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# Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Nonresident Parents

October 18, 2021

**Congressional Research Service**
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R46942

**CRS REPORT**
Prepared for Members and
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SUMMARY

R46942

October 18, 2021

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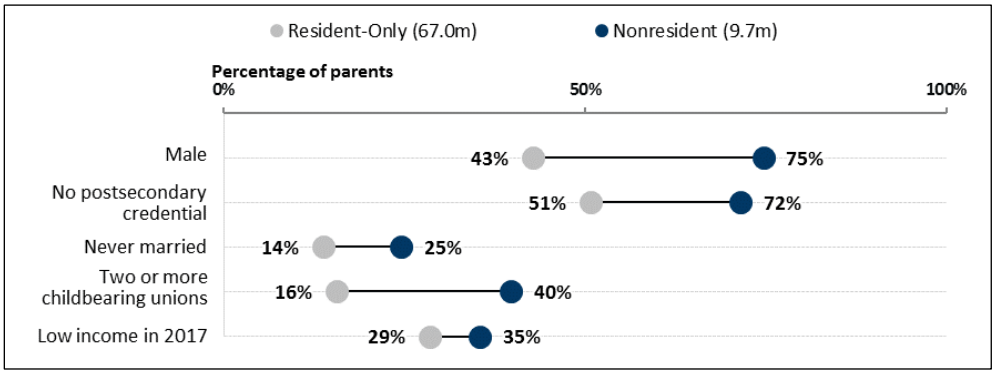
# Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Nonresident Parents

More than 9.7 million parents in the United States did not live with one or more of their children under age 21 in 2018. Policymakers have expressed interest in these *nonresident parents* out of concern for the wellbeing of the parents and the important emotional, time, financial, and other contributions they can make to their children's lives. Research finds that many nonresident parents and their children are economically vulnerable, and government policies often have substantial impacts on their lives. In light of congressional interest, this report reviews demographic, relationship, and economic characteristics of nonresident parents, with additional focus on the low-income subset of such parents. The report also presents data on nonresident parents' child support payments, and concludes by discussing potential implications for policymaking. The report uses data from the 2018 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP); depending on the topic, this survey provides information as of the interview month (in 2018) or the prior calendar year (2017).

In comparison to parents who report residing with each of their children under age 21 for a majority of nights (resident-only parents), nonresident parents showed the following selected characteristics:

- They were disproportionately male, older, non-Hispanic Black (though a majority were non-Hispanic White), and reported less formal education (typically possessing a high school diploma or its equivalent but no college degree) in 2018.
- A majority were married or divorced, had had one childbearing union, had no resident children, or had one nonresident child as of 2018. However, sizable shares of nonresident parents had never married, had had children with more than one partner, had resident children, or had multiple nonresident children.
- They (particularly nonresident fathers) were less likely to report working than resident-only parents (particularly resident-only fathers) in 2017. Nonresident parents also reported less personal and family income.

Figure S1. Differences in Selected Characteristics Between Nonresident Parents and Resident-Only Parents, 2018




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

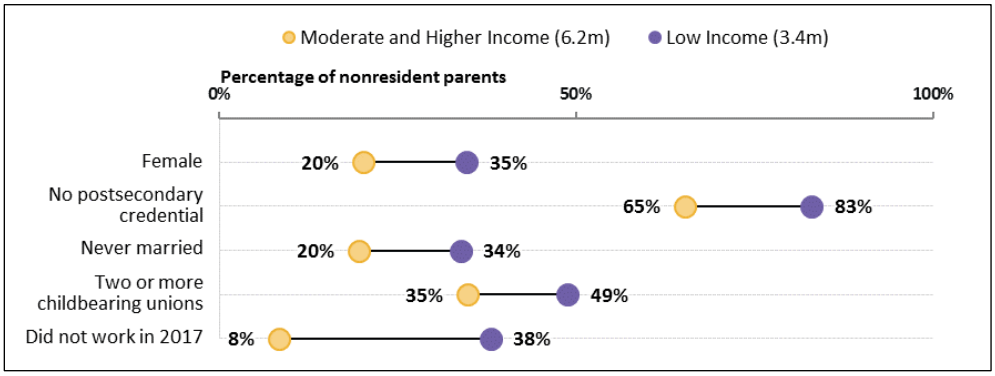
**Notes:** Parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. m = millions of parents. For additional notes, see **Figure 4** and **Figure 9**.

More than one-third of nonresident parents (3.4 million) reported having low income, defined in this report as a family income that was less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds in 2017. Relative to moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents, low-income nonresident parents were

- more likely to be female, younger, non-Hispanic Black, and report less formal education;
- more likely to have never married, report two or more childbearing unions, and have more resident and nonresident children under age 21;
- less likely to have worked in 2017, particularly full-time, year-round; and

- for the subset without any resident children, less likely to report receiving need-tested benefits or having health insurance coverage for the year than either low-income nonresident parents who have resident children or low-income resident-only parents in 2017.

Figure S2. Differences in Selected Characteristics Between Low-Income Nonresident Parents and Moderate- and Higher-Income Nonresident Parents, 2017

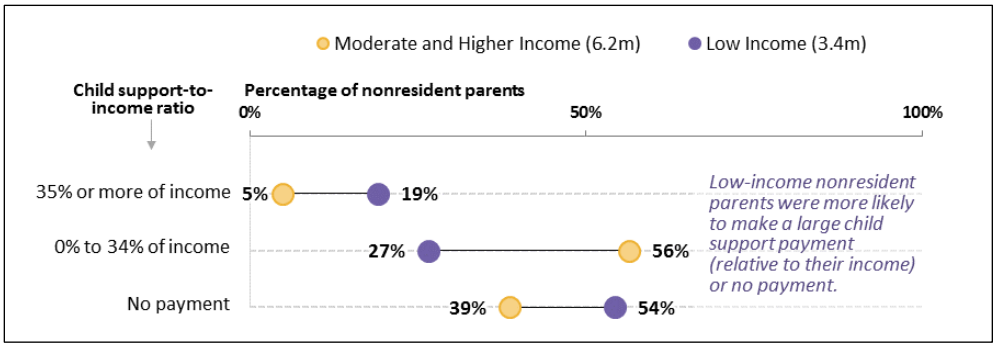



**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. m = millions of parents. For additional notes, see **Figure 11** and **Figure 13**.

A majority of nonresident parents (5.4 million) reported paying child support in 2017. Among nonresident parents who paid anything in child support, the median payment was $4,785, the mean payment was $6,271, and the estimated total amount paid in child support was $33.8 billion. **Figure S3** shows that while low-income nonresident parents were less likely to pay child support (and their payments were also smaller in absolute terms), their payments were more likely to be large relative to their income.

Figure S3. Difference in Child Support-to-Income Ratio Between Low-Income Nonresident Parents and Moderate- and Higher-Income Nonresident Parents, 2017




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. m = millions of parents. For additional notes, see **Figure 18**.

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# Introduction

In the United States, there were more than 9.7 million parents who were not living with one or more of their children under age 21 in 2018.[1] Federal policymakers have expressed interest in these *nonresident parents* out of concern for the wellbeing of the parents and the impacts for children who live apart from one or more of their parents.[2] (For the purposes of this report, a nonresident parent is a person 15 years or older who does not reside for a majority of nights in the same household as one or more of his or her biological, adopted, or stepchildren under age 21.[3]) About 21.9 million (26%) children under age 21 had a parent who lived outside their household in 2018.[4] Like all parents, nonresident parents can make important emotional, time, financial, and other contributions to their children's lives.

Nonresident parents are also of interest to federal policymakers because many are directly affected by one or more government policies. For example, some nonresident parents are eligible for or receive need-tested benefits such as Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).[5] Some nonresident parents also receive services from fatherhood initiatives that seek to encourage greater family well-being.[6] The Child Support Enforcement program strives to ensure children receive financial support from their parents, even when the children and parent(s) live apart.[7] Additionally, criminal justice policies such as incarceration affect a sizable number of nonresident parents.[8]

This report uses data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) to describe a broad population of nonresident parents in the United States.[9] The most recent, publicly available data that meet the Census Bureau's Statistical Quality Standards are from interviews conducted in 2018. Depending on the topic, the survey asked respondents for their information as of the time they were surveyed (in 2018) or reflecting their status during the prior calendar year (2017). The values presented in this report are estimates with a margin of error. Unless otherwise noted, the differences in values between groups highlighted in this report are statistically different from zero

[1] The Congressional Research Service (CRS) tabulated this estimate based on data from the 2018 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). This estimate likely undercounts the number of nonresident parents for reasons discussed in more detail in **Appendix A**.

[2] The term *nonresident* as used in this report does not refer to parents' residency status in the United States or any other country (e.g., for immigration or tax purposes). The term *noncustodial parents* is sometimes used to refer to the same group of parents labeled as nonresident parents in this report.

[3] For additional detail on determining household membership in the SIPP, see U.S. Census Bureau, *2018 Survey of Income and Program Participation Users' Guide*, August 2020, pp. 14-18 (hereinafter, "U.S. Census Bureau, 2020").

[4] Timothy Grall, *Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2017*, U.S. Census Bureau, May 2020, p. 15 (hereinafter, "Grall, 2020").

[5] For more information, see CRS Report R46823, *Need-Tested Benefits: Who Receives Assistance?*.

[6] For more information, see CRS Report RL31025, *Fatherhood Initiatives: Connecting Fathers to Their Children*.

[7] For more information, see CRS Report RS22380, *Child Support Enforcement: Program Basics*.

[8] For example, an analysis of data from the Survey of Prison Inmates estimates that there were 0.7 million nonresident parents (with a biological or adopted child age 17 or younger) residing in a federal or state prison in 2016; see Laura M. Maruschak, Jennifer Bronson, and Mariel Alper, *Parents In Prison And Their Minor Children*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, March 2021.

[9] For recent reviews of potential data sources on nonresident parents, see Kye Lippold, *Estimating the Nonresident Parent Population in National Surveys*, Urban Institute, April 2017 (hereinafter, "Lippold, 2017"); and J. Bart Stykes, Wendy D. Manning, and Susan L. Brown, "Nonresident Fathers and Formal Child Support: Evidence from the CPS, the NSFG, and the SIPP," *Demographic Research*, vol. 29 (December 2013), pp. 1299-1330 (hereinafter, "Stykes, Manning, and Brown, 2013").

at the 10% significance level. This analysis does not identify causal relationships between nonresident parenthood and other characteristics (e.g., education), as that would require more rigorous methodology and detailed data than are presented here. Additional discussion of the data and analysis used in this report is included in **Appendix A**.

This report first presents selected demographic, relationship, and economic characteristics of nonresident parents. These results are compared to the characteristics of all other parents, who exclusively have resident children. Next, the report focuses on similar characteristics for low-income nonresident parents, a subpopulation of particular interest to policymakers. The report then presents estimates of the child support payments of nonresident parents, as child support can be a significant expense for these parents and source of income support for their nonresident children. The final section discusses several potential implications of this report's analysis for Congress. Report findings are presented in more detail in the data tables in **Appendix B**.

# Characteristics of Nonresident Parents

Among the civilian, noninstitutionalized population in 2018, there were an estimated nearly 9.7 million nonresident parents who were living apart from one or more of their children under age 21. This includes over 5.6 million parents who were living apart from all of their children under age 21 and more than 4.0 million who had both nonresident and resident children.[10] Another 67.0 million parents reported they were living with all of their children under age 21. Combined, this totals to an estimate of 76.7 million parents in 2018. **Figure 1** illustrates how the population of nonresident parents was fairly large in absolute terms but accounted for a relatively small proportion (13%) of the total parent population.

There are no reliable data on long-term trends in the share of parents who have nonresident children. The share of children living apart from one or more of their parents does not appear to have changed much between 2004 and 2018,[11] although it may have increased modestly between 1996 and 2009[12] and more substantially between 1968 and the mid-1990s.[13] These findings might indicate that the share of parents who have nonresident children increased between 1968 and the mid-1990s or early 2000s, but changed little in more recent years.

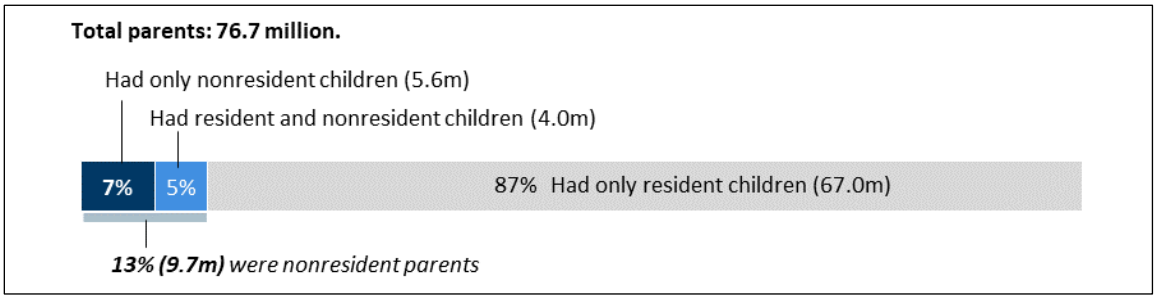
[10] The figures for these subgroups do not sum to the total of 9.7 million nonresident parents because of rounding.

[11] Grall, 2020, p.15; Timothy Grall, *Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2003*, U.S. Census Bureau, July 2006, p. 12; and Krista K. Payne, *Children's Family Structure, 2019* (Family Profiles, FP-19-25), National Center for Family & Marriage Research at Bowling Green State University, 2019.

[12] Wendy D. Manning, Susan L. Brown, and J. Bart Stykes, "Family Complexity among Children in the United States," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 654, no. 1 (July 2014), p. 57.

[13] Paul Hemez and Chanell Washington, "Number of Children Living Only With Their Mothers Has Doubled in Past 50 Years," America Counts: Stories Behind the Numbers, U.S. Census Bureau, April 2021.

**Figure 1. Distribution of Parents by Residency of Children, 2018**



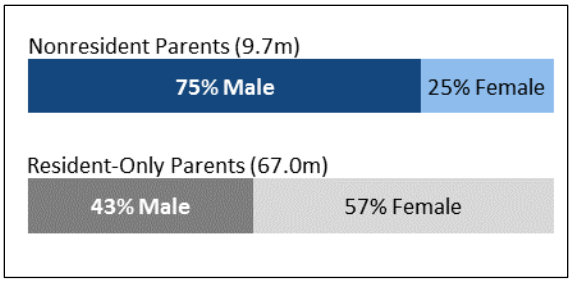

**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. m = millions of parents. Groups may not sum to totals or 100% due to rounding.

## Demographics of Nonresident Parents

Nonresident parents were disproportionately likely to be male, as displayed in **Figure 2**. An estimated 75% (7.2 million) of nonresident parents were fathers and 25% (2.5 million) were mothers. For comparison, fathers made up 43% (28.6 million) of parents who exclusively had resident children. While fathers' direct involvement in childrearing has increased in recent decades in the United States, and custody laws have generally shifted from maternal preference to the best interests of the child, mothers are still much more likely to be awarded sole or primary custody over children following a divorce, separation, or nonmarital birth.[14]

**Figure 2. Sex of Parents, by Residency of Children, 2018**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. m = millions of parents. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

More than two-thirds of nonresident parents were between the ages of 30 and 49 in 2018, including 30% (2.9 million) who were in their 30s and 38% (3.6 million) who were in their 40s. An estimated 12% of nonresident parents (1.1 million) were young persons between the ages of 15 and 29, and the remaining 20% (1.9 million) were age 50 or older.[15] A greater share of nonresident parents than resident-only parents were age 40 or older. The typically older age of nonresident parents likely reflects a number of factors, including that they were more often male (on average, fathers are older than mothers at the time of childbirth[16]) and that the probability of a

[14] See Grall, 2020, p. 2; Daniel R. Meyer, Marcia J. Carlson, and Md Moshi Ul Alam, *2018–2020 Child Support Policy Research Agreement Task 12: Changes in Placement after Divorce and Implications for Child Support Policy*, Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) for Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (WI DCF), December 20, 2019, p. 1; and Yiyu Chen, "Does a Nonresident Parent have the Right to Make Decisions for his Nonmarital Children?: Trends in Legal Custody Among Paternity Cases," *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 51 (April 2015), pp. 55-56.

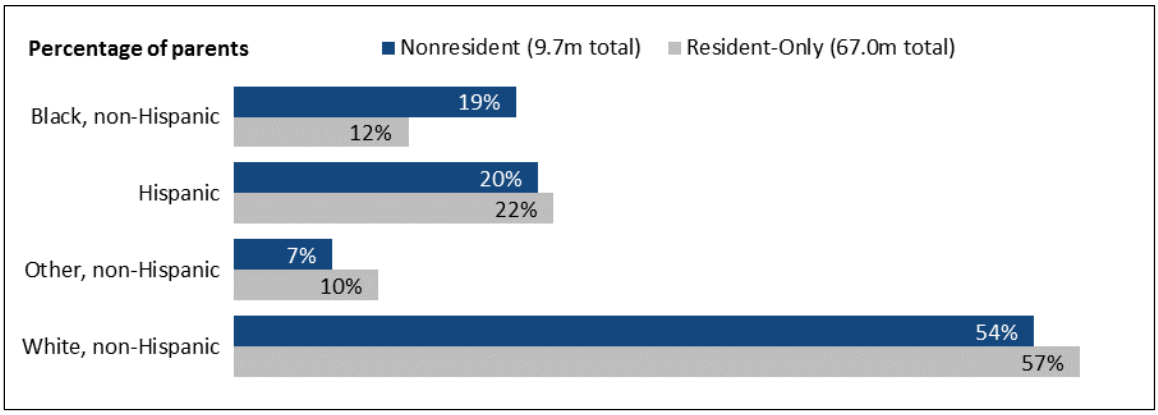
[15] Age was reported as of the survey date in 2018.

[16] See Table II in Yash S. Khandwala et al., "The Age of Fathers in the USA is Rising: An Analysis of 168,867,480 births from 1972 to 2015," *Human Reproduction*, vol. 32, no. 10 (October 2017), pp. 2110-2116.

parent living apart from his or her child is generally cumulative and increases as the child (and parent) ages.[17]

**Figure 3** shows that in 2018 the majority of parents were White, non-Hispanic, including 54% (5.2 million) of nonresident parents. An estimated 19% (1.8 million) of nonresident parents were Black, non-Hispanic, a disproportionate share when compared with resident-only parents (12%). An additional 20% (2.0 million) of nonresident parents were Hispanic and 7% (0.6 million) had other racial backgrounds. (In terms of race, the designation "other" used in this analysis refers to persons who did not identify exclusively as White or Black—for example, it includes persons who identified as Asian, Native American, or mixed race/multiracial. Persons who identified as Hispanic origin/ethnicity comprise the fourth category. The level of detail presented for race/ethnicity reflects the available SIPP data and sample size limitations.) One factor that may contribute to the elevated share of nonresident parents who were Black may be the higher prevalence of early (in life), unintended,[18] and nonmarital (increasingly cohabiting) childbearing among Black parents,[19] as research finds that these relationship forms are more likely to dissolve and result in a parent living apart from their child(ren) than other forms of childbearing relationships in the United States.[20] (Childbearing and the intimate relationships that contextualize it are themselves influenced by many factors.[21])

**Figure 3. Race/Ethnicity of Parents, by Residency of Children, 2018**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. The designation "other" refers to persons who did not identify exclusively as White or Black in terms of race—for example, it includes persons who identified as Asian, Native American, or mixed race/multiracial. m = millions of parents. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

[17] Marcia J. Carlson and Sara S. McLanahan, "Fathers in Fragile Families," in *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, 5th ed., ed. Michael E. Lamb (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), pp. 254, 256.

[18] "Unintended pregnancies and births are those that occur earlier than desired ['mistimed'] or among those who want no [more] children ['unwanted.']"; see Karen Benjamin Guzzo and Sarah R. Hayford, "Pathways to Parenthood in Social and Family Contexts: Decade in Review, 2020," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 82, no. 1 (February 2020), p. 119 (hereinafter, "Guzzo and Hayford, 2020").

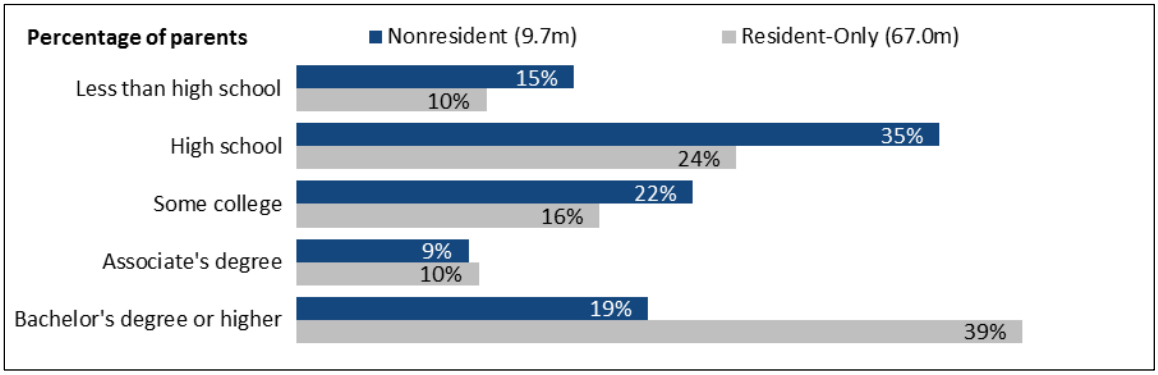
[19] Huijing Wu, "Trends in Births to Single and Cohabiting Mothers, 1980-2014" (Family Profiles, FP-17-04), National Center for Family & Marriage Research at Bowling Green State University, 2017; and Guzzo and Hayford, 2020, p. 123.

[20] Susan L. Brown, J. Bart Stykes, and Wendy D. Manning, "Trends in Children's Family Instability, 1995–2010," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 78, no. 5 (October 2016), pp. 1173-1183; and Guzzo and Hayford, 2020, p. 120.

[21] Guzzo and Hayford, 2020.

**Figure 4** illustrates that nonresident parents had lower levels of formal educational attainment than resident-only parents in 2018.[22] An estimated 15% (1.5 million) of nonresident parents had not completed high school, 35% (3.4 million) had a high school diploma or its equivalent, and 22% (2.1 million) had some postsecondary experience but no college degree. In contrast, an estimated 10% (6.7 million) resident-only parents had not completed high school, 24% (16.1 million) had a high school diploma or its equivalent, and 16% (10.7 million) had some postsecondary experience but no college degree. While 19% (1.8 million) of nonresident parents had a Bachelor's degree or higher level of education, 39% of resident-only parents had achieved the same. Many factors are relevant to the formal education levels observed among nonresident parents. For example, less formal education is associated with a higher rate of early, unintended, and nonmarital childbearing,[23] which, as previously noted, are in turn associated with a greater likelihood of living apart from one's children. Educational attainment is itself influenced by many factors,[24] and education is just one factor that may influence the likelihood of becoming a nonresident parent.

**Figure 4. Educational Attainment of Parents, by Residency of Children, 2017**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. Education reflects a person's highest level of attainment as of December 2017; some parents may have still been enrolled in school. The category "some college" includes any postsecondary education short of a degree. m = millions of parents. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

## Relationships of Nonresident Parents

An estimated 36% (3.5 million) of nonresident parents were currently married, compared with 76% of resident-only parents, in 2018.[25] Another 6% (0.6 million) of nonresident parents were separated and 32% (3.1 million) were divorced.[26] Nearly 25% (2.4 million) of nonresident parents had never married, which was greater than the rate of 14% for resident-only parents. As discussed

[22] Education as reported in this analysis reflects a person's highest level of attainment as of December 2017; some parents may have still been enrolled in school.

[23] Pamela J. Smock and Christine R. Schwartz, "The Demography of Families: A Review of Patterns and Change," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 81, no. 1 (February 2020), p. 16; and Guzzo and Hayford, 2020, pp. 119-120.

[24] See, for example, Greg J. Duncan and Richard J. Murnane, eds., *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011).

[25] Marital status is reported as of the survey date in 2018.

[26] Results for the widowed are not presented because the estimate for this category among nonresident parents is less reliable due to a small sample size and large standard error. As a result, the values for marital status groups presented in this report will not sum to 100%.

previously, nonmarital childbearing is associated with a greater likelihood of nonresident parenthood.

**Figure 5** presents the fertility[27] and child residency relationships of nonresident parents.[28] The majority of nonresident parents, 59% (5.7 million), had biologically fathered or given birth to a child in one relationship. A large minority of nonresident parents had had children with more than one partner, including 31% (3.0 million) with two partners and 8% (0.8 million) with three or more partners. For comparison, 82% of resident-only parents had had children with one partner, 13% had two childbearing unions, and 3% had three or more childbearing unions. (A small proportion of parents, including some nonresident parents, solely have children as the result of step or adoptive relationships.[29]) The number of childbearing unions (e.g., multi-partner fertility) is analyzed here because it may have important policy implications, as parents may find it more challenging to allocate emotional, financial, and other forms of support to children involving different households or caregiving partners (e.g., co-parenting).[30] Research finds that unstable and serial romantic relationships, unintended childbearing, and the social norms and elevated status associated with being a parent may contribute to multi-partner fertility.[31]

The majority of nonresident parents, 58% (5.6 million), did not have any of their children under age 21 living with them. Still, many nonresident parents were living with one or more of their biological, step, or adopted children under age 21.[32] An estimated 20% (1.9 million) of nonresident parents had one resident child, 13% (1.3 million) had two resident children, and 8% (0.8 million) had three or more resident children under age 21.

A majority of nonresident parents, 58% (5.6 million), reported living apart from only one of their children under age 21. Another 29% (2.8 million) of nonresident parents had two nonresident children, and 13% (1.3 million) had three or more nonresident children.

[27] This report uses the term *fertility* to refer to reproductive outcome or performance (a definition associated with the social science discipline of demography). In this report, fertility is not a reference to the capability to bear children.

[28] Fertility and children (number, residency) were reported as of the survey date in 2018.

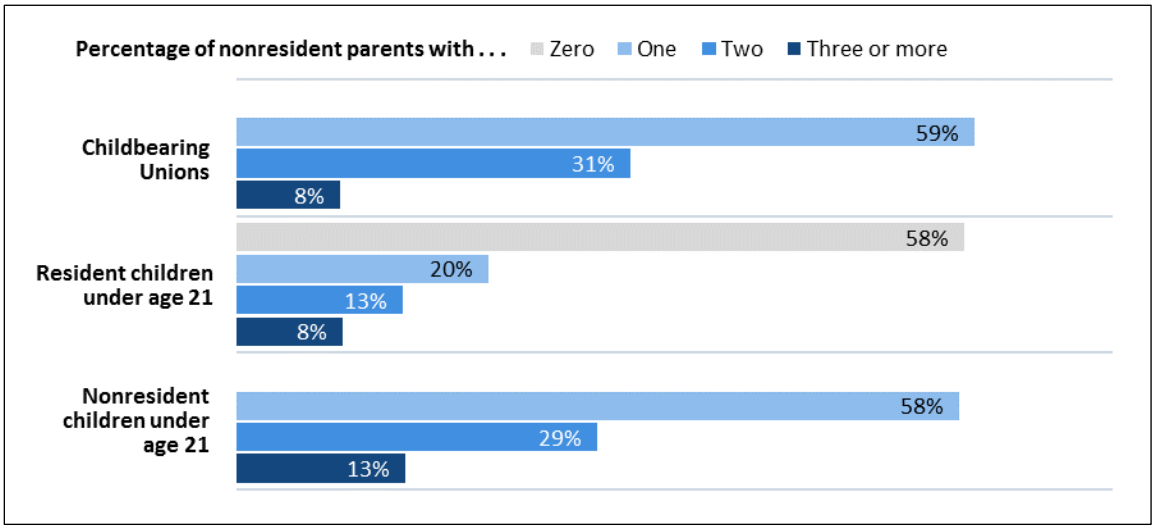
[29] Results for "zero" (biological) childbearing unions are not presented because the estimate for this category among nonresident parents is less reliable due to a small sample size and large standard error. As a result, the values for the groups of parents by number of childbearing unions presented in this report will not sum to 100%.

[30] See Lawrence M. Berger et al., "Do Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers Trade Families? Economic Contributions to Children in Multiple Families," *Social Service Review*, vol. 93, no. 2 (June 2019), pp. 183-217; and Laura Tach et al., "The Family-Go-Round: Family Complexity and Father Involvement from a Father's Perspective," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 654, no. 1 (July 2014), pp. 169-184 (hereinafter, "Tach et al., 2014").

[31] For additional discussion, see Tach et al., 2014; and Karen Benjamin Guzzo, "New Partners, More Kids: Multiple-Partner Fertility in the United States," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 654, no. 1 (July 2014), pp. 66-86.

[32] In some cases, adults may be identified as the stepparent of a resident child even though they are not married to a biological parent of the child. Correspondence between CRS and Shelley Irving, SIPP Coordination and Outreach Staff, U.S. Census Bureau, December 23, 2019.

**Figure 5. Fertility and Number of Children of Nonresident Parents, 2018**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. Fertility and children (number, residency) were reported as of the survey date in 2018. For the number of childbearing unions, a relatively small number of parents may have had "zero" (no biological children, exclusively step or adopted children); this estimate is not presented because it may be less reliable due to a small sample size. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding, and because an estimate for zero childbearing unions is not presented.

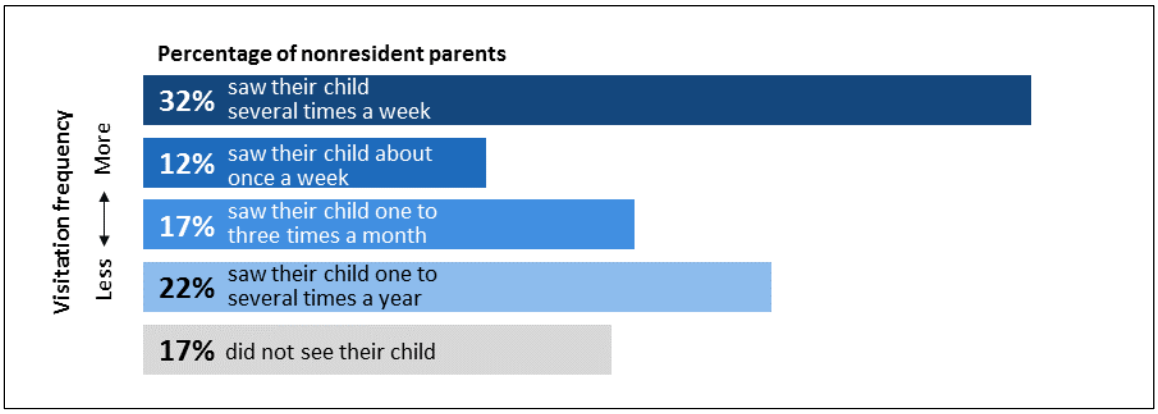
**Figure 6** shows that nonresident parents frequently reported seeing their youngest nonresident child in the year preceding the survey. (The SIPP exclusively collects information on child contact for parents' youngest nonresident child.) Thirty-two percent (3.0 million), of nonresident parents saw their youngest nonresident child several times a week. Another 12% (1.2 million) saw their youngest nonresident child about once a week, 17% (1.7 million) saw their youngest nonresident child one to three times a month, and 22% (2.2 million) of saw their youngest nonresident child one to several times a year. Finally, 17% (1.6 million) of parents did not see their youngest nonresident child during the previous year. Nonresident parents vary in their desire to interact with some or all of their nonresident children, and in their success in acting upon any intentions to see them.[33] The costs to interact with a nonresident child may outweigh the value a parent places on continued contact. Interested nonresident parents may face barriers to contact with their child, including legal access to the child, their relationship with the child's other parent or caregivers, new family obligations, physical distance, mental and behavioral health challenges (e.g., depression, substance use), and constrained economic circumstances.[34] There are also many reasons why a child's caregiver(s) may seek to restrict a nonresident parent's access, including

[33] Tach et al., 2014, pp. 178-181.

[34] Robin Dion et al., *Parents and Children Together: The Complex Needs of Low-Income Men and How Responsible Fatherhood Programs Address Them*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, March 2018, pp. 5-8, 16-19; Kathryn Edin and Timothy Nelson, *Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the Inner City* (University of California Press, 2013); and Jennifer M. Randles, *Essential Dads: The Inequalities and Politics of Fathering* (University of California Press, 2020).

concern for the child or caregiver's safety[35] and the nonresident parent's competence with childrearing responsibilities.[36]

**Figure 6. Frequency of Visitation with Youngest Nonresident Child of Nonresident Parents, 2017**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. Visitation data were reported for the previous calendar year (2017). Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

## Economic Circumstances of Nonresident Parents

**Figure 7** illustrates that nonresident parents (particularly nonresident fathers) had lower levels of employment than parents (particularly fathers) with resident-only children in 2017. Panel A presents the employment distribution for all parents in 2017, showing that nonresident parents had modestly lower levels of employment than resident-only parents. The majority of nonresident parents, 57% (5.5 million), worked full-time, year-round. Another 25% (2.4 million) of nonresident parents worked either part-time or part-year. Finally, 19% (1.8 million) of nonresident parents did not work at all.

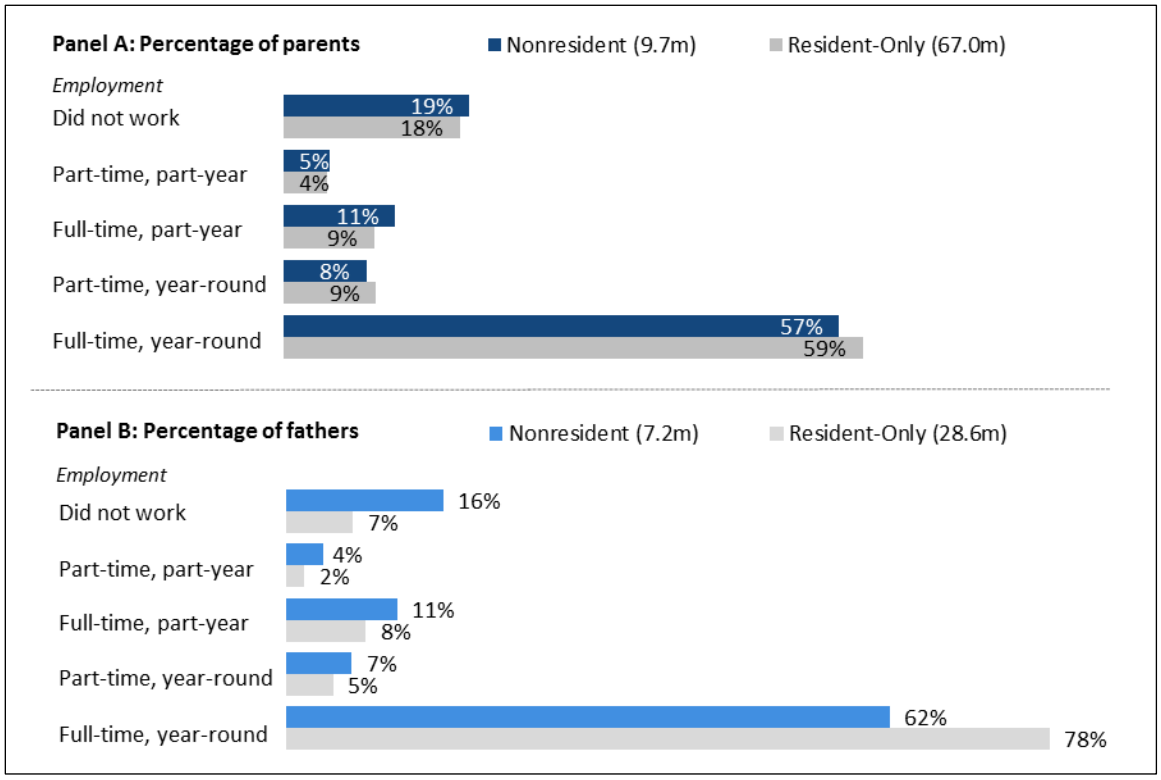
However, the comparison of employment by child residency in Panel A is limited because nonresident parents are more likely than resident-only parents to be male and men are more likely to be employed than women in the United States.[37] Panel B restricts the analysis of employment to fathers, highlighting that nonresident fathers had substantially lower levels of employment than resident-only fathers in 2017. Sixty-two percent (4.5 million) of nonresident fathers worked full-time, year-round, which was less than the 78% (22.4 million) of resident-only fathers who worked as much. Sixteen percent (1.2 million) of nonresident fathers did not work at all, which was a greater proportion than the 7% (2 million) of resident-only fathers without employment. (By comparison, nonresident mothers and resident-only mothers had rates of employment that were similar to one another in the SIPP data, results which are not presented here.)

[35] Maureen R. Waller and Raymond Swisher, "Fathers' Risk Factors in Fragile Families: Implications for 'Healthy' Relationships and Father Involvement,"" *Social Problems*, vol. 53, no. 3 (August 2006), pp. 392-420.

[36] Yoshie Sano, Leslie N. Richards, and Anisa M. Zvonkovic, "Are Mothers Really 'Gatekeepers' of Children? Rural Mothers' Perceptions of Nonresident Fathers' Involvement in Low-Income Families," *Journal of Family Issues*, vol. 29, no. 12 (December 2008), pp. 1714-1715.

[37] In 2018, the employment rate was 86% for males aged 25-54 and 73% for females aged 25-44; see CRS Report R45330, *Labor Market Patterns Since 2007*.

**Figure 7. Employment of Parents and Fathers, by Residency of Children, 2017**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. "Full-time" is defined as working 35 or more hours a week for 50% or more of the weeks worked in 2017. "Year-round" is defined as working 50 weeks or more in 2017. m = millions of parents. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

The most common reason nonresident parents who did not work in 2017 reported not working for pay was because of a chronic health condition or disability; this was reported by 41% (0.8 million) of these parents.[38] Nonresident parents also commonly reported that they were not working because of caregiving responsibilities (13%), they were unable to find work (12%), or they were retired (10%).[39] Resident-only parents were less likely to report not working because of a chronic health condition or disability, inability to find work, or retirement, and more likely to report not working because of caregiving responsibilities. Part, but not all, of the differences between nonresident parents and resident-only parents in reported reasons for not working can be explained by differences in the sex composition of these groups. For example, nonresident

[38] Reasons for not working presented here were for not working in December 2017. Information is unavailable about reasons for not working for a small number of persons categorized as nonworkers in the analysis underlying Figure 7 because the SIPP classifies these persons as employed even though they worked zero hours during the year. For example, a person may report that they were absent from a job or personal business without pay for the entire year. Because the SIPP considers this person employed, albeit at a job that did not involve any hours of work, the SIPP would not ask this person why they were not working for pay.

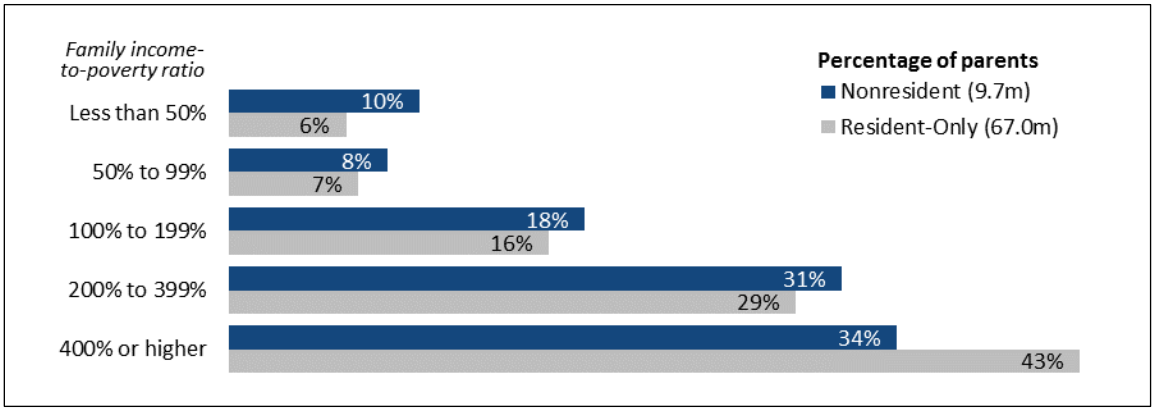
[39] SIPP respondents can agree to more than one reason for not working. Less frequently reported reasons are not presented here because smaller sample sizes make those estimates less reliable. Other reasons for not working that SIPP respondents can agree to include temporarily unable to work because of injury or illness, not interested in working, going to school, layoff, and working without pay for a family business. In addition, the reason "other" is not presented here because there is no clear interpretation for this response.

parents are more likely than resident-only parents to be male, and men are consistently more likely than women to report not working for health or disability reasons and less likely to report not working because of caregiving responsibilities.[40]

A sizable minority of nonresident parents (and a higher percentage than resident-only parents) reported having little or no personal or family income, which may constrain some of these parents' ability to support themselves and their children financially. (The data reported here reflect income in 2017 from a broad range of sources, including business income, investments, social insurance programs, and need-tested programs, not just employment income.) Over a third (3.4 million) of nonresident parents reported receiving less than $20,000 annually in personal income,[41] while 23% (2.2 million) reported receiving $60,000 or higher. Resident-only parents were less likely than nonresident parents to report receiving an income between $1 and $59,999, and 31% of resident-only parents reported receiving $60,000 or higher.

**Figure 8** shows how nonresident parents also have lower family income-to-poverty ratios than resident-only parents. Nearly 18% (1.7 million) of nonresident parents reported a family income that was less than the official poverty thresholds in 2017, and an additional 18% (1.7 million) reported a modestly higher family income that was still less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds. Thirty-four percent (3.3 million) of nonresident parents reported a family income greater than 400% of the official poverty thresholds. In comparison, resident-only parents reported higher levels of income, with 12% reporting a poverty-level family income and 43% reporting a family income that was greater than 400% of the official poverty thresholds. The next section of the report examines low-income nonresident parents in more detail.

**Figure 8. Ratio of Family Income-to-Poverty of Parents, by Residency of Children, 2017**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. Income data were reported for the previous calendar year (2017). m = millions of parents. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

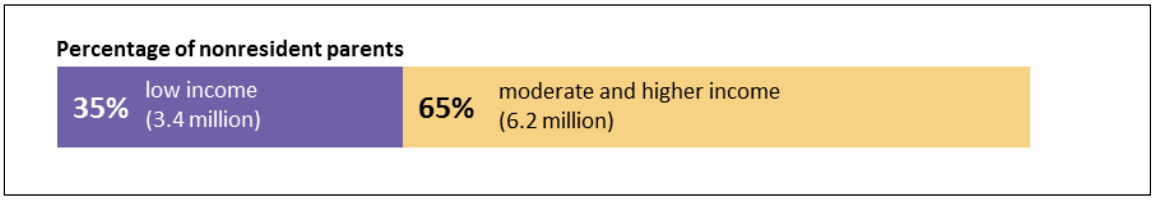
[40] For data on differences in reasons for not working between men and women, see Steven F. Hipple, "People Who Are Not in the Labor Force: Why Aren't They Working?," *Beyond the Numbers: Employment and Unemployment*, vol. 4, no. 15 (December 2015), pp. 8-15.

[41] This includes individuals with negative personal income.

# Characteristics of Low-Income Nonresident Parents

In recent years, observers have expressed concern that some nonresident parents are economically vulnerable and struggling to support themselves and their children.[42] The children of low-income nonresident parents are disproportionately likely to be economically vulnerable as well.[43] This report defines *low income* as a family income-to-poverty ratio of less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds.[44] **Figure 9** shows there were an estimated 3.4 million low-income nonresident parents in 2017, with the remaining 6.2 million nonresident parents having a family income at or above 200% of the official poverty thresholds (referred to as *moderate- and higher-income* nonresident parents in this report). In light of policymaker interest in low-income populations, this section compares the circumstances of low-income nonresident parents relative to moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents. (Many factors affect income, regardless of whether a person is a nonresident parent. Discussing the causes of low income, why certain characteristics such as race or education are associated with low income in the United States, and the extensive literature related to these topics is beyond the scope of this report.) This section concludes by comparing the receipt of need-tested benefits and the health insurance status of low-income nonresident parents to low-income, resident-only parents.

**Figure 9. Distribution of Nonresident Parents by Family Income-to-Poverty Level in 2017**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. "Low income" is defined as having a family income that is less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds in 2017.

[42] For example, see Ronald B. Mincy, Monique Jethwani, and Serena Klempin, *Failing our Fathers: Confronting the Crisis of Economically Vulnerable Nonresident Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); and American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Brookings Institution Working Group on Poverty and Opportunity, *Opportunity, Responsibility, and Security: A Consensus Plan for Reducing Poverty and Restoring the American Dream*, December 2015, pp. 38-39.

[43] Marilyn Sinkewicz and Irwin Garfinkel, "Unwed Fathers' Ability to Pay Child Support: New Estimates Accounting for Multiple-Partner Fertility," *Demography*, vol. 46, no. 2 (May 2009), p. 259.

[44] In 2020, an income less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds would have bene equivalent to less than $26,929 for a single person under age 65 living with no related children under age 18. Poverty thresholds vary by family size and composition; see U.S. Census Bureau, "Poverty Thresholds," at https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html. Analyzing persons with income less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds is a common practice in the research literature. For example, below 200% is one of the ratios of income to poverty reported by the Census Bureau in its annual poverty reports; see Jessica Semega et al., *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2019*, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2020, pp. 18-19 (hereinafter, "Semega et al., 2020"). Households with income below 200% of poverty reported relatively higher rates of material hardship than more well-off households; see Table 2 of John Iceland, Claire Kovach, and John Creamer, "Poverty and the Incidence of Material Hardship, Revisited," *Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 102, no. 1 (January 2021), pp. 585-617.

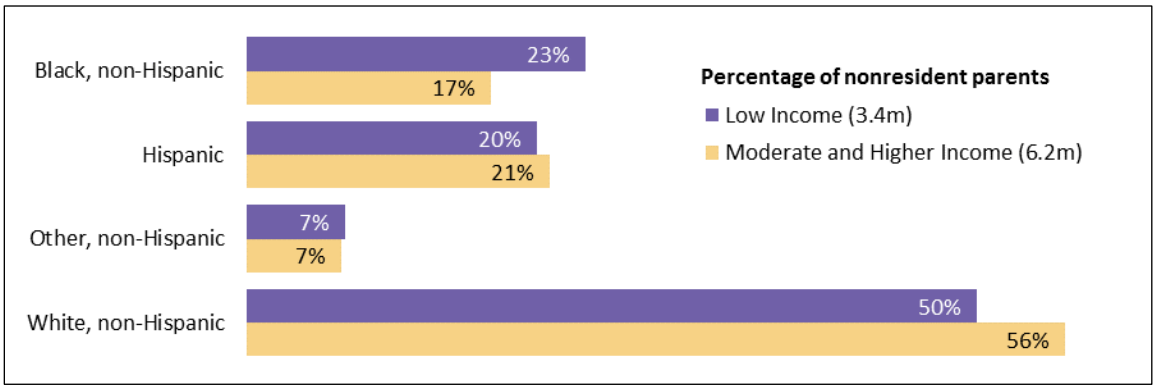
## Demographics of Low-Income Nonresident Parents

While most low-income nonresident parents were male, nonresident mothers comprised a relatively large share (35%) of this group in 2017. A little over 65% (2.2 million) of low-income nonresident parents were male, compared with nearly 80% (5.0 million) of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents. Prior research finds that nonresident mothers are disproportionately likely to be low-income.[45]

Most low-income nonresident parents were in their 30s or 40s, though they were more likely to be relatively younger than moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents. About 16% (0.6 million) of low-income nonresident parents were under age 30, compared with 9% (0.6 million) of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents. Thirty-three percent (1.1 million) of low-income nonresident parents were in their 40s, compared with 40% (2.5 million) of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents. The shares of nonresident parents who were in their 30s or were 50 or older were similar across low-income and other nonresident parents.

About 50% (1.7 million) of all low-income nonresident parents were White, non-Hispanic, as illustrated in **Figure 10**. Black, non-Hispanic parents made up another 23% (0.8 million) of low-income nonresident parents, a relatively disproportionate share. By comparison, 56% (3.5 million) of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents were White, non-Hispanic, and a relatively smaller share of 17% (1.0 million) were Black, non-Hispanic. The percentage of low-income and moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents who were Hispanic or other, non-Hispanic were similar. The differences in income by racial and ethnic category are not unique to nonresident parents; low income is more common for Black people and less common for White, non-Hispanic people among the overall U.S. population as well.[46]

**Figure 10. Race/Ethnicity of Nonresident Parents, by Family Income-to-Poverty Level, 2017**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

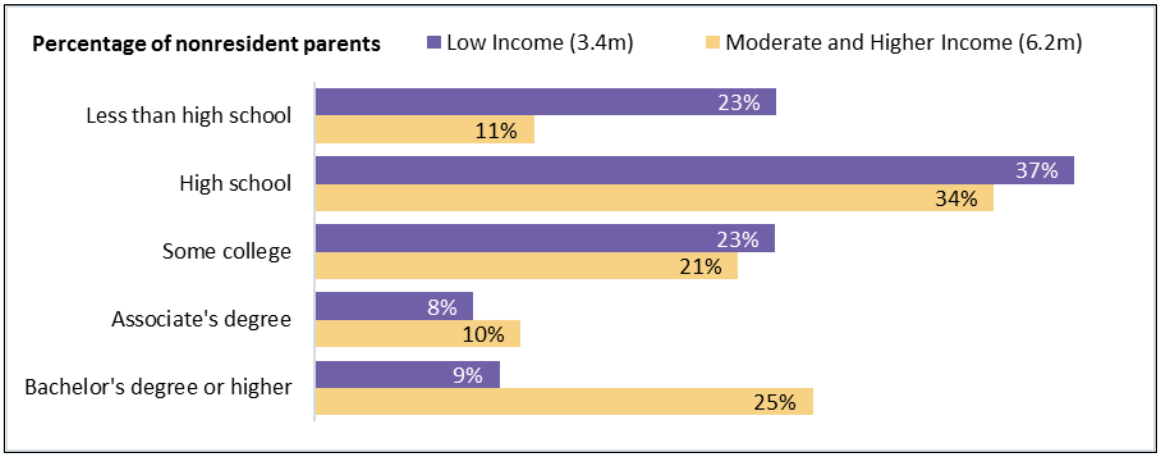
**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. "Low income" is defined as having a family income that is less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds in 2017. The designation "other" refers to persons who do not exclusively identify as White or Black in terms of race—for example, it includes persons who identify as Asian, Native American, or mixed race/multiracial. m = millions of parents. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

[45] Kate Stirling and Thomas Aldrich, "Economic Inequities in Child Support: The Role of Gender," *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, vol. 53, no. 5 (July 2012), pp. 330-333.

[46] Semega et al., 2020, p. 59.

**Figure 11** presents the education distribution of low-income and moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents in 2017, which demonstrates that education and income are positively associated with one another among nonresident parents (just as they are among the overall U.S. population).[47] Low-income nonresident parents were approximately twice as likely to have not completed high school, with 23% (0.8 million) having less than a high school education, compared with 11% (0.7 million) of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents. While 9% (0.3 million) of low-income nonresident parents had a Bachelor's degree or higher, nearly 25% (1.5 million) of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents had a Bachelor's degree or higher.

**Figure 11. Educational Attainment of Nonresident Parents, by Family Income-to-Poverty Level, 2017**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. "Low income" is defined as having a family income that is less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds in 2017. Education reflects a person's highest level of attainment as of December 2017; some parents may have still been enrolled in school. The category "some college" includes any postsecondary education short of a degree. m = millions of parents. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

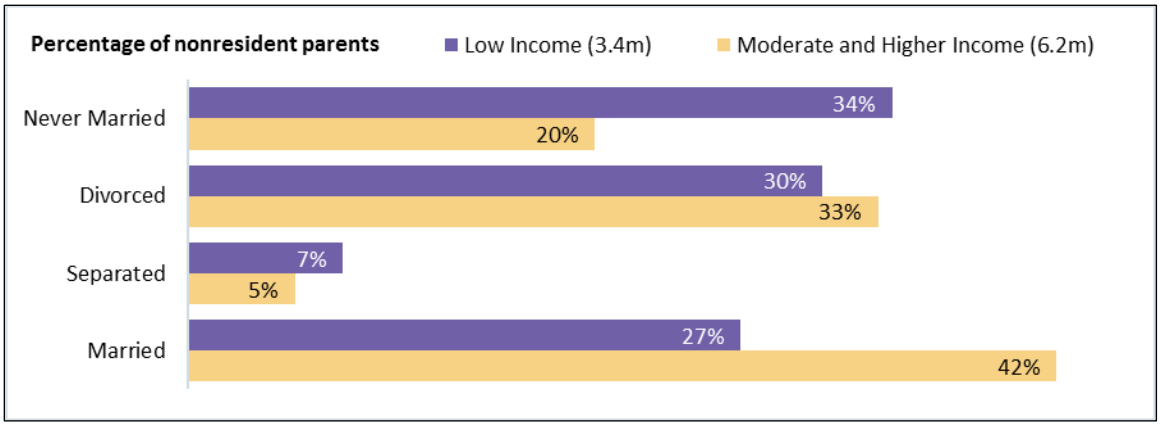
## Relationships of Low-Income Nonresident Parents

Similar to race/ethnicity and education, marital status is strongly associated with income among nonresident parents (just as it is among the overall U.S. population).[48] As shown in **Figure 12**, 34% (1.2 million) of low-income nonresident parents in 2017 had never married, compared with 20% (1.2 million) of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents. Twenty-seven percent (0.9 million) of low-income nonresident parents were currently married, compared with 42% (2.6 million) of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents.

[47] See, for example, Semega et al., 2020, p. 18.

[48] See, for example, Marianne Cooper and Allison J. Pugh, "Families Across the Income Spectrum: A Decade in Review," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 82, no. 1 (February 2020), p. 275 (hereinafter, "Cooper and Pugh, 2020").

**Figure 12. Marital Status of Nonresident Parents, by Family Income-to-Poverty Level, 2017**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. "Low income" is defined as having a family income that is less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds in 2017. Marital status was reported as of the survey date in 2018. m = millions of parents. Groups may not sum to 100% because an estimate for the widowed is not presented here (it may be less reliable due to a small sample size) and due to rounding.

Low-income nonresident parents had, on average, more childbearing unions and children, resident or nonresident, than moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents.[49]

- Forty-nine percent (1.7 million) of low-income nonresident parents had two or more childbearing unions, compared with 35% (2.2 million) of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents.
- Twenty-five percent (0.9 million) of low-income nonresident parents had two or more resident children under age 21, compared with 20% (1.2 million) of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents. (The share of nonresident parents with zero resident children was similar between the two groups at about 58%, while a smaller share of low-income nonresident parents than moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents had one resident child.)
- Nearly 18% (0.6 million) of low-income nonresident parents had three or more nonresident children under age 21, compared with 11% (0.5 million) of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents. A larger proportion of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents had either one or two nonresident child(ren), relative to low-income nonresident parents.

The finding that low-income nonresident parents tended to have more childbearing unions and children than moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents aligns with previous research finding that multi-partner fertility is more prevalent among low-income adults[50] and that there is a

[49] One qualifier to these results is that the presence of more resident children—while holding all other factors constant—will often mechanically increase measured poverty, as the official poverty thresholds are partly based on family size and children typically do not earn income. Therefore, it may not be surprising to find that there was a higher proportion of nonresident parents with two or more resident children among the low-income group.

[50] Lindsay M. Monte, "Multiple-Partner Fertility in the United States: A Demographic Portrait," *Demography*, vol. 56, no. 1 (February 2019), pp. 115, 118.

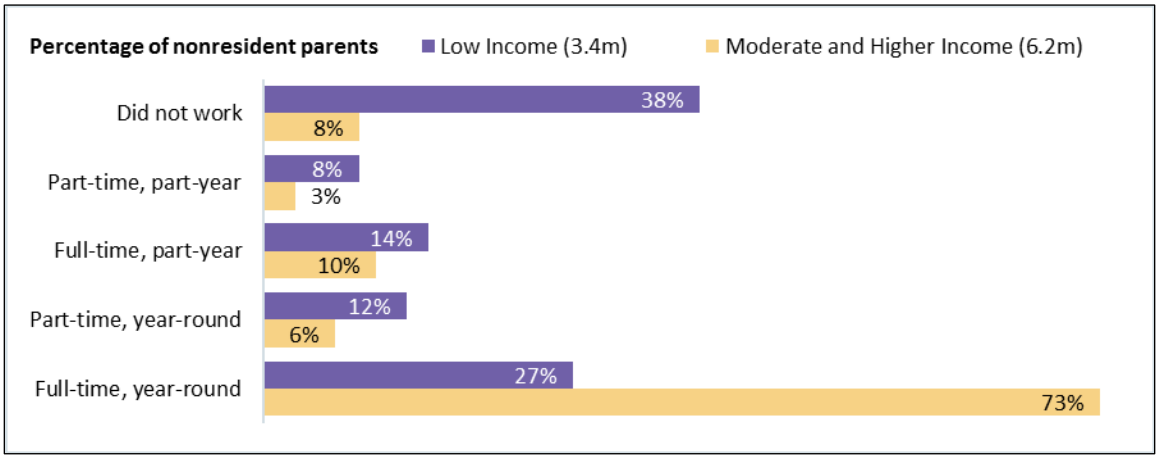
negative association between the number of children and income-to-poverty ratios among the overall U.S. population.[51]

Low-income nonresident parents reported seeing their youngest nonresident child at lower levels than moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents in 2017 (see **Table B-6**). However, prior research on the relationship between nonresident parent income and parent-child contact has produced mixed findings, so the results for 2017 from SIPP data should be interpreted with caution.[52]

## Economic Circumstances of Low-Income Nonresident Parents

Low-income nonresident parents were more likely not to be working compared with moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents in 2017, as illustrated in **Figure 13**. Thirty-eight percent (1.3 million) of low-income nonresident parents were not working, compared with 8% (0.5 million) of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents. Twenty-seven percent (0.9 million) of low-income nonresident parents worked full-time, year-round, substantially less than the 73% (4.6 million) of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents who worked with this regularity. Low-income nonresident parents who did not work for pay in 2017 were similar to nonresident parents overall in that they were most likely to report not working because of a chronic health condition or disability (30%), an inability to find work (10%), or caregiving responsibilities (9%).

**Figure 13. Employment of Nonresident Parents, by Family Income-to-Poverty Level, 2017**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. "Low income" is defined as having a family income that is less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds in 2017. "Full-time" is defined as working 35 or more hours a week for 50% or more of the weeks worked in 2017. "Year-round" is defined as working 50 weeks or more in 2017. m = millions of parents. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

[51] U.S. Census Bureau, "Current Population Survey Detailed Tables for Poverty: Table POV-04," at https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pov/pov-04.html.

[52] For a literature review and original findings, see Angela Guarin and Daniel R. Meyer, "Are Low Earnings of Nonresidential Fathers a Barrier to their Involvement with Children?," *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 91, (August 2018), pp. 304-318.

**Figure 14** compares the receipt of select need-tested benefits and year-round health insurance coverage among low-income nonresident parents and low-income resident-only parents in 2017. (In results presented in **Table B-7**, low-income nonresident parents were more likely to receive need-tested benefits and less likely to have health insurance coverage than moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents. However, this finding is not particularly revealing, as need-tested refers to the practice of limiting benefits to those meeting a test of low income or other financial resources,[53] and because it is already well-documented that low income is associated with a greater lack of health insurance coverage in the United States.[54]) The analysis in this report compares low-income nonresident parents to low-income resident-only parents to explore the less-examined phenomenon of how different parent-child relationships affect benefit receipt and health insurance coverage. The need-tested benefits included in this analysis are the EITC,[55] SNAP,[56] and Medicaid.[57] Other need-tested benefits are excluded either because they were received less frequently[58] or not measured by the SIPP.[59] Panel A in **Figure 14** shows that low-income nonresident parents were less likely to report receiving the EITC (21%; 0.7 million) or having year-round health insurance coverage (68%; 2.3 million) than low-income resident-only parents. In contrast, low-income nonresident parents reported receiving SNAP (33%, 1.1 million) and Medicaid (39%, 1.3 million) at rates comparable to low-income resident-only parents.

However, the comparison in Panel A of benefit receipt by whether parents had nonresident children is limited because the major need-tested programs often restrict eligibility by whether adults have qualifying relationships with resident children.[60] This report previously showed that 42% of nonresident parents also have resident children. Panel B distinguishes between low-income nonresident parents without resident children and low-income nonresident parents with resident children, highlighting that low-income nonresident parents without resident children were substantially less likely to report receiving benefits or having health insurance coverage than either low-income nonresident parents with resident children or low-income resident-only parents. Among low-income nonresident parents without resident children, 13% (0.3 million) reported receiving the EITC, 26% (0.5 million) reported receiving SNAP, 33% (0.7 million) reported receiving Medicaid, and 64% (1.3 million) reported having health insurance coverage for the entire year in 2017. By comparison, among low-income nonresident parents who also had resident children, 32% (0.5 million) reported receiving the EITC, 43% (0.6 million) reported receiving SNAP, 46% (0.7 million) reported receiving Medicaid, and 73% (1.1 million) reported having year-round health insurance coverage.

[53] For more information, see CRS Report R46823, *Need-Tested Benefits: Who Receives Assistance?*.

[54] Katherine Keisler-Starkey and Lisa N. Bunch, *Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2019*, U.S. Census Bureau, September 2020, p. 18.

[55] For more information, see CRS Report R43805, *The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC): How It Works and Who Receives It*.

[56] For more information, see CRS Report R42505, *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): A Primer on Eligibility and Benefits*.

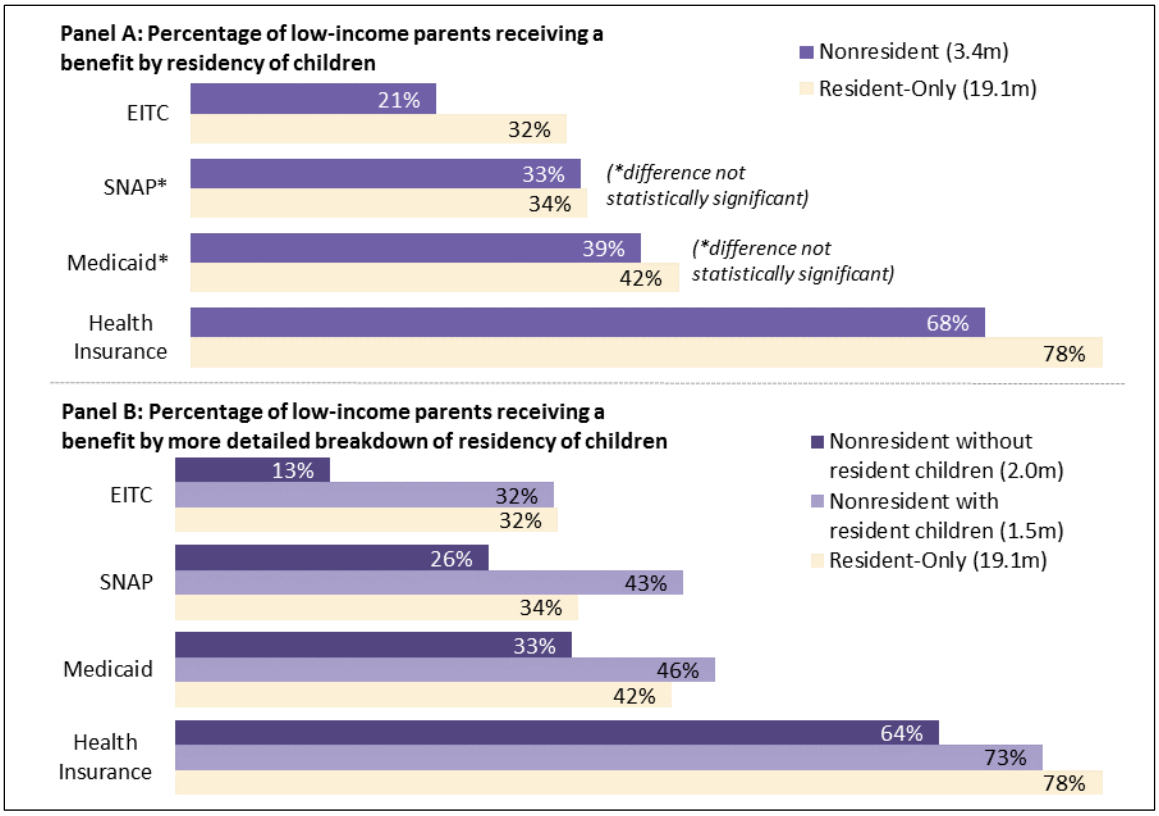
[57] For more information, see CRS In Focus IF10322, *Medicaid Primer*.

[58] Limited receipt results in small sample sizes that are insufficient for reliable estimation of these benefits for a modest-sized sub-population such as low-income nonresident parents.

[59] Notably, the SIPP does not ask about receipt of the additional child tax credit.

[60] For more information, see CRS Report R46823, *Need-Tested Benefits: Who Receives Assistance?*.

**Figure 14. Receipt of Need-Tested Benefits and Health Insurance Coverage Among Low-Income Parents, by Residency of Children, 2017**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Low-income parents with children under age 21. "Low income" is defined as having a family income that is less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds in 2017. In Panel A, "nonresident" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children; in Panel B, this group is split into two subgroups defined by presence of resident children. Reported benefit receipt data are for 2017. EITC = Earned Income Tax Credit; SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; and Health Insurance = possessing health insurance coverage for the entire year. m = millions of parents. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

# Child Support Payments

Policymakers have traditionally been interested in ensuring children with a nonresident parent receive a level of support, including financial contributions, from both parents that is similar to what they would have been expected to receive if they were living with both parents in a single household. This is one of the primary purposes of the Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program.[61] In light of policymaker interest, this section analyzes the amount of child support paid and the size of these payments relative to nonresident parents' income, with a particular focus on the child support payments of low-income nonresident parents.

This report does not compare nonresident parents' reported payment of child support to data on *custodial families'* reported receipt of child support income in the SIPP. (Custodial families or parents refers to those individuals living with children who have one or more nonresident

[61] For more information, see CRS Report RS22380, *Child Support Enforcement: Program Basics*.

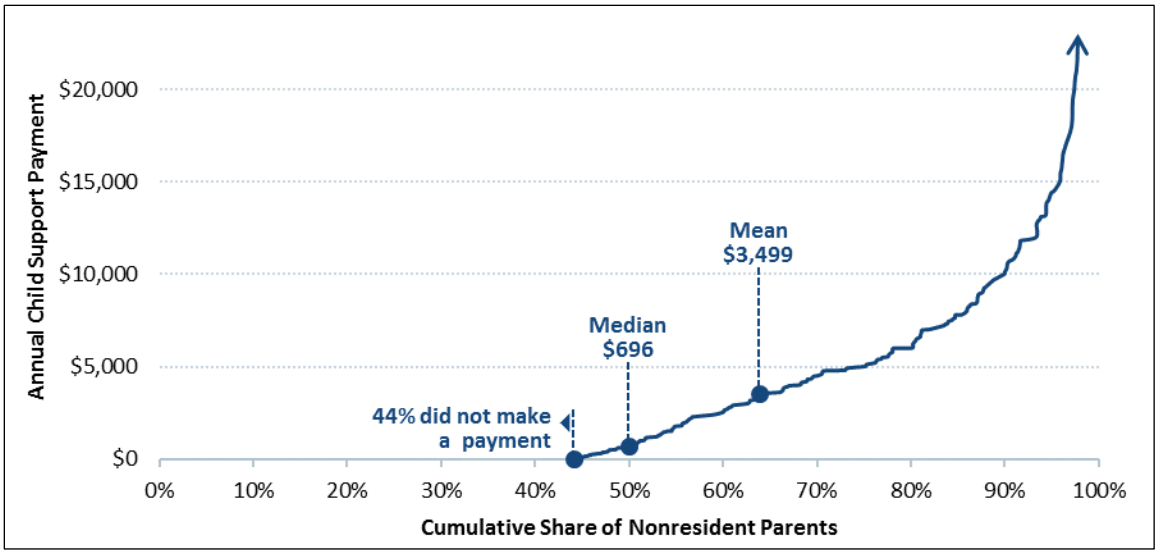
parents.) The report also does not cover data from alternative sources on child support payments, including data from other surveys such as the Current Population Survey-Child Support Supplement[62] or administrative data[63] from the CSE program.

## Child Support Payments of Nonresident Parents

**Figure 15** illustrates that nonresident parents displayed considerable variation in their child support payments in 2017. A majority of nonresident parents (56%; 5.4 million) reported paying child support. The remaining 44% (4.3 million) did not report making child support payments. In some cases, parents who were not making payments may have had no formal or informal agreement to pay child support. In other cases, parents had obligations for which they were not making payments. The SIPP asks nonresident parents about their payments, not their child support obligations. The questions are framed around child support paid through any means, as opposed to just payments made through the CSE program.

Nonresident parents reported paying an estimated $33.8 billion in child support in 2017. The median nonresident parent paid a total of $696 annually in child support; the mean payment was $3,499. (Among nonresident parents who paid anything in child support, the median payment was $4,785 and the mean payment was $6,271.) Some nonresident parents made relatively large payments, including 11% (1.1 million) who reported paying $10,000 or more.

**Figure 15. Child Support Payments of Nonresident Parents, 2017**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. Nonresident parents making no payment may have had no legal obligation or informal expectation to pay child support. Child support payments were reported for the previous calendar year (2017). The U.S. Census Bureau topcodes child support payment amounts to protect the confidentiality of respondents. For about 2% of nonresident parents in the 2018 SIPP public-use files, the respondent-reported

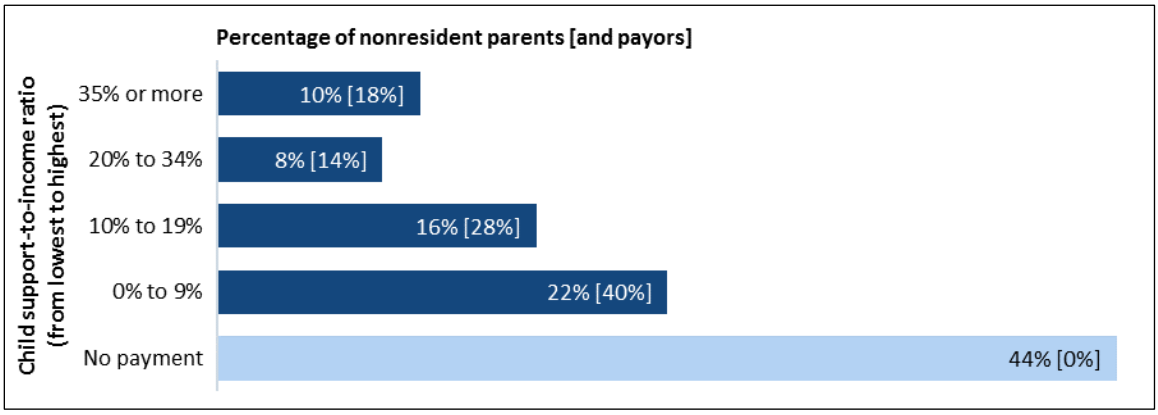
[62] For example, see Grall, 2020.

[63] For example, see Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), *FY2020 Preliminary Data Report*, HHS, ACF, June 2021 (hereinafter "OCSE, 2021").

amounts were replaced by an average of the values being topcoded ($23,800). Topcoded values are not displayed in this figure.

**Figure 16** presents the ratio of nonresident parents' child support payments relative to their total personal income in 2017. Child support-to-income ratios for nonresident parents ranged from the 44% making no payment, to 10% (1.0 million) who reported paying 35% or more.[64] The equivalent percentages when solely counting the subgroup of nonresident parents who paid anything in child support (payors) are presented in brackets. (In other words, nonresident parents making no payment are excluded from consideration when calculating the child support-to-income rations for payors, the figures presented in the brackets. The bracketed values present the range of child support-to-income ratios, conditional on a nonresident parent having paid anything in child support.) For example, 18% of nonresident parents paying child support reported paying a sum equivalent to 35% or more of their income.[65]

**Figure 16. Child Support-to-Income Ratio of Nonresident Parents [and Payors], 2017**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. Child support payments and income were reported for the previous calendar year (2017). "Payors" are the subset of nonresident parents who paid any child support. Nonresident parents making no payment may have had no legal obligation or informal expectation to pay child support. The "child support-to-income ratio" is the child support payment amount relative to total personal income. The U.S. Census Bureau topcodes child support payment and income data to protect the confidentiality of respondents; the respondent-reported amounts are replaced by an average of the values being topcoded. The category of "35% or more" includes 6% of nonresident parents [10% of payors] who reported paying more in child support than they received in income, including those who reported having zero or negative income. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

## Child Support Payments of Low-Income Nonresident Parents

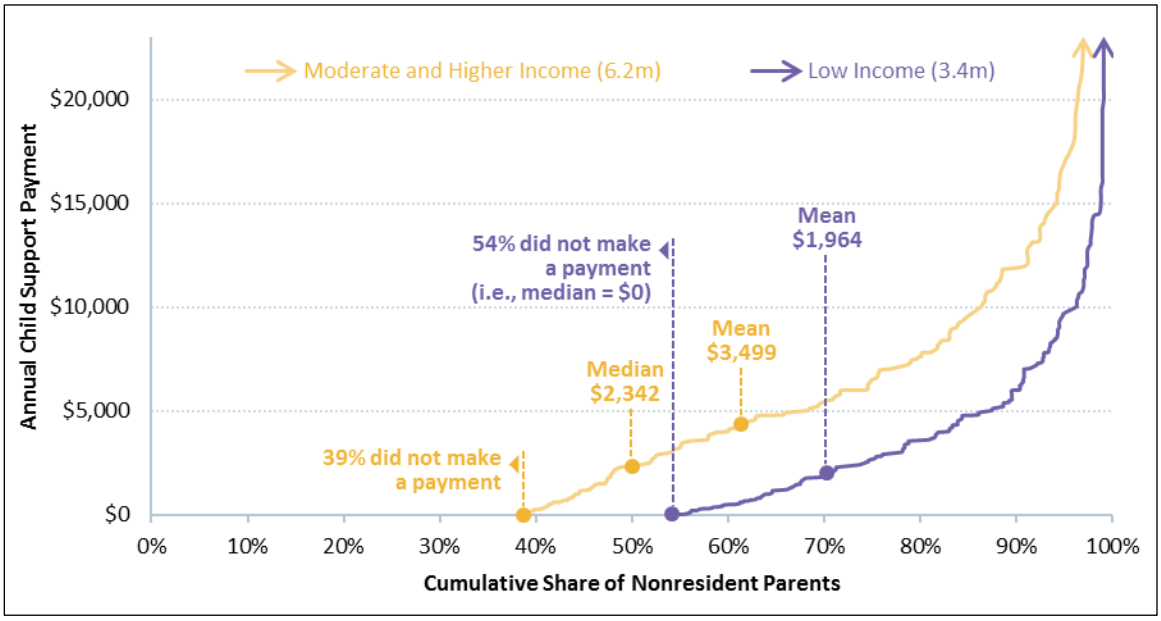
Low-income nonresident parents were more likely to pay little or no child support than moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents in 2017. **Figure 17** shows that 54% (1.9 million) of low-income nonresident parents did not make a child support payment, compared with 39% (2.4

[64] The category of "35% or more" includes the 6% of nonresident parents who reported paying more in child support than they received in income in 2017, including those who reported having zero or negative income.

[65] The category of "35% or more" includes the 10% of nonresident parents paying child support (payors) who reported paying more in child support than they received in income in 2017, including those who reported having zero or negative income.

million) of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents. The median annual child support payment among low-income nonresident parents was $0 (as more than half paid nothing) and the mean annual payment was $1,964, leading to a total of $6.7 billion in child support payments. In comparison, the median annual payment for moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents was $2,342, the mean annual payment was $4,344, and the payments totaled $27.1 billion.[66]

**Figure 17. Child Support Payments of Nonresident Parents, by Family Income-to-Poverty Level, 2017**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

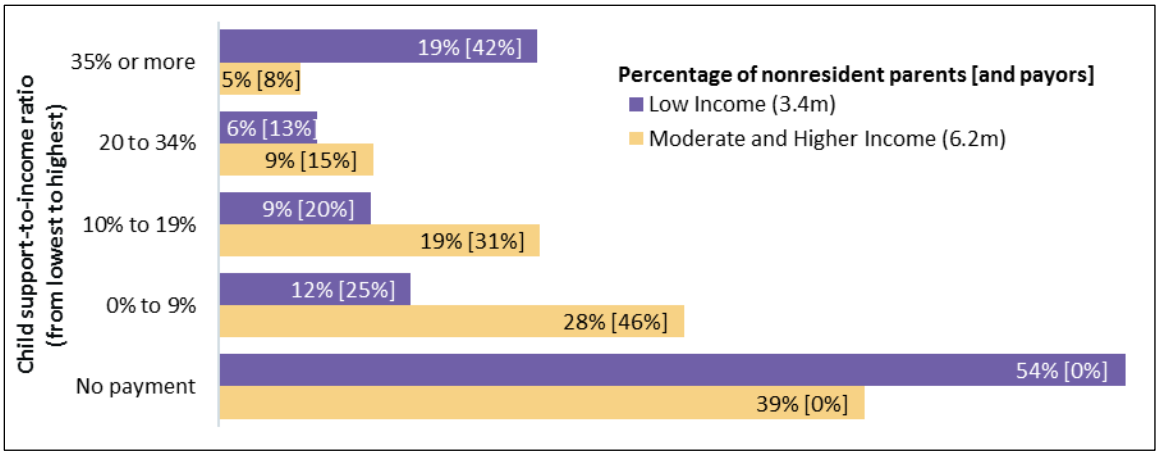
**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. Nonresident parents making no payment may have had no legal obligation or informal expectation to pay child support. Child support payments and income were reported for the previous calendar year (2017). "Low income" is defined as having a family income that is less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds in 2017. The U.S. Census Bureau topcodes child support payment amounts to protect the confidentiality of respondents. For about 2% of nonresident parents in the 2018 SIPP public-use files, the respondent-reported amounts were replaced by an average of the values being topcoded ($23,800). Topcoded values are not displayed in this figure.

Although low-income nonresident parents pay smaller amounts on average, the sums they paid in 2017 were more likely to represent a larger share of their income than the sums paid by moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents, as displayed in **Figure 18**. For example, 19% (0.7 million) of low-income nonresident parents reported paying child support that represented 35% or more of their total personal income,[67] while 5% (0.3 million) of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents reported a child support burden as large relative to their income.

[66] The differences in median and total payments between low-income nonresident parents and moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents were not tested for statistical significance. See **Appendix A** for discussion.

[67] The category of "35% or more" includes 12% of low-income nonresident parents and 2% of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents who reported paying more in child support in 2017 than they received in income, including those who reported having zero or negative income.

**Figure 18. Child Support-to-Income Ratio of Nonresident Parents [and Payors], by Family Income-to-Poverty Level, 2017**




**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. "Payors" are the subset of nonresident parents who paid any child support. Child support payments and income were reported for the previous calendar year (2017). "Low income" is defined as having a family income that is less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds. The "child support-to-income ratio" is the child support payment amount relative to total personal income. The U.S. Census Bureau topcodes child support payment and income data to protect the confidentiality of respondents; the respondent-reported amounts were replaced by an average of the values being topcoded. The category of "35% or more" includes 12% of low-income nonresident parents and 2% of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents who reported paying more in child support in 2017 than they received in income, including those who reported having zero or negative income. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

# Policy Considerations

This section reviews potential implications of the preceding findings, taking into consideration policymakers' expressed interests in the wellbeing of nonresident parents and the important emotional, time, financial, and other contributions these parents can make to their children's lives. The reviewed findings highlight a number of topics (e.g., employment, poverty, parent-child contact, financial support) where some nonresident parents have different outcomes than might be preferred by many policymakers, as well as nonresident parents themselves, their children, and other caregivers responsible for children. This section briefly discusses some of the policy issues related to influencing the circumstances and relationships of nonresident parents, with potential spillover effects on their children living elsewhere as well as other family members. This section does not attempt to provide a comprehensive review of every potentially relevant policy issue, but instead highlights notable examples from recent legislation or research.

## Employment and Earnings

Nonresident fathers had a lower level of employment, particularly full-time, year-round employment, compared to resident-only fathers in 2017. Low employment and earnings contribute to many nonresident parents having low incomes, which limits their ability to support themselves and provide financial support to their nonresident children and other family members. This report also identifies nonresident parents' lower level of educational attainment and higher rate of work-limiting chronic health conditions or disabilities as two contributing factors to their lower level of employment. Research has identified other significant employment barriers some

nonresident parents may face, including labor market conditions, lack of transportation or housing, discrimination, and contact with the criminal justice system.[68]

The federal government supports many policies designed to increase employment or earnings that may impact some nonresident parents, including the federal minimum wage and other labor standards,[69] employment and earnings subsidies such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC),[70] and monetary policy relating to maximizing employment.[71] There is also federal support for education, training, and other employment-related services provided through secondary career and technical education, non-degree and degree-granting postsecondary training and education programs, major components of the workforce development system, need-tested benefits programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), social insurance programs like Unemployment Insurance, and programs targeting specific populations such as Native Americans, veterans, youth, people with disabilities, and individuals involved in the criminal justice system.[72] With respect to the employment of people with low income, federal spending is substantially greater on the EITC or higher education than it is for predominantly short-term, non-degree employment and training programs.[73] Changes to these kinds of employment policies might impact nonresident parents.

## Child Support-Related Policies

This report highlights that most nonresident parents reported paying child support in 2017, and program administrative data indicate that many of them did so through the public Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program.[74] However, a sizable minority of nonresident parents did not report paying child support in 2017. The number of custodial families with child support cases through the CSE program has declined in recent years.[75] In addition, many nonresident parents who paid something in child support paid a small amount relative to their income in 2017. Meanwhile, many custodial families had limited income to support raising a child.[76] However, many nonresident parents also had limited income and a sizable percentage reported paying a child support amount that was large relative to their income in 2017 (e.g., 35% or more of their income). Balancing the economic capacity and basic subsistence needs of jointly low-income nonresident parents and custodial families, within the context of existing public benefits, may be

[68] For relevant research, see footnote 10 of CRS Report R46365, *Child Support Enforcement-Led Employment Services for Noncustodial Parents: In Brief*.

[69] See, for example, CRS In Focus IF10975, *Major Functions of the U.S. Department of Labor*.

[70] See, for example, CRS Insight IN11610, *The "Childless" EITC: Temporary Expansion for 2021 Under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA; P.L. 117-2)*; and CRS Report R43805, *The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC): How It Works and Who Receives It*.

[71] For more information, see CRS Insight IN11499, *The Federal Reserve's Revised Monetary Policy Strategy Statement*.

[72] For more information on many of these programs, see CRS Report R46306, *Direct Federal Support of Individuals Pursuing Training and Education in Non-degree Programs*; CRS Report R44252, *The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the One-Stop Delivery System*; and U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Employment and Training Programs: Department of Labor Should Assess Efforts to Coordinate Services Across Programs*, March 2019 (hereinafter, "GAO, 2019").

[73] For more information, see CRS Report R46214, *Federal Spending on Benefits and Services for People with Low Income: FY2008-FY2018 Update*; and GAO, 2019, pp. 12-16.

[74] OCSE, 2021, p.7.

[75] Asaph Glosser, Carly Morrison, and Justin Germain, *Building the Next Generation of Child Support Policy Research*, HHS, ACF, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), August 2018, p. 3.

[76] Grall, 2020, p. 5.

a particularly challenging issue for the CSE program and policymakers.[77] In response, observers have proposed a variety of child support-related policy changes to better achieve this balance. While assessing these is outside the scope of this report, some examples of approaches that have received recent attention in the federal context include

- accounting for the nonresident parent's ability to pay in calculating the amount of the child support order,[78]
- automatically reviewing and modifying child support orders in cases where the nonresident parent is unemployed or underemployed,[79]
- allowing programs the option to reduce or forgive child support debt that is not owed to the family (i.e., child support debt that is state- and federal-owed) in cases where that successfully incentivizes nonresident parents to regularly pay the current support,[80]
- allowing programs the option of funding work-oriented programs for noncustodial parents who are unable to meet their child support obligations,[81] and
- revisiting requirements that families receiving assistance under certain programs (e.g., TANF, Medicaid) cooperate with the CSE program.[82]

This report also shows that most nonresident parents reported seeing their youngest nonresident child in the preceding year, but some parents rarely or never saw their child. Historically, federal law primarily dealt with child support enforcement and treated child access as a separate issue.[83] In light of evidence that parental absence is associated with negative long-term consequences for children[84] and contact between a nonresident parent and their child can increase child support compliance,[85] policymakers in recent years have promoted efforts to address the potential connection between child support and child access. CSE Access and Visitation Grants provide financial support for activities such as mediation, counseling, education, development of

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[77] Maria Cancian and Daniel R. Meyer, "Reforming Policy for Single-Parent Families to Reduce Child Poverty," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, vol. 4, no. 2 (February 2018), pp. 91-112.

[78] Maria Cancian and Molly A. Costanzo, "Comparing Income-Shares and Percentage-of-Income Child Support Guidelines," *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 96 (January 2019), pp. 451-462; and Leslie Hodges and Lisa Klein Vogel, "Too Much, Too Little, or Just Right? Recent Changes to State Child Support Guidelines for Low-Income Noncustodial Parents," *Journal of Policy Practice and Research*, vol. 2, no. 3 (September 2021), pp. 146-177.

[79] OCSE, *Providing Expedited Review and Modification Assistance*, Project to Avoid Increasing Delinquencies, Child Support Fact Sheet No. 2, HHS, ACF, June 2012; and Yoonsook Ha, Maria Cancian, and Daniel R. Meyer, "Unchanging Child Support Orders in the Face of Unstable Earnings," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Fall 2010), pp. 799-820.

[80] Ascend at the Aspen Institute and GOOD+ Foundation, *Child Support Policy Fact Sheet: Reducing Arrears*, August 2020.

[81] For more information, see CRS Report R46365, *Child Support Enforcement-Led Employment Services for Noncustodial Parents: In Brief*.

[82] Rebekah Selekman and Pamela Holcomb, *Child Support Cooperation Requirements in Child Care Subsidy Programs and SNAP: Key Policy Considerations*, HHS, ASPE, October 2018; Robert Doar, "Empowering Child Support Enforcement to Reduce Poverty," in *A Safety Net That Works: Improving Federal Programs for Low-Income Americans*, ed. Robert Doar (Washington, DC: AEI, 2017), pp. 63-86; and Vicki Turetsky, "Why Forcing Food Stamp Participants to Receive Child-Support Services Is a Bad Idea," *Governing*, May 15, 2018, https://www.governing.com/gov-institute/voices/col-forcing-food-stamp-recipients-receive-child-support-services.html.

[83] OCSE, *Essentials for Attorneys in Child Support Enforcement*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: ACF, HSS, 2021), p. 15-1.

[84] See review of research in Cooper and Pugh, 2020, p. 276.

[85] OCSE, *Child Access and Visitation – Employment and Training – Fatherhood – Incarceration and Re-Entry – Projects In Progress*, HHS, ACF, July 2009, pp. 28-29.

parenting plans, and visitation enforcement.[86] In addition, some have proposed increasing federal financial support for parenting time initiatives through the CSE program.[87]

## Access to Need-Tested Benefits

Many nonresident parents reported relatively low levels of income and elevated rates of poverty in 2017. Besides income from work (and the social insurance benefits usually tied to work history),[88] need-tested benefits are typically the other major income source for low-income individuals.[89] However, low-income nonresident parents without resident children are less likely to receive major need-tested benefits than either low-income nonresident parents who also have resident children or low-income resident-only parents. In some cases, nonresident parents may have shared legal custody to their children and even physical custody of their children for much of the time (even without an official custody agreement), yet fail to qualify for child-related benefits under existing program rules.[90] Contemporary family arrangements may pose unique challenges and trade-offs for designing and administering government programs.

Providing need-tested benefits to nonresident parents directly can have significant effects on them, as well as their nonresident children and other family members. Medicaid, SNAP, and the EITC are the three largest need-tested spending programs that have seen recent changes in and continued debate over eligibility rules for adults without dependent children (affecting many nonresident parents).[91] When nonresident parents have access to more resources, they may be more capable of addressing their own basic needs while also providing support to their children.[92] However, some policymakers have historically expressed concern that need-tested benefits may reduce people's reliance on work and family for supporting themselves and their children.[93]

## Likelihood of Nonresident Parenthood

Federal policy may seek to affect the share of children being born and principally raised by co-residing parents, relative to separated parents living apart or other arrangements. The share of children living apart from one or more of their biological parents, a proxy measure for nonresident parenthood, has substantially increased since the 1960s (though the level has held

[86] OCSE, "Access and Visitation (AV)," at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/css/grants/current-grants/access-and-visitation-mandatory-grants.

[87] For more information, see CRS Insight IN11744, *S. 503, the Parents Act of 2021*.

[88] U.S. Congressional Budget Office (CBO), *The Distribution of Household Income, 2018*, August 2021, p.7.

[89] For more information, see CRS Report R46823, *Need-Tested Benefits: Who Receives Assistance?*.

[90] Daniel R. Meyer and Marcia J. Carlson, "Family Complexity: Implications for Policy and Research," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 654, no. 1 (July 2014), pp. 259-276.

[91] For more background on these programs' rules for adults without qualifying children, see CRS Report R43357, *Medicaid: An Overview*; CRS Report R42505, *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): A Primer on Eligibility and Benefits*, and CRS Insight IN11610, *The "Childless" EITC: Temporary Expansion for 2021 Under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA; P.L. 117-2)*.

[92] For example, research has found that changes in Medicaid policy (e.g., the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion) that increased (or decreased) the public health insurance eligibility of low-income populations encompassing many nonresident parents also increased (or decreased) the child support income received by custodial families. See Lindsey R. Bullinger, "Child Support and the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid Expansions," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, vol. 40, no. 1 (Winter 2021), pp. 42-77; and Lindsey R. Bullinger and Sebastian Tello-Trillo, "Connecting Medicaid and Child Support: Evidence from the TennCare Disenrollment," *Review of Economics of the Household*, vol. 19, no. 3 (September 2021), pp. 785-812.

[93] For more information, see CRS Report R43731, *Poverty: Major Themes in Past Debates and Current Proposals*.

steady in recent years). Scholars have advanced many explanations for the changes in children's typical living arrangements, with some of them leading to suggested or enacted policy interventions with the intention of influencing family composition.[94] Comprehensively assessing the hypothesized explanations for family change lies outside the scope of this report, but some of the federal policy strategies that have been pursued or proposed are listed below to illustrate the potential breadth of this topic.

- Improve people's current or prospective socioeconomic circumstances, potentially for young males from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular (e.g., expand or reform federal policies that seek to boost education, employment, and earnings, as well as reduce substance use disorder and contact with the criminal justice system[95]).
- Change social policies to increase financial incentives and support for family stability (e.g., make tax and spending program benefits significantly more generous for two-parent families than the benefits for single-parent families[96]).
- Promote the value of stable relationships for raising children and providing relationship skills training (e.g., increase federal support for the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood programs, which seek to promote strong, healthy family formation and responsible parenting[97]).
- Expand family planning services (e.g., increase federal support for family planning services through Medicaid, the Title X Family Planning program, and other policies[98]).

There is often limited research on these strategies or the findings to date are mixed or null—more experimentation and rigorous research might help identify what changes in federal policy, if any, can increase the share of children being born and principally raised by co-residing parents (in conjunction with other caregivers).

[94] For relevant research, varying viewpoints, and potential policy options, see Andrew J. Cherlin, *Labor's Love Lost: The Rise and Fall of the Working-Class Family in America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2014); Ron Haskins, "The Family Is Here to Stay—or Not," *The Future of Children*, vol. 25, no. 2 (Fall 2015), pp. 129-153; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2019), pp. 195-203; and Rachel Sheffield and Scott Winship, *The Demise of the Happy Two-Parent Home*, Joint Economic Committee – Republicans Social Capital Project, July 2020.

[95] For more information, see CRS Report RL33975, *Vulnerable Youth: Background and Policies*.

[96] For varying perspectives and policy options, see individual chapters in Robert A. Moffitt, ed., *The Economics of Means-Tested Transfer Programs in the United States, Volume 1* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016); and Bradford Wilcox, Chris Gersten, and Jerry Regier, *Marriage Penalties in Means-Tested Tax and Transfer Programs: Issues and Options*, HHS, ACF, Office of Family Assistance (OFA), October 2019.

[97] For more information, see CRS Report RL31025, *Fatherhood Initiatives: Connecting Fathers to Their Children*.

[98] For more information, see CRS Report R46785, *Federal Support for Reproductive Health Services: Frequently Asked Questions*.

# Appendix A. Data and Analysis Used in This Report

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) used data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) to characterize nonresident parents because of the SIPP's breadth in terms of population surveyed and depth in terms of information collected. The SIPP is a nationally representative, household-based survey designed by the U.S. Census Bureau and conducted as a continuous series of national panels.[99] Each panel sample is interviewed multiple times (known as interview *waves*, conducted annually in recent panels[100]) over a multiyear period lasting approximately four years. The survey collects extensive information on individuals and households, including their income and economic wellbeing, participation in government programs, household composition, and other characteristics. Much of this information is detailed at the monthly level.

While the SIPP has many advantages as a data source for the analysis in this report, it also has several limitations.[101] First, the survey samples the civilian, noninstitutionalized population. As a result, the SIPP does not cover persons, including parents, who are unsheltered (homeless), institutionalized (e.g., correctional inmates, nursing home residents), members of the military living in barracks, or living abroad. As a result, estimates produced using the SIPP most likely underestimate the total nonresident parent population of the United States. In addition, nonresident parents in the population sampled by the SIPP may have different characteristics than nonresident parents from the population excluded from the SIPP.

Second, the SIPP (like other surveys) produces estimates for the survey-eligible population that are subject to a variety of potential errors.[102] For example, research indicates that the SIPP may underestimate the prevalence and imperfectly describe the composition of survey-eligible nonresident parents (i.e., those in the civilian, noninstitutionalized population).[103] There are two reasons for this possibility. First, the SIPP and many other household surveys often under-observe persons from certain demographic groups along dimensions such as sex (male), race/ethnicity (Black, Hispanic), and age (young adults).[104] Survey under-coverage (inadequate representation

[99] For more information on the survey, see U.S. Census Bureau, "Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)," at https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp.html.

[100] For an independent evaluation of the recent reengineering of the SIPP, see National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *The 2014 Redesign of the Survey of Income and Program Participation: An Assessment* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2018) (hereinafter, "National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018").

[101] Potential issues not highlighted here include sample attrition and underrepresentation of new entrants to the survey-eligible population. Though the SIPP's panel design is valuable for allowing researchers to follow the same group of individuals and households over time, longitudinal surveys can suffer from sample attrition and loss of representativeness. When respondents are no longer observed by a survey, it reduces available sample size and estimates can be biased if those leaving the sample are systematically different from those who remain. Similarly, new entrants to the population such as births, immigrants from abroad, and people moving from group quarters to household residences may not be adequately reflected in the panel in later waves. This report's analysis relies on data from the first wave (year) of the 2018 panel, so these factors are not applicable.

[102] See Chapter 7 of U.S. Census Bureau, 2020; and Section 2 of Faith Nwaoha-Brown et al., *Source and Accuracy Statement for Calendar Year 2018 Data Collection of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)*, U.S. Census Bureau, January 2021 (hereinafter, "Nwaoha-Brown et al., 2021").

[103] Lindsay M. Monte and Jason M. Fields, "Where's Daddy? Challenges in the Measurement of Men's Fertility," in Analyzing Contemporary Fertility, ed. R. Schoen (Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2020), pp. 257-284; Lippold, 2017; and Stykes, Manning, and Brown, 2013.

[104] For relevant 2018 SIPP-specific findings, see Julia Yang et al., *Nonresponse Bias Analysis for Calendar Year 2018 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)*, U.S. Census Bureau, March 2021, pp. 10-14 (hereinafter, Yang et

of demographic subgroups) and nonresponse bias (the result of differences between those who participate in a survey and those who do not) may be particularly germane to this report because young Black men are disproportionately likely to be nonresident parents.[105] Another reason the SIPP may mischaracterize the nonresident parent population is that some research suggests nonresident parent status is underreported by respondents in many surveys.[106]

Comparing estimates from the SIPP with those from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) may partially illustrate the potential scope of these issues. The NSFG is focused on gathering information on pregnancy and births, marriage and cohabitation, infertility, use of contraception, family life, and general and reproductive health.[107] Currently, the NSFG sample universe is restricted to noninstitutionalized men and women ages 15-49 (ages 15-44 in earlier samples), and only men are asked detailed questions about nonresident parenthood. Scholars hypothesize that the NSFG's individual-level survey design (rather than being household-based), direct reporting (other individuals in the household cannot serve as proxies and provide answers for sample members), more extensive set of questions related to these topics, and order of content asked by the survey are better suited for identifying nonresident fathers than other survey designs.[108] For example, one study estimated using the 2008 SIPP that there were 3.9 million or 5.9 million nonresident fathers aged 15-44, depending on which set of questions was used to identify nonresident parents.[109] By comparison, the same study estimated using the 2006-2010 NSFG that there were 6.9 million nonresident fathers aged 15-44. The larger number of nonresident fathers observed in the NSFG were also more likely to be Black or Hispanic and have less than a high school diploma compared with those observed in the SIPP, which corresponds with the previously discussed concerns about under-coverage and nonresponse in the SIPP.[110]

Respondents may provide inaccurate information in response to additional topics beyond nonresident parenthood. For example, the detailed income and program participation information measured in the SIPP appears to be underreported compared with aggregate national totals from more reliable data sources. While the SIPP typically performs better at income measurement than other household surveys, it still misses a substantial share of income from earnings, pensions, assets, need-tested transfers, and unemployment and workers' compensation.[111]

The Census Bureau takes many steps to mitigate some of these issues. For example, it frequently imputes survey responses for sample members with missing or inconsistent data.[112] It also adjusts sample weights to address a variety of concerns, including adjustments to compensate for

al., 2021"); and Nwaoha-Brown et al., 2021, pp. 11-12.

[105] Stykes, Manning, and Brown, 2013, p. 1302.

[106] Lippold, 2017, p. 2.

[107] For more information on the NSFG, see HHS, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, "National Survey of Family Growth," at https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg/index.htm.

[108] Stykes, Manning, and Brown, 2013, p. 1306-1309.

[109] Lippold, 2017, p. 10.

[110] Lippold, 2017, p. 24; and Stykes, Manning, and Brown, 2013, p. 1306-1313.

[111] See Yang et al., 2021, pp. 17-20; Chapter 7 of National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; and Bruce D. Meyer, Wallace K. C, Mok, and James X. Sullivan, "Household Surveys in Crisis," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Fall 2015), pp. 199-226.

[112] For example, 7% of persons categorized as nonresident parents in the 2018 SIPP had that status imputed for them, rather than being reported by a sample member. The Census Bureau uses a variety of imputation procedures, including logical inferences from other data that has been provided for a person or statistical models that predict values for persons with missing data. For more background on the imputation procedures applied to SIPP data, see Chapter 6 of U.S. Census Bureau, 2020.

differences between the interviewed sample and independently derived population targets (nonresponse adjustments). However, these efforts may not fully eliminate the potential for bias in a survey-based estimate.

The SIPP is also subject to sampling error, which is the potential difference between an estimate based on a sample and the corresponding value that would be calculated using information on the entire population (if such information were available by census or other means). With limited exceptions, the comparisons presented in this report have been tested for statistical significance to reduce the risk of interpreting potential random sampling variation as real differences. Unless otherwise noted, the differences in values between groups highlighted in this report are statistically different from zero at the 10% significance level. Differences in mean annual child support payment amounts were assessed using a two-sided t-test. Otherwise, differences in characteristics across groups were assessed for statistical significance using a Rao-Scott second-order (Satterthwaite) chi-square test.[113] The chi-square test results indicate whether there is a statistically significant difference in the overall distribution of a characteristic (e.g., race/ethnicity categorized into four levels) between groups (e.g., nonresident parents and resident-only parents).

Several results were not tested for statistical significance:

- The difference between nonresident and resident-only parents in terms of the number of resident children under age 21 was not tested for statistical significance. These groups of parents cannot take on the same range of possible values for this variable (i.e., by definition, resident-only parents must have some number of resident children, while some nonresident parents have no resident children). As a result, these groups' distributions for this characteristic are intrinsically different.[114] To limit misinterpretation, the only estimates of the number of resident children included in the body of this report are for nonresident parents. Estimates of the number of resident children among resident-only parents can be found in **Table B-2**.
- The difference in median annual child support payments between low-income nonresident parents and moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents was not tested because doing so requires making additional analytic assumptions (e.g., about the mathematical distributional form of annual child support payments).
- The difference in total annual child support payments between low-income nonresident parents and moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents was not tested because total child support payments are a simple function of the number of nonresident parents comprising a group multiplied by the group's mean annual child support payment, and the difference in the mean payment between groups was itself tested for statistical significance separately.

[113] Note that receipt of the EITC, SNAP, Medicaid, and health insurance coverage for the entire year counts as four distinct characteristics that were each tested separately. For example, the chi-square test for the EITC evaluates whether there is a statistically significant difference in the distribution in people who are either (1) receiving the EITC or (2) not receiving the EITC, between groups (e.g., low-income nonresident parents compared to low-income resident-only parents).

[114] Relatedly, no results are presented in this report (or are available for significance testing) for resident-only parents in terms of the number of nonresident children under age 21 and contact with the youngest nonresident child because, by definition, resident-only parents cannot take on any values for these variables.

# Appendix B. Data Tables

**Table B-1. Demographic Characteristics of Parents, by Residency of Children, 2018**

| | Nonresident Parents | | Resident-Only Parents | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| Weighted total | 9,669,243 | | 67,514,447 | |
| Sex | | | | |
| Male | 7,218,346 | 74.7 | 28,622,112 | 42.7 |
| Female | 2,450,897 | 25.3 | 38,385,209 | 57.3 |
| Age | | | | |
| 15-29 | 1,134,042 | 11.7 | 8,671,311 | 12.9 |
| 30-39 | 2,941,835 | 30.4 | 22,763,777 | 34.0 |
| 40-49 | 3,645,518 | 37.7 | 23,507,292 | 35.1 |
| 50 or older | 1,947,848 | 20.1 | 12,064,941 | 18.0 |
| Race and Hispanic origin | | | | |
| White, non-Hispanic | 5,212,379 | 53.9 | 38,215,340 | 57.0 |
| Black, non-Hispanic | 1,839,164 | 19.0 | 7,855,117 | 11.7 |
| Hispanic | 1,978,586 | 20.5 | 14,427,157 | 21.5 |
| Other, non-Hispanic | 639,113 | 6.6 | 6,509,707 | 9.7 |
| Education | | | | |
| Less than high school | 1,457,821 | 15.1 | 6,915,529 | 10.3 |
| High School | 3,376,355 | 34.9 | 16,011,970 | 23.9 |
| Some college | 2,083,112 | 21.5 | 11,040,999 | 16.5 |
| Associate's degree | 905,008 | 9.4 | 6,627,660 | 9.9 |
| Bachelor's degree or higher | 1,846,947 | 19.1 | 26,411,162 | 39.4 |

**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. Age was reported as of the survey date in 2018. The designation "other" refers to persons who do not exclusively identify as White or Black in terms of race—for example, it includes persons who identify as Asian, Native American, or mixed race/multiracial. Education reflects a person's highest level of attainment as of December 2017; some parents may have still been enrolled in school. The category "some college" includes any postsecondary education short of a degree. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding. There are statistically significant differences in the distribution of presented characteristics between nonresident parents and resident-only parents; see **Appendix A** for more details.

**Table B-2. Relationships and Fertility of Parents by Residency of Children, 2018**

| | Nonresident Parents | | Resident-Only Parents | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| Weighted total | 9,669,243 | | 67,514,447 | |
| Marital status | | | | |
| Married | 3,511,138 | 36.3 | 50,907,394 | 76.0 |
| Separated | 576,006 | 6.0 | 1,408,140 | 2.1 |
| Divorced | 3,110,846 | 32.2 | 4,890,246 | 7.3 |
| Never married | 2,377,241 | 24.6 | 9,189,474 | 13.7 |
| Number of childbearing unions | | | | |
| One childbearing union | 5,699,919 | 58.9 | 55,236,430 | 82.4 |
| Two childbearing unions | 3,044,655 | 31.5 | 8,683,129 | 13.0 |
| Three or more childbearing unions | 798,692 | 8.3 | 1,775,657 | 2.6 |
| Number of resident children under age 21 | | | | |
| Zero | 5,624,017 | 58.2 | NA | NA |
| One child | 1,943,801 | 20.1 | 27,540,846 | 41.1 |
| Two children | 1,282,975 | 13.3 | 24,901,549 | 37.2 |
| Three or more children | 818,449 | 8.5 | 14,564,926 | 21.7 |
| Number of nonresident children under age 21 | | | | |
| One child | 5,582,979 | 57.7 | NA | NA |
| Two children | 2,783,108 | 28.8 | NA | NA |
| Three or more children | 1,303,155 | 13.5 | NA | NA |
| Amount of time spent with youngest nonresident child | | | | |
| None | 1,607,534 | 16.6 | NA | NA |
| One to several times a year | 2,154,851 | 22.3 | NA | NA |
| One to three times a month | 1,684,996 | 17.4 | NA | NA |
| About once a week | 1,175,085 | 12.2 | NA | NA |
| Several times a week | 3,046,776 | 31.5 | NA | NA |

**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. Marital status, number of childbearing unions, and children (number, residency) were reported as of the survey date in 2018. For the number of childbearing unions, a relatively small number of parents may have had "zero" (i.e., no biological children, exclusively step or adopted children). Results for the marital status "widowed" and the "number of childbearing unions" category "zero" are not presented because the sample size is insufficient to produce a reliable estimate. Visitation data were reported for the previous calendar year (2017). Certain characteristics and potential values are not applicable ("NA") for resident-only parents. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding and estimates for certain statuses/categories not being presented. There are statistically significant differences in the distribution of marital status and number of childbearing unions between nonresident parents and resident-only parents. Differences in the number of resident children, number of nonresident children, and amount of time spent with the youngest nonresident child were not tested for statistical significance; see **Appendix A** for more details.

**Table B-3. Employment of Parents by Residency of Children, 2017**

| | Nonresident Parents | | Resident-Only Parents | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Number** | **Percentage** | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| Weighted total | 9,669,243 | | 67,514,447 | |
| Employment | | | | |
| Did not work | 1,824,740 | 18.9 | 12,023,977 | 17.9 |
| Part-time, part-year | 456,059 | 4.7 | 2,945,111 | 4.4 |
| Full-time, part-year | 1,098,507 | 11.4 | 6,156,223 | 9.2 |
| Part-time, year-round | 814,604 | 8.4 | 6,292,806 | 9.4 |
| Full-time, year-round | 5,475,332 | 56.6 | 39,589,204 | 59.1 |
| *Employment, among fathers only:* | | | | |
| *Did not work* | *1,161,921* | *16.1* | *1,952,335* | *6.8* |
| *Part-time, part-year* | *275,400* | *3.8* | *526,015* | *1.8* |
| *Full-time, part-year* | *824,005* | *11.4* | *2,330,860* | *8.1* |
| *Part-time, year-round* | *483,972* | *6.7* | *1,365,027* | *4.8* |
| *Full-time, year-round* | *4,473,048* | *62.0* | *22,447,874* | *78.4* |
| *Common reasons for not working for pay in December, among year-long nonworkers only:* | | | | |
| *Chronic health condition or disability* | *734,679* | *40.6* | *1,848,627* | *15.5* |
| *Caregiving (including pregnancy or childbirth)* | *241,100* | *13.2* | *7,005,736* | *58.3* |
| *Unable to find work* | *221,471* | *12.2* | *661,415* | *5.5* |
| *Retired* | *175,030* | *9.7* | *534,885* | *4.5* |

**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. Employment-related information was reported for the previous calendar year (2017). "Full-time" is defined as working 35 or more hours a week for 50% or more of the weeks worked. "Year-round" is defined as working 50 weeks or more. Certain estimates are italicized because they are results for subgroups (i.e., fathers, year-long nonworkers) of the overall populations of nonresident parents and resident-only parents. Data on reasons for not working for pay are presented for the month of December (respondents are asked for this information at the monthly level). Information is unavailable about reasons for not working for a small number of persons categorized as year-long nonworkers because the SIPP classifies these persons as employed even though they worked zero hours during the year. SIPP respondents can agree to more than one reason for not working. Less frequently reported reasons are not presented here because smaller sample sizes make those estimates less reliable. Other reasons for not working that SIPP respondents can agree to include temporarily unable to work because of injury or illness, not interested in working, going to school, layoff, and working without pay for a family business. In addition, the reason "other" is not presented here because there is no clear interpretation for this response. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding. There are statistically significant differences in the distribution of presented characteristics between nonresident parents and resident-only parents; see **Appendix A** for more details.

**Table B-4. Income, Need-Tested Benefit Receipt, and Health Insurance Coverage of Parents, by Residency of Children, 2017**

| | Nonresident Parents | | Resident-Only Parents | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| Weighted Total | 9,669,243 | | 67,514,447 | |
| Personal Income | | | | |
| Zero | 903,517 | 9.3 | 6,745,547 | 10.1 |
| $1 to $9,999 | 1,176,162 | 12.2 | 8,032,577 | 12.0 |
| $10,000 to $19,999 | 1,272,327 | 13.2 | 6,684,880 | 10.0 |
| $20,000 to $39,999 | 2,551,873 | 26.4 | 14,410,166 | 21.5 |
| $40,000 to $59,999 | 1,557,007 | 16.1 | 10,099,959 | 15.1 |
| $60,000 or higher | 2,208,357 | 22.8 | 21,034,193 | 31.4 |
| Family income-to-poverty ratio | | | | |
| Less than 50% | 926,149 | 9.6 | 3,953,696 | 5.9 |
| 50% to 99% | 774,313 | 8.0 | 4,368,945 | 6.5 |
| 100% to 199% | 1,731,309 | 17.9 | 10,802,085 | 16.1 |
| 200% to 399% | 2,984,089 | 30.9 | 19,126,789 | 28.5 |
| 400% or higher | 3,253,383 | 33.6 | 28,755,806 | 42.9 |
| Public benefit receipt | | | | |
| Earned Income Tax Credit | 1,451,439 | 15.0 | 10,777,484 | 16.1 |
| Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program | 1,434,251 | 14.8 | 7,958,817 | 11.9 |
| Medicaid | 1,762,495 | 18.2 | 10,960,367 | 16.4 |
| Health insurance for the year | 7,510,399 | 77.7 | 59,800,370 | 89.2 |

**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. Income, need-tested benefit receipt, and health insurance coverage were reported for the previous year (2017). The personal income category "zero" includes individuals with a negative personal income. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding. There are statistically significant differences in the distribution of presented characteristics between nonresident parents and resident-only parents, except for the EITC (difference is not statistically significant); see **Appendix A** for more details.

**Table B-5. Demographic Characteristics of Nonresident Parents, by Family Income-to-Poverty Level, 2017**

| | Low-Income Nonresident Parents | | Moderate- and Higher-Income Nonresident Parents | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Number** | **Percentage** | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| Weighted total | 3,431,771 | | 6,237,472 | |
| Sex | | | | |
| Male | 2,241,774 | 65.3 | 4,976,571 | 79.8 |
| Female | 1,189,996 | 34.7 | 1,260,901 | 20.2 |
| Age | | | | |
| 15-29 | 560,280 | 16.3 | 573,761 | 9.2 |
| 30-39 | 1,090,232 | 31.8 | 1,851,603 | 29.7 |
| 40-49 | 1,125,287 | 32.8 | 2,520,230 | 40.4 |
| 50 or older | 655,971 | 19.1 | 1,291,877 | 20.7 |
| Race and Hispanic origin | | | | |
| White, non-Hispanic | 1,717,662 | 50.1 | 3,494,717 | 56.0 |
| Black, non-Hispanic | 797,092 | 23.2 | 1,042,072 | 16.7 |
| Hispanic | 683,889 | 19.9 | 1,294,697 | 20.8 |
| Other, non-Hispanic | 233,127 | 6.8 | 405,986 | 6.5 |
| Education | | | | |
| Less than high school | 781,230 | 22.8 | 676,591 | 10.8 |
| High school | 1,286,262 | 37.5 | 2,090,094 | 33.5 |
| Some college | 780,564 | 22.7 | 1,302,548 | 20.9 |
| Associate's degree | 269,674 | 7.9 | 635,333 | 10.2 |
| Bachelor's degree or higher | 314,041 | 9.2 | 1,532,907 | 24.6 |

**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. "Low income" is defined as having a family income that is less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds in 2017. Age was reported as of the survey date in 2018. The designation "other" refers to persons who do not exclusively identify as White or Black in terms of race—for example, it includes persons who identify as Asian, Native American, or mixed race/multiracial. Education reflects a person's highest level of attainment as of December 2017; some parents may have still been enrolled in school. The category "some college" includes any postsecondary education short of a degree. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding. There are statistically significant differences in the distribution of presented characteristics between low-income nonresident parents and moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents; see **Appendix A** for more details.

**Table B-6. Relationships and Fertility of Nonresident Parents, by Family Income-to-Poverty Level, 2017**

| | Low-Income Nonresident Parents | | Moderate- and Higher-Income Nonresident Parents | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Number** | **Percentage** | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| Weighted total | 3,431,771 | | 6,237,472 | |
| Marital status | | | | |
| Married | 910,573 | 26.5 | 2,600,565 | 41.7 |
| Separated | 255,306 | 7.4 | 320,701 | 5.1 |
| Divorced | 1,045,360 | 30.5 | 2,065,486 | 33.1 |
| Never married | 1,159,580 | 33.8 | 1,217,661 | 19.5 |
| Number of childbearing unions | | | | |
| One childbearing union | 1,711,965 | 49.9 | 3,987,954 | 63.9 |
| Two childbearing unions | 1,270,223 | 37.0 | 1,774,431 | 28.4 |
| Three or more childbearing unions | 405,839 | 11.8 | 392,853 | 6.3 |
| Number of resident children under age 21 | | | | |
| Zero | 1,972,956 | 57.5 | 3,651,061 | 58.5 |
| One child | 604,939 | 17.6 | 1,338,862 | 21.5 |
| Two children | 496,007 | 14.5 | 786,968 | 12.6 |
| Three or more children | 357,868 | 10.4 | 460,581 | 7.4 |
| Number of nonresident children under age 21 | | | | |
| One child | 1,902,081 | 55.4 | 3,680,898 | 59.0 |
| Two children | 924,557 | 26.9 | 1,858,551 | 29.8 |
| Three or more children | 605,133 | 17.6 | 698,022 | 11.2 |
| Amount of time spent with youngest nonresident child | | | | |
| None | 760,813 | 22.2 | 846,721 | 13.6 |
| One to several times a year | 709,755 | 20.7 | 1,445,096 | 23.2 |
| One to three times a month | 538,503 | 15.7 | 1,146,493 | 18.4 |
| About once a week | 452,161 | 13.2 | 722,924 | 11.6 |
| Several times a week | 970,539 | 28.3 | 2,076,237 | 33.3 |

**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. "Low income" is defined as having a family income that is less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds in 2017. Marital status, number of childbearing unions, and children (number, residency) were reported as of the survey date in 2018. Results for the marital status "widowed" and the "number of childbearing unions" category "zero" are not presented because the sample size is insufficient to produce a reliable estimate. Visitation data were reported for the previous calendar year (2017). Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding, and estimates for certain statuses/categories not being presented. There are statistically significant differences in the distribution of presented characteristics between low-income nonresident parents and moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents; see **Appendix A** for more details.

**Table B-7. Economic Characteristics of Nonresident Parents, by Family Income-to-Poverty Level, 2017**

| | Low-Income Nonresident Parents | | Moderate- and Higher-Income Nonresident Parents | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Number** | **Percentage** | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| Weighted Total | 3,431,771 | | 6,237,472 | |
| Employment | | | | |
| Did not work | 1,304,256 | 38.0 | 520,483 | 8.3 |
| Part-time, part-year | 284,082 | 8.3 | 171,977 | 2.8 |
| Full-time, part-year | 490,778 | 14.3 | 607,729 | 9.7 |
| Part-time, year-round | 426,663 | 12.4 | 387,941 | 6.2 |
| Full-time, year-round | 925,990 | 27.0 | 4,549,342 | 72.9 |
| Personal income | | | | |
| Zero | 694,485 | 20.2 | 209,032 | 3.4 |
| $1 to $9,999 | 927,005 | 27.0 | 249,156 | 4.0 |
| $10,000 to $19,999 | 978,914 | 28.5 | 293,413 | 4.7 |
| $20,000 to $29,999 | 631,676 | 18.4 | 747,446 | 12.0 |
| $30,000 or higher | 199,691 | 5.8 | 4,738,426 | 76.0 |
| Public benefit receipt | | | | |
| Earned Income Tax Credit | 723,054 | 21.1 | 728,385 | 11.7 |
| Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program | 1,145,831 | 33.4 | 288,420 | 4.6 |
| Medicaid | 1,324,008 | 38.6 | 438,487 | 7.0 |
| Health insurance for the year | 2,335,489 | 68.1 | 5,174,910 | 83.0 |

**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who had both nonresident and resident children. Employment, income, need-tested benefit receipt, and health insurance coverage were reported for the previous year (2017). "Low income" is defined as having a family income that is less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds. "Full-time" is defined as working 35 or more hours a week for 50% or more of the weeks worked. "Year-round" is defined as working 50 weeks or more. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding. There are statistically significant differences in the distribution of presented characteristics between low-income nonresident parents and moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents; see **Appendix A** for more details.

**Table B-8. Need-Tested Benefit Receipt and Health Insurance Coverage of Low-Income Parents, by Residency of Children, 2017**

| | Low-Income Nonresident Parents | | Low-Income Resident-Only Parents | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Number** | **Percentage** | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| Weighted total | 3,431,771 | | 19,124,725 | |
| Public benefit receipt | | | | |
| Earned Income Tax Credit | 723,054 | 21.1 | 6,158,032 | 32.2 |
| Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program | 1,145,831 | 33.4 | 6,502,683 | 34.0 |
| Medicaid | 1,324,008 | 38.6 | 7,996,103 | 41.8 |
| Health insurance for the year | 2,335,489 | 68.1 | 14,932,128 | 78.1 |

| | Low-Income Nonresident Parents without Resident Children | | Low-Income Nonresident Parents with Resident Children | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Number** | **Percentage** | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| Weighted total | 1,972,956 | | 1,458,814 | |
| Public benefit receipt | | | | |
| Earned Income Tax Credit | 256,923 | 13.0 | 466,131 | 32.0 |
| Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program | 521,364 | 26.4 | 624,467 | 42.8 |
| Medicaid | 660,178 | 33.5 | 663,830 | 45.5 |
| Health insurance for the year | 1,269,896 | 64.4 | 1,065,593 | 73.0 |

**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" consists of two types of parents, parents with only nonresident children and parents with both nonresident and resident children. Estimates for the combination and both components are presented in this table and compared to results for resident-only parents. Income, need-tested benefit receipt, and health insurance coverage were reported for the previous year (2017). "Low income" is defined as having a family income that is less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds. Differences between low-income nonresident parents and low-income resident-only parents in the percentage receiving the EITC or having health insurance coverage for the year are statistically significant; the differences for SNAP and Medicaid are not statistically significant. The differences between low-income nonresident parents without resident children, low-income nonresident parents with resident children, and low-income resident-only parents are all statistically significant. For more details on statistical significance testing, see **Appendix A**.

**Table B-9. Child Support Payments of Nonresident Parents, 2017**

| | Nonresident Parents | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| Weighted total | 9,669,243 | |
| Annual child support payment | | |
| No payment | 4,274,493 | 44.2 |
| Less than $2,000 | 1,107,221 | 11.5 |
| $2,000 to $3,999 | 1,099,408 | 11.4 |
| $4,000 to $5,999 | 1,070,254 | 11.1 |
| $6,000 to $7,999 | 708,324 | 7.3 |
| $8,000 to $9,999 | 319,472 | 3.3 |
| $10,000 or more | 1,090,070 | 11.3 |
| Median | $696 | |
| Mean | $3,499 | |
| Total | $33.8B | |
| Child support-to-income ratio | | |
| No payment | 4,274,493 | 44.2 |
| 0% to 9% | 2,136,447 | 22.1 |
| 10% to 19% | 1,514,930 | 15.7 |
| 20 to 34% | 782,040 | 8.1 |
| 35% or more | 961,333 | 9.9 |

**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who have both nonresident and resident children. Nonresident parents making no payment may have had no legal obligation or informal expectation to pay child support. Child support payments and total personal income were reported for the previous calendar year (2017). The U.S. Census Bureau topcodes child support payment and income data to protect the confidentiality of respondents; the respondent-reported amounts are replaced by an average of the values being topcoded. The "child support-to-income ratio" is the child support payment amount relative to total personal income. The category of "35% or more" includes 6% of nonresident parents who reported paying more in child support than they received in income, including those who reported having zero or negative income. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

**Table B-10. Child Support Payments of Nonresident Parents, by Family Income-to-Poverty Level, 2017**

| | Low-Income Nonresident Parents | | Moderate- and Higher-Income Nonresident Parents | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Number** | **Percentage** | **Number** | **Percentage** |
| Weighted total | 3,431,771 | | 6,237,472 | |
| Annual child support payment | | | | |
| No payment | 1,862,423 | 54.3 | 2,412,070 | 38.7 |
| Less than $2,000 | 537,437 | 15.7 | 569,784 | 9.1 |
| $2,000 to $3,999 | 410,073 | 11.9 | 689,335 | 11.1 |
| $4,000 to $5,999 | 263,130 | 7.7 | 807,125 | 12.9 |
| $6,000 to $9,999 | 182,957 | 5.3 | 844,839 | 13.5 |
| $10,000 or more | 175,750 | 5.1 | 914,320 | 14.7 |
| Median | $0 | | $2,342 | |
| Mean | $1,964 | | $4,344 | |
| Total | $6.7B | | $27.1B | |
| Child support-to-income ratio | 1,862,423 | 54.3 | 2,412,070 | 38.7 |
| No payment | 395,865 | 11.5 | 1,740,581 | 27.9 |
| 0% to 9% | 313,754 | 9.1 | 1,201,175 | 19.3 |
| 10% to 19% | 203,819 | 5.9 | 578,220 | 9.3 |
| 20 to 34% | 655,908 | 19.1 | 305,425 | 4.9 |
| 35% or more | 1,862,423 | 54.3 | 2,412,070 | 38.7 |

**Source:** CRS analysis of data from the 2018 SIPP.

**Notes:** Nonresident parents with children under age 21. "Nonresident parents" includes parents who have both nonresident and resident children. Child support payments and income were reported for the previous calendar year (2017). "Low income" is defined as having a family income that is less than 200% of the official poverty thresholds. Nonresident parents making no payment may have had no legal obligation or informal expectation to pay child support. The U.S. Census Bureau topcodes child support payment and income data to protect the confidentiality of respondents; the respondent-reported amounts are replaced by an average of the values being topcoded. For "annual child support payment," the category "$6,000 to $9,999" is presented (rather than being broken into "$6,000 to $7,999" and "$8,000 to $9,999") to maintain an adequate sample size for a reliable estimate. The "child support-to-income ratio" is the child support payment amount relative to total personal income. For "child support-to-income ratio," the category of "35% or more" includes 12% of low-income nonresident parents and 2% of moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents who reported paying more in child support than they received in income, including those who reported having zero or negative income. Groups may not sum to 100% due to rounding. There are statistically significant differences in the distribution of annual child support payments and child support-to-income ratios, as well as mean child support payments, between low-income nonresident parents and moderate- and higher-income nonresident parents. Differences in median and total child support payments were not tested for statistical significance; see **Appendix A** for more details.

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