that may benefit the mother, the potential additional resources may facilitate economic stability and therefore speed reunification and permanency. In addition to these indirect effects on permanency through economic stability, a direct economic incentive for these parents to work towards more rapid reunification may result from charging parents for the costs of care.

Our earlier analysis found that larger child support orders for mothers to pay to offset substitute care costs appear to lead to longer time in out-of-home care, suggesting that the reduction in economic resources resulting from child support orders to offset costs outweighs any incentive effects the order may create.

Given these findings on the relationship between child support and the child welfare outcomes during an OHP, in this report we consider interactions with the child support system after the OHP spell has ended. We focus on those families in which the children have been reunified with a parent. As children are returned to the family we would expect to see that child support orders established to offset substitute care costs would be discontinued, and that orders from nonresident fathers to the resident mothers would be either redirected to the mother (for those with previous orders) or newly established (for those with no previous order). In contrast, arrears remain permanently assigned, up to the costs of care. These changes reflect potential increases in the economic resources available to the reunified family which could improve the likelihood of successful reunifications. The consequences of child support changes during the OHP may also be relevant. The assignment to the state of any previous arrears on child support owed by the fathers to the mother reduces potential economic resources available to the reunified family. Arrears owed by the mother on a child support order established to offset substitute care costs may directly reduce resources available to the family after reunification. And, arrears owed by the father on orders to offset substitute care costs may also reduce resident parent resources as tax intercept

payments will be directed to pay off these arrears, and as other payments on arrears may reduce the resources shared with the family.

An important consideration in thinking about the way child support orders affect households' potential resources lies in the different ways that the child support enforcement system handles current support obligations and arrears. When a child support order is issued, the amount owed in each time period is considered a "current support order," and any payments made will first go to pay off that current order. If full payments are not made each time period, then arrears start accruing. The obligor is expected to pay off all arrears owed, but in an effort to enforce child support accounts that have arrears balances, the child support system may establish a secondary order (an "arrears order") that the obligor is also expected to make a regular payment on to pay down outstanding balances. Even when the current support order is discontinued (for example, a mother's order to offset substitute care will end when the children are reunified), the parent will still be obliged to pay off his or her arrears balance, and may have an ongoing arrears order to do that. In addition, even if there is no specific arrears order in place, the child support system may intercept certain types of income (primarily tax refunds) in order to pay off arrears balances.

Thus, the potential for child support orders to affect post-reunification resources is multi-fold. Current child support orders for the nonresident father(s) to pay the mother represent a potential increase in household income, current child support orders for the mother or father(s) to pay for substitute care (a situation that should only occur if there is problem or delay in the enforcement system) represent a potential decline in resources, the assignment to the state of father(s)' pre-placement arrears to the mother reflect a decline in potential resources, and, finally, arrears owed by mother or father(s) for offsetting substitute care costs can also decrease resources—either because an arrears order is in place, or because of the potential for tax intercepts.

In addition, having large arrears balances may create a psychological disincentive for making payments even on current support owed. If fathers accrue large arrears during the OHP on orders to offset the cost of care, then this may lead to a lower likelihood of paying on their current support to the mother

post-reunification, thereby reducing the potential positive effect of having a new or re-activated current support order. One might presume that large arrears balances that mothers accrue during the OHP might also have negative incentive effects; by reducing returns to employment (if there is an arrears order in place then some of her income may be withheld), or as an indirect stressor.

Therefore in this paper we document the different types of obligations that mothers and fathers in Wisconsin may have with the child support system, both during the period of the OHP itself, and then during reunification. We consider current support orders, arrears orders and total arrears balances from father(s) to mother, and from each parent to the state for offsetting care costs. We then examine the relationship between these different types of child support obligations and the stability of reunification.

## DATA AND METHODS

We use Wisconsin administrative data from the child welfare system, the Wisconsin Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (WiSACWIS), to identify families with children who are removed from their parent's (or parents') care and placed out of home. Our sample begins with all mothers in Wisconsin who had a child removed and placed in an OHP in a two-year period between July of 2004<sup>5</sup> and June of 2006 (N = 9,024). We further restrict our sample to mothers with at least one child age 14 or less at initial placement, who is therefore at risk for an OHP for 48 months (N = 7,718). For the initial descriptive analysis we focus on families in which all of the children are reunified with a parent within 42 months (N = 7,130), which allows us to observe at least 12 months post-reunification for all families in the sample. This excludes families where children transitioned to some other permanent situation, such adoption or guardianship.

We analyze the first observed "spell" of OHP that starts after June 2004 and the first observed "spell" of reunification following. We count a mother as entering a spell when any child is removed (that is, when she becomes a mother with at least one child in an OHP), and we count her as exiting the spell

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<sup>5</sup>Our best estimates suggest that reliable statewide information on placements is available as of June 2004.

when all her known children are reunified with a parent. (See the Appendix in Cancian et al. (2012a) for additional detail on the construction of the sample.)

Drawing on data from WiSACWIS and from the child support administrative data system (KIDS), we aim to identify the family's living arrangements at the time of the first placement.

Understanding family structure, particularly whether the mother and/or the father are living with the children at the time of initial placement (that is, whether they are resident or nonresident parents), is important to our analysis. But, it is difficult to derive reliable estimates based on WiSACWIS records. KIDS records are also limited, and are not available for most of those without child support orders. We aim to distinguish families in which:

- all the mother's children were living with her, and not with their father, at the start of the spell;
- all the mother's children were living with her, and all or some were also living with their father;
- some of the mother's children were living with her, but not all; some children may also be living with their father; and
- none of the mother's children were living with her at the start of the OHP; they may or may not have been with their father.<sup>6</sup>

In this report we focus our analysis on the first, and most common, group. We further restrict the sample to those with at least one father identified in our administrative data. This results in a final focal sample of 2,055 resident mothers who experienced a spell with at least one child in an OHP during the period, and had no co-residing fathers at the time of initial placement, and who had all children reunified within 42 months.<sup>7,8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>See Appendix in Cancian et al. (2012a) for details.

<sup>7</sup>For this analysis we used data through 2010. Thus, we restrict our sample to cases in which all children have achieved permanency within 42 months in order to have 12 months of post-reunification data available for all cases in the cohort (i.e. for cases beginning a spell as late as June, 2006). This excludes 83 resident mothers whose children had not achieved permanency within 42 months.

<sup>8</sup>These 2,055 mothers have had 6,935 children with 4,016 separately identified fathers (fewer than 100 fathers have children with more than one of the mothers in our sample).

We begin by documenting child support outcomes for these families involved in the CPS system. We compare outcomes during the OHP spell and at 12 months after reunification.<sup>9</sup> We present measures of child support payments and child support orders, contrasting different types of child support obligations: orders to pay current support, orders to pay arrears, and arrears balances. We consider whether there is child support owed and paid by the nonresident father(s) of the mother's child(ren), and whether that support is owed and paid to the mother, or to the government to offset OHP costs. We also document orders and payments from the pre-placement resident mother to the government to offset OHP costs. In the case of nonresident fathers, orders to pay support to offset the costs of OHP may be the result of existing orders being redirected from the resident mother to the government. In the case of pre-placement resident mothers, orders to pay child support to offset the costs of OHP are typically new.<sup>10</sup>

We analyze how these orders and payments vary by child support history (whether there are pre-placement orders), as well as by the economic status (father's earnings, mother's earnings) and demographic characteristics (father's age, mother's age, mother's race, whether the mother has children with more than one father). Our primary focus is on child support owed and paid during an OHP and after reunification for our sample of reunified mother-only families. However, we also provide summary information on child support paid to offset substitute care costs for reunified families with other living arrangements at placement (in Appendix Table 2).

Finally we compare the likelihood of a second out of home placement spell for those mothers with or without child support orders and payments at each month throughout the year following reunification.

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<sup>9</sup>As discussed below, in some cases the reunification disrupts within 12 months and the child is placed back in substitute care.

<sup>10</sup>When a child is in an OHP placement, a new case is created but the child oftentimes remains active in the original (root) case. As we understand it, there is no requirement to inactivate the original case or indicate whether a child is still at home or emancipated. Moreover, in some cases some, but not all, of the children covered by a child support order will be removed to an OHP. Another complication results from the high proportion (over 60 percent) of mothers in our sample who have had children with multiple fathers. In these cases one (or more) father's children may be in an OHP, while another father's children remain with the mother. We are in the process of investigating KIDS data to better understand the status and consequences of orders during OHP.

## RESULTS

Child Support Orders and Payments during an Out-of-Home-Placement and after Reunification

In order to examine the relationship between child support and child welfare, we focus our analysis on those we know to be demographically-eligible for child support<sup>11</sup> at the time of the original OHP: mothers living with all her known children, with no father in the home (N = 2,055). Table 1 shows our 3 measures of child support obligation (open current support orders, open arrears orders and the arrears balances) measured during the OHP and in the 12<sup>th</sup> month after reunification.<sup>12</sup> The top panel indicates whether there was an order or arrears balance, the second panel shows the average monthly amount for the orders or the total arrears balance, and the third panel shows order and balance amounts just among those with positive amounts. Within each obligation outcome we show the orders (or balance) owed to the mother by the father(s) of her child(ren), the orders or balance owed by those fathers to the government to reimburse OHP costs, and the orders or balance owed by the mothers themselves to the government to reimburse substitute care costs.<sup>13</sup>

General policy prescriptions for the handling of child support in child welfare cases are to redirect any existing child support order owed by a father to a mother for a child placed in out-of-home care. If there is no existing child support order then the child support agency may pursue a new order. If a father has multiple children and not all are removed from the mother's home, then the father may owe child support both to the mother (for the children still in the home) and to the government (to reimburse OHP

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<sup>11</sup>Child support policy would generally provide for a child support order for children who are not living with their father, assuming that a father had been legally-identified (i.e. is born to married parents or has had paternity legally established). Our sample is limited to mothers who have at least one child with a father identified in the data, but not all of these fathers are legally established for purposes of child support enforcement. Two-thirds of the mothers in this sample have children with at least one legally-established father according to our records (i.e. with paternity established, or with a divorce recorded in KIDS). Child support outcomes are higher for this group. But, our analysis considers the larger group of all mothers with identified fathers.

<sup>12</sup>For measures "during OHP", current Support Orders and Arrears Orders during OHP are measured over the entire OHP spell. Arrears Balances are measured in the month prior to the end of the OHP spell, immediately before reunification.

<sup>13</sup>Orders to reimburse OHP costs include reimbursements to counties or the state for nonrelative substitute care (61 percent of cases), and reimbursements for kinship care (39 percent of cases). Available data does not allow us to distinguish reimbursements for court-ordered kinship care (which we consider OHP), and voluntary kinship care (which is not considered OHP).

**Table 1: Child Support Orders and Arrears Balances During and After Out-of-Home Placements**

	Current Orders			Arrears Orders			Arrears Balances		
	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs
Any Support Owed or Any Arrears Balance									
During an OHP	52.17%	29.15%	17.13%	32.12%	12.9%	5.99%	46.72%	25.84	14.11
1 yr. post-reunification	44.48	11.97	7.4	30.56	16.2	5.26	47.74	27.83	10.95
Mean Support Owed or in Balance									
During an OHP	\$154	\$56	\$20	\$18	\$3	\$2	\$6,409	\$1,127	\$227
1 yr. post-reunification	161	31	12	19	5	2	7,183	\$1,415	\$221
Mean Support Owed or in Balance if Positive									
During an OHP	\$331	\$227	\$172	\$56	\$24	\$29	\$13,732	\$4,362	\$1,606
1 yr. post-reunification	361	256	165	61	30	44	15,063	\$5,085	\$2,023

**Notes:** N =2055. Sample: Mothers in Wisconsin with (1) no children in an OHP in June 2004; (2) at least one child entering an OHP between July 2004 and June 2006; (3) all children transitioning to reunification within 42 months; (4) all mother's children live with her, and not with their father, at start of the OHP spell; and (5) mother has at least one child with an identified father in IRP Multi-Sample Person File (MSPF) data (though it may not be a legally established paternity). OHP = Out-of-home placement. Gov. = Government.

costs). If a mother has children with multiple fathers, only some of whose children are removed from the home, then the mother may have support owed to her from some fathers and there may be orders for support owed to the government for other fathers. Finally, the mother herself may have an order established to reimburse the government for the substitute care of her children. Decisions to redirect existing orders or to establish new orders to offset OHP costs, may depend on child welfare workers' assessments of how long the placement is expected to last. Other factors which may motivate the decision to pursue orders for reimbursement include management decisions about the priority of recovering OHP costs, a general commitment to enforcing parental financial support for their children, and concerns about the economic stability of mother's household and its impact on future reunification outcomes.

As shown in the first row of Table 1, slightly over half (52 percent) of subsequently reunifying mothers have a current child support order from one or more fathers during the time they have a child in an OHP. Almost a third (29 percent) of fathers have orders redirected or new orders established to offset the costs of having their children in care, while 17 percent of mothers have offset orders while the children are in an OHP.<sup>14</sup> Few fathers or mothers appear to pay these orders in full: 47 percent of mothers are owed arrears from fathers, 26 percent have fathers who owe the government and 14 of the mothers themselves owe the government at the end of the OHP, implying that only 3 percent of fathers and mothers fully comply with their offset orders, and only 5 percent of these mothers are fully paid what they are owed by fathers. A majority of the mothers owed support have fathers with orders to pay off those arrears (32 percent of the 52 percent with current orders), and large fractions of the fathers and mothers with offset orders also have arrears orders (13 percent of 29 percent for fathers, 6 percent of 17 percent for mothers).

At one year after reunification, the prevalence of current orders from fathers to mothers has declined somewhat (to 44 percent), and the prevalence of current orders to offset costs has fallen by more

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<sup>14</sup>These are slightly lower (29 percent instead of 34 percent for fathers and 17 percent instead of 21 percent for mothers) than the incidence of current support offset orders shown in the previous report (Cancian, 2012a), due to exclusion of mothers whose children transition into a different permanence situation. Mothers whose children go on to be adopted or into guardianship are more likely to have offset orders established.

than half (to 12 percent for fathers and 7 percent for mothers). That offset orders have not been entirely discontinued is largely due to the fact that some children have experienced another removal by this time, as discussed below.<sup>15</sup> The prevalence of cases with arrears balances and arrears orders do not appear to drop much, and in some cases, even rise slightly after reunification. Even in those cases in which the immediate burden of a current support order has been discontinued, the economic burden of unpaid arrears and, often, a specific order to pay off those arrears, continues.

Average amounts of orders and balances across all cases are shown in the second panel. In the third panel we show average monthly amounts of orders and total balances just for those cases and months with an order or balance. Average current support order amounts from fathers to mothers poses as a large potential resource for mothers with orders, and that amount increases slightly (from \$331 to \$361) after reunification. Amounts owed for current support orders to offset OHP costs are lower than the orders to pay mothers (\$227 during an OHP), and mothers are ordered even lower offset amounts (\$172 during an OHP); these amounts change little after reunification, as do the much lower amounts owed on arrears orders.

When they have arrears balances (and almost all with orders do), those balances run to several thousands of dollars; 12 months after reunification, for those with arrears balances for support fathers owe to mothers average over \$15,000, balances for fathers offsetting costs are over \$5,000, and for mothers offsetting costs over \$2,000. While many of these arrears balances will never be paid in full, tax refunds (including EITC funds for which many of these families would be eligible) can be intercepted to pay these (and they are they are used to pay debts to the government first), resulting in either a direct reduction in funds for the mother's household, or a reduction in the funds available to fathers to pay support owed to mothers.

As mentioned above, current offset orders after reunification decline but do not wholly disappear, largely due to the instability of reunification. Table 1a shows current orders post-reunification separately

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<sup>15</sup>Another explanation is that our measure of offset orders includes some orders for voluntary kinship care.

**Table 1a: Current Child Support Orders After Reunification, By Reunification Survival**

Child Support At 1 year post-reunification	Current Orders		
	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs
<b>Any Support Owed</b>			
All	44.48%	11.97%	7.40%
Stably Reunified	47.08	4.76	2.82
Disrupted Within 1 year	37.59	31.03	19.50
<b>Mean Support Owed</b>			
All	\$161	\$31	\$12
Stably Reunified	174	11	5
Disrupted Within 1 year	124	83	32
<b>Mean Support Owed if Positive</b>			
All	\$361	\$256	\$165
Stably Reunified	370	228	165
Disrupted Within 1 year	330	267	165

**Notes:** N = 2055. Stably Reunified Cases (N = 1491, 72.6%), Disrupted Reunifications within 12 months (N = 564, 27.4%)

for those families with stable reunifications for the 12 months after (the first) reunification and those who have a second removal during that time period. Most reunifications (73 percent) do survive, and current offset orders are low (5 percent for fathers, 3 percent for mothers) for that group. For the 27 percent of reunified families that experience another OHP in that first year, the incidence of offset orders is even higher than it was in the first OHP (31 percent versus 29 percent for fathers, 20 percent versus 17 percent for mothers), but there is little difference in order amounts between the stably reunified and those with another removal.

Child support orders only have a direct economic impact if they result in actual payments. In Table 2 we examine the payments made on the orders shown in Table 1. Payments shown include payments on the current order and any payments made on arrears. We measure payments during an OHP over the full span of the OHP, while payments after reunification are measured in a single month. Thus, we would expect lower payment rates given that payments are often irregular. In the top panel we see that 28 percent of mothers had payments made by their children's fathers during the OHP spell, and 20

**Table 2: Child Support Payments During and After Out-of-Home Placements**

	Paid by Fathers to Mother	Paid by Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	Paid by Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs
Any Support Paid			
During an OHP	27.69%	20.24%	13.48%
1 yr. post-reunification	19.85	8.86	4.91
Mean Support Paid			
During an OHP	\$72	\$28	\$12
1 yr. post-reunification	73	17	7
Mean Support Paid if Positive			
During an OHP	\$347	\$232	\$225
1 yr. post-reunification	368	197	152

**Notes:** N = 2055. Includes payments for current support or arrears.

percent received a payment in the 12<sup>th</sup> month following reunification. Payments on offset orders dropped more substantially for both fathers and mothers (20 percent to 9 percent for fathers, 13 percent to 5 percent for mothers). Payments on offset orders may be particularly sensitive to the one-month window for measuring payments after an OHP, since many of these payments may be the result of tax intercepts.

#### Factors Associated with Child Support Orders and Payments

One might expect that determinations about pursuing child support orders, especially for orders to reimburse the government for care costs, may vary with the economic and demographic characteristics of the case. There is a long and substantial research literature (e.g. Sorenson and Hill, 2004; Ha et al., 2008), which considers the characteristics associated with child support orders and payments from nonresident fathers to resident mothers, and, as we found in the previous report, the results for the present sample conform to that literature. Therefore we largely focus on differences in orders to offset substitute care costs. We look at earnings of the father (highest-earning father if more than one) and mother as derived

from Wisconsin Unemployment Insurance Wage records,<sup>16</sup> the number of fathers with whom each mother has had children, mother's race and ethnicity, and each parent's age.

Table 3 shows differences in current support orders during an OHP and after reunification. As in the previous report, trends in current support orders from fathers to mother correspond with findings in other literature; with orders more likely and for higher amounts as either parents' income increases, orders owed to mother more likely and larger when she has children with more than one man, and orders more likely and larger for older parents. Interestingly, as also found in the previous report, there does not appear to be consistent variation in the likelihood of orders established for offsetting OHP costs by parents' income or age, during and after an OHP. While mean support owed by fathers to offset costs generally rises with income (though not uniformly),<sup>17</sup> there is no consistent relationship for mothers, though the highest earning mothers do have relatively high orders to offset costs, especially during an OHP. While child support order amounts between nonresident parents and resident parents are based, in large part, on parents' income, it appears to play less of a role in setting orders to offset substitute care costs. We do find that the likelihood of a father having an order to offset substitute care costs increases as mother has children with more men, both during an OHP (21 percent of mothers with 1 father vs 38 percent of mothers with 3 or more fathers) and after reunification (10 percent of mothers with 1 father vs 17 percent of mothers with 3 or more fathers). Also, we note that African-American mothers are substantially less likely to have an order to offset care costs during an OHP than those of other races, in part reflecting policy in Milwaukee County, which include a substantial portion of these cases.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Unemployment Insurance wage records are available only for individuals for whom we have Social Security numbers, and as most child welfare cases do not collect Social Security numbers, a large percentage of parents were not found in the Unemployment Insurance wage record and are thus categorized as having no earnings.

<sup>17</sup>The lack of a more uniform correspondence between fathers' earnings levels and order levels may in part reflect the comparison of total support owed (across all fathers) to the earnings of the highest-earning father. In future analysis we hope to distinguish orders, arrears balances, and payments associated with each father (and by whether that particular father's child(ren) are in substitute care).

<sup>18</sup>See Appendix Table 1, showing that no reunified mothers in Milwaukee County have arrears orders on reimbursement orders after 12 months, and that only 3 percent have any arrears balance on those accounts, indicating that such orders appear to be used less frequently in Milwaukee County than they are on average in the state.

**Table 3: Current Child Support Orders During and After Out-of-Home Placements: Variation Parents' Economic and Demographic Characteristics**

	During an OHP															12 Months After Reunification					
	Any Support Owed for Current Orders					Mean Support Owed for Current Orders if Positive					Any Support Owed					Mean Support Owed if Positive					
	N	% of Sample	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs		By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs		By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs							
			Fathers to Mother	OHP Costs	Costs							Fathers to Mother	OHP Costs	Costs	Fathers to Mother	OHP Costs	Costs	Fathers to Mother	OHP Costs	Costs	
<b>By Earnings of Highest-Earning Father in Year Before an OHP</b>																					
No earnings	1,160	56%	43%	24%	18%	\$299	\$225	\$171	37%	10%	7%	\$322	\$253	\$170							
\$1 to \$2,500	128	6	52	40	14	260	171	169	45	16	9	273	195	176							
\$2,501 to \$5,000	74	4	59	35	18	273	166	160	51	18	5	304	206	115							
\$5,001 to \$10,000	115	6	67	42	14	305	187	164	51	18	9	319	205	141							
\$10,001 to \$25,000	248	12	66	38	19	288	218	173	56	14	9	320	272	150							
\$25,001 to high	330	16	66	32	16	481	298	180	58	14	8	528	316	176							
<b>By Earnings of Mother in Year Before an OHP</b>																					
No earnings	1,137	55%	48%	28%	15%	\$320	\$238	\$168	40%	11%	7%	\$355	\$241	\$165							
\$1 to \$2,500	257	13	53	25	20	316	211	143	40	13	9	320	274	144							
\$2,501 to \$5,000	117	6	55	37	22	294	224	180	41	17	9	341	230	179							
\$5,001 to \$10,000	180	9	61	36	23	310	214	158	57	13	9	330	272	153							
\$10,001 to \$25,000	256	12	61	32	18	346	216	183	55	11	7	357	249	185							
\$25,001 to high	108	5	60	27	16	495	204	284	56	12	6	552	374	194							
<b>By Number of Men with Whom Mother Has Children</b>																					
One father	806	39%	35%	21%	15%	\$292	\$242	\$181	28%	10%	6%	\$322	\$282	\$188							
2 fathers	740	36	59	32	20	330	218	175	51	11	7	357	261	171							
3+ fathers	509	25	68	38	17	366	224	153	61	17	10	394	227	137							
<b>By Mother's Race/Ethnicity*</b>																					
White	1,298	63%	52%	29%	19%	\$352	\$232	\$175	44%	12%	8%	\$380	\$272	\$165							
Black	423	21	59	33	9	262	156	141	53	12	5	285	186	145							
Hispanic	127	6	42	28	22	376	273	174	34	9	7	426	245	125							
Multiple	169	8	50	27	19	342	356	180	41	17	12	404	298	201							
<b>By Mother's Age At Start of the OHP</b>																					
Missing	14	1%	7%	7%	7%	\$172	\$368	\$205	7%	14%	7%	\$235	\$136	\$216							
Age 15–17	24	1	17	29	8	139	157	137	17	4	.	216	78	.							
Age 18–20	109	5	29	27	23	161	177	149	36	11	7	189	254	155							
Age 21–25	296	14	51	33	16	215	209	160	42	14	11	265	240	158							
Age 26–30	279	14	60	39	18	284	230	164	50	17	8	340	260	139							
Age 31–35	521	25	58	30	18	358	232	167	51	14	8	371	258	174							
Age 36+	812	40	51	24	17	389	239	186	42	9	6	418	266	175							

(table continues)

**Table 3, continued**

	During an OHP												12 Months After Reunification					
	Any Support Owed for Current Orders						Mean Support Owed for Current Orders if Positive						Any Support Owed			Mean Support Owed if Positive		
	N	% of Sample	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs		By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs		By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs		By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	
By Age of Oldest Father at Start of the OHP																		
Missing	71	3%	3%	1%	15%	\$194	\$94	\$202		1%	1%	4%	\$460	\$91	\$221			
Age 15–17	14	1			14			229		7	7		294	78				
Age 18–20	34	2	26	29	18	123	121	174		32	6	3	168	251	230			
Age 21–25	142	7	48	30	18	199	211	147		40	17	8	261	212	149			
Age 26–30	213	10	51	31	14	239	200	165		42	11	7	277	226	136			
Age 31–35	346	17	53	33	17	291	227	180		47	17	9	301	267	196			
Age 36+	1,235	60	57	29	18	372	237	171		48	11	8	404	266	159			

**Note:** N = 2,055.

\*Excludes 31 cases with missing race/ethnicity, and 7 Asian mothers.

Table 4 shows similar breakdowns for arrears balances. There is little consistent variation by income in arrears likelihood or balance amount on arrears balances owed by nonresident fathers—to mothers and to offset care costs. There is some tendency for higher earning mothers to owe lower arrears, though the relationship is not consistent, especially in the second period. The likelihood of having arrears on orders owed by the father to the mother by the father to the government is higher in families with multiple male partners. Arrears during an OHP on mother to government orders is substantially lower for African American women, as expected given the lower probability of an order on which arrears could accumulate. Younger parents have lower arrears balance amounts on all three obligation types in both periods (during an OHP and after reunification), although the trend is most consistent for orders from father to mother. But perhaps the most surprising finding is that balance amounts, even for the orders in which the father owes the mother, do not vary systematically by payers' income level.<sup>19</sup>

Differences in arrears orders by economic and demographic characteristics are shown in Table 5. As with arrears balances, exposure matters; arrears orders for fathers to pay mothers, or for fathers to pay the state to offset care costs, appear more likely for families where the mother has children with multiple men. Few other characteristics appear related to either the likelihood or amount of arrears orders. Arrears order likelihood or amounts show no consistent variation by payer's income on any obligation type. Arrears order amounts on obligations from father to mother do appear to increase with the parent's age, in line with the larger arrears balances associated with age. It may be that arrears orders are set based on the amount of the arrears balance, rather than on an assessment of ability to pay.

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<sup>19</sup>Though as noted above, the lack of correspondence between fathers' earnings and child support outcomes may in part reflect the comparison of total support outcome amounts (across all fathers) being compared to the earnings of the highest-earning father. In future analysis we hope to distinguish orders, arrears balances and payments associated with each father (and by whether that particular father's child(ren) are in substitute care).

**Table 4: Arrears Balances During and After Out-of-Home Placements: Variation Parents' Economic and Demographic Characteristics**

	During an OHP															12 Months After Reunification					
	Any Arrears Balance					Mean Arrears Balance if Positive					Any Arrears Balance					Mean Arrears Balance if Positive					
	N	% of Sample	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs				
																		By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother
By Earnings of Highest-Earning Father in Year Before the OHP																					
No earnings	1,160	56%	40%	21%	14%	\$13,917	\$4,938	\$1,632	41%	24%	10%	\$15,241	\$5,586	\$2,176							
\$1 to \$2,500	128	6	52	39	12	13,238	4,753	2,261	59	44	11	13,795	4,863	2,008							
\$2,501 to \$5,000	74	4	59	31	11	15,334	3,528	1,381	62	41	12	16,642	3,923	1,661							
\$5,001 to \$10,000	115	6	67	39	12	15,624	4,821	976	63	44	12	18,381	5,062	1,226							
\$10,001 to \$25,000	248	12	56	33	17	12,004	3,587	2,082	56	35	13	13,341	4,734	2,854							
\$25,001 to high	330	16	52	26	15	13,555	3,231	1,109	51	23	12	14,693	4,322	1,248							
By Earnings of Mother in Year Before the OHP																					
No earnings	1,137	55%	43%	24%	12%	\$14,391	\$4,781	\$1,820	44%	27%	11%	\$15,920	\$5,264	\$2,195							
\$1 to \$2,500	257	13	47	23	17	11,658	3,120	1,825	47	26	15	12,955	3,948	1,957							
\$2,501 to \$5,000	117	6	49	34	20	12,987	4,401	1,383	51	36	13	11,880	5,661	2,287							
\$5,001 to \$10,000	180	9	52	34	21	13,186	4,702	1,330	58	33	14	13,775	5,609	1,674							
\$10,001 to \$25,000	256	12	57	29	14	12,416	4,024	1,183	56	28	7	14,552	5,283	1,745							
\$25,001 to high	108	5	47	20	11	17,871	2,532	992	45	24	6	19,641	3,183	541							
By Number of Men with Whom Mother Has Children																					
One father	806	39%	29%	19%	12%	\$10,229	\$3,703	\$1,542	30%	20%	8%	\$11,190	\$4,616	\$1,742							
2 fathers	740	36	54	28	17	12,869	4,352	1,200	55	30	12	13,978	4,915	1,589							
3+ fathers	509	25	65	33	14	17,273	4,970	2,397	66	37	14	19,194	5,696	2,794							
By Mother's Race/Ethnicity*																					
White	1,298	63%	45%	25%	16%	\$10,418	\$4,015	\$1,467	46%	26%	11%	\$11,505	\$4,831	\$1,833							
Black	423	21	58	32	8	20,312	5,486	1,991	60	36	9	22,292	6,048	2,109							
Hispanic	127	6	38	24	19	24,630	4,415	2,112	39	24	10	26,610	5,320	3,592							
Multiple	169	8	48	22	17	11,470	3,278	1,745	50	26	17	11,748	3,639	2,147							
By Mother's Age At Start of the OHP																					
Missing	14	1%	7%	14%	7%	\$18,890	\$10,437	\$189	7%	14%	7%	\$22,999	\$11,513	\$220							
Age 15-17	24	1	13	25	8	2,482	675	332	17	21	.	2,987	897	.							
Age 18-20	109	5	22	27	20	1,797	917	744	39	26	17	2,028	1,305	1,034							
Age 21-25	296	14	44	27	14	5,008	2,922	1,205	48	31	13	5,828	3,085	1,568							
Age 26-30	279	14	54	35	13	10,409	5,939	1,855	56	40	13	11,965	6,425	2,086							
Age 31-35	521	25	55	27	16	15,736	4,744	2,323	53	28	12	18,214	5,932	2,880							
Age 36+	812	40	45	21	13	17,448	4,465	1,338	44	23	9	19,235	5,230	1,741							

(table continues)

Table 4, continued

	During an OHP												12 Months After Reunification					
	Any Arrears Balance						Mean Arrears Balance if Positive						Mean Arrears Balance if Positive					
	N	% of Sample	By			By			By			By			By			
			Fathers to Mother	Gov. for OHP Costs	Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	Fathers to Mother	Gov. for OHP Costs	Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	Fathers to Mother	Gov. for OHP Costs	Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	Fathers to Mother	Gov. for OHP Costs	Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	Fathers to Mother	Gov. for OHP Costs	Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	
By Age of Oldest Father at Start of the OHP																		
Missing	71	3%	3%	1%	7%	\$18,491	\$262	\$667	3%	1%	6%	\$365	\$555	\$411				
Age 15–17	14	1			14			425	7	7		106	61					
Age 18–20	34	2	21	26	15	1,196	780	1,058	35	21	12	1,716	1,031	1,983				
Age 21–25	142	7	37	27	15	3,073	2,878	709	44	33	11	3,681	3,106	1,088				
Age 26–30	213	10	45	29	13	8,757	4,041	1,159	48	32	10	9,896	4,319	1,251				
Age 31–35	346	17	49	29	13	11,283	4,592	2,516	52	32	14	12,383	5,576	2,526				
Age 36+	1,235	60	51	26	15	16,151	4,639	1,605	50	27	11	18,173	5,471	2,136				

**Note:** N = 2,055.

\*Excludes 31 cases with missing race/ethnicity, and 7 Asian mothers.

**Table 5: Arrears Orders During and After Out-of-Home Placements: Variation Parents' Economic and Demographic Characteristics**

	During an OHP															12 Months After Reunification					
	Any Arrears Order			Mean Arrears Order if Positive						Any Arrears Order			Mean Arrears Order if Positive								
	N	% of Sample	By		By Fathers to Gov. for OHP	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP	By		By Fathers to Gov. for OHP	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP						
			Fathers to Mother	Gov. for OHP							Fathers to Gov. for OHP	Mothers to Gov. for OHP									
By Earnings of Highest-Earning Father in Year Before the OHP																					
No earnings	1,160	56%	28%	11%	6%	\$54	\$20	\$29	27%	15%	5%	\$57	\$30	\$41							
\$1 to \$2,500	128	6	34	23	6	45	9	33	36	30	5	58	19	37							
\$2,501 to \$5,000	74	4	35	18	4	59	34	16	31	19	3	41	39	20							
\$5,001 to \$10,000	115	6	50	17	6	63	20	15	46	24	6	74	22	52							
\$10,001 to \$25,000	248	12	40	18	7	53	27	30	36	19	5	59	28	55							
\$25,001 to high	330	16	33	8	6	63	49	36	32	11	5	75	50	47							
By Earnings of Mother in Year Before the OHP																					
No earnings	1,137	55%	30%	13%	5%	\$55	\$23	\$30	28%	16%	5%	\$58	\$30	\$44							
\$1 to \$2,500	257	13	31	10	8	57	13	45	31	14	8	68	19	46							
\$2,501 to \$5,000	117	6	32	18	8	53	30	17	30	19	9	85	45	41							
\$5,001 to \$10,000	180	9	33	18	9	51	41	29	36	19	8	58	44	33							
\$10,001 to \$25,000	256	12	40	13	6	59	19	17	37	18	3	57	28	63							
\$25,001 to high	108	5	32	8	4	62	6	22	30	12	2	74	11	26							
By Number of Men with Whom Mother Has Children																					
One father	806	39%	17%	8%	4%	\$49	\$13	\$29	16%	10%	4%	\$53	\$21	\$44							
2 fathers	740	36	37	14	8	57	32	31	35	18	6	60	35	47							
3+ fathers	509	25	48	19	6	58	20	26	47	23	6	66	31	37							
By Mother's Race/Ethnicity*																					
White	1,298	63%	29%	12%	7%	\$64	\$32	\$24	27%	14%	5%	\$69	\$36	\$43							
Black	423	21	47	20	3	36	11	24	46	24	3	46	13	26							
Hispanic	127	6	29	9	6	49	17	32	26	16	6	52	29	56							
Multiple	169	8	28	9	8	69	17	65	28	17	11	73	53	54							
By Mother's Age At Start of the OHP																					
Missing	14	1%	.	7%	.	.	\$5	.	7%	14%	.	\$86	\$3	.							
Age 15–17	24	1	8%	17	.	\$8	18	.	.	8	.	.	14	.							
Age 18–20	109	5	17	9	7%	19	8	\$19	22	15	9%	25	51	\$26							
Age 21–25	296	14	28	17	3	34	14	27	28	21	5	31	19	34							
Age 26–30	279	14	42	22	8	43	13	37	41	27	8	42	19	42							
Age 31–35	521	25	39	12	6	61	35	31	37	15	6	72	40	46							
Age 36+	812	40	29	9	6	68	32	27	26	12	4	77	36	52							

(table continues)

**Table 5, continued**

During an OHP

12 Months After Reunification

	N	% of Sample	Any Arrears Order			Mean Arrears Order if Positive			Any Arrears Order			Mean Arrears Order if Positive		
			By Fathers to Mother	By Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother	By Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother	By Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother	By Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs
By Age of Oldest Father at Start of the OHP														
Missing	71	3%	1%	.	1%	\$24	.	\$27	.	.	1%	.	.	\$26
Age 15–17	14	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	7%	.	.	\$12	.	.
Age 18–20	34	2	15	18%	12	14	\$13	15	12	15%	6	28	\$35	19
Age 21–25	142	7	25	15	3	20	9	23	30	23	7	32	31	27
Age 26–30	213	10	31	15	4	45	16	21	30	18	4	38	19	52
Age 31–35	346	17	34	15	6	43	12	44	32	20	6	49	19	50
Age 36+	1,235	60	35	13	7	64	31	28	33	15	5	72	36	44

**Note:** N = 2,055

\*Excludes 31 cases with missing race/ethnicity, and 7 Asian mothers.

Finally, in Table 6 we show variations in child support payment on our three types of child support obligation before and after reunification by economic and demographic characteristics. During the OHP spell, the likelihood of payments on orders owed by nonresident fathers to mother increases as father's income increases, as does the payment amount, corresponding with the variation in current support orders, and in line with previous literature. Unlike the probability of a current support order, the likelihood of payment on orders owed by fathers to the state for OHP costs also increases with father's income, although not as dramatically, and that relationship appears to disappear by the time period after reunification. In neither time period is there any consistent relationship between mother's income and her payments on orders for OHP costs. Again the additional exposure of multiple fathers increases the likelihood of observing a payment by father (to mother or to the state), but does not appear related to the payment amount.

Overall, outside of the expected relationship between income and orders between nonresident and resident parents, there are only a few factors among those examined here which demonstrate a consistent relationship with orders and payments to offset the costs of substitute care. These include cases with multiple fathers having an increased likelihood of having such orders or making payments—a likely result of increased exposure—and the lower likelihood of having reimbursement orders among African American mothers. This latter finding may be explained by county-level variation in the use of out-of-home care reimbursement orders, as documented in Appendix Table 1.

#### Relationship between Child Support and Disrupted Reunifications

In a previous report (Cancian et al., 2012a) we found evidence that child support orders for mothers to offset substitute care costs were associated with delays in reunification. Given that relationship, we are interested in whether child support obligations might be related to the stability of reunifications. In Table 7 we present a descriptive analysis comparing the likelihood of reunifications disrupting for those with and without different type of child support obligations. The table shows

**Table 6: Child Support Payments During and After Out-of-Home Placements: Variation Parents' Economic and Demographic Characteristics**

	Table 6: Child Support Payments During and After Out-of-Home Placements: Variation Parents' Economic and Demographic Characteristics														
	During an OHP									12 Months After Reunification					
	Any Payment			Mean Payment if Positive			Any Payment			Mean Payment if Positive					
	N	% of Sample	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	
<b>By Earnings of Highest-Earning Father in Year Before the OHP</b>															
No earnings	1,160	56%	21%	15%	13%	\$309	\$229	\$199	15%	7%	4%	\$307	\$197	\$157	
\$1 to \$2,500	128	6	22	23	9	242	126	181	13	13	5	263	177	129	
\$2,501 to \$5,000	74	4	24	23	11	313	167	159	24	8	7	228	248	168	
\$5,001 to \$10,000	115	6	41	29	11	384	159	291	21	13	3	332	134	169	
\$10,001 to \$25,000	248	12	42	29	16	306	216	344	30	10	6	362	187	114	
\$25,001 to high	330	16	39	28	15	465	321	217	31	11	6	527	231	170	
<b>By Earnings of Mother in Year Before the OHP</b>															
No earnings	1,137	55%	26%	18%	12%	\$330	\$247	\$228	18%	9%	4%	\$366	\$185	\$144	
\$1 to \$2,500	257	13	25	18	14	356	238	144	19	9	7	273	285	156	
\$2,501 to \$5,000	117	6	29	27	18	280	171	331	21	8	8	459	167	95	
\$5,001 to \$10,000	180	9	35	28	19	359	193	164	26	9	6	290	169	170	
\$10,001 to \$25,000	256	12	31	23	15	384	232	223	22	9	5	426	212	165	
\$25,001 to high	108	5	31	22	16	437	247	373	28	10	7	469	148	212	
<b>By Number of Men with Whom Mother Has Children</b>															
One father	806	39%	18%	16%	13%	\$331	\$250	\$202	12%	8%	5%	\$365	\$248	\$148	
2 fathers	740	36	30	22	15	334	209	250	24	9	5	366	188	167	
3+ fathers	509	25	39	24	13	374	243	222	27	10	6	371	148	141	
<b>By Mother's Race/Ethnicity*</b>															
White	1,298	63%	31%	23%	16%	\$338	\$239	\$203	23%	10%	6%	\$372	\$213	\$144	
Black	423	21	22	16	5	290	147	487	15	7	3	260	110	262	
Hispanic	127	6	20	19	19	550	263	156	9	5	6	806	300	102	
Multiple	169	8	31	18	14	414	309	248	22	8	4	376	172	109	
<b>By Mother's Age At Start of the OHP</b>															
Missing	14	1%	.	7%	7%	.	\$6	\$274	.	.	.	.	.	.	
Age 15–17	24	1	8%	21	8	\$1,102	279	177	8%	13%	4%	\$124	\$43	\$449	
Age 18–20	109	5	18	18	15	301	197	164	13	9	2	182	107	68	
Age 21–25	296	14	26	21	12	297	217	191	15	10	5	236	189	138	
Age 26–30	279	14	33	24	13	257	244	192	24	11	5	267	177	106	
Age 31–35	521	25	31	21	14	373	220	243	23	8	7	490	257	145	
Age 36+	812	40	27	19	14	381	245	245	20	8	4	372	191	182	

(table continues)

Table 6, continued

	N	% of Sample	During an OHP						12 Months After Reunification					
			Any Payment			Mean Payment if Positive			Any Payment			Mean Payment if Positive		
			By	By		By	By		By	By		By	By	
			Fathers to	Fathers to	Mothers	Fathers to	Fathers to	Mothers	Fathers to	Fathers to	Mothers	Fathers to	Fathers to	Mothers
			Gov. for	to Gov.	for OHP	Gov. for	Gov. for	to Gov.	Gov. for	Gov. for	to Gov.	to Gov.	to Gov.	
			OHP	for OHP	Costs	OHP	OHP	for OHP	OHP	OHP	for OHP	Costs	Costs	Costs
			Costs	Costs	Costs	Costs	Costs	Costs	Costs	Costs	Costs	Costs	Costs	Costs
By Age of Oldest Father at Start of the OHP														
Missing	71	3%	.	.	14%	.	.	\$272	.	.	.	.	.	.
Age 15–17	14	1	.	.	14	.	.	225	14%	7%	7%	\$159	\$72	\$449
Age 18–20	34	2	15%	21%	12	\$454	\$194	156	9	9	3	383	73	25
Age 21–25	142	7	22	22	13	261	215	189	16	11	3	225	123	109
Age 26–30	213	10	24	18	11	283	183	195	15	10	4	216	200	168
Age 31–35	346	17	31	22	14	278	204	175	20	10	7	270	187	117
Age 36+	1,235	60	30	21	14	381	250	246	23	9	5	421	215	164

Note: N = 2,055.

\*Excludes 31 cases with missing race/ethnicity, and 7 Asian mothers.

**Table 7: Child Support Orders and Arrears Balances After Out-Of-Home Placements by Reunification Length**  
**Probability of disruption among cases that remained reunified at the beginning of the month, by CS status in previous month**

		0 Months	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6	Month 7	Month 8	Month 9	Month 10	Month 11	Month 12
N remaining reunified		2,055	1,940	1,858	1,800	1,747	1,705	1,667	1,625	1,599	1,576	1,552	1,523	1,505
All		5.60%	4.23%	3.12%	2.94%	2.40%	2.23%	2.52%	1.60%	1.44%	1.52%	1.87%	1.18%	0.93%
<b>Any Support Owed in Previous Month</b>														
By father to mother	No	5.99%	5.28%	3.64%	2.79%	2.00%	1.80%	2.75%	1.42%	1.56%	0.98%	1.60%	1.13%	0.76%
	Yes	5.02	3.00	2.56	3.11	2.84	2.70	2.26	1.80	1.30	2.11	2.16	1.24	1.12
By father to offset OHP costs	No	5.57	4.32	3.12	2.72	2.25	2.17	2.41	1.36	1.38	1.54	1.83	0.90	0.98
	Yes	5.67	3.95	3.16	6.31	5.00	3.37	4.55	5.88	2.47	1.25	2.56	6.58	0.00
By mother to offset OHP costs	No	5.86	4.54	3.12	2.83	2.37	2.24	2.48	1.65	1.36	1.57	1.73	1.08	0.96
	Yes	4.03	2.43	3.23	5.97	3.51	1.85	3.77	0.00	4.00	0.00	6.25	4.44	0.00
<b>Any Arrears Orders in Previous Month</b>														
By father to mother	No	5.92%	4.58%	3.14%	2.70%	1.97%	2.02%	2.50%	1.24%	1.26%	1.45%	1.85%	1.04%	0.86%
	Yes	4.81	3.41	3.07	3.51	3.39	2.72	2.57	2.43	1.85	1.68	1.91	1.50	1.08
By father to offset OHP costs	No	5.64	4.17	3.00	2.78	2.28	2.40	2.19	1.47	1.14	1.60	1.92	1.21	1.07
	Yes	5.24	4.64	4.00	4.15	3.30	0.97	4.85	2.50	3.50	1.01	1.50	0.99	0.00
By mother to offset OHP costs	No	5.56	4.39	3.18	2.99	2.36	2.22	2.52	1.48	1.31	1.59	1.68	1.17	0.97
	Yes	6.32	1.06	2.06	2.15	3.30	2.35	2.50	3.95	4.11	0.00	5.88	1.56	0.00
<b>Any Arrears Balances in Previous Month</b>														
By father to mother	No	6.39%	4.43%	3.14%	3.04%	1.82%	1.86%	2.24%	1.32%	1.10%	1.12%	1.39%	1.02%	1.03%
	Yes	4.69	4.00	3.10	2.84	2.99	2.60	2.81	1.89	1.79	1.94	2.36	1.35	0.82
By father to offset OHP costs	No	5.77	4.44	2.99	2.69	2.28	2.17	2.29	1.29	0.98	1.73	1.92	1.27	1.03
	Yes	5.08	3.65	3.49	3.69	2.77	2.42	3.23	2.58	2.94	0.84	1.69	0.87	0.59
By mother to offset OHP costs	No	5.67	4.48	3.36	3.11	2.21	2.23	2.40	1.50	1.17	1.59	1.82	1.21	1.00
	Yes	5.17	2.76	1.60	1.79	3.88	2.26	3.55	2.53	4.08	0.75	2.38	0.85	0.00
<b>Any Support Paid in Previous Month</b>														
By father to mother	No	5.28%	4.28%	2.85%	2.44%	2.01%	2.05%	2.56%	1.24%	1.17%	1.02%	1.59%	0.89%	0.81%
	Yes	6.96	3.99	4.16	4.93	3.98	2.95	2.37	2.96	2.56	3.62	3.05	2.47	1.48
By father to offset OHP costs	No	5.78	4.57	3.04	2.95	2.36	2.36	2.46	1.54	1.51	1.60	1.89	1.10	0.98
	Yes	4.47	1.97	4.11	2.83	3.23	0.00	3.70	2.86	0.00	0.00	1.39	2.82	0.00
By mother to offset OHP costs	No	5.80	4.49	3.10	2.91	2.37	2.22	2.56	1.61	1.36	1.58	1.81	1.22	0.96
	Yes	3.43	1.65	3.40	3.39	2.91	2.41	1.54	1.45	3.57	0.00	3.33	0.00	0.00

Note: N = 2,055.

proportion of still-reunified families that disrupt in each month. We compare disruption rates for those with or without current support orders, arrears orders, arrears balances and any payments, either from the fathers to the mother, from the fathers to the state to offset OHP costs and from the mother to the state to offset OHP costs. If child support obligations increased the risk of disruption, we would expect to see disruption rates for those with such obligations to be consistently higher than for those without such obligations. The relatively small number of cases with a disruption limits the conclusions that can be drawn, but we do not see any consistent relationship; disruption rates rise and fall from month to month, and are sometimes higher for those with obligations and sometimes higher for those without. As more data become available we expect to consider a longer time period, and also estimate multivariate models of the risk of disruption. However, this preliminary analysis does not suggest a systematic relationship between child support orders and the stability of reunifications.

#### CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The child welfare system and the child support system interact in ways that are important to understand, both for the implications on program management, and for the consequences of those interactions on family outcomes. In a previous report, we found that a substantial fraction of Wisconsin families with children removed from the home had existing child support orders that had the potential to provide economic resources to the resident family, and that many of the resident and nonresident parents in those families had child support orders established during the removal to offset the costs of out-of-home care. While these orders offset the costs of substitute care, they also impose financial burdens on parents who may already be struggling financially. Our analysis showed that these orders appear to lengthen the time children are kept out of the home.

When children are reunified after a substitute care placement, their families remain vulnerable to the risk of further removals, and we have found that the child support system has the potential to have significant influence on these reunified families' economic resources. The child support system appears to appropriately end orders for reimbursing the child welfare system in fairly short order after the family has

reunified (although further research is needed to confirm that the 5 percent of fathers and 3 percent of mothers who still have such orders 12 months after reunification are explained by orders for voluntary kinship care); but even then the arrears that accumulate on the orders in place have the prospect of diminishing available resources. Ten percent of reunified mothers and over a quarter of the nonresident fathers have arrears balances on those reimbursement accounts 12 months into the reunification (this is almost two-thirds of the mothers and 90 percent of the fathers that had orders to offset substitute care costs). Arrears balances average \$2,000 for mothers and \$5,000 for fathers (in addition to the average \$15,000 in arrears nearly half of fathers owe on their orders to the mother). About half of those with arrears balances have specific orders to make payments on those arrears, and all face the possibility of tax refunds being intercepted. When payments on those reimbursement accounts are made, they may reduce available household funds, and also have secondary effects on work incentives and psychological well-being.

Of additional interest is the finding that when offset orders are established, either for mothers or nonresident fathers, they do not appear to be based on the percentage of income standard that guides the amount of orders between nonresident and resident parents. We find limited evidence of a relationship between order amounts and ability to pay, suggesting that orders may be proportionally more burdensome for the most economically disadvantaged. That said, the current descriptive analysis does not suggest that arrears balances, arrears orders, or current child support orders, have a systematic relationship with the stability of reunifications, at least over the first year of the reunification.

Most families served by the child welfare system are economically vulnerable, and lack of financial resources may contribute, directly or indirectly, to initial OHP, the length of time in substitute care, or the stability of reunification. Child support provided to resident parents may be an important source of economic support. And, child support redirected from the nonresident parent, or paid by the resident parent, to offset substitute care costs may contribute to economic strain for resident parent families. At the same time, offset payments are a potentially important source of revenue for government agencies funding substitute care arrangements. Understanding the current and potential interactions of the

child welfare and child support systems, and their implications for family wellbeing and public costs, is important. This report is part of a series aimed at developing an evidence base to inform policy in this area.

**Appendix Table 1: Child Support Orders to Offset Costs of Out-of-Home Placement: Variation by County (Where Mom Doesn't have Children Out of Home Within 12 Months of Reunification)**

	N	Any CS Owed 12 months After Reunification			Any CS Arrears Orders 12 months After Reunification			Any CS Arrears Balances 12 months After Reunification		
		By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs
Full Sample	1,491	47%	5%	3%	30%	13%	4%	48%	22%	7%
By County										
Ashland	11	64%	18%	9%	18%	9%	9%	73%	45%	9%
Barron	33	39	6	3	24	12	0	36	18	3
Brown	65	45	18	8	22	12	3	45	25	6
Calumet	10	20	0	0	30	0	0	30	20	0
Chippewa	15	40	13	7	7	0	7	53	33	7
Dane	101	46	1	1	37	19	6	50	25	7
Dodge	15	53	0	0	20	27	0	40	40	0
Dunn	17	47	0	6	24	0	6	47	0	12
Eau Claire	23	65	0	4	48	17	22	65	39	22
Fond du Lac	25	36	4	0	44	24	20	56	28	8
Green	15	40	0	0	27	13	0	40	13	0
Jefferson	22	32	0	0	14	5	5	23	14	5
Kenosha	65	43	8	3	25	25	14	45	32	26
La Crosse	35	51	0	6	29	14	3	49	20	6
Manitowoc	22	50	5	0	27	9	5	41	14	5
Marathon	30	53	3	0	30	13	7	50	20	7
Marinette	18	56	0	0	39	6	0	44	6	0
Milwaukee	293	49	5	2	38	17	0	53	26	3
Monroe	14	43	14	7	7	0	0	57	21	14
Oneida	10	20	0	0	10	10	10	30	40	10
Outagamie	12	33	0	0	25	17	0	25	17	0
Ozaukee	11	45	0	0	0	9	9	36	18	9
Polk	10	20	10	10	10	0	10	20	10	10
Portage	16	50	0	0	44	25	13	63	31	6
Price	10	20	0	10	0	0	10	30	0	30
Racine	55	69	7	9	47	18	9	67	44	18
Rock	79	44	3	4	23	9	1	46	18	5
Sauk	24	54	0	0	46	13	0	63	17	0
Sheboygan	55	64	4	5	40	9	2	58	11	2
Walworth	13	54	15	15	15	0	8	54	38	15

(table continues)

**Appendix Table 1, continued**

	N	Any CS Owed 12 months After an OHP			Any CS Arrears Orders 12 months After an OHP			Any CS Arrears Balances 12 months After an OHP		
		By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Fathers to Mother	By Fathers to Gov. for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Gov. for OHP Costs
Washington	31%	52%	0%	0%	32%	3%	3%	52%	10%	3%
Waukesha	22	18	9	0	18	14	0	27	36	0
Winnebago	114	55	4	0	37	15	4	56	18	5
Wood	25	52	4	4	32	20	8	56	28	8
All Others*	175	41	8	4	23	11	5	43	23	11

**Note:** N = 2,055.

\*Counties with 5 or fewer cases.

**Appendix Table 2: Child Support Orders and Payments to Offset Costs of Out-of-Home Placement: Comparison for Alternative Samples**

	N	By Fathers to Government for OHP Costs	By Mothers to Government for OHP Costs
<b>Any Child Support Owed for Current Orders 12 months after Reunification</b>			
All reunified families with an OHP in the period	5,759	10	6
Children living just with mother (base)	2,055	12	7
Children living w/both biological parents	350	6	3
Other living arrangements	3,354	9	5
<b>Any Child Support Owed for Arrears Orders 12 months after Reunification</b>			
All reunified families with an OHP in the period		12	4
Children living just with mother (base)		16	5
Children living w/both biological parents		5	4
Other living arrangements		9	4
<b>Any Arrears Balances 12 months after Reunification</b>			
All reunified families with an OHP in the period		20	9
Children living just with mother (base)		28	11
Children living w/both biological parents		11	5
Other living arrangements		16	8
<b>Any Child Support Paid 12 months after Reunification</b>			
All reunified families with an OHP in the period		6	4
Children living just with mother (base)		9	5
Children living w/both biological parents		4	3
Other living arrangements		5	3

**Notes:** N = 5,759. Sample: Mothers in Wisconsin with (1) no children in an OHP in June 2004; (2) at least one child entering an OHP between July 2004 and June 2006; and (3) all children transitioning to reunification within 42 months.

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