

## **Placement Outcomes for Children of Divorce in Wisconsin**

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## Summary

In considering where children should live after their parents divorce, state law formerly gave explicit preference to the mother. This gender preference has now been removed from law in all states, and shared placement has become more common; in Wisconsin, for example, shared placement became presumptive as of May 2000. This research examines whether these laws are having an effect by examining physical placement outcomes among Wisconsin divorces from 1996 to 1998, compared to divorces coming to court from 1990 to 1993. The research sample consists of nearly 2,900 divorces from the Wisconsin Court Record Database, roughly half from each time period.

Understanding trends in shared placement is important, not least because under Wisconsin law child support orders tend to be lower in shared-placement cases. Are shared placement and father placement increasing? In what types of divorce cases is placement awarded to both parents, or to the father? If such arrangements are not stable, children who end up largely in the care of one parent may not have adequate support.

Between the earlier and later periods, our simple descriptive analysis found a clear move away from mother sole placement, which declined from 74.6 percent to 63.7 percent of cases. Shared placement, both equal and unequal, more than doubled over these 5-6 years, from 11.4 to 23.1 percent; father sole placement increased slightly (8.7 to 9.4 percent). Among the variables we examined, mothers were more likely to receive placement when children were younger, or were all girls, and when their incomes accounted for a higher proportion of total family income. Shared placement was most likely when the parents lived in the same zip code, very uncommon when the parents lived in different states.

Placement outcomes varied dramatically only when we examined legal representation. When only the father had an attorney, the proportion of mother sole placement cases was only 52 percent in the early cohort and 42 percent in the later cohort; father sole placement accounted for 28 and 32 percent, respectively. When only the mother had an attorney, mother sole placement accounted for 87 and 82 percent, respectively; the likelihood of the father being awarded placement dropped to 2 percent and 4 percent.

We estimated a multinomial logit model for three independent outcomes, father sole placement, mother sole placement, and shared placement, equal or unequal (using a 30 percent of time threshold to define unequal placement). The factors we examined include total income and mother's share of income, any prior marriages, number, age, and gender of children, variables related to the court process, and some residential variables. Model results show that the increase in shared and father sole placement over the time periods was still significant and the strong effect of legal representation seen in the descriptive analyses remained when we controlled for background characteristics,

In general, the increased diversity of placement arrangements presents challenges to the child support system, requiring a greater variety of solutions and a need to monitor the stability of arrangements and the relationship between formal awards and actual living arrangements.

## I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

As divorce among families with children has become more common, policymakers and researchers have become increasingly interested in what happens to children in families that divorce. Most research on postdivorce outcomes for children looks exclusively at children who live with their mothers, the most common arrangement. This research documents very high levels of economic vulnerability and several negative consequences of growing up in a mother-only family (e.g., McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Some have suggested that these negative consequences could be expected because living without a father is likely to have detrimental effects on a child's development. Many of these writers have called for an increased role for fathers in their children's lives after divorce, either through children sharing time between their mother and father or through the father gaining sole physical placement. Others have argued that any negative consequences are primarily the result of the low incomes of mother-only families. In these cases, as well, there is some rationale for encouraging children to live with their fathers, since single fathers tend to have substantially higher incomes than single mothers.<sup>2</sup>

As this debate has occurred, laws governing where children live upon divorce have changed. Whereas state laws previously gave an explicit preference to mothers, in every state the gender preference in these laws has been removed (for a review, see Buehler and Gerard 1995). In Wisconsin, where gender preferences have not been explicit for a substantial period, recent legislation has made "shared placement" arrangements, in which children spend substantial time

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<sup>1</sup>This section, and the discussion of methodology, draw from Cancian and Meyer (1998).

<sup>2</sup>Another response would be to increase the amount of child support and alimony transferred from nonresident fathers to resident mothers. But even this response could increase father placement if the increased cost of being a nonresident parent encouraged some fathers to pursue placement more vigorously.

with both parents, presumptive as of May of 2000. Although the final judgment in the cases considered here was made before this date, court practice may have preceded the formal requirement. The debate and the change in laws raises several questions: Are these laws having an effect, that is, are shared placement and father placement increasing? In what types of divorce cases is placement awarded to both parents or to the father? In this paper, we examine placement outcomes among recent Wisconsin divorces, exploring factors associated with shared placement as well as mother sole and father sole placement.

Understanding trends in placement arrangements and the factors related to these trends is important because these trends have implications for the economic well-being of children. The Wisconsin standard requires that child support orders be lower in shared-placement cases.<sup>3</sup> If shared-placement arrangements are not stable, but tend to drift toward children spending most of their time with mothers (as anecdotes and some empirical research suggest; see Maccoby and Mnookin 1992), and if child support orders are not adjusted to reflect the new arrangement, there may be less child support available to these children.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, children in father-only families may be better off economically, in that these families tend to have higher incomes than mother-only families (Meyer and Garasky 1993; Meyer 1996). Finally, theoretical models of child support suggest that one reason nonresident parents do not always support their children is that they lack control over the allocation of resources within the resident-parent household (Weiss and Willis 1985). If fathers provide greater resources to their children when the child is

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<sup>3</sup>Whether orders in shared-time cases are consistent with the Wisconsin standard is the subject of a companion paper (Cook, 2002).

<sup>4</sup>Whether actual living arrangements are consistent with the court order is the subject of a separate IRP report (Krecker, Brown, Melli, and Wimer, 2003).

in their care, a trend towards shared placement may have important implications for the resources available to children.

This paper documents the child placement arrangements in recent Wisconsin divorces, those coming to court from 1996–98. We are particularly interested in documenting changes in the incidence of shared placement as a social phenomenon in the state, so we contrast the placement arrangements in these cases with divorces coming to court 1990–93. A brief discussion of the data used in this report is included in Part II of this report, Part III presents the results of the analyses related to changes in placement patterns between the two time periods; a discussion of findings follows in Part IV.

## **II. Data and Sample Selection**

We use the Wisconsin Court Record Data (CRD), a sample of cases coming to court in 21 Wisconsin counties (Brown, Roan and Marshall, 1994).<sup>5</sup> The frequent use and discussion of the CRD database in the context of numerous other studies and technical reports for the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) makes a detailed description unnecessary. To analyze changes in placement patterns over time, we specifically selected cases which entered the court system in two time periods: an early group of 2,324 couples that had court cases filed from July 1, 1990 through January 31, 1993, and a later group of 2,947 couples that had court cases filed from July 1, 1996 through June 30, 1998.<sup>6</sup> These cases include couples who are filing for divorce and those having paternity legally established. As shared placement

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<sup>5</sup>The counties are: Calumet, Clark, Dane, Dodge, Dunn, Green, Jefferson, Juneau, Kewaunee, Marathon, Milwaukee, Monroe, Oneida, Ozaukee, Price, Racine, Richland, St. Croix, Sheboygan, Waukesha, and Winnebago.

<sup>6</sup>The early group is referred to as cohorts 11 and 12 in the WCRD data. The late group is cohorts 17 and 18.

orders are quite uncommon among paternity establishment cases, we limit our analyses to the divorce cases in the sample; there are 1,386 divorce cases in the early sample and 1,590 in the later. Among these, there are a small number of cases that never record a final judgment during the period of data collection, leaving 1,362 in the early sample and 1,544 in the later. Finally, we delete 13 cases from the analysis where all the children of the couple are no longer minors, one case where the divorced couple is recorded as living together, and 15 cases where physical placement of the children is assigned to someone other than one of the parents. This results in a final sample of 2,877 cases (1,347 in the early time period and 1,530 in the later).

In cases where information on a parent's income is missing from the court record<sup>7</sup> we have used data from the Wisconsin Unemployment Insurance (UI) Wage Record files to supplement the court record. Although UI data are not available for all parents in the sample, and only include earnings for which UI reporting is required (and so are not entirely consistent with the gross income figures reported in the CRD), these data do allow us to measure the economic well-being of a far larger percentage of the sample. Whenever possible, income data used in subsequent analyses will come from the CRD. This is based on the assumption that the courts make child support decisions on the basis of the information in the legal materials and court records before them, not on the basis of earnings information that may be found in other state records. We should note, however, that current income information available to the courts at the time of hearings may arise from informal testimony and vary from that available in court *or* public records.

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<sup>7</sup>In the early group, 89 percent of mothers and 86 percent of fathers have income information in the court record, compared to 56 percent of mothers and 58 percent of fathers in the late group .

Unless otherwise noted, information on placement, child support orders, and other terms of the divorce settlement are drawn at the point in time at which the final decree is issued by the court. Some additional demographic data are taken from earlier court records. Although some divorce cases have multiple contacts with the court before or after receiving a final judgment, an analysis of these changes is beyond the scope of this study.

We analyze physical placement, not legal custody. Several physical placement outcomes are possible. In our initial descriptive analysis we differentiate between mother sole placement, father sole placement, equal shared placement, unequal shared placement (in which the child lives with one parent 30–49 percent of the time and the other parent 51–70 percent) and split placement (in which at least one child lives with the mother and at least one with the father). We use the 30 percent threshold to define unequal shared placement because this is the level at which a different child support formula takes effect in Wisconsin.<sup>8</sup> After presenting initial descriptive information on these physical placement outcomes, our analysis focuses on mother sole placement, shared placement (including both equal and unequal), and father sole placement.

For our primary analysis we estimate a multinomial logit model with the three independent outcomes. Such a model allows us to predict the effect that various case characteristics have on the odds of shared placement and father sole placement outcomes (versus mother sole placement). For this estimation we exclude cases which have other types of placement outcomes (such as split placement, or placement types which vary over time).

Our conceptualization of the factors that may influence the placement outcome follows economic theory and the previous literature (see in particular, Cancian and Meyer, 1998, as well

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<sup>8</sup>Common thresholds in other states are 25, 30, and 35 percent (Melli and Brown, 1994).



as Brown, Melli, and Cancian, 1996; Fox and Kelly, 1995; Seltzer, 1990). We examine total income to explore whether placement outcomes differ by class, and mother's share of income to account for differences related to the mother's economic independence. We include whether each parent had a prior marriage to examine whether prior commitments of each parent affect placement outcomes. The number, age, and gender of children are included because these may affect parental preferences or child care costs. We also include variables related to the court process—legal representation, and location (county) of final judgment. We include several other variables as controls, including whether parents live in the same zipcode or state, parental ages, and marriage length. Because we are using court records, some characteristics are not available, notably the parents' race and educational level.

### **III. Results**

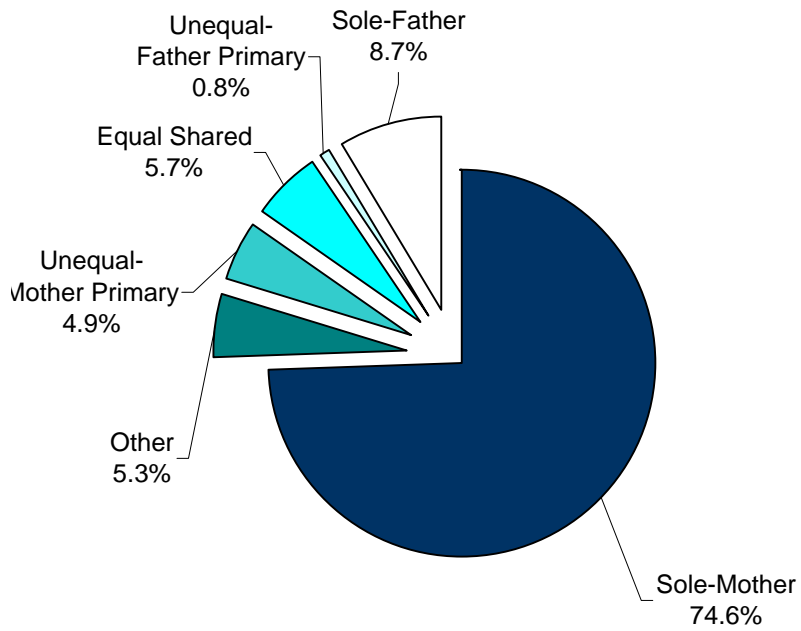
#### Change in the Distribution of Placement Arrangements over Time

We first compare the proportions of cases with different placement types in each period, early cases (filed in 1990–93) and later cases (filed in 1996–98). Placement types include mother sole, father sole, unequal shared—father primary, unequal shared—mother primary, equally shared, and “other” types of placement which includes cases with split placement and cases where placement arrangements are scheduled to vary over time. As indicated above, the father-primary and mother-primary outcomes are cases where placement is shared unequally, and the primary parent has the child 51–70 percent of time.

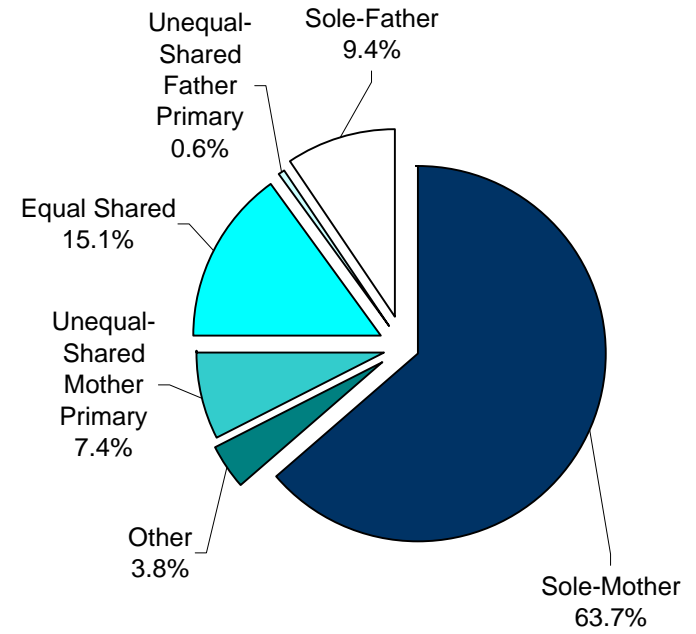
Figure 1 illustrates the proportion of the sample in each placement arrangement for the two time periods and shows the move away from mother sole placement. This trend is a

**Figure 1**  
**Placement Outcomes by Cohort**

**Early Cohorts**  
**1990-1992**



**Late Cohorts**  
**1996-1998**



continuation of the pattern documented in prior research. In particular, Cancian and Meyer (1998) found mother sole placement as the outcome in 80 percent of cases in the mid-1980s. In the earlier cohort (1990–93) we find that 75 percent of placement arrangements were for sole placement with the mother, a figure that fell to 64 percent just 5 to 6 years later.<sup>9</sup>

This decline in mother sole placement cases is accompanied by a large increase in the proportion of cases with equally shared placement, from 5.7 percent to 15.1 percent, and by smaller increases in father sole placement (8.7 percent to 9.4 percent) and unequal-shared—mother primary placement (4.9 percent to 7.4 percent). Unequal-shared—father primary placement remains a very uncommon arrangement throughout the periods (0.8 percent and 0.6 percent) and “other” types, such as split placement, become less likely across the two time periods (5.3 percent to 3.8 percent). All together we see that the proportion of cases with shared placement (both equal and unequal) has more than doubled in just these 5 to 6 years, from 11.4 percent to 23.1 percent of all placement arrangements; and has tripled from the 7 percent found in 1986–87 by Cancian and Meyer (1998).

#### Variation in Placement Arrangements Across Subgroups

Figure 1 showed changes in the overall distribution of placement outcomes over time. Tables 1a–1d show how the distribution varies for key subgroups in our sample. For most subgroups, the proportion with a mother sole placement arrangement fell over time, and the percentage of cases in shared placement rose between the two cohorts.

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<sup>9</sup>All percentages in this section are weighted to reflect differential sampling proportions across counties in the CRD.

Table 1a shows placement outcomes by the number, age, and sex of the couples' children. There are generally not large differences by family size. However, among the fairly small subgroup of families with four or more children, shared placement was less common, "other" placement arrangements more common.<sup>10</sup> Considering placement outcomes by the age of the youngest child, we find that among couples with younger children the mother was more likely to receive placement, whereas father sole placement and "other" placement arrangements were more common for those couples with youngest children in their teens. As shown in the next panel, when the couples' children were all girls, mothers were more likely, and fathers less likely, to receive sole placement.

Table 1b shows the relationship between placement arrangements and the parents' ages, length of marriage, and prior marriage history. We do not find substantial differences in most placement outcomes by the parents' age, although shared placement was somewhat more common when parents were in the middle age categories (26–30, 31–40).<sup>11</sup> The next panel shows the distribution of placement by length of marriage—which is likely to be related to the age of the children, as well as parents' age. For both periods, mother sole placement was more likely the shorter the marriage, whereas "other" arrangements were more common when marriages ended after a longer time. For the earlier cohort, mother sole placement was more likely in cases in which only the father had been previously married (87 percent) and less likely when only the mother had been previously married (60 percent). However, there was substantially less variation in placement arrangement by previous marital status in the later period.

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<sup>10</sup>Among cases with many children, most of the "other" cases are cases with split placement.

<sup>11</sup>The group consisting of couples where the father is under 25 is one of the few groups to show an increase in mother sole placement from the early (77.7 percent) to the later (82.0 percent) samples.

**Table 1A: Physical Placement by Child Variables (Early and Late Cohorts)**

|                              | Early Cohorts (1990-1992) |                             |                     |                             |       | Late Cohorts (1996-1998) |                             |                     |                             |       |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|-------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|-------|
|                              | N                         | Mother<br>Sole<br>Placement | Shared<br>Placement | Father<br>Sole<br>Placement | Other | N                        | Mother<br>Sole<br>Placement | Shared<br>Placement | Father<br>Sole<br>Placement | Other |
| <b>All Cases</b>             | 1347                      | 74.6%                       | 11.5%               | 8.7%                        | 5.3%  | 1529                     | 63.7%                       | 23.1%               | 9.4%                        | 3.8%  |
| <b>Number of Children</b>    |                           |                             |                     |                             |       |                          |                             |                     |                             |       |
| One                          | 533                       | 78.4                        | 13.4                | 8.2                         | 0.0   | 645                      | 67.8                        | 22.2                | 10.0                        | 0.1   |
| Two                          | 563                       | 72.3                        | 11.8                | 8.8                         | 7.2   | 617                      | 59.2                        | 25.7                | 8.4                         | 6.7   |
| Three                        | 197                       | 70.6                        | 7.2                 | 10.8                        | 11.3  | 216                      | 61.4                        | 22.2                | 10.5                        | 5.9   |
| Four or More                 | 54                        | 73.1                        | 1.1                 | 5.1                         | 20.7  | 51                       | 74.4                        | 6.1                 | 9.5                         | 10.0  |
| <b>Age of Youngest Child</b> |                           |                             |                     |                             |       |                          |                             |                     |                             |       |
| Unborn                       | 112                       | 86.7                        | 4.7                 | 5.7                         | 2.9   | 91                       | 74.0                        | 24.1                | 1.4                         | 0.5   |
| 0-2                          | 307                       | 74.9                        | 13.1                | 8.0                         | 4.0   | 280                      | 66.6                        | 26.1                | 6.7                         | 0.6   |
| 3-5                          | 360                       | 74.5                        | 14.2                | 8.7                         | 2.7   | 438                      | 61.6                        | 27.4                | 9.5                         | 1.4   |
| 6-10                         | 350                       | 74.9                        | 11.6                | 6.0                         | 7.6   | 420                      | 62.4                        | 21.4                | 10.2                        | 6.0   |
| 11-17                        | 214                       | 68.4                        | 7.6                 | 15.0                        | 9.0   | 300                      | 62.7                        | 16.3                | 13.1                        | 8.0   |
| <b>Sex of Children</b>       |                           |                             |                     |                             |       |                          |                             |                     |                             |       |
| Both                         | 486                       | 72.2                        | 7.6                 | 9.4                         | 10.7  | 601                      | 59.6                        | 22.3                | 12.8                        | 5.3   |
| Boys Only                    | 426                       | 73.3                        | 14.8                | 8.8                         | 3.1   | 487                      | 63.6                        | 24.4                | 8.3                         | 3.7   |
| Girls Only                   | 418                       | 78.4                        | 12.0                | 7.8                         | 1.9   | 424                      | 68.5                        | 23.7                | 6.1                         | 1.7   |

Note: Four cases with child's age missing and 34 cases with child's sex missing are not shown.

**Table 1B: Physical Placement by Age and Marriage Variables (Early and Late Cohorts)**

|                                   | Early Cohorts (1990-1992) |                |           |                |       | Late Cohorts (1996-1998) |                |                |           |       |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|-------|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|-------|
|                                   | N                         | Mother         | Shared    | Father         | Other | N                        | Mother         | Shared         | Father    | Other |
|                                   |                           | Sole Placement | Placement | Sole Placement |       |                          | Sole Placement | Sole Placement | Placement |       |
| <b>All Cases</b>                  | 1347                      | 74.6%          | 11.5%     | 8.7%           | 5.3%  | 1529                     | 63.7%          | 23.1%          | 9.4%      | 3.8%  |
| <b>Mother's Age</b>               |                           |                |           |                |       |                          |                |                |           |       |
| Under 26                          | 235                       | 77.5           | 7.6       | 12.8           | 2.1   | 190                      | 70.2           | 19.9           | 9.7       | 0.2   |
| 26-30                             | 356                       | 76.2           | 13.2      | 6.9            | 3.7   | 350                      | 69.8           | 22.1           | 7.2       | 0.9   |
| 31-40                             | 596                       | 73.3           | 12.3      | 7.5            | 6.9   | 727                      | 58.9           | 26.0           | 9.7       | 5.5   |
| Over 40                           | 160                       | 71.9           | 9.6       | 11.5           | 7.0   | 255                      | 64.7           | 19.2           | 11.6      | 4.5   |
| <b>Father's Age</b>               |                           |                |           |                |       |                          |                |                |           |       |
| Under 26                          | 135                       | 77.7           | 8.5       | 13.3           | 0.6   | 98                       | 82.0           | 12.4           | 5.7       | 0.0   |
| 26-30                             | 296                       | 78.6           | 10.7      | 8.0            | 2.7   | 260                      | 71.1           | 20.6           | 8.1       | 0.2   |
| 31-40                             | 650                       | 72.2           | 13.7      | 7.8            | 6.3   | 746                      | 59.1           | 27.1           | 9.0       | 4.8   |
| Over 40                           | 264                       | 74.3           | 8.3       | 9.7            | 7.7   | 420                      | 62.8           | 20.2           | 11.7      | 5.2   |
| <b>Length of Marriage</b>         |                           |                |           |                |       |                          |                |                |           |       |
| Less Than 2 Yrs                   | 78                        | 81.7           | 7.7       | 10.6           | 0.0   | 67                       | 80.0           | 18.7           | 1.3       | 0.0   |
| 2 to 5 Yrs                        | 222                       | 79.6           | 12.0      | 6.7            | 1.6   | 279                      | 70.0           | 23.2           | 6.5       | 0.3   |
| 5 to 10 Yrs                       | 424                       | 76.4           | 13.1      | 6.9            | 3.6   | 469                      | 65.4           | 23.8           | 10.0      | 0.9   |
| 10 to 15 Yrs                      | 313                       | 72.1           | 12.9      | 10.1           | 4.9   | 339                      | 58.9           | 28.2           | 7.5       | 5.4   |
| Over 15 Yrs                       | 300                       | 70.8           | 7.0       | 10.4           | 11.9  | 370                      | 58.4           | 18.3           | 14.2      | 9.1   |
| <b>Parents Previously Married</b> |                           |                |           |                |       |                          |                |                |           |       |
| Both                              | 75                        | 79.0           | 14.2      | 5.2            | 1.7   | 102                      | 68.6           | 18.0           | 8.7       | 4.8   |
| Only Father                       | 146                       | 87.0           | 4.1       | 4.5            | 4.4   | 163                      | 69.4           | 20.7           | 7.9       | 2.0   |
| Only Mother                       | 97                        | 59.7           | 18.8      | 16.3           | 5.2   | 157                      | 61.5           | 28.1           | 8.6       | 1.8   |
| Neither                           | 1017                      | 73.9           | 11.6      | 8.7            | 5.7   | 1096                     | 62.9           | 23.0           | 9.8       | 4.3   |

Note: Seven cases with mothers' age missing, 7 cases with fathers' age missing, 15 cases with length of marriage missing, and 23 cases with parents' previous marriage status missing are not shown.

Table 1c shows placement outcomes by parents' total income and mother's relative income. Particularly in the earlier cohort, mother sole placement became less common, and shared placement more common, as couples' total income rose. Considering relative incomes, mothers were more likely to be awarded sole placement when their incomes accounted for a higher proportion of the total.

Finally, as shown in Table 1d, placement outcomes varied dramatically by whether each parent had legal representation. When the father had an attorney but the mother did not, the proportion of cases with mother sole placement was only 52 percent in the early cohort and 42 percent in the later cohort. In the same situation, father sole placement accounted for 28 and 32 percent of cases in each period. When only the mother has an attorney, the likelihood of mother sole placement was 87 percent in the early period and 82 percent in the later period, whereas the likelihood of the father being awarded sole placement dropped to 2 percent and 4 percent in each period. Particularly in the later period, shared placement was more likely when both parents were represented by an attorney than when there was legal representation only for the mother (in both periods) or only for the father. This variation may reflect the tendency for parents to seek representation when they intend to pursue placement, as well as the tendency for placement to be awarded to parents who are represented by a lawyer.

The final panel shows variation in placement by proximity of the parents, distinguishing parents who live in the same zipcode, in different zipcodes but the same state, and in different states. Shared placement is most likely when both parents live in the same zipcode, and very uncommon in cases in which the parents live in different states.

**Table 1C: Physical Placement by Income Variables (Early and Late Cohorts)**

|                                       | Early Cohorts (1990-1992) |                |           |                |       | Late Cohorts (1996-1998) |                |                  |                  |       |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|-------|--------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|-------|
|                                       | N                         | Mother         | Shared    | Father         | Other | N                        | Mother         | Shared           | Father           | Other |
|                                       |                           | Sole Placement | Placement | Sole Placement |       |                          | Sole Placement | Shared Placement | Shared Placement |       |
| <b>All Cases</b>                      | 1347                      | 74.6%          | 11.5%     | 8.7%           | 5.3%  | 1529                     | 63.7%          | 23.1%            | 9.4%             | 3.8%  |
| <b>Total Income</b>                   |                           |                |           |                |       |                          |                |                  |                  |       |
| 0-\$10,000                            | 40                        | 88.6           | 7.5       | 1.2            | 2.6   | 116                      | 71.7           | 14.2             | 9.5              | 4.6   |
| \$10,000-\$20,000                     | 138                       | 78.3           | 4.9       | 11.9           | 4.9   | 108                      | 88.2           | 7.2              | 3.0              | 1.6   |
| \$20,000-\$30,000                     | 182                       | 73.8           | 6.8       | 9.8            | 9.6   | 147                      | 74.0           | 12.0             | 10.5             | 3.5   |
| \$30,000-\$40,000                     | 236                       | 79.0           | 5.6       | 9.0            | 6.5   | 233                      | 66.3           | 20.8             | 11.0             | 1.9   |
| \$40,000-\$50,000                     | 241                       | 75.3           | 10.3      | 9.8            | 4.6   | 243                      | 61.0           | 21.1             | 11.9             | 6.0   |
| \$50,000-\$60,000                     | 168                       | 71.4           | 15.7      | 8.2            | 4.7   | 230                      | 58.4           | 23.2             | 14.1             | 4.3   |
| \$60,000-\$75,000                     | 159                       | 71.9           | 18.0      | 7.8            | 2.4   | 217                      | 57.7           | 31.0             | 8.6              | 2.7   |
| \$75,000-\$100,000                    | 104                       | 67.3           | 22.8      | 6.6            | 3.3   | 139                      | 54.0           | 40.8             | 2.4              | 2.8   |
| More than \$100,000                   | 38                        | 70.7           | 20.2      | 0.8            | 8.3   | 87                       | 62.9           | 26.6             | 5.4              | 5.2   |
| <b>Mothers' Share of Total Income</b> |                           |                |           |                |       |                          |                |                  |                  |       |
| None                                  | 61                        | 68.9           | 13.9      | 7.5            | 9.8   | 111                      | 63.1           | 13.5             | 21.3             | 2.2   |
| 1%-20%                                | 171                       | 68.4           | 12.6      | 11.9           | 7.1   | 187                      | 53.7           | 32.7             | 10.5             | 3.1   |
| 21%-40%                               | 453                       | 73.7           | 11.6      | 10.9           | 3.8   | 437                      | 61.7           | 23.8             | 9.6              | 4.9   |
| 41%-60%                               | 416                       | 73.1           | 14.0      | 7.2            | 5.7   | 479                      | 61.7           | 26.7             | 7.9              | 3.7   |
| 61%-80%                               | 96                        | 84.0           | 8.5       | 4.1            | 3.5   | 108                      | 73.4           | 18.0             | 7.0              | 1.6   |
| 81%-100%                              | 105                       | 86.0           | 5.4       | 2.9            | 5.6   | 159                      | 81.5           | 12.1             | 4.3              | 2.2   |

Note: Fifty cases with Total Income missing and 43 cases with Mothers' Share of Total Income = Zero missing are not shown.



**Table 1D: Physical Placement by Environment Variables (Early and Late Cohorts)**

|                                      | Early Cohorts (1990-1992) |                |           |                |       | Late Cohorts (1996-1998) |                |                |           |       |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|-------|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|-------|
|                                      | N                         | Mother         | Shared    | Father         | Other | N                        | Mother         | Shared         | Father    | Other |
|                                      |                           | Sole Placement | Placement | Sole Placement |       |                          | Sole Placement | Sole Placement | Placement |       |
| <b>All Cases</b>                     | 1347                      | 74.6%          | 11.5%     | 8.7%           | 5.3%  | 1529                     | 63.7%          | 23.1%          | 9.4%      | 3.8%  |
| <b>Parents' Legal Representation</b> |                           |                |           |                |       |                          |                |                |           |       |
| Both Parents Have Attorney           | 710                       | 70.9           | 14.3      | 8.7            | 6.1   | 732                      | 56.6           | 31.5           | 7.6       | 4.3   |
| Only Father Has Attorney             | 121                       | 51.5           | 16.9      | 28.3           | 3.3   | 141                      | 41.6           | 20.5           | 31.6      | 6.3   |
| Only Mother Has Attorney             | 327                       | 87.0           | 6.1       | 1.6            | 5.2   | 392                      | 82.4           | 10.5           | 3.9       | 3.3   |
| Neither Has Attorney                 | 182                       | 81.4           | 6.4       | 8.3            | 4.0   | 263                      | 69.9           | 19.0           | 9.2       | 1.9   |
| <b>Proximity of Parents</b>          |                           |                |           |                |       |                          |                |                |           |       |
| Missing                              | 214                       | 80.1           | 5.5       | 6.2            | 8.2   | 83                       | 72.0           | 13.9           | 9.0       | 5.1   |
| Same Zip Code                        | 386                       | 69.6           | 16.4      | 9.8            | 4.3   | 478                      | 54.3           | 33.9           | 7.9       | 3.9   |
| Same State                           | 647                       | 75.3           | 11.8      | 8.7            | 4.2   | 840                      | 65.3           | 21.3           | 9.9       | 3.6   |
| Different States                     | 100                       | 76.0           | 4.1       | 9.7            | 10.2  | 128                      | 80.7           | 3.2            | 11.6      | 4.5   |

Note: Eight cases with Parents' Legal Representation missing are not shown.

### Multivariate Analysis of the Factors Associated with Placement Arrangements

The previous discussion highlights the variation in placement arrangements across subgroups. In a number of cases, however, interpreting the patterns presented in Tables 1a–1d may be complicated because of the relationships between different categories. For example, the tendency for mother sole placement to be less common among couples with longer marriages may reflect the relationship between placement arrangements and marriage length, as well as the tendency for couples with longer marriages to have older children (which also appears in Table 1a to be associated with low proportions of mother sole placement). With this in mind, Table 2 reports the estimates of a multivariate logit model used to estimate the relationship between the variables discussed above and placement arrangements. We estimated the model using the pooled cases from both periods, including an indicator variable to identify cases from the later cohort. We also estimated a fully interacted model, which allowed for the relationship between each variable and placement outcomes to be different in the two periods (estimates not shown). We note those cases in which there are significant differences in estimates in the two periods.

The first column of coefficient estimates in Table 2 concerns the probability of (equal or unequal) shared placement, relative to mother sole placement. The second column of coefficient estimates concerns the probability of father sole placement, again, relative to mother sole placement. The first row of estimates shows that both types of placement outcomes were significantly more likely in the second period than in the first.

The next panels of Table 2 show the relationships between the number, age, and sex of children and placement arrangements. Relative to couples with only one child, couples with two children are significantly more likely have to shared placement, whereas those with four or more children are less likely to share placement. There is no significant relationship between number

of children and the likelihood of father sole placement. We find no statistically significant relationship between the age of the youngest child and shared placement. However, when the mother is pregnant (when the youngest child is not yet born) fathers are significantly less likely to receive sole placement than when the child is under three years old. The sex of the couples' children also does not appear to be related to the likelihood of shared placement, though fathers are significantly less likely to be awarded sole placement if the children are all girls.<sup>12</sup>

The next set of variables relates to parents' age, length of marriage, and previous marital status. We find no significant relationship between mothers' age and likelihood of shared placement. However, father sole placement is significantly more likely when the mother is under 26 than when she is 26–30, and, in contrast to the apparent relationship shown in Table 1b, father sole placement is significantly less likely when the mother is over 40 years old. Fathers' age is not significantly related to father sole placement, but fathers between the ages of 31 and 40 are significantly more likely to be involved in shared placement arrangements than are younger fathers. We also find that shared placement is less likely, and father sole placement more likely, when the couple has been married at least 15 years.<sup>13</sup> Shared placement is significantly less likely when only the father has been previously married, though models estimated separately for each cohort suggest this relationship no longer holds in the second period.

We now turn to measures of income. Higher total income is associated with a greater likelihood of shared placement. It is noteworthy that when the model is estimated separately for the two periods, there is a significant decline in the positive relationship in the later period. This

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<sup>12</sup>Separate estimates for the two cohorts (not shown) suggest that the negative relationship between only girl children and father sole placement is greater in the second period.

<sup>13</sup>Separate estimates for the two cohorts (not shown) suggest the positive relationship between marriages longer than 15 years and the likelihood of father sole placement increases significantly in the later period.

is consistent with the growth in shared placement at lower income levels that we showed in Table 1c. Total income has no measurable impact on the likelihood of father sole placement. The mothers share of total income is not associated with the likelihood of shared placement, but the estimates suggest that when the mother has a higher proportion of total income, father sole placement is less likely.

Consistent with the results shown in Table 1d, legal representation is significantly related to placement arrangement. Both shared placement and father sole placement are less likely when only the mother has legal representation. Both outcomes are more likely when only the father is represented.<sup>14</sup>

The final panel of Table 2 shows the relationship between parents' proximity and placement arrangements. Shared placement is less likely when the parents live in different states, but, surprisingly, is more likely when they live in the same state but different zipcode than when they live in the same zipcode.

#### **IV. Discussion**

Although mother sole placement remains the most common arrangement for physical placement of children following divorce, the results of our analysis suggest that the frequency of other placement arrangements is growing. The increase in shared placement is consistent with earlier patterns discussed in Cancian and Meyer (1998), who compare placement arrangements in the mid 1980s and early 1990s. However, in contrast to the findings for the earlier time span

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<sup>14</sup>Although the negative relationship between no legal representation for either parent and father sole placement is only marginally significant ( $p < 0.10$ ) in the models shown in Table 2, when the models are estimated separately for each period, the negative relationship is significant in both periods.

considered there, in this report we find that between the early and late 1990s there was also a significant increase in the likelihood of father sole placement, once other characteristics of the couples are held constant.

The increase in the diversity of placement arrangements presents a variety of challenges to the child support enforcement system. Alternative placement arrangements require different child support orders; use of the guidelines in shared placement cases is the subject of a companion report (Cook, 2002). Given differences in the guidelines and concerns about equity as well as child well-being, the growing variety of arrangements also requires that we better understand the stability of placement arrangements, and the relationship between formal awards and actual living arrangements. This is also the topic of another report (Krecker, Brown, Melli, and Wimer, 2003).

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