

Support From Absent Fathers in Aid to Dependent Children

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The need for public assistance among children whose fathers are dead has been materially reduced in recent years by old-age and survivors insurance. No comparable resource is available for children whose parents are divorced, separated, or unmarried and who, as a result, now make up the majority of those receiving aid to dependent children. Because of the widespread interest in the problem, a study of the support contributed by absent fathers in such broken families receiving assistance was conducted in the summer of 1955 by the Bureau of Public Assistance, with the cooperation of State and local public assistance agencies. The report is summarized in the following pages.

UNDER the Social Security Act, payments made in the program of aid to dependent children may be granted in behalf of "a needy child under the age of eighteen, who has been deprived of parental support or care by reason of the death, continued absence from the home, or physical or mental incapacity of a parent, and who is living" with a specified relative.

Growth in Number of Absent-Father Families

In recent years the father's continuous absence has become the major reason that children are deprived of parental support and so are in need of aid to dependent children. In the summer of 1955, 323,600 families (including 836,200 children) received aid to dependent children because of the father's estrangement; they represented 53.2 percent of all the families (50.3 percent of all children) receiving aid. In earlier years such families represented a smaller proportion of the caseload—35.8 percent in 1942 and 45.5 percent in 1948.

Two factors brought about the growth in the relative importance of the father's estrangement as a reason for receiving aid to dependent chil-

dren. One is the expansion of old-age and survivors insurance as a means of meeting the needs of orphaned children, with the result that relatively fewer children need aid to dependent children because of the father's death. The other is the growth in the absolute number of assistance families with an estranged father; from 1948 to 1955 the number rose 50 percent in the continental United States.

In most (57.3 percent) of the cases receiving aid because of estrangement, the father's marriage to the mother was broken by divorce, separation, or desertion; in the remaining cases the father was never married to the mother. The growth of the latter group is especially striking. From 1948 to 1955 the number of unwed mothers receiving aid in behalf of their children rose 91 percent (based on data for the same 50 States in both 1948 and 1955); in 1955 they represented 22.7 percent of all families receiving aid, compared with 14.8 percent in 1948.

Aid to dependent children helps the victims of social disorganization represented by these figures, but it is no more responsible for the growth of the social ills it treats than doctors are responsible for the growth of the physical ills that they treat. Without the program, children who are the innocent victims of parental discord would often face destitution. Many would be forced to leave school at an early age and thus be poorly prepared to face their adult respon-

sibilities. Their childhood would be spent on the edge of starvation—hardly a fitting preparation for their future responsibilities as parents and citizens. Aid to dependent children at least mitigates the worst economic effects of marital estrangement by providing a minimum of economic security for the families whose needs cannot be met by a mother's earnings or a father's contributions. The broad aim of the program is to participate with other forces in the community in helping children to develop into stable, mature, and responsible adults. Few programs for the expenditure of public funds serve a more useful social purpose than does aid to dependent children.

To serve this purpose costs money, and it is estimated that in 1955 more than \$350 million was spent from public funds to assist needy children whose fathers were estranged. This cost would be considerably higher were it not that public assistance workers

—often are successful in bringing about a reconciliation between an estranged father and mother when the reconciliation is in the family's best interests

—work with fathers to obtain an agreement that they will support their families and cooperate with courts and law-enforcement officials in obtaining support orders

—cooperate with the mother and law-enforcement officials in efforts to locate estranged fathers whose whereabouts is unknown.

Congress expressed its interest in the problem of the absent father by amending the Social Security Act, effective July 1, 1952, to require that public assistance agencies notify appropriate law-enforcement officials when children who have been deserted or abandoned by a parent receive aid to dependent children. It was thought that the law-enforcement officials could use these notices

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to identify situations in which prosecution under a State law concerning desertion and abandonment might be warranted. It was also hoped that both public assistance agencies and law-enforcement officials might increase their efforts to obtain greater support from absent fathers.

In the summer of 1955—3 years after the effective date of this amendment—the Bureau of Public Assistance, with the cooperation of the State assistance agencies, conducted a study of support from absent fathers of children receiving aid to dependent children. The basic purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which absent fathers contribute to the assistance families, the extent to which contributions are related to legal or other efforts to obtain support, and the extent to which noncontributing fathers are individuals from whom it is reasonable to expect additional contributions if additional effort were put forth in trying to obtain them.

Interpretation of Increase

The increase in the number of absent-father families receiving aid to dependent children reflects primarily the growth in the number of broken families in the population. (For the purposes of this article, broken families are defined as those with one or more children under age 18 whose parents are divorced or separated or whose father has deserted them or is not married to the mother.) To a lesser extent, the growth in the number of broken families receiving aid to dependent children reflects some increase in the proportion of all broken families in the general population receiving public assistance.

The best evidences of the growth in the number of broken families in the population are found in statistics on divorce and on illegitimate births.

Divorce rates.—With few exceptions the number of divorces increased each year from 1900 to 1946. In that year, 610,000 divorces were granted—a rate of 17.8 divorces for every 1,000 married women. Since the 1946 peak, caused by the dissolution of many wartime marriages, the number of divorces has declined, but the 379,000 divorces granted in 1954 still represented a divorce rate

(9.5 per 1,000 married women) greater than that in any year before 1942. Moreover, a decline in the total number of divorces does not necessarily mean a decline in the number of divorces involving children. For example, it is estimated, on the basis of data reported by 22 States, that more divorces affecting children were granted in 1954 (181,000) than in 1952 (175,000), even though fewer divorces were granted in 1954 (379,000) than in 1952 (392,000).

The general rise in the number of divorces granted has resulted in a tremendous increase in the number of women in divorced status despite the fact that many divorced women remarry. In 1950 there were 1,373,000 divorced women, or 2.4 percent of all women aged 14 and over. From 1890 to 1950 the relative increase in the number of divorced women was ten times the increase for all women aged 14 and over.

Rates for illegitimate births.—The number of children born out of wedlock doubled between 1938 and 1954, going from 87,900 to 176,600. Illegitimate births represented a much higher rate per 1,000 unmarried females aged 15–44 in 1954 than in 1938 (18.3 per 1,000 in 1954 and 7.0 per 1,000 in 1938).

Illegitimate births in 1954 also represented a higher ratio to all live births (44 per 1,000) than in earlier years. The relative increase in nonwhite illegitimate births from 1938 to 1954 (143 percent) was much greater than in white illegitimate births (52 percent).

The greater relative growth in nonwhite illegitimate births has an important bearing on the program of aid to dependent children because the probability of being adopted is much less for nonwhite children born out of wedlock than for white children. It is roughly estimated that about 70 percent of the white children born out of wedlock are adopted but fewer than 5 percent of the nonwhite children; relatively few adopted children, of course, are likely to need aid to dependent children.

Low income of broken families.—Since most broken families have low incomes, any increase in their number is bound to produce an increase in the number of families needing aid to dependent children. The me-

dian income of all families with a female head (including families headed by widows) was only \$2,294 in 1954, and 45 percent of such families had an income of less than \$2,000. The income of families headed by divorced, separated, and unmarried women was even lower; it is likely that more than half of such broken families have less than \$2,000 a year to live on. Moreover, the income position of the families with a female head showed no improvement from 1948 to 1954 after adjustment for price increases, although the income of families with a male head improved substantially. In 1948, on the average, the income of families with a female head was 37 percent smaller than the income of families with a male head, but by 1954 it was 47 percent smaller.

One reason that broken families have low incomes is that many, if not most, of such families cannot look to the absent father for sufficient regular support. In addition many mothers are unable to fill the income gap created by the loss of the father's support.

Many families broken by divorce (and relatively more of those broken by other types of estrangement) have little prospect of obtaining sufficient support from absent fathers.

—Many divorced fathers remarry and their new family obligations reduce their ability to support their first family. From January 1950 to April 1953 the number of divorced men remarrying was almost half the number obtaining divorces, and more than half the remarriages occurred less than 3 years after the divorce.

—Absent fathers often completely sever their relations with the family and leave no trace of their whereabouts.

—The income of other absent fathers is often too low to enable them to support themselves in a separate establishment and at the same time support their children. The income of divorced men in 1950 was about a fourth smaller than the income of married men living with their wives, and the income of separated men was even lower. In 1949 more than half of all divorced men had an income of less than \$2,000.

With little or no support from the fathers of their children, necessity—

not choice—forces many mothers of broken families into the labor market. In 1955 more than half (52.9 percent) of widowed, divorced, and separated mothers but fewer than a fourth (24.0 percent) of other mothers were in the labor force. Working mothers in broken families usually earn fairly little because of low wage rates, part-time employment, or a combination of these factors. Almost a fourth of all female family heads had no personal income in 1954, and the other three-fourths received a median income (\$1,489) that was almost 60 percent smaller than the income of male family heads. In 1949 fully 87.5 percent of all separated women and 70.0 percent of all divorced women received a personal income of less than \$2,000 (based on data for women under age 55 in situations where the presence of children was fairly likely).

Recipient rate of broken families.—In the summer of 1955 about one-fifth of the families headed by divorced, separated, or unmarried mothers received aid to dependent children. Mothers in broken families receive public assistance somewhat more frequently than widows or aged individuals. All three groups have low average incomes, but—unlike the widows and the aged—the mothers in these broken families are ineligible for old-age and survivors insurance benefits.

From 1948 to 1955 the recipient rate of broken families rose somewhat. The increase accounted, however, for only one-fourth to one-third of the 50-percent increase in the number of absent-father families receiving aid; between two-thirds and three-fourths of this increase was caused by the rise in the number of broken families in the population. During this period also the number of unwed mothers and their children receiving aid to dependent children increased relatively more than the number of illegitimate births.

Although the rise in the recipient rate of broken families results partly from the failure of their income to rise in line with the income of other groups, it also results from the fact that, when needed improvements in assistance standards are made, some families with marginal income become newly eligible for assistance.

An additional factor, relevant to the growth in the proportion of illegitimate children receiving aid to dependent children, is the large increase in the number of nonwhite illegitimate children, who typically stay with their mothers or other relatives and are seldom adopted.

Large families are especially likely to need assistance when the father is estranged. The recipient rate of separated and divorced mothers with four or more children is almost five times the rate for mothers with only one child. In the assistance families broken by divorce, separation, or desertion the average number of children in a family was 2.9, compared with only 2.1 for all such family groups in the population in 1955. Only 21.9 percent of the family groups receiving aid to dependent children, but 42.2 percent of all families of separated and divorced mothers, had one child. Fully 30.0 percent of the assistance families had four or more children, but only 12.5 percent of all families of separated and divorced mothers were this large.

The principal source of support for the 80 percent of the broken families not receiving assistance cannot be reliably estimated. A reasonable guess might be that 30 percent of all broken families depend mainly on contributions from absent fathers and that about 50 percent derive their principal support from the mother's earnings. Income from either source may often be irregular, with the result that the proportion of broken families that receive assistance at some time or other during the period beginning with the father's estrangement and ending when the youngest child in the family attains age 18 is undoubtedly far greater than 20 percent.

Fathers Currently or Previously Married to Mothers

Of the 323,600 absent-father families receiving aid to dependent children in the summer of 1955 in the country as a whole, 185,500 (including 527,400 children) consisted of families in which the absent father was currently or previously married to the mother. In the study, schedule A was used to record the data on these cases, and for brevity they are referred to here as *A* cases. Sum-

mary data are presented in this article for 162,400 of the *A* cases in 51 States.¹

Frequency of Contributions

More than one-sixth (18.3 percent) of the *A* families received contributions from the absent fathers. In 81.1 percent of the cases no contribution was made, and in a few cases (0.6 percent) the father's contribution status was unknown.

The probability that a family will receive a contribution from an absent father is most closely associated with three interrelated factors—the existence of a support order or agreement, the type of estrangement, and the father's whereabouts. Without a support order or agreement, there is almost no chance of obtaining support from an absent father. With a support order or agreement, there is a fair probability of receiving some contribution. The frequency of support orders or agreements is, in turn, related to the type of estrangement; support is ordered or agreed to much more often in cases of divorce or separation than in cases of desertion. The type of estrangement, in turn, is associated with the factor of the father's whereabouts. The location of the deserting father is unknown much more often than that of the divorced or separated father, and fathers whose address is unknown rarely contribute to the support of their families.

Support order or agreement.—In almost three-fifths of the *A* cases no support order or agreement was in effect at the time of the study, and in the rest (42.4 percent) support was ordered or agreed to. Support orders outnumbered support agreements 5 to 1.

Only 1.0 percent of the families in which the father was not subject to a support order or agreement received contributions from him, compared with 41.8 percent of the families

¹ Nevada did not participate in the study because it did not inaugurate its program of aid to dependent children until July 1955. California data for *A* and *B* cases are not included because its study was conducted in 1954 with schedules similar to but not identical with the schedules used by the rest of the States in 1955. Some of the items that were incorporated in the final study schedules were not included in the schedules used by California.

where support was ordered or agreed to.

Fathers subject to court orders for support contributed less often than those who had agreed by one means or another to provide support. Contributions were made by only 37.6 percent of the fathers subject to court orders but by 64.8 percent of the fathers subject to agreements. Moreover, the more informal the nature of the agreement, the greater is the frequency of contributions. In the most informal type of arrangement, where the father and the mother between them arrived at an agreed-upon amount, more than three-fourths of the fathers contributed. The following tabulation shows the proportion of the fathers subject to each type of order or agreement who contributed to the assistance family during the study month.

Type of support order or agreement	Percent making contributions
Court order	37.6
Agreement, total	64.8
After negotiation with father by law-enforcement officials	54.2
After negotiation with father by agency	67.6
By other means	75.7

In general, the data on the frequency of contributions, when related to the type of support order or agreement, support the proposition that wherever feasible it is better to obtain support agreements than to go to court to compel an absent father to provide support. Court proceedings may sometimes engender greater hostility between the parents of the children and impair any prospects that might have existed for a family reconciliation; in addition, court costs must be paid. In many cases, however, there is no choice as to whether an order or an agreement shall be obtained; a court order is already in effect when the family applies for assistance. In other cases, such as those in which a father has repeatedly violated a support agreement, a court order may be the only available method for trying to obtain support. It may help, at least for a time, to increase support. The frequency of support is probably greater in the cases with court orders than it would be in the same cases if there were no court order. As the data indicate, however, chances are

only about 3 to 5 that a father under court order will in fact contribute to the family.

The study did not provide information on how often there was a realistic choice to be made between seeking support through an agreement or an order. It is known that the fathers with support agreements are a relatively small, select group, constituting less than one-sixth (15.6 percent) of all cases with support orders or agreements. The fathers with support agreements probably represent primarily cases in which the prospects for support without the formality of judicial proceedings appear favorable. If support is actually received following the conclusion of a support agreement, further steps are not taken; and, if support is not received, an attempt may later be made to obtain a support order.

Among cases where support has been ordered or agreed to, the frequency of contributions shows considerable variation, which is related to the amount and duration of the order or agreement and the father's location in relation to the court issuing a support order. The probability of receiving contributions is greatest when the order is for a modest amount and has recently been issued and when the father is located within the court's jurisdiction.

—The frequency of contributions declined from 49.9 percent when the amount of support order or agreement was less than \$25 to 35.8 percent when the amount was \$100 or more.

—Of the fathers subject to a court order or agreement that was less than 6 months old, 64.0 percent contributed to the family in the study month, compared with only 31.7 percent of the fathers who were subject to an order or agreement that had been in effect for 3 years or more.

—More than three-fifths (61.2 percent) of the fathers who were located within the jurisdiction of the court issuing a support order contributed to the family, compared with 43.2 percent of the fathers who were not located within the court's jurisdiction; for the fathers whose whereabouts in relation to the court was unknown, the contribution rate was negligible (3.6 percent).

Type of estrangement.—More than

half (53.0 percent) of the absent fathers were divorced or separated from the mother. These fathers were subject to support orders or agreements and contributed to the families receiving aid to dependent children far more often than the fathers who had deserted. Divorce or separation is, of course, inherently a more responsible method of breaking family ties than desertion. When a court grants a decree providing for divorce or separation, it often simultaneously orders support in a stipulated amount or consents to a support agreement worked out between the husband and wife or their legal representatives. In addition, the whereabouts of most of the divorced or separated fathers is known to the public assistance agency. When a father deserts his family, however, he may often do so expressly to avoid his obligation to support his family. The cases in which the father had deserted his family but was nevertheless subject to a support order or agreement may represent primarily cases in which the father had first tried to conceal his whereabouts but was later found and became subject to a support order or agreement. The location of most of the deserting fathers was unknown.

Of the divorced and separated fathers, 58.0 percent lived in the same county or State as the assistance family or in some other place known to the agency, 59.2 percent were subject to a support order or agreement, and 26.6 percent contributed to the family in the study month. Of the deserting fathers, only 30.1 percent lived in a place known to the public assistance agency, 24.3 percent were subject to a support order or agreement, and only 9.5 percent contributed to the family.

Current whereabouts of absent father.—The most important fact militating against prospects for support from absent fathers is that the whereabouts of so many of them is unknown. The whereabouts of more than half (54.5 percent) was unknown at the time of the study. More than a fifth (22.7 percent) lived in the same county as the family, and the others were known to be living elsewhere.

As might be expected, the fre-

quency of contributions is greatest when the father lives near the family and decreases as the father's distance from the family increases. The probability of receiving contributions goes down almost to zero when the father's whereabouts is unknown. The nature of this relationship is brought out in the following tabulation.

<i>Father's location in relation to family</i>	<i>Percent contributing</i>
In same county	45.4
In same State but not same county...	35.3
In other State	29.0
Unknown	1.4

Other factors.—Almost three-fifths (59.1 percent) of the absent fathers were white, and they contributed to their families at a significantly greater rate (21.3 percent) than the nonwhite fathers (14.0 percent). This difference is basically due to differences between the two races in the type of estrangement and the frequency of support orders or agreements. A white father is more likely to contribute than a nonwhite father because he is more likely to be divorced or separated, to have a support order or agreement, and to have his whereabouts known. The nonwhite fathers with support orders or agreements contribute about as frequently as the white fathers with support orders or agreements, but relatively fewer nonwhite fathers (33.2 percent) than white fathers (48.7 percent) have support orders or agreements. Similarly, it may be inferred that within each type of estrangement there is no essential difference between the white and the nonwhite contribution rates; the observed difference is related almost entirely to the fact that a much larger proportion of the white fathers (65.7 percent) than of the nonwhite fathers (34.7 percent) were divorced or separated and a smaller proportion had deserted their families.

There is an inverse correlation between the duration of the father's absence from the family receiving aid to dependent children and the contribution rate. Almost half the fathers (47.5 percent) were absent 5 years or more, and they contributed less frequently (16.5 percent) than the fathers who were absent for a shorter time (20.1 percent). The small proportion (7.8 percent) of the

fathers who were absent less than a year had the highest contribution rate (23.5 percent).

The probability of receiving contributions is also undoubtedly affected by the answers to these questions: What is the father's income? How many children, if any, does he have outside the assistance family? If the father is divorced from the mother, has he remarried?

Unfortunately, "unknown" was given as the answer to each of these questions in a substantial proportion of the cases studied. Definite information on income was not reported in three-fourths of the cases. The frequency of "unknown" as an answer to these questions is, of course, related in part to the fact that the whereabouts of so many of the fathers was not known. Among those for whom definite answers were obtained, the fathers with relatively high incomes, those with no children outside the assistance family, and those who were not remarried contributed more frequently than other fathers.

State variations.—Not all States studied a large enough sample of absent-father cases to prepare detailed tables. Among the 29 States that prepared such tables, the proportion of cases receiving a contribution from the absent father varied widely, 0.7 percent to 37.1 percent, with a median of 20.7 percent. This variation is closely related to State variations in three basic factors—existence of a support order or agreement, the father's whereabouts, and the type of estrangement. In a comparison of any two States the probability is (1) excellent—about 7 to 1—that the State having the higher proportion of cases with a support order or agreement will also have a higher proportion of cases receiving contributions from absent fathers; (2) good—3 to 1—that the State with the higher proportion of cases with father's whereabouts known will have the higher percentage of cases receiving contributions; and (3) fair—about 2 to 1—that the State with the lower proportion of cases with the father deserting (and consequently the higher proportion of fathers who are divorced or separated) will have a higher percentage of cases receiving contributions.

Value of Contributions

Among the families receiving contributions from absent fathers, the distribution by contribution amount in the study month is shown below.

<i>Amount of contribution</i>	<i>Percentage distribution</i>
Total	100.0
Less than \$25	18.5
25-49	31.6
50-74	25.3
75-99	13.4
100 or more	11.3

Half the families with contributions received less than \$50, and half received this amount or more. The average contribution was \$55.09 per family receiving contributions and \$17.39 per child in these families. It is estimated that, on an annual basis, aggregate contributions amounted to about \$20 million in 51 States in 1955.

The saving in assistance expenditures resulting from a contribution is often less than the amount contributed. This situation occurs because, in many States, assistance payments cannot go beyond specified maximum amounts, and a contribution may be used in whole or in part to meet family needs that cannot be met within the maximum payment. For 13.5 percent of the cases where a contribution was made and counted in the family's assistance plan, the contribution did not affect the payment; and in an unknown number of additional cases the assistance payment was reduced by less than the full amount of the contribution. (A few States often followed the practice of not counting a father's contribution in the family's assistance plan. Instead, the contribution was received by the agency and used as a refund for assistance previously granted to the family, thus reducing the net assistance expenditure.)

Despite the limiting effect of maximums on assistance payments, every State reported a significant difference between the average assistance expenditure for children in families not receiving contributions and the average expenditure for children in families that did receive contributions. In the 27 States for which data on this point were available, the savings in assistance expenditures resulting from absent fathers' contributions are estimated to amount to

\$7.3 million in 1955, compared with contributions amounting to \$13.2 million. For all States, of course, the estimated savings would be considerably higher, but there is no reliable basis on which an estimate for the other States can be prepared.

In cases with contributions the value of the contributions was equal to 59.9 percent of the assistance payments made to such cases.

In the aggregate, 32.5 percent of the amount of support ordered by courts or agreed to after negotiation with the father by law-enforcement officials was paid in the study month. More than two-thirds (67.5 percent) of the amount of support agreed to after negotiation with the father by the agency or by other means was also paid in the study month.

The full amount specified in the support order or agreement was paid in 30.4 percent of the cases. Less was paid in the other cases (in 56.9 percent, no support was paid).

Characteristics of Fathers

One of the purposes of the study was to determine how many non-contributing fathers are individuals from whom it is reasonable to expect additional contributions if further effort were put forth to obtain them.

A direct answer to this question is provided in terms of agency judgments on the extent to which non-contributing fathers whose whereabouts is known are considered able to contribute. The study gave the following information on all non-contributing fathers:

—For 66.0 percent the whereabouts was unknown.

—For 2.2 percent the whereabouts was known at the time of the study, and they had made some contribution in the 6 months ending with the study month, though not in the study month itself.

—For 31.9 percent the whereabouts was known at the time of the study, but they had made no contribution at any time in the 6 months ending with the study month.

Concerning this third group of non-contributing fathers, the agencies reported as follows:

—18.0 percent (or only 5.7 percent of all noncontributing fathers) were

considered able to support the family.

—22.9 percent might or might not be able to contribute; the agency had reached no decision.

—59.0 percent were considered unable to support, and in more than 7 out of 10 of these cases the stated reason for the agency's judgment was that the father was unemployed, ill or disabled, or employed but with insufficient earnings.

The most hopeful outlook for future support presumably was found in those cases (5.7 percent of all noncontributing fathers) where the father's address was known and he was considered able to contribute. Even if all of them had contributed, the frequency of contributions for A cases would have gone up only from 18.3 percent to 23.0 percent. Though this would be a worthwhile gain, it would still leave more than three-fourths of the absent fathers not contributing to their families.

Additional light on the prospects for support from noncontributing fathers is provided when the characteristics of the noncontributing fathers and of the contributing fathers are compared.

—The contributing fathers were far more frequently divorced or separated (76.8 percent) than the non-contributing fathers (47.4 percent), and they had far less frequently (22.0 percent) deserted their families than the noncontributing fathers (47.1 percent).

—The fathers who contributed lived much more often in the same county as the family (56.3 percent) than did the noncontributing fathers (15.0 percent). Only 4.3 percent of the contributing fathers had unknown whereabouts, compared with 66.0 percent of the noncontributing fathers.

—Practically all (96.6 percent) of the contributing fathers but only 29.8 percent of the noncontributing fathers were subject to a support order or agreement.

—Of the contributing fathers subject to a support order or agreement negotiated with law-enforcement officials, 83.0 percent were located within the jurisdiction of the responsible court or law-enforcement officials. Of the corresponding group of noncontributing fathers, only a third were thus situated.

It is impossible to estimate how

many additional absent fathers might contribute if additional effort were put forth in trying to obtain support. No doubt additional effort with some is likely to be fruitful, but these fathers probably constitute a small minority of the total number. In most instances the prospects do not appear hopeful.

The typical noncontributing father is likely to be a man who left his family without entering into any agreement to support them. He has been gone a fairly long time. If his whereabouts is known, he is probably unable to provide support because of illness, unemployment, or low income. If his whereabouts is unknown, which is more often the case, he may never be located despite intensive efforts. If he is located, he will probably be brought before a court and ordered to support his family. He may comply with the order for a while, but the burden of compliance becomes irksome and before long he leaves the jurisdiction of the court for parts unknown.

Before noncontributing fathers can be expected to provide support for their families they must be found, they must have sufficient income, and they must have the necessary motivation. Finding them is not easy, even with skillful and persistent effort, but the problem of trying to obtain regular support from them begins only after they are found. This endeavor is complicated by various personal and environmental factors, including the degree of the father's motivation to contribute, his economic capacity, his feelings about himself, his relationship with his family, and the attitude of his family and the community towards him. The challenge confronting both public assistance agencies and law-enforcement officials is how to help a father cope successfully with these factors so that he will assume responsibility for the support of his family to the degree that his economic resources permit.

Unknown Whereabouts

The possibility of receiving support from an absent father whose whereabouts is unknown is practically nonexistent. Since the location of more than half the absent fathers studied was unknown, several questions were

asked on the efforts made to locate missing fathers—how frequently were such efforts made, who made them, what sources were used, and to what extent available means for trying to locate them had been exhausted.

In about 4 out of 5 missing-father cases some effort had been made to establish the father's whereabouts either by law-enforcement officials, by the public assistance agency, or by both. Cases where the most recent agency effort to locate a missing father occurred within the past 12 months outnumbered other cases by more than 2 to 1.

When the public assistance agency tried to locate a missing father, either directly or by helping the mother explore possible sources of information, the most frequent sources contacted were the father's relatives (46.0 percent), the father's employers (29.8 percent), and government records (25.1 percent). Since in many cases more than one source was contacted, the preceding percentages, as well as the percentages for other types of sources contacted (social agencies, for example), are not mutually exclusive.

In more than a third of the missing-father cases (35.2 percent), additional efforts to locate the father were presumably being planned; these were the cases in which the agency had decided that available means for trying to locate the missing father had not been exhausted. In the other cases, either it was decided that available means for trying to locate the father had been exhausted (46.1 percent) or no decision had been made (18.6 percent).

The efficacy of efforts to locate missing fathers is indicated by the data showing how the father had been located in the 12.7 percent of the total cases where his whereabouts, though currently known to the agency, had not usually been known in the past. In 69.0 percent of these cases the father's location had become known through the efforts of the public assistance agency, law-enforcement officials, or both.

Public assistance agencies, as well as law-enforcement officials, have clearly recognized the seriousness of the problem of the missing fathers and in most instances have used all available resources to determine their

whereabouts. The fact that no effort was made to locate the father in about a fifth of the missing-father cases should not lead to the inference that there was no concern about trying to determine the father's whereabouts. In many of these cases there may have been no clue to the father's possible whereabouts.

Fathers Never Married to Mothers

Families in which the absent father was never married to the mother of the children receiving aid to dependent children numbered 138,100, and there were 308,800 children in these families. Schedule B was used to record the information on these cases, which are referred to here as *B* cases. Summary data are presented below for 125,220 of these cases in 51 States.²

Frequency of Contributions

About one-tenth (10.2 percent) of the *B* families received contributions from the absent father. In the other cases, no contribution was made (89.2 percent) or the contribution status of the absent father was unknown (0.6 percent).

Three interrelated factors—the existence of a support order or agreement, the status of the case with respect to establishment of the children's paternity, and the father's whereabouts—affect the probability that a *B* family will receive a contribution from the absent father. Without a support order or agreement, there is almost no chance of obtaining support from an absent father. When the father is not married to the mother, it is practically impossible to obtain a support order or agreement unless paternity is determined. If the father's whereabouts is unknown, efforts to establish paternity or to obtain a support order or agreement are futile, and if his address becomes unknown after a support order or agreement has been obtained, it is impossible to enforce the terms of the order or agreement.

Support order or agreement.—In almost five-sixths (82.4 percent) of the *B* cases no support order or agreement was in effect at the time of

the study, and in the other cases support had been ordered or agreed to. More than three-fifths (61.1 percent) of the cases where paternity was established by judicial determination or by formal acknowledgment had a support order or agreement in effect, compared with fewer than a fourth (23.9 percent) where paternity was admitted through informal acknowledgment and almost none (0.8 percent) where paternity was alleged but not admitted.

Only 0.6 percent of the families in which the father was not subject to a support order or agreement received contributions, compared with 55.0 percent of the cases where support had been ordered or agreed to.

Fathers subject to court orders for support contributed less frequently than those who had agreed, by one means or another, to provide support. Only 47.1 percent of the fathers subject to court orders but 66.2 percent of the fathers subject to agreements contributed. As in the *A* cases, the more informal the nature of the support agreement, the greater is the frequency of contributions. In the most informal type of agreement, where the father and mother independently agreed on the amount of support, more than three-fourths of the fathers contributed. The following tabulation shows the proportion of fathers subject to each type of order or agreement who contributed to the assistance family during the study month.

Type of support order or agreement	Percent making contributions
Court order	47.1
Agreement, total	66.2
After negotiation with father by law-enforcement officials	56.1
After negotiation with father by agency	64.3
By other means	77.9

As in the *A* cases, there is a relation between frequency of contributions and the amount of an order or agreement for support, its duration, and the location of the father in relation to the court responsible for making a support order.

—The frequency of contributions declined from 70.3 percent when the order or agreement was less than 6 months old to 38.3 percent when the order or agreement had been made

² Data exclude California and Nevada; see footnote 1.

3 years or more before the time of the study.

—The contribution rate declined from 56.2 percent when the amount of order or agreement was less than \$25 to 43.5 percent when the amount was \$75 or more.

—More than two-thirds (68.2 percent) of the fathers who were located within the jurisdiction of the court issuing the support order contributed to the family, compared with 52.0 percent for fathers who were not located in the court's jurisdiction; for the fathers whose whereabouts in relation to the court was unknown, the contribution rate dropped sharply, to only 5.6 percent.

Establishment of paternity.—In two-fifths of the B cases, paternity was established either by judicial determination (9.1 percent), by formal acknowledgment (11.2 percent), or by the father's admission through informal acknowledgment or by other means (20.2 percent). In the remaining three-fifths of the cases, paternity was alleged but not admitted (47.4 percent) or the identity of the father was not alleged (12.1 percent).

The greater the formality by which paternity is established, the greater is the probability that contributions will be received. When paternity is not established, almost no contributions are received.

—42.5 percent contributed when paternity was established by judicial determination.

—23.5 percent contributed when paternity was established by formal acknowledgment.

—16.6 percent contributed when paternity was admitted through informal acknowledgment or by other means.

—0.7 percent contributed when paternity was alleged but not admitted, and 0.1 percent when the identity of the father was not alleged.

Father's whereabouts.—More than a fourth (26.0 percent) of the fathers lived in the same county as the family receiving aid to dependent children, and, as expected, they had the highest contribution rate (32.4 percent). The whereabouts of more than three-fifths (61.2 percent) of the fathers was unknown to the agency, and almost none of them (0.5 percent) contributed. Of the 12.7 per-

cent who did not live in the same county as the family, 11.4 percent contributed.

Race.—Almost two-thirds of the mothers of the B families were nonwhite (65.2 percent of all cases reported and 66.2 percent of the cases where the race of the mother was reported). Although the nonwhite proportion is high, it is actually smaller than might be expected from population data on the racial distribution of all illegitimate births and of adoptions. It is estimated that, if the illegitimate children receiving aid to dependent children had the same racial distribution as all illegitimate children who are not adopted, about 84 percent would be nonwhite.

The families with nonwhite unmarried mothers received contributions at a somewhat greater rate (10.9 percent) than the families with white mothers (9.2 percent). This difference is related to the fact that support orders or agreements were more often in effect in the nonwhite cases (19.3 percent) than in the white cases (14.9 percent). Relatively more of the nonwhite cases (79.1 percent) than of the white cases (55.9 percent) lived in urban areas, and the frequency of support orders or agreements was much greater generally in urban cases (21.4 percent) than among rural cases (8.4 percent).

Other factors.—The number of cases with "unknown" recorded as the answer to questions on income of the father, his current marital status, and the number of children, if any, that he had outside the assistance family was so great that reliable conclusions on the relation between these factors and the frequency of contributions cannot be drawn. For the limited number of cases where information on these items was recorded, the contribution rate was higher for the fathers with a fairly high income, those who were not currently married, and those who had no children outside the assistance family than it was for other fathers.

State variations.—Among the 23 States that prepared detailed tables on the B cases, the proportion of cases receiving contributions varied widely—going from less than 1 percent in three States to 30.6 percent in another State; the median was 8.4 percent. This variation is closely

related to State variations in three basic factors—existence of a support order or agreement, establishment of paternity, and the father's whereabouts. When any two States are compared, the probability is (1) excellent—10 to 1—that the State having the higher proportion of cases with a support order or agreement will also have the higher proportion receiving contributions from absent fathers; (2) very good—4 to 1—that the State with the higher proportion of cases with the father's paternity determined will have the higher proportion receiving contributions; and (3) very good—4 to 1—that the State with the lower proportion of cases with the father's whereabouts unknown (and consequently a higher proportion of fathers whose whereabouts is known) will have a higher percentage receiving contributions.

Value of Contributions

The following tabulation shows the percentage distribution of the B families receiving contributions from absent fathers (10.2 percent of all B families) by amount of contribution during the study month.

Amount of contribution	Percentage distribution of cases
Total	100.0
Less than \$25	38.5
25-49	48.2
50-74	9.9
75-99	1.3
100 or more	2.2

Half the families with contributions received less than \$31.00 a month and half received \$31.00 or more. The average contribution was \$30.11 per family receiving contributions and \$10.38 per child in these families. It is estimated that, on an annual basis, aggregate contributions amounted to about \$4.6 million in 51 States in 1955.

In the 19 States reporting data on this point, the savings in assistance expenditures resulting from the absent fathers' contributions amounted to \$1.9 million in 1955, and their contributions amounted to \$2.3 million. For all States the estimated savings would, of course, be considerably higher, but there is no reliable basis upon which an estimate for the other States can be prepared.

The value of the contributions was equal to about one-third (33.5 per-

cent) of the assistance payments made to all cases receiving contributions from an absent father.

In the aggregate, more than two-fifths (42.8 percent) of the amount of support ordered by courts or agreed to after negotiation with the father by law-enforcement officials was paid in the study month. More than two-thirds (68.3 percent) of the amount of support agreed to after negotiation with the father by the agency or by other means was also paid in the study month.

The full amount of the support order or agreement was paid in 46.9 percent of the applicable cases, and less than the full amount was paid in the others; in 43.6 percent, no support was paid.

Characteristics of Noncontributing Fathers

The study shows that the typical noncontributing father is one whose paternity has not been established, whose whereabouts is unknown, and who is not subject to a support order or agreement.

—65.9 percent did not have their paternity determined, either by formal or informal means. These were the cases in which either paternity was alleged but not admitted or the identity of the father was not alleged.

—67.9 percent had unknown whereabouts.

—91.4 percent were not subject to a support order or agreement.

No doubt, there are some noncontributing fathers from whom contributions might be obtained if they could be located and if their paternity were established. It would be incorrect to infer, however, that if these noncontributing fathers could be located their contribution rate would become as great as the contribution rate of fathers whose whereabouts is presently known. Paternity would probably be more difficult to establish in these cases and support orders or agreements harder to obtain.

Fathers Who Returned to Family

To supplement the information reported on families receiving aid to dependent children in the summer

of 1955 because of the estrangement of the father, the State agencies administering aid to dependent children were asked to submit a report on each case closed in a consecutive 2-month period (not later than September and October 1955) because an absent father returned home or because of increased support from an absent father. The States submitted data on 2,893 closings, including 1,820 cases closed because an absent father returned home and 1,073 closed because of increased support from an absent father.³ It is believed that the true number of closings for these reasons was greater than the reported totals.

Because the data reported probably represent an incomplete count, they are not necessarily representative of all closings of the specified types. The nature and extent of the bias resulting from the incomplete reporting, however, are not known and cannot be measured.

Since schedule C was used to record the data on cases closed because an absent father returned home, such cases are referred to as C cases.

Duration of fathers' absence.—In more than three-fourths of the C cases (78.4 percent) the returning father was absent from the family less than 2 years; in 31.9 percent of the cases the absence lasted less than 6 months, and in 24.5 percent it lasted 6–12 months. In more than two-fifths (42.7 percent) of the C cases the father's recent estrangement was not the first.

When the data on the duration of absence of the returning fathers are compared with similar data for the active cases, it is evident that a father who has been absent for a short time is much more likely to return home than one who has been gone a long time.

Length of time on assistance rolls.—Related to the short duration of most of the fathers' absences is the short stay on the assistance rolls for most of the cases in which the father returned home. In more than 7 out of 10 cases (70.9 percent) the family received aid to dependent children for less than a year before the assistance payment was discontinued.

³ Nevada was the only State not reporting; see footnote 1.

Previous discontinuance of assistance.—In more than 7 out of 10 cases (72.3 percent) the period of assistance terminated by the father's return home represented the first time that the family had received assistance. In 486 cases—26.7 percent of all C cases—the family had received assistance on a previous occasion. In seven-tenths of these 486 cases, the family's previous period on the assistance rolls had also been terminated by the father's return home from a period of estrangement. These data point to the desirability of continuing to offer social services to families of returning fathers in order to strengthen the prospects that the family reconciliation may continue.

Agency contact with father.—In more than three-fifths of the C cases (61.4 percent) the father lived in the same State as the family before his return home, and in 43.9 percent he lived in the same county as the family.

The local agency had had some contact with the father before his return home in 56.6 percent of the cases where the father had been living in the same county as the family. By keeping in touch with an absent father and discussing with him the welfare of his family, a public assistance agency can often help to make the chance of the father's returning home greater than it might otherwise be.

Support order or agreement.—Of the 1,820 returning fathers, 675 or 37.1 percent were subject to a support order or agreement before returning home; there were almost 2 support orders for every agreement.

In more than 7 out of every 10 of these C cases (71.9 percent) the order or agreement was less than a year old, and in half the cases it was less than 6 months old. On the average, the orders and agreements in the cases of returning fathers were of much shorter duration than those in the active cases continuing to receive assistance. The short lapse of time that occurred in so many cases between the making of a support order or agreement and the father's return home suggests the possibility that, at least in some cases, there may have been a causal connection between the two events.

The returning fathers tended to have larger amounts specified in their support orders or agreements than did the fathers in the active cases continuing to receive aid to dependent children. The average monthly amount was at least \$75.43, which was significantly greater than the average in the A cases and greater still than in the B cases.

Contributions before father's return.—About a third (33.8 percent) of the returning fathers had made one or more contributions to their families in the 6 months before their return home, and 21.6 percent had made some contribution in the month immediately before their return.

Effect of return home on family economic status.—When an estranged father returns home, there is no assurance that he will stay there. One factor that could militate against his remaining at home would be a worsening of the family's economic situation if his income is not sufficient to replace the loss of the assistance payment. Two questions related to this factor were therefore asked about the C cases: Was the family income after the last assistance payment greater than the family income from assistance and other sources in the month before the father returned home? Was the family income after the last assistance payment greater than the family requirements, as measured by agency standards?

In response to the first question it was reported that in more than a third of the cases (34.3 percent) the family income was greater after discontinuance of assistance than it was before the father's return but that in 13.5 percent it was not greater. Both percentages grossly understate the true proportions since in 52.2 percent of the cases no definite answer was given.

In response to the second question, the family income was reported as greater than the family's requirements in about a third of the cases, but for 1 case out of 8 the family income was not greater than the family requirements after discontinuance of the assistance payment. The true proportion in each of these classifications is much greater but cannot be reliably estimated because of the large number of cases (54.6 per-

cent) in which a definite answer was not obtained.

The 223 cases for whom it was reported that the family income after discontinuance of assistance was not greater than the family's requirements were grouped according to whether or not other assistance was granted to make up for the family's unmet need. Other assistance was granted to more than a third (36.3 percent), other assistance was not granted to half the cases (49.8 percent), and for the balance no definite answer was provided.

Although economic security cannot guarantee family stability, the absence of economic security endangers it. A serious question can be raised as to the soundness of social policy under which all assistance is withdrawn from a family immediately upon a father's return home and the family, in some instances, must try to live on an income that is even lower than its requirements as measured by the modest standards of public assistance agencies.

Fathers Who Increased Support

In a 2-month period in 1955, 1,073 cases receiving aid to dependent children were reported as discontinued because of increased support from an absent father who continued to be estranged from the mother of his children.⁴ The true number of closings for this reason was undoubtedly greater than the reported total, but it cannot be reliably estimated.

Schedule D was used to record the data on cases closed because of increased support; they are referred to here as D cases.

Duration of father's absence.—In more than half the D cases, the father's current absence from the family had lasted for less than 2 years when the assistance payment was discontinued, in 28.3 percent the absence had lasted for less than a year, and in 23.3 percent it lasted 1-2 years. On the average, the father's absence was much shorter in the D cases than in the active cases continuing to receive assistance.

In at least 31.9 percent of the D cases, the father's current absence

was not his first period of estrangement from the family.

Length of time on assistance rolls.—The typical D case received assistance for only a short time. In two-thirds of the cases the family received aid to dependent children for a continuous period of less than a year before the payment was discontinued.

Father's whereabouts and agency contact with him.—In about 7 out of 10 D cases the absent father lived in the same State as his family and in 54.7 percent in the same county.

The local agency granting aid to dependent children or another public assistance agency had contacted the absent father some time during the 6 months before the closing of the assistance case in about half (50.8 percent) of all the D cases and in 58.3 percent when the father lived in the same county as the family. Contacts with the absent father were much more frequent in the D cases than in the active cases continuing to receive assistance and no doubt were sometimes instrumental in bringing about the discontinuance of assistance.

Support order or agreement.—Support had been ordered or agreed to in 88.2 percent of the D cases. Support orders outnumbered agreements 2 to 1—a much smaller ratio than in the cases continuing to receive assistance. The average amount of support ordered or agreed to was at least \$82.08 a month, which was considerably higher than in the active cases. The support orders or agreements were typically of very short duration. In almost 8 out of 10 cases the support order or agreement was less than a year old at the time the assistance payment was discontinued.

Contributions.—In the month of the last assistance payment, more than three-fourths (77.7 percent) of the D families received some contribution from the absent father. The other cases consisted of those in which no contribution was received in the month of the last payment (13.3 percent) and those in which the amount of contribution, if any, was unknown (8.9 percent).

Even if no contribution were received in the month of the last assistance payment, the case could be

⁴ Nevada was the only State not reporting; see footnote 1.

closed because of an agency's expectation that in the next month the amount of support received from the absent father, plus any other income the family might have, would be sufficient to wipe out the family's need for assistance. If this expectation should not be realized, the family would be free to reapply for assistance, and its eligibility would be re-determined on the basis of its actual income and resources at the time of application. In some agencies, however, the amount of a court order is treated as income to the family even though there may be no assurance that the family is actually receiving the amount of support ordered. The average monthly contribution in the cases receiving contributions was at least \$63.40.

Previous discontinuance of assistance.—In 7 out of 10 *D* cases the family had been receiving aid to dependent children for the first time, and in a few cases (1.2 percent) it was not known whether aid to dependent children had been previously received and discontinued. In the remaining 28.3 percent (304 cases) the family had received aid to dependent children on another occasion; the reasons the cases had been closed are of interest. For more than two-fifths of this group the reason for the earlier discontinuance and the present reason were the same: the absent father increased his support to the family but did not return home. The remaining cases were evenly divided between those closed because the father had on a previous

occasion returned home from a period of estrangement and those closed for some other but unspecified reason.

These data, combined with the previously reported data showing to what extent the father's current period of absence was not the first such absence, suggest that, in a substantial number of cases closed because of increased support from an absent father, the case may not remain closed indefinitely and that the family may need assistance again at some later date.

Conclusion

In the summer of 1955, 323,600 families, representing 53.2 percent of the total caseload in aid to dependent children, received assistance because of estrangement of the father. The total included 185,500 families (with 527,400 children) where the father was currently or previously married to the mother of the children receiving aid to dependent children and 138,100 families (with 308,800 children) where the father was never married to the mother.

The growth of the absent-father problem in aid to dependent children reflects primarily an increase in the number of broken families in the population. To a lesser extent, it reflects some increase in the proportion of broken families receiving aid to dependent children. The higher recipient rate stems partly from the fact that the income of broken families has failed to rise along with the income of other families and partly from the fact that when needed im-

provements in assistance standards are made, some broken families with marginal income become newly eligible for assistance. An additional factor is the large increase in the number of nonwhite illegitimate children, who typically stay with their mothers or other relatives and are seldom adopted.

A high assistance caseload of divorced, separated, deserted, and unmarried mothers and their children is likely to continue so long as the present rates for broken families and for children born out of wedlock continue. Substantial reductions in the caseload cannot be expected since it is unlikely that many more mothers in broken families will (under normal circumstances) obtain employment or that many more absent fathers will support their families.

By providing a minimum of economic security for families whose needs cannot be met by a mother's earnings or father's contributions, aid to dependent children at least mitigates the worst economic effects of marital estrangement and assures the children a greater opportunity to develop into useful and responsible citizens than they would otherwise have. At the same time the cost of the program is reduced by the substantial efforts made by public assistance agencies, often working cooperatively with law-enforcement officials, to bring about family reconciliations, to strengthen family relationships, to obtain support from fathers who continue to be estranged, and to locate those whose whereabouts is unknown.