Parental Coresidence Transitions for Children in the Years Surrounding Welfare Reform: Evidence from the Survey of Program Dynamics

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Introduction

Since children who live with one parent have been found to be at a higher risk for behavioral problems and lower educational achievement than those in two parent families[1], much research on child well being has focused on the living arrangements of children. This paper focuses on the association between parental marital status changes and transitions in aid receipt for a 5-year time period which spans welfare reform. From the child's point of view, parental marital status changes often mean a change in living arrangements as a parent moves out after a divorce, or a parent moves in after a marriage. Before considering the association between marital status changes and transitions in aid receipt, the paper will look at the proportion of low income children who experience a transition in the number of parents with whom they live, as well as looking at which children are more likely to either gain or lose a parent.

Using data from the Survey of Program Dynamics, this paper considers transitions in living arrangements between 1993 and 1998 for low income children under 18 in 1993. The paper is organized around four questions: 1. What percentage of low income children experienced a transition in the number of coresident parents? 2. What characteristics are associated with a higher likelihood of gaining a parent?

3. What characteristics are associated with a higher likelihood of losing a parent? 4. Are children living in households who received aid in 1993 and whose parent marries more likely to see their household go off assistance programs?

Data and Sample

This paper uses recently released longitudinal data from the Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD) for 1993 and 1998. The SPD respondents were originally respondents from the Survey of Income and Program Participation in the 1992 and 1993 panels who were re-contacted after the SIPP panels expired. Data from the 1993 and 1998 collection years on the SPD longitudinal file are used in this analysis. The 1993 SPD data contain 1993 calendar year information about respondents in both the 1992 and 1993 SIPP panels. The 1998 SPD data reflect respondent conditions in calendar years 1997 and the first half of 1998 (hereafter referred to as "1998"). Thus, the data are longitudinal and provide social and economic measures about the same group of people at two time points. All of the analyses are weighted using the longitudinal panel weight.

In order to limit the sample to those who are more likely to receive public assistance, children are included if they are in interviewed households which were below 200 percent of poverty in 1993, and were also interviewed in 1998. So, the children are age 0 to 17 in 1993, and get older, so that in 1998, they are age 5 to 22. The unweighted number of low income children interviewed at both time points is 5,780.

Households are considered to be aid recipients if anyone in the household received public assistance (general assistance, TANF) or food stamps. Four types of households by aid receipt status are studied. Non-recipients refers to those in households up to 200 percent of poverty in 1993 who did not receive aid at either time point. Leavers refers to those in households who received aid in 1993 but not in 1998. Stayers refers to those in households who received aid in both years. Joiners are those who did not receive aid in 1993, but did receive aid in 1998.

Since there is a small number of joiner households in which only 169 children or about 3 percent of the children lived (unweighted), I will not discuss them separately, although I do control for this group in the multivariate models in order to maintain the four mutually exclusive groups.

The number of children in each of these groups is shown in Table 1. Half of the children were in Non-recipient households, while the other half were in households which received aid in at least one of the two years. Of children in households which received aid in 1993, approximately half were in households which had left aid by 1998.

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[1] Sandefur, Gary and Sara McLanahan. 1994. *Growing Up With a Single Parent.* Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass.

Table 1. Children in Households up to 199 Percent of the Poverty Level in 1993 by Aid Receipt Status

Aid Receipt Status	Number
Total	30,562,023
Left (received aid 1993; no aid 1998)	7,273,415
Join (no aid 1993; received aid 1998)	869,570
Stay (received aid 1993 and 1998)	7,050,094
Non-Recipients (no aid 1993 or 1998)	15,368,944

Source: SPD, First Longitudinal File, 1992-1998.

Sample: Children age 0 to 17 in 1993 in households up 199 percent of the poverty level in 1993 who had a 1998 interview.

Parental Coresidence Transitions

Looking at changes in the number of coresident parents of children in the SPD data requires that certain assumptions be made. Data released in the SPD longitudinal file do not contain parent pointers for both mom and dad for each child. Instead, when children live with a parent, they point to a designated parent, which is usually the mother if she is in the household. Children may also point to a guardian if their parent is not present in the household. Since there is no way to distinguish between these, it is important to remember that the children whom I have grouped as living with one or two parents at either time point may actually be living with a guardian–for example, their grandparent(s). Since only one parent pointer is available, I have assigned the spouse of the designated parent as the child's other parent if the designated parent is married. This design unfortunately misses cases in which the child lives with both of their biological parents if these parents are unmarried. These children will appear to live with only one of their parents.

To summarize, children are assigned coresidential parents in the following three ways:

1. The designated parent is assigned as the child's mom or dad, based on the sex of the person. If the designated parent is married, their spouse is assigned as the child's other parent.

The 1993 calendar year data were compiled by the Urban Institute from the 1992 and 1993 SIPP panel data to create a 1993 calendar year file, which has several anomalies which are not allowed in regular Census Bureau editing procedures. For example, there are some households which do not have a reference person, and others in which children have someone listed as their designated parent who is not present in the household. In households without a reference person, where the person is reported as the child of the householder, but there is no householder present, I do the following. I assign the person marked as spouse of the householder as the child's parent if the spouse pointer for that person points to the same person as the designated parent pointer of the children in the household whose relationship to the reference person is "child of householder."   2. For children who are marked as children of the householder, and

yet point to someone who is not present in the household, I have counted the householder as their parent. If the householder has a spouse, this person is assigned as the child's other parent.   3. If these methods failed to find parents for the child, then I use other family relationship variables. If the child is a child of reference person or subfamily reference person, I find the person who is listed as their family/subfamily reference person (they have the same family number as the child) and assign that person to be the child's parent.

Assigning parents in these ways results in 434 unweighted children in 1993 and 530 unweighted children in 1998 being coded as living with neither parent. This category is basically a residual which includes all children for whom I could not find any parent in the household. When weighted, this is 3.3 percent of all children in 1993, regardless of poverty status, and 4.9 percent of all children in 1998. The estimate of the percentage of children living with neither parent using data from the 1996 panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) was 4 percent.[2] However, SIPP includes two parent pointers for each child–one to indicate the child's mother and one to indicate the child's father. Considering that the SPD designated parent pointer may indicate the child's grandparent, or other related or unrelated guardian, the percentage of children living with neither parent would appear to be a bit higher in the SPD than in the SIPP. The weighted percentage of low income children living with neither parent for the sample of children used for this paper (in households up to 200 percent of poverty in 1993) is 5 percent.

The following definitions outline the possible living arrangements and parental coresidence transitions children experienced in 1993 and 1998.

No transition:
1. 0 parents–not living with either parent, both time points;
2. 1 parent–child lived with 1 parent at both time points;
3. 2 parent–lived with 2 parents at both time points.

Experienced a transition:

GAIN–child lived with 1 parent in 1993 and 2 parents in 1998 (or no parents to living with parent(s))
LOSE–child lived with 2 parents in 1993 and 1 parent in 1998 (or living with 1 parent in 1993 to living with no parents in 1998)
Aged out--children who were old enough to form their own household (age 15 or older) at the second time point and didn't live with a parent.
Switched parents–lived with mom at time 1 and with dad at time 2, for example. Also includes children who lived with

[2] Fields, Jason. 2001. *Living Arrangements of Children: Fall 1996*, Current Population Reports, P70-74, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC.

2 parents at both time points, but one of the parents was a different person.

Table 2. Percent of Children by Changes in Parental Coresidence, 1993 to 1998	Low income Children	Non-Low income Children
No Transition	**81.0**	**88.6**
0 Parents	2.0	1.1
1 Parent	31.8	11.2
2 Parents	47.2	76.3
Experienced a Transition	**19.1**	**11.4**
GAINED a parent	12.1	4.7
LOST a parent	2.5	2.9
AGED out	3.3	3.3
Switched parents	1.1	0.6
Source: SPD, First Longitudinal File, 1992-1998.		
Sample: Children age 0-17 in 1993 who had a 1998 interview.		

What proportion of children experienced parental coresidence transitions?

Eighty one percent of low income children did not experience a transition in the number of parents with whom they lived in the 5 year interval covered by these data. (See Table 2.) Most of these children lived with two parents (47 percent). Of the remaining 19 percent–those who experienced a transition, over half (12 percent) gained a parent. As might be expected, a higher percentage of low income children than non-low income experienced a transition in parental coresidence. Eleven percent of non-low income children experienced a transition, compared with 19 percent of low income children. This difference is almost entirely made up by the higher percentage of low income children who gained a parent (12 percent) as compared with non-low income children (5 percent). Because a higher percentage of low income children live with one parent, compared with non-low income children, it is likely that more of them will experience a change in which they gain a second coresidential parent.

Race[3] and Parental Coresidence Transitions

[3] The race and Hispanic origin groups used in this paper are mutually exclusive. So, if a person indicated their race as white, and said they are of Hispanic origin, they are included in the "Hispanic" group. For ease of use, I will refer to the groups as "white, black, American Indian, Asian and Hispanic," although the groups are more accurately "white non-Hispanic, black non-Hispanic, American Indian non-Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Islander non-Hispanic, and Hispanics of any race.

For the sample of low income children, 51 percent are White, 23 percent are Black, 1 percent are American Indian, 2 percent are Asian and 23 percent are Hispanic. Black children are overrepresented in the 0 parents and 1 parent categories. While only 18 percent of the children in the sample are Black, over 50 percent of those living with no parents are Black. A higher percentage of White children are in the "Lost a parent" category than in the sample as a whole–73 as compared with 51 percent. Of children who lost a parent, only a small percentage (7 percent) are Black, which probably reflects the fact that these children are more likely to live in one parent households than White and Hispanic children, and so are less likely to be at risk of losing a parent since most children live with at least one of their parents.

Are minority low income children more likely to experience a parental coresidence transition?

The percentage of low income children who experience a parental coresidence transition does not differ across race and Hispanic origin. Apparent differences in whether the children experience a transition are not significant. However, significant differences do exist in the percentage of children who did not experience a transition who are living with 2 parents. White and Asian children were more likely to be living with 2 parents than Black and Hispanic children. White children who experienced a transition were more likely than Black and Hispanic children to lose a parent--3.6 percent as compared with .8 and 2.0 percent, respectively.

Parental Coresidence Transitions and Change in Aid Receipt Status

Children who were in 1-parent situations at both time points were more likely to be receiving aid at both time points--stayers, while children who were in 2-parent situations at both time points were more likely not to receive aid at either time point--non-recipients. Comparing children who gained a parent with those who lost a parent, similar percentages are leavers, stayers and non-recipients. This distribution is also quite similar to that for the children who aged out of their parents' households.

Race and Change in Aid Receipt Status

While most White (65 percent) low income children were non-recipients, the proportion of Black and Hispanic low income children were more evenly distributed among the three groups–leavers, stayers, and non-recipients, with no one group comprising a majority of the children. The largest percentage of low income Black children (38 percent) were stayers and the largest percentage of low income Hispanic children (40 percent) were non-recipients.

Logistic Regression Models Investigating Parental Coresidence Transitions

Model 1: What characteristics are associated with a higher likelihood of GAINING a parent?

In order to assess characteristics of the child and their parent which are associated with a higher likelihood of gaining a parent, I restrict the sample to children living with one parent in 1993 and use a logistic regression to predict the odds that they live with 2 parents in 1998. The model has 2,050 children (unweighted), 22 percent of whom live with one parent in 1993 and gain a parent by 1998.

Variables were coded in mutually exclusive categories in order to do the logistic regression analysis. Non-recipients are the omitted category for the pattern variable indicating change in aid receipt. Age is in years. The variable indicating whether the child lives with a single father rather than a single mother was included in order to see if the likelihood of the child gaining a parent varied by this characteristic. Parent's educational attainment was not a significant predictor, and so was dropped from the model.

Children who live with one parent in 1993 and so are at risk of gaining a parent by 1998 are roughly split into three groups, with about a third in each of Stayer, Leaver and Non-Recipient households. The children, on average are 8 years old, and 91 percent of them lived with their mother in 1993. Forty percent of the children are White, 35 percent are Black and 23 percent are Hispanic.

Results

Table 3 presents the logistic regression model estimating the odds that a low income child who lives with one parent in 1993 will gain a parent by 1998. Children who live with dad only, have more than 4 times the odds of gaining a parent as compared with children living with mom only. Stayers are 19 percent as likely to gain a parent as non-recipients (comparison category). Black children are half as likely to gain a parent as White children. The reader should keep in mind the fact that these data do not allow us to track a biological parent, or cohabiting partner of the child's biological parent who may be in the household when this person is not married to the child's parent. So it is possible that a number of Black children who are categorized here as living with one parent actually do have a second parent or parent figure living in their household.

Table 3. Odds Ratios from the Logistic Regression Model Predicting Whether Low income Children GAIN a Parent, 1993 to 1998		
Variable	Odds Ratio	Standard Error
STAYERS***	0.19	0.36309
JOINERS	0.58	0.69321
LEAVERS	0.89	0.27699
NON-RECIPIENTS	1.00	
Hispanic	1.11	0.30702
API non-Hispanic	1.62	0.87213
AIAN non-Hispanic	1.61	1.28667
Black non-Hispanic*	0.51	0.30891
White non-Hispanic	1.00	
Age in 1993*	0.94	0.02688
Lived with Dad only***	4.54	0.35637
Lived with Mom only	1.00	
Source: SPD, First Longitudinal File, 1992-1998.		
*=p<.05 **=p<.01 ***=p<.001 (two-tailed tests)		
Sample: Children age 0 to 17 in 1993 in households up 199 percent of the poverty level in 1993 who had a 1998 interview and were living with no parents, or one parent in 1993.		

Model 2: What characteristics are associated with a higher likelihood of LOSING a parent?

Disruption in the living arrangements of children caused by divorce is a source of concern for parents, their children, and researchers. In order to explore what characteristics are associated with a higher likelihood of losing a parent in the five year interval covered in the SPD file, I ran a logistic regression model predicting the odds that children living with 2 parents at time 1 were living with only one parent at time 2. As in the variable indicating parental coresidence transitions, children who become old enough to form their own household and are living without a parent at time 2 are excluded from the model. The sample is restricted to low income children who are living with 2 parents in 1993, which leaves 2,682 children (unweighted). Very few marital disruptions occurred in these families in this 5-year period: only 5 percent of these children are living with only one parent in 1998.

I have included father's education as an indicator of socioeconomic status since people tend to marry someone with a similar level of education, and since educational attainment levels are also associated with employment status and income levels. Child's age is not included in the model since it was not significant.

The majority of low income children living with 2 parents in 1993 (the risk set for losing a parent by 1998) were White (62 percent) and were Non-Recipients (66 percent). Only 10 percent of the children were Black, and 24 percent were Hispanic. Just 12 percent were in Stayer households, and 20 percent were in Leaver households. Thirty seven percent of the children's fathers had only a high school degree, and another 36 percent of the children lived

with fathers who did not have a high school degree.

Table 4. Odds Ratios from the Logistic Regression		
Model Predicting Whether Low income Children LOSE a Parent, 1993 to 1998		
Variable	Odds Ratio	Standard Error
Black non-Hispanic	0.45	0.74739
AIAN non-Hispanic	0.49	1.96791
API non-Hispanic	0.27	1.66635
Hispanic+	0.38	0.53193
White non-Hispanic	1.00	
LEAVERS+	2.35	0.45276
JOINERS	2.34	1.12329
STAYERS	2.24	0.54831
NON-RECIPIENTS	1.00	
Dad's educ--some college plus	0.93	0.46368
Dad's educ--HS	1.00	
Dad's educ--<HS	1.96	0.54852
Source: SPD, First Longitudinal File, 1992-1998.		
+=p<.10 *=p<.05 **=p<.01 ***=p<.001 (two-tailed tests)		
Sample: Children age 0 to 17 in 1993 in households up 199 percent of the poverty level in 1993 who had a 1998 interview and were living with 2 parents in 1993.		

Results

Table 4 shows the odds ratios for the logistic regression model predicting whether children lose a parent by 1998. Only two of the predictors have coefficients that are significantly different from zero at the .10 level. Leavers are more likely than non-recipients to lose a parent, and Hispanic children are less than half as likely to lose a parent as White children. It is counterintuitive that leavers would be more likely than non-recipients to lose a parent, since losing a parent is usually associated with a reduction in household income, which might mean a greater need for aid. However, the odds ratios for each of the groups who received aid for either 1993, 1998, or at both years are very similar–about 2 times that for non-recipients. So perhaps any child whose household received aid at either or both time points is more likely to lose a parent since they may be more likely to experience financial difficulties and perhaps other stresses at some time in the interval than those households which did not receive aid at either time point. The coefficients for Stayers and Joiners, however, do not approach significance since these groups are smaller. The other finding–that Hispanic children are less than half as likely to lose a parent as White children is in line with other work, which has found that Hispanics may have a lower incidence of divorce than

Whites[4].

Logistic Regression Model Exploring the Connection Between Marriage and Aid Receipt
Model 3: Is the child's household more likely to stop receiving aid if the child's PARENT MARRIES?

One of the stated goals of welfare reform is to encourage marriage among unmarried mothers who are aid recipients. In order to explore this question, I limited my sample to children in households up to 200 percent of poverty in 1993 who were receiving aid and who had at least one coresident parent in 1993 and who did not age out of their parents' household by 1998. I used a logistic regression model to predict whether the household left aid (was not receiving aid in 1998). The sample (unweighted) contained 2,189 children, 51 percent of whom were in households which received aid in 1993, but did not receive aid in 1998–leavers.

The omitted category for the marital status change variables includes children whose dad and mom stayed married to each other and both resided with the child at both time points ("mom and dad stayed married"). The categories "Mom got married" and "Dad got married" indicate children who lived with either their unmarried mom or dad in1993 and their parent was married in 1998. "Mom got unmarried" and "Dad got unmarried" indicate children who lived with either their mom or dad in 1993 and their parent was married in 1993, but divorced or separated in 1998. The categories "Mom stayed married" and "Dad stayed married" include children whose mom or dad was married spouse present or married spouse absent at both time points, but was not necessarily married to the same person. A child who lived with their mom in 1993 and their dad in 1998, or vice versa, or who lived with 2 parents but they were not the same 2 parents would fall under the category: "child switched parents." Parent's education is coded as follows. If the child lives with one parent, then that parent's educational level is reflected. If the child lives with two parents, then the mother's education is used, or if the mother's education is missing, the father's education is used.

The children in low income households who received aid in 1993 were age 7 on average. Roughly one third of the children are Black, with another 28 percent who are Hispanic, and 36 percent who are White. Most of the children lived in households where either their mom and dad stayed married to each other (34 percent) or their mother remained unmarried (44 percent). Nine percent of the children lived with their mother, who married by 1998.

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[4] Kreider, Rose M. and Jason M. Fields. 2002. *Number, Timing and Duration of Marriages and Divorces: 1996*. Current Population Reports, P70-80. Washington, DC.

Results

For each year of age, the child's household is 4 percent more likely to leave (see Table 5). Black, Hispanic and Asian children are all much less likely to leave than White children. If the child's parent has less than a high school degree, the household is 43 percent as likely to leave. Dad's marital status changes are not associated with whether the household leaves aid. Those whose mothers remained unmarried, or became unmarried are only 33 and 37 percent (respectively) as likely to leave aid as those who lived with two continuously married parents. The data show that while living with a mother who stays or gets unmarried is negatively associated with leaving aid programs, having a parent get married is not necessarily associated with leaving aid. Factors such as educational attainment, which can lead to greater employment opportunities may be the more critical factor in determining who is able to leave assistance programs than changes in marital status.

Conclusion

In the five year interval between 1993 and 1998, which spans welfare reform, most low income children (81%) did not experience a change in the number of parents with whom they resided. Over half of those who did experience a transition gained a parent. Children living with one parent are over 4 times more likely to gain a parent if they live with dad only rather than with only their mother. Black non-Hispanic children and those who live in households which received aid at both time points–stayers are less likely to gain a parent than White children and those who lived in households which did not receive aid at either time point, respectively.

The model exploring the association between various child characteristics and whether the child loses a parent suggests that Hispanic children may be less likely to lose a parent, while children in households that left aid may be more likely to lose a parent. These findings were significant only at the p<.10 level.

In terms of the association between parental marital status changes and transitions in aid receipt, living with a parent who gets married is not associated with significantly higher odds that the household will leave aid. On the other hand, in comparison with children who lived with two married parents at both time points, those who live with a mother who remained unmarried, or became unmarried have a lower likelihood that their household will leave aid. These findings suggest that while marital disruptions may create financial turmoil in households leading to increased reliance on public assistance programs, forming marriages may not necessarily provide a quick solution to getting off these programs.

Table 5. Odds Ratios from the Logistic Regression Model		
Predicting Whether Low income Children in Households That Received Aid in 1993 LEFT Aid in 1998		
Variable	Odds Ratio	Standard Error
Child's Age in 1993+	1.04	0.02205
Black non-Hispanic+	0.64	0.25116
AIAN non-Hispanic	0.56	1.06449
API non-Hispanic*	0.15	0.77931
Hispanic+	0.64	0.25389
White non-Hispanic	1.00	
Mom got married	1.50	0.38766
Mom got unmarried+	0.37	0.51975
Mom stayed unmarried***	0.33	0.2331
Mom stayed married	1.14	0.51198
Dad got married	1.00	757.47
Dad got unmarried	1.02	1.10838
Dad stayed unmarried	1.74	0.93366
Dad stayed married	0.99	0.93324
Child switched parents	1.90	0.91119
Mom and Dad stayed married	1.00	
Parent's education some college plus+	1.63	0.30282
Parent's education HS	1.00	
Parent's education <HS***	0.43	0.22197
Source: SPD, First Longitudinal File, 1992-1998.		
+=p<.10 *=p<.05 **=p<.01 ***=p<.001 (two-tailed tests)		
Sample: Children age 0 to 17 in 1993 in households up 199 percent of the poverty level in 1993 who had a 1998 interview and who were in households which received aid in 1993.		