

# Child support: The British fiasco

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In 1991 the British government, borrowing policy from the United States and Australia, passed the Child Support Act. The act was intended to sweep away the old arrangements for maintenance (i.e., child support), which had been based on a dual system through the courts and the “liable relative procedures” in social security law and administration. A Child Support Agency (CSA) was to be established with powers to assess and enforce child support payments, using a standard, and supposedly simple, formula.

Originally all “absent” (nonresident) parents were to be covered by the new scheme, whether or not their former partners were dependent on social security benefits and the parents had agreed on a settlement before the passage of the act. All child support received would be counted as income in calculating benefits paid to the majority of lone parents who were on Income Support (social assistance); only a limited amount of support would be disregarded in calculating family income, which determines the amount of work-related benefits (Family Credit, Disability Working Allowance, and Housing Benefit). Lone parents who refused to disclose the name and whereabouts of the fathers would be subject to a reduction in benefits. The act was passed with the support of all political parties and despite the urgent warnings about its potential problems from academics and lobbying groups in the family policy area.<sup>1</sup>

This remarkable political consensus had various roots: a kind of “moral panic” over the decline of the family that was encouraged by the rhetoric of Conservative prime ministers Margaret Thatcher and John Major; a fundamentally moral view that biological parents should be responsible for their children; a pragmatic concern about the increase in the numbers of lone parents and their dependence on benefits; and the knowledge, derived from research, that existing maintenance awards through the courts were low, irregularly paid, and often not reviewed over time.<sup>2</sup> And when the government White Paper that contained the reform proposals was published in 1990, benefit savings and increased incentives for lone parents to join the labor force were also added to the objectives of the child support reforms.<sup>3</sup>

## The failure of the Child Support Act

This is not the place to review the débâcle of child support since the CSA began operations in April 1993. It is widely agreed that the act contained some fundamental flaws: it was retrospective in nature—long-settled court and informal agreements were overturned by the new CSA assessments; the poorest children would gain nothing, because there was to be no disregard of maintenance received by those on Income Support; and the formula for computing maintenance awards was complicated and rigid.

The implementation of the act by the CSA was a fiasco. Huge delays and backlogs, inaccurate assessments, and incompetent or nonexistent enforcement resulted in confusion, distress, and a general loss of confidence in the agency by both lone and nonresident parents. The child support system is still failing to deliver on all its objectives. By February 1999, among cases that were fully assessed and in which payments were made via the CSA (about a third of all active cases), only 44 percent of nonresident fathers were paying the full amount, a quarter paid a partial amount, and a third were noncompliant.<sup>4</sup> There is no evidence on the compliance of parents who do not use the CSA collection service, but noncompliance and collusion are thought to be epidemic, and CSA annual accounts for 1997–98 estimated that arrears assessed amounted to about £600 million (about U.S. \$990 million).

Despite the aspiration to create a single system, the CSA has dropped nonbenefit cases and a dual system has been reestablished: the child support system for lone parents on means-tested benefits, and other arrangements through lawyers and the courts for other people. The proportion of lone parents receiving regular child support is very little different than it was under the old system; nor, if we take into account inflation since 1989, is the level of payments, which have fallen as a result of changes to the formula in 1995. The National Association for Child Support Action, a private advocacy group, argues that the savings to the public purse from the new system have been minuscule or nonexistent, if the cost of administering the CSA is considered.<sup>5</sup>

## The new Labour child support scheme

The Labour government elected in 1997 decided to abandon the existing act. A new bill is on its way through

Parliament and the new child support scheme will begin to take on new cases in April 2001. The main changes in the new bill are:

- A simpler formula which assesses the child support payable on the basis of the nonresident father's income only. Child support will be 15 percent of net income (after income tax and national insurance contributions only) for one child, 20 percent for two, 25 percent for three or more. If the father is supporting resident children, then there will be an allowance of the same proportion of income per child before the formula is applied to income.
- Fathers with incomes of less than £200 (U.S. \$320) per week will pay lower amounts on a sliding scale, and those with less than £100 per week or on Income Support will be expected to pay a minimum of £5 per week.
- There will be a child maintenance premium—an income disregard for mothers on Income Support of £10 per week in child support. Child support will also be completely disregarded in calculating the Working Families and Disabled Workers tax credits.
- The child support scheme will apply automatically to lone parents on Income Support. Private cases (those not on Income Support) will be able to opt into the scheme after a court order has been in place for at least a year.
- There will be tougher enforcement, with deductions from earnings, fines and even imprisonment for non-compliance, and seizure of driving licenses.

The scheme has been subject to a critical review by the Social Security Committee of the House of Commons and from opposition members in Parliament during debates on the bill.<sup>6</sup>

## Challenges to child support policy

The Child Support Act of 1991 was passed without any research ever having been undertaken on nonresident fathers in Britain and their behavior, beliefs, and feelings about their financial obligations. We have just completed such a study.<sup>7</sup> It consisted of a sample survey of about 600 nonresident fathers, identified by a screening questionnaire in an all-purpose survey, plus two follow-up qualitative studies, one of which was devoted to financial obligations. But only about 5 percent of men interviewed in the survey identified themselves as nonresident fathers; the actual proportion may be up to three times greater. Thus the sample is unlikely to be representative of all nonresident fathers, although we were able to adjust for nonresponse bias among those fathers identified in the screening survey. We would expect that, if anything, our sample is biased in favor of those with a greater capacity to pay.

Three findings of our research present a challenge to the Labour government's proposals and to child support policy in general.

### 1. There is a tendency to exaggerate the capacity to pay of nonresident fathers.

It was the intention of the Child Support Act of 1991 to increase the level of support paid and the proportion of nonresident fathers paying support. It failed to achieve either objective. Taking into account inflation, the average level of child support actually paid is little higher than was found by Jonathan Bradshaw and Jane Millar in 1991, and the proportion of nonresident fathers paying formal child support has not increased.<sup>8</sup> So it is again a primary objective of the new scheme to increase payment rates and amounts paid. But even if the new scheme results in increased compliance (or succeeds in enforcing it), there is rather limited paying potential among nonresident fathers.

The socioeconomic circumstances of nonresident fathers differed from those of resident fathers in the survey. They were less likely to have stayed at school after age 16, only two-thirds were employed (compared with over 80 percent of resident fathers), and they were more likely to be low paid. Only about half the unemployed were looking for work, and there was a high rate of sickness and disability. The actual unemployment rate was 17 percent, compared with 9 percent among resident fathers. Compared with fathers in general, nonresident fathers were much more likely to be dependent on Income Support and other benefits and to be living in poverty. This has implications for their capacity to pay child support.

Of the fathers we interviewed, 57 percent reported that they were currently paying support, and two-thirds of the rest claimed to be giving some informal support in the form of presents, clothing, pocket money, and even household or domestic goods.<sup>9</sup> The odds of a father paying child support were much lower if he was not employed, if he was young when he became a father, if there was no formal arrangement in place for paying child support, if the mother was receiving Income Support, and if the father had no contact with the mother (or child) and gave no informal support (see Table 1).

What scope is there for increasing the proportion of fathers who are paying maintenance? If there were to be an effective child support regime, what would be its target? What evidence is there that nonpayers are financially able to pay but nevertheless deliberately avoid their obligation? In an attempt to tackle these questions, we divided nonpayers in our sample into four groups.

Group 1: **No paying potential** (63 percent). These included the unemployed, nonactive (both disabled and out

of the labor market), those on Income Support or with equivalent net disposable income in the bottom quintile of the income distribution, and those who shared in the care of their children.

**Group 2: Possible paying potential** (13 percent). These included those not in Group 1 who had (new) family commitments involving children and equivalent net disposable income in the second and third quintiles, implying competition for whatever resources were available in the household.

**Group 3: Probable paying potential** (15 percent). These had income in the second and third quintiles of the income distribution, but no new family commitments; thus there was no competition for household resources.

**Group 4: Certain paying potential** (9 percent). These were not in the previous three groups and had income in the top two quintiles.

We see, therefore, rather little scope for increasing the proportion of nonresident fathers who pay maintenance. Note that this analysis covers *all* nonpayers, whereas the new child support scheme (and effectively the existing scheme) is aimed mainly at lone parents on Income Support. Such parents are much less likely to be receiving child support, and the nonresident parents of their children are also less likely than average to have any paying potential. In May 1999, 36 percent of nonresident parents for whom full child support assessments had been made were receiving Income Support or the equivalent, and 51 percent of nonresident parents who had received a full child support assessment had net incomes of less than £100 per week.<sup>10</sup>

This analysis of paying potential was based on the existing scheme, in particular the rule that nonresident fathers on Income Support with new families should not be expected to pay child support. In the new scheme it is proposed to charge all fathers minimum child support of £5 per week, regardless of their incomes and family commitments. The justification for this—that personal circumstances cannot negate responsibility for one's children—competes with the principle that Income Support is supposed to be a floor, a safety net.

The £5 requirement is also effectively a transfer from one poor family to another poor family. By sequestering £5 of the income assistance received by their former partners for child support, it just about compensates lone mothers on Income Support for the 1997 abolition of the lone parent premium they then received. There is a balance to be struck between parents and the taxpayer. The taxpayer takes primary responsibility for supporting the children of those parents who are not in the labor market and also has responsibility for supporting the children of lone parents on Income Support. This has been the collective arrangement considered reasonable since 1948. It

**Table 1**  
**Factors Associated with the Chances of Currently Paying Child Support**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Bivariate Analysis</i>	<i>Best Fitting Analysis</i>
<b>Net Income Quintile</b>		
1	1.00	
2	1.38	
3	4.24***	
4	15.26***	
5	19.75***	
Don't know income	3.61***	
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Employed	1.00	1.00
Self-employed	0.67	0.77
Inactive	0.06***	0.05**
<b>Current Marital Status</b>		
Single	1.00	
Married	1.50*	
Cohabiting	1.58*	
<b>Current Family Circumstances</b>		
Lives with children	1.00	
No children	2.08***	
Lives alone	1.29	
<b>Age When First Became a Father</b>		
Under 20	1.00	1.00
20–24	3.29***	3.49**
25–30	4.78***	4.00**
31+	3.76***	3.84*
<b>Marital Status to Mother</b>		
Married now divorced	1.00	1.00
Married now separated	0.80	1.13
Cohabited never married	0.33***	0.45*
Never lived with mother	0.52*	2.08
<b>Time Lived with Mother</b>		
Less than 1 year	1.00	
1–4	1.27	
5–9	2.51***	
10+	2.44***	
<b>Time since Separation</b>		
Less than 2 years	1.00	
2–5	1.05	
5–9	1.19	
10+	0.85	
<b>Distance Lived from Child</b>		
0–9 Miles	1.00	
10–25	1.27	
26+	0.77	
<b>Age of Youngest Child</b>		
0–4 Years	1.00	
5–10	1.95**	
11–18	1.90**	
<b>Number of Nonresident Children</b>		
One	1.00	
Two	1.62**	
Three or More	1.77	
<b>Contact with Child</b>		
No	1.00	
Yes	3.29***	

(table continues)

**Table 1, continued**

Variable	Bivariate Analysis	Best Fitting Analysis
<b>Mother's Employment Status</b>		
Working	1.00	
Not working	0.27***	
Don't know	0.28***	
<b>Mother Lives with a New Partner</b>		
Yes	1.00	
No	1.10	
Don't know	0.33***	
<b>Mother Receives Income Support</b>		
Yes	1.00	1.00
No	3.16***	5.30***
Don't know	0.76	1.33
<b>Contact with Mother</b>		
Yes	1.00	1.00
No	0.29***	0.36**
<b>Relations with Mother</b>		
Amiable	1.00	
Amiable/distant	1.29	
Not amiable	0.72	
No relationship	0.26**	
<b>Gives Informal Support</b>		
No	1.00	1.00
Yes	4.27***	3.17**
<b>Maintenance Arrangement</b>		
Court/DSS/CSA at some time	1.00	1.00
No formal arrangement	0.33***	0.11***
<b>Assessed by the CSA</b>		
Yes	1.00	
No	0.75*	

\*\*\*p<.0001, \*\*p<.001, \*p<.01

is an understandable aspiration to get fathers to contribute what they can, but not when there is a risk that other children will suffer.

In the White Paper, moreover, there is no limit to the maximum maintenance that nonresident fathers will be expected to pay, on the ground that "children have a right to share in the income of their parents." Our results suggest there will be serious opposition from better-off fathers if the scheme expects them to pay more than what they consider to be the cost of a child and more than is necessary to lift their children (but not the mothers, let alone the new partners) beyond the scope of Income Support. Why should the state determine how much fathers should pay for their nonresident children when it does not involve the taxpayer? This would be considered an assault on personal liberty if it happened in a two-parent family.

We undertook an analysis of the proposed child support scheme outlined in 1998, using data from the survey of nonresident fathers in Britain to illustrate its possible impact.<sup>11</sup> We found:

- Under the new scheme most nonresident parents will be expected to pay more than they are currently paying, even if they are already paying some child support.<sup>12</sup>
- The largest group who will be expected to pay more are the poorest—those dependent on benefits and especially those with resident children, who are not expected to pay any child support under the existing scheme.
- The new scheme fails to take into account resident children (either their presence or how many there are) if the fathers' net earnings are below £100 or if they are dependent on benefits. Children in second families are therefore being treated inequitably across different groups of nonresident parents.

**2. Nonresident fathers do not share the principle that they have an absolute financial obligation to support their biological children.**

The Child Support Act of 1991 was based on the principle that biological fathers have an absolute and unreserved responsibility to provide financial support for their children. The most important general finding of our research was that not all the fathers accepted this principle. The maintenance obligation has never been unconditional. It has been negotiated, both implicitly and explicitly. Fathers arrived at a commitment to pay maintenance by weighing up the strength of the financial obligation in the context of their own personal, financial, and family circumstances and those of the mother and children. Making that commitment depended partly upon their ability to pay, the children's material needs, and the mother's (and her partner's) ability to provide financially. Most important, it depended upon the ability of the father to negotiate explicit contact arrangements with the mother.

Fathers felt that the mother's right to claim maintenance (albeit on behalf of children) had to be *legitimized* before they would pay. This legitimization process partly depended upon the father's perception of the mother's behavior over contact as being "fair."<sup>13</sup> If the mother facilitated contact or at least recognized the father's independent relationship with his children then her claim for maintenance was accepted as legitimate. Failure of the mother to do so induced an overwhelming sense of victimization and powerlessness. Fathers' attitudes tended to be that there was no point in paying maintenance "for a child they were not seeing." If maintenance was enforced, some fathers would use withdrawal of payment to send messages of disquiet and anger over the loss of contact.

In the absence of meaningful social relationships with their children, fathers were generally reluctant to accept the maintenance obligation. Yet it is difficult for any external authority to ensure contact, or at least not with-

out risk of damage to all involved.<sup>14</sup> Janet Finch, in her 1989 study, *Family Obligations and Social Change*, has well described the problem that the government faces:

[G]overnments are quite capable of promoting a view of family obligations which is out of step with what most people regard as proper and reasonable, and with the commitments people have arrived at themselves, through the delicate process of negotiation. . . . Governments in this situation may try to ensure that their own views prevail, but their chances of success are probably partial at the best.<sup>15</sup>

This area of policy calls for a degree of flexible, individualized justice. Rather than a child support regime based on a rigid and complicated formula administered by the Department of Social Security (DSS), it might have been preferable to increase the consistency of adjudication in the courts and establish mechanisms for better review and enforcement. The 1991 scheme lost the support of both fathers and mothers because it was seen as unfair (and incompetent).

Under the proposed new scheme, child support is once again to be imposed without regard to other matters. Great Britain is unusual in Europe in seeking to do this. Anne Corden found that the most usual arrangement in European countries was for issues of property, finance, contact, and child support to be dealt with together, through negotiation at the time of formal separation.<sup>16</sup>

The 1999 White Paper recognized the interrelationship between contact and higher maintenance levels, stating that “It is clearly important for effective child support arrangements that contact is settled to the satisfaction of both parents,” but it does not say how that is to be achieved. There is only some vague notion of an “active family policy,” and the hope that a more effective system for child support will enable parents “to put financial issues to one side when sorting out the more difficult questions of caring for their children.”<sup>17</sup> In regard to contact, little has changed for child support policy, and we still face the likelihood of a split system for child support. The DSS will deal almost exclusively with Income Support cases. Other cases will make private arrangements between themselves or with the support of solicitors and the courts.

Under a 1996 law, the Family Law Act, the Lord Chancellor’s Department began experimenting with information and mediation services following marital (but not cohabitation) breakdown, covering the arrangements for children, the distribution of property and other assets—in fact, everything except child support. But the Family Law Act has not yet been fully implemented and is indeed stalled. The information service and mediation experiments appear to have failed.

Because of the stalling of the Family Law Act, there was an opportunity for thrashing out a common strategy and

more coherent set of arrangements for negotiating contact, child support, and other matters consequent on the breakdown of relationships when children are involved. The difficulty is that we are not starting from scratch. The Child Support Agency exists, and so does the Family Law Act, after a torrid passage through Parliament that makes it unlikely that the legislation will be revisited. We may be left, after the reforms, with a set of incoherent arrangements, in which private agreements for child support are acceptable, but only when Income Support is not paid to the children.

### **3. The moral power of children’s entitlement to encourage compliance may be overestimated.**

Making a commitment to pay maintenance is not based upon a straightforward economic calculation. It also constitutes a moral obligation, as it reflects normative expectations for specific family practices. Fathers should pay maintenance (it is argued) because children are entitled to financial support from their parents. It is this moral argument of entitlement that has underpinned the legitimacy of the Child Support Acts. The 1991 act and the 1995 revisions were flawed, because no maintenance, or only a small amount, was handed over to the poorest children—those dependent upon means-tested benefits. The new scheme intends to correct this and to reestablish the legitimacy of children’s entitlement by disregarding child support for those receiving work-related benefits and by giving a maintenance premium to those on Income Support.

Certainly fathers in our research have tended not to dispute this principle of entitlement, at least in the abstract. But although premiums and disregards will benefit mothers and children, their incentive effect on fathers may be more limited. Children’s entitlement was intimately interwoven with mothers’ entitlement. Where relations with mothers were mistrustful—and this often went hand in hand with no contact—the fathers questioned the legitimacy of the obligation. In such circumstances, the moral power of children’s entitlement to encourage compliance is diminished. In effect, fathers see the mothers as trustees of the father’s “active” role as a parent and of the expression of care attached to child support. Where fathers have no faith in the mother as a trustee, they often prefer to give informal support in the form of gifts, clothing, or savings directly to the children. By these gifts, children’s entitlement to financial support, though not to formal cash maintenance, is preserved.

Nonpayment of maintenance in the context of mistrustful relationships with the mother shows how the moral power of children’s entitlement to financial support can also work to discourage payment. Where parental relationships are poor, fathers do not always believe that the assumed benefits of entitlement can be turned into reality by simply paying maintenance. The assumption in the 1999 White Paper, that the maintenance premium will

encourage compliance because the “fathers will know that they are contributing directly to the support of their children,” therefore completely misses the point.<sup>18</sup>

Our research shows that fathers do want to fulfill all their parental obligations—social, emotional, and financial—but it seems that one is unsatisfactory without the others. There is, in some sense, no need to “reinforce” parental obligations; they exist and are accepted already. But there is a need to facilitate them through an increased understanding of the emotional and moral turmoil that follows family separation, cohabitation breakdown, or a nonmarital birth.

## Conclusions

In the 1991 Child Support Act, the state took a robust moral stance in the interests of the taxpayer and imposed a law on people, who, it has been demonstrated, were not prepared to consent to it. In this new episode of child support policymaking, government ministers have, in general, been much more open than those that have gone before. The discourse of vilification has been muted, the language changed, many more people, notably including nonresident fathers’ groups, have been given an opportunity to have their say, and some attention has been paid to research evidence.

Little has changed, however, over the legislative course. Discussion of reform has been most heavily influenced by the experience of the DSS and the CSA with the 1991 act and its successors. Indeed, the new scheme seems largely to be directed toward simplifying and reducing the administrative overheads of the CSA. The proposals fall short of providing a truly integrated system. One of the few (and most welcome) changes was the result of the Department of Social Security persuading the Treasury to disregard child support in full in assessing the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC).

The government has accepted the legitimacy of private negotiations for cases claiming WFTC (despite the involvement of the taxpayer). It has not accepted their legitimacy for lone mothers receiving Income Support. Here a formula will still be rigidly enforced, and very strict conditions for departures from the formula will be applied. The state is earmarking a proportion of fathers’ earned income (and benefit income in the case of Income Support claimants) for maintenance if the nonresident children are dependent upon Income Support. The obligation to pay maintenance is still effectively a tax, as this financial debt is to come before fathers’ other day-to-day expenses and other obligations to their nonresident children, including the provision of informal support (except for some exceptional expenses, such as mortgage payments for the child’s home).<sup>19</sup>

Under the proposed scheme for child support, the assessment is still formula-driven for all participants and enforced independently of negotiations between the parents about their arrangements for financial support, contact, and other related matters.<sup>20</sup> In the context of the private meanings of parenthood, it is wholly inappropriate that an external agency should define how the parental obligation to children is to be expressed—in cash terms—and prioritized. Fathers’ social, financial, and moral obligations to their children are intimately interwoven. They exist and operate in different social realities and are effectively negotiated within a framework of parenthood and not within a framework of social security agency regulations.

Fundamental confusions over the aims of child support policy remain. Does it seek some recompense for the state’s costs in supporting children or more money to increase children’s well-being? If it is the latter, then more care should be exercised in the assessment procedures and the provision of informal support should be recognized. Above all, we believe, it is necessary to develop a joint approach to the settlement of issues that arise from fractured relationships in which children are involved. Policymakers should set in place a series of experimental pilot schemes to explore a coordinated Family Court System for dealing with all matters relating to divorce and cohabitation breakdown. ■

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<sup>1</sup>H. Barnes, P. Day, and N. Cronin, *Trial and Error: A Review of UK Child Support Policy* (London: Family Policy Studies Centre, 1998).

<sup>2</sup>The first national survey of lone parents found that only 29 percent at any one time were receiving regular payments from a nonresident father, with a mean payment per child of £16 per week. See J. Bradshaw and J. Millar, *Lone Parent Families in the UK* (London: HMSO, 1991).

<sup>3</sup>H. M. Government, *Children Come First: The Government’s Proposals on the Maintenance of Children*, Cm 1264, London: HMSO, 1990. “White Papers” embody proposed government policies. “Green Papers” are issued by the government to open political discussion of particular policy proposals.

<sup>4</sup>Child Support Agency, *Quarterly Summary Statistics*, London: HMSO, 1999. [Ed. note: 1997 U.S. data from the National Survey of America’s Families show that 52 percent of children with nonresident fathers had a support order, 68 percent of those received some support, and only 23 percent received the full amount of the order. See the article in this *Focus* by Sorensen and Zibman.]

<sup>5</sup>This organization was previously called the Network Against the Child Support Act. Its World Wide Web site is <http://www.nacsa.org>.

<sup>6</sup>The Labour Government published a Green Paper setting out their ideas in 1998 (*Children First: A New Approach to Child Support*, Cm 3992, London: HMSO, 1998) and a White Paper setting out their proposals in 1999 (*A New Contract for Welfare: Children’s Rights and Parents’ Responsibilities*, Cm 4349, London: HMSO, 1999). There was also an inquiry by the House of Commons Social Security Committee, *The 1999 Child Support White Paper*, Tenth Report Session 1998/99, HC 798, London: HMSO, 1999.

<sup>7</sup>J. Bradshaw, C. Stimson, C. Skinner, and J. Williams, *Absent Fathers?* (London: Routledge, 1999), and “Nonresident Fathers in Brit-

ain,” in *Changing Britain: Families and Households in the 1990s*, ed. S. McRae (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). The research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (with supplementary funding from the Department of Social Security) as part of the program of research on Population and Household Change in Britain. (See S. McRae, ed., *Changing Britain*, pp. 404–26.)

<sup>8</sup>Bradshaw and Millar, *Lone Parent Families*.

<sup>9</sup>This is higher than the proportion reported paying by samples of lone mothers, probably because of misreporting by fathers or mothers, and/or bias in our sample.

<sup>10</sup>Child Support Agency, *Quarterly Summary Statistics* (London: HMSO, 1999).

<sup>11</sup>J. Bradshaw, C. Skinner, and J. Williams, “Impact of the Proposed Child Support Scheme on Nonresident Parents,” unpublished paper, University of York, 1998.

<sup>12</sup>Note that what they were paying is not the same as what they should have been paying under the Child Support Act. In fact, by the time they were interviewed only 23 percent had been assessed by the CSA. And if the new scheme were introduced tomorrow, none of these fathers would immediately experience the actual changes in their child support.

<sup>13</sup>The qualitative work demonstrated that there are other reasons for the obligation to be regarded as legitimate, e.g., where the mother is viewed as being entitled because she is the primary caregiver, or

where the father feels a need to compensate for his past misdemeanors.

<sup>14</sup>J. Walker, *Staying in Touch*, Family Policy Studies Centre Bulletin, November 1996.

<sup>15</sup>J. Finch, *Family Obligations and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 243.

<sup>16</sup>A. Corden, *Making Child Maintenance Regimes Work* (London: Family Policy Studies Centre, 1999).

<sup>17</sup>*A New Contract for Welfare*, quotations, pp. 45, 47.

<sup>18</sup>*A New Contract for Welfare*, p. 18.

<sup>19</sup>*A New Contract for Welfare*, pp. 57, 40.

<sup>20</sup>This is the conclusion of similar research undertaken in New Zealand. See S. Uttley, “Child Support: The Limits of Social Policy Based on Assumptions of Knavery,” *Social Policy and Administration* 33, no. 5 (1999): 552–56.

## ***Economic Conditions and Welfare Reform***

**Sheldon H. Danziger, Editor**

This new book addresses three critical questions arising from the federal and state welfare reforms of the past five years: 1. Why are welfare caseloads falling? 2. How are welfare recipients faring? 3. How are the states responding?

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