

Child Support Awards in Britain: An Analysis of Data from the Families and Children Study

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Abstract

This paper examines the extent to which mothers that care for children where the father is non-resident have an award or agreement for child support in place. Data from the Families and Children Study are used to explore not only whether mothers have an award or order but the type of award they have. Results show that mothers without awards are significantly disadvantaged. Moreover, awards were less commonplace where there were fewer children, where mothers claimed Income Support, were from an Asian background and where contact between the non-resident father and his children was infrequent. Private agreements, in contrast to a CSA award or no award, were more likely where mothers had recently separated, when there was frequent contact between the non-resident father and his children, and where children were younger; they were less common among those living in social housing.

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Introduction

By 2004, approximately 3 million children in the United Kingdom were living in a lone parent family (Office for National Statistics, 2005). This equated to about one quarter of all dependent children, up from less than ten per cent in the early 1970s. Moreover, in 2004 there were a further seven hundred thousand UK families – one in ten of all families - containing step-children. One of the most significant policy responses to this change in family life has been the attempt to compel non-resident parents to support their children financially. The Child Support Agency (CSA) currently represents the government's main policy mechanism through which this goal is to be achieved. The Agency was established initially as a response to the high rates of benefit dependency among parents with care¹ with the result that tax payers rather than non-resident parents were supporting large numbers of children financially.

In order for a parent with care to receive regular, formalised child support payments, they must first have an agreement, order or award for child support in place. In the UK there are a variety of routes through which a parent with care might obtain an award². The parent with care and the non-resident parent are free to establish a private agreement. Parents may also use the CSA to establish an award as a 'private case'. However, parents with care are currently expected to use the Agency where they claim means tested out-of-work benefits such as Income Support³. Court orders post-1993 are generally small in number and typically part of a post-divorce settlement package. At its inception the CSA effectively took over the role of the courts. As a result, awards arrived at via the courts post-1993 are considered private agreements (see Marsh and Rowlingson 2002)⁴. Finally, if a parent with care submits a claim for means-tested benefit but already has a private agreement or court order, she is still expected at present to pursue an award through the CSA, regardless of existing arrangements.

To date little detailed evidence exists in the UK as to the factors associated with whether a parent with care has an award or not, and the types of child support arrangements parents have. This gap in the evidence base has come about mainly due to a lack of available data to study awards. One data source that does provide

¹ The term 'parent with care' refers to a parent (natural or adoptive) living with a child or children where the child or children's other parent is resident elsewhere.

² Throughout this paper the term 'award' is used to refer to court orders, CSA awards and private agreements collectively.

³ Parents claiming means tested benefits who refuse to comply with the Agency face a reduction in their Income Support payments unless they can show 'good cause' for not pursuing a claim through the Agency.

⁴ Previous UK studies have generally referred to such agreements as 'voluntary' rather than 'private'.

information on whether an award has been obtained and the type of award is the Families and Children Study or FACS, details of which are described below.

This paper is divided in four parts. First, a brief history of recent developments in UK child support policy is provided, specifically reforms to the CSA. This is followed by an overview of the British and US literature examining award status. FACS data are then used to consider award status in Great Britain; first examining simple descriptive statistics and then moving on to describe results from a series of multivariate regression models. Finally, some conclusions and implications are discussed.

A more detailed understanding of the processes leading to the establishment of awards for child support is important for two reasons. First, obtaining an award is a crucial first step in the process of securing child support payments for mothers and the potential benefits in poverty reduction and work incentives such payments bring. Second, both the Henshaw Redesign report and the recent child support reform White Paper set out a framework for the future placing great emphasis on encouraging private maintenance arrangements along with the end of compulsion. As a result, it is important to consider what factors might be related to the establishment of private agreements and how these relationships might differ in the case of other arrangements. Despite the fact that the data analysed here come from the pre-Henshaw/White Paper reform period, such an analysis may provide insights as to the implications of these proposals.

Recent history of child support arrangements in the UK

Despite the existence of a large number of private agreements to pay child support it is the operation of the CSA which has remained the focus of attention in the UK. The previous Conservative government established the Agency with the aim of shifting the burden of supporting lone parents and their children from the state to the non-resident parent thereby reinforcing parental responsibility. More recently under New Labour, the CSA has come to be seen as an element in the Government's anti-poverty strategy.

The Agency commenced operation in 1993 having been established by the 1991 Child Support Act. Unfortunately, the operation of the Agency over the 1990s appeared to make little difference to the proportion of lone mothers receiving child support payments, which remained at around 30 per cent⁵ over the period. Moreover, the

⁵ It is important to point out that estimates of the proportion of parents with care in receipt of child support are based on responses to survey questions. Since the Child Support Agency came into being, it has become increasingly difficult for some survey respondents, particularly those receiving Income Support, to know whether payments are being made or not (Marsh and Perry, 2003). This is because child support payments under the original child support rules were deducted pound for pound in any assessment of Income Support entitlement. This meant that any maintenance being paid to a mother claiming Income Support went directly to the government and

Agency has not paid for itself. In 2004/5, the net costs of the CSA stood at around £200 million (Department for Work and Pensions, 2006b). For these and other reasons the Agency came under sustained criticism and has remained controversial, attracting a large amount of negative coverage in the media.

One enduring criticism of the Agency has been that its processes and procedures are too complex, difficult to understand and therefore to administer. Partly in response to this, the New Labour Government set about reforming both aspects of the policy and the organisation of the Agency itself. The 2000 Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act, aimed to reform the Agency primarily through addressing the problem of complexity. Furthermore, the Agency's efforts were not just to focus on offsetting costs to the taxpayer but also on alleviating child poverty.

The reforms comprised a significantly simplified formula for calculating the amount of support due. Moreover, a disregard of £10 for lone parents on Income Support known as the Child Maintenance Premium⁶ was introduced. The reforms aimed to speed up the assessment of child support claims and also tighten enforcement procedures (House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 2004). Furthermore, additional sanctions had already been introduced such as deduction from earnings orders (DEOs) with non-compliance becoming an offence from January 2000. Unfortunately, due to problems implementing a new IT system many of the changes were not finally introduced until 2003 (Ridge, 2003).

Despite these reforms, patience with the CSA was wearing thin. By 2004 the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee was describing the Agency as 'a failing organisation.....currently in crisis' (House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 2004: 3). As already noted, the problems centred on difficulties implementing the CS2 IT system but also on a perceived inability to enforce the collection of outstanding payments and a general sense that the Agency was encumbered with a legacy of operational difficulties. The Agency's most recent response to its perceived short-comings is the Operational Improvement Plan (OIP) launched at the start of 2006 (Child Support Agency, 2006). However, at about the same time the Government finally decided to 'call time' on the Agency. In a statement to the House of Commons, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions John Hutton described both the Agency and the policy it represents as 'not fit for purpose'. Moreover, the Secretary of State appointed Sir David Henshaw to completely redesign the UK's system of child support (Hansard 2006: 9 February 2006, column 1021).

therefore in many cases parents with care were unaware as to whether they were technically in receipt or not.

⁶ Since 1997, the Child Maintenance Bonus has also been introduced for parents with care receiving maintenance payments but on Income Support. A one off bonus of up to £1000 is payable on leaving Income Support for work, introduced to further strengthen work incentives.

Sir David Henshaw's recommendations (Department for Work and Pensions, 2006b) were published at the end of July 2006. His analysis of the Agency's problems put failure down to both policy and operational factors. The policy objectives of the Agency were 'overly ambitious' with potentially conflicting joint aims to tackle child poverty and reduce the financial burden on the taxpayer. Furthermore, the complexity of the system, particularly the process through which it sought to make awards sensitive to the circumstances of individuals, made it very difficult to administer efficiently. Moreover, because under the old CSA system the exchequer effectively retained all child support payments made to mothers claiming Income Support, and mothers qualified for only £10 of any payments made under the system introduced from 2003, there was little financial incentive for parents claiming means-tested benefits to co-operate

Sir David Henshaw's recommendations represented a departure from the existing child support system in a number of significant areas. First, parents with care could choose not to have an arrangement for child support in place. Furthermore, parents on benefits would no longer be compelled to use a government agency to obtain an award. The focus instead would be on encouraging parents to reach agreement privately. Where parents could not agree over child support arrangements, a new administrative system would be available to them. The focus of this new system would be on tracing the absent parent, establishing an award, monitoring payment and enforcing compliance.

The recommendations also contained a renewed emphasis on tackling child poverty through child support system. The Henshaw Redesign recommended that a much larger amount of child support be disregarded in the calculation of benefit entitlement and passed through to parents. In addition to having the reduction of poverty firmly in its sights, this recommendation also aimed to increase the incentives for mothers and fathers to arrive at agreements voluntarily. Furthermore, it was hoped that by creating such incentives and generally simplifying the system, the number of parents with care with an award and in receipt of payments might rise. This approach drew inspiration from similar policies found to raise the proportion of mothers in receipt of support in Wisconsin (Meyer and Cancian, 2001).

The New Labour government welcomed the Henshaw Redesign's main conclusions and a White Paper – 'A New System of Child Maintenance' - was published in December 2006 setting out proposals for legislation (Department for Work and Pensions, 2006a). The White Paper built in large part on Henshaw's recommendations placing a strong emphasis on enforcement as well as announcing the new Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission or C-MEC, to replace the Child Support Agency. Private arrangements will underpin the new system with the state stepping in only where agreement is not reached voluntarily. Moreover, the White Paper confirms the intention that no longer should an application for benefits by a parent with care be considered an application for child maintenance, as is the case under current arrangements. Furthermore, measures to encourage more joint registration of births were also outlined.

Previous studies of award status

There are few studies based on data collected in Britain which consider the factors associated with award status. Recent published estimates based on the 2004 FACS survey show that only half of families due child support reported having some type of award (Lyon, Barnes and Sweiry 2006)⁷. Couples were more likely to have an award than lone parents – 60 per cent as compared to 48 per cent – as were older families and working families. Of those with an award, 65 per cent actually received payment.

Previous analysis of FACS and its forerunner studies commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions⁸ showed that award rates drifted up very slightly between the mid 1990s and 2001. The proportion of lone mothers *without* an award declined to 51 per cent in 2001 from 58 per cent in 1994 (Marsh and Perry, 2003). Over the same period, the proportion with court orders fell, which was to be expected. Furthermore, the proportion of private agreements grew slightly. Since the late nineties, the proportion of lone mothers reporting a CSA award has remained at approximately two in ten (see Table 1). It is important to note that these are mothers with CSA awards *only*. Some mothers have a combination of awards, often where there is more than one former partner with whom they have had children. Marsh and Perry (2003) estimate that about 6 per cent of lone mothers with children eligible for support had a CSA award combined with some other arrangement.

Examining compliance by award status, Marsh and Perry (2003) found that receipt was highest under private agreements (92 per cent), compared to court orders (two thirds) and CSA awards (29 per cent). Marsh and Rowlingson 2002 found that award status for lone mothers varied by marital status. Six in ten lone mothers separated from marriage had an award; whilst half of those separated from cohabitation did so, as did just over a quarter of single never married lone mothers. Similar patterns were found by Marsh et al (2001). Lone mothers who worked less than 16 hours per week or not at all were less likely to have an award (four in ten) than mothers who worked longer hours (six in ten) (Marsh and Rowlingson 2002 and Marsh et al 2001). Finally, higher income families were more likely to have arrangements for child support in place.

For more detailed analyses of child support *award status* we need to turn to evidence from the United States, where there are a number of studies that have examined factors associated with award rates, very often as part of a wider investigation into compliance.

⁷ These results differ slightly from the estimates based on 2004 data presented in Table 1 due to the different sample selection criteria used.

⁸ The Survey of Low-income Families (SOLIF) and Programme of Research into Low Income Families (PRILIF)

Generally US studies find that older mothers are more likely to have an award (Beller and Graham, 1986; Hanson et al, 1996; Miller and Garfinkel, 1999) while Black and Hispanic mothers have lower award rates (Argys and Peters, 2001; Beller and Graham, 1986; Hanson et al, 1996; Miller and Garfinkel, 1999; Robins and Dickinson, 1984). However, Teachman (1990) finds the effect of race diminishes once the incomes of both the father and mother at divorce are controlled for. Argys and Peters (2001) find that although award rates are lower for Black families there is on average more contact between Black non-resident fathers and their children.

Studies also find that previous marital status is important. Never married mothers were less likely to have an award than those separated from marriage (Beller and Graham, 1986; Hanson et al, 1996; Teachman 1990). Argys and Peters (2001) find that mothers who re-partner are *less* likely to have an award, whilst the reverse was the case for non-resident fathers. Mother's education has been shown to be important in a number of studies, with better educated mothers more likely to have an award (Argys and Peters, 2001; Beller and Graham, 1986; Hanson et al, 1996; Miller and Garfinkel, 1999; Robins and Dickinson, 1984; and Teachman, 1990). Argys and Peters (2001), however, find that father's education had no effect on whether an award was in place. Most US studies find that families are more likely to have an award the more children due support (Hanson et al, 1996; Argys and Peters, 2001; and Miller and Garfinkel, 1999).

Child support arrangements vary across the US, from state to state, and studies also find regional variations in award rates (Beller and Graham, 1986; and Robins and Dickinson, 1984). Other research looks at the affects of state expenditure on the collection of child support, efficiency of expenditure and enforcement provisions on award status (for example Argys and Peters, 2001 and Miller and Garfinkel, 1999). As one might expect, these studies find that tougher enforcement leads to higher award rates.

Teachman (1990), Hanson et al (1996) and Robins and Dickinson (1984) look at the economic position of mothers and fathers and award status. Robins and Dickinson (1984) find that employed mothers are more likely to have an award than those without work. Teachman (1990) found only a small statistically significant effect of father's income on award status and that mother's income at divorce was positively associated with subsequently obtaining an award. Hanson et al (1996), however, found that mothers' incomes at time of divorce or first birth was negatively associated with award status but that the reverse was the case for fathers.

Huang and Pouncy (2005) look at factors determining the type of child support arrangements mothers have. They distinguish between formal and informal arrangements⁹, and find that better qualified mothers with more children, living in

⁹ In Huang and Pouncy (2005) a 'formal' legal agreement referred to the position where mothers had a legally enforceable written document, whilst an 'informal' agreement related to a verbal or written agreement which was not legally enforceable. Huang and

rural areas were more likely to have ‘formal legal’ agreements for child support; whereas those from minority ethnic groups, those never married, separated or remarried, or living in city centres were more likely to have no award. Those with ‘informal’ arrangements tended to be younger, separated, have a high school education and larger families.

The data

The data come from the Families and Children Study, or FACS. FACS is an annual longitudinal survey comprising face-to-face interviews with around 7,500 parents. The sample is topped-up or refreshed at each wave so that the data from any given year can be analysed as a representative cross-section. In most cases the main respondent is the mother, the sample having originally been drawn from Child Benefit records. For the bulk of the analysis discussed in this paper the data come from four waves of FACS collected over the period 2001 to 2004¹⁰.

The analysis is based on two samples. First, the 2004 FACS cross section sample is used to provide descriptive statistics of mothers’ award status by various classificatory variables. The sample is restricted to families containing children who have a living non-resident parent liable to pay child support. Families without dependent children¹¹ were excluded, as were those where a male was the main respondent thereby removing lone father households¹². Second, samples for the years 2001, 2002 and 2003 were selected on the same criteria as that for 2004. These four samples were then pooled to provide a large sample of observations on families due child support payments and upon which the main analyses are conducted¹³.

Pouncy also included mothers in their analyses who had a ‘legal’ support order pending.

¹⁰ FACS was previously known as the Survey of Low Income Families or SOLIF. Data were collected in 1999 and 2000 from low to moderate income families only and so have not been used in the analysis here.

¹¹ Where a dependent child is defined as being aged 16 or under, or under 19 and in full-time education.

¹² Lone fathers comprise about four percent of the initial sample and are excluded because the small sample numbers make it difficult to draw reliable conclusions concerning their position. Their situation is also likely to be quite different to that of mothers.

¹³ It is possible that by pooling the data mothers who have split recently are under-represented. Once a mother has separated, they enter the sample and remain in it because of the repeated observations on the same mothers. Thus recent splitters might form a lower fraction of the pooled sample than they would of a cross-section sample. In order to test for this, the length of time since mothers had separated from their last partner in the pooled dataset was compared to the length of time since mothers had

It is likely that some mothers may make mistakes in reporting their award status. For example, once in place an award should remain in force until the child concerned reaches at least their 16th birthday. Marsh and Rowlingson (2002) noted, however, that some mothers interviewed as part of FACS considered their award to have ceased when payments were no longer received even though ‘technically’ they still had an award. This is likely particularly in the case of private agreements; though some mothers with CSA awards may also view their award to have expired when payments are no longer made. Generally, it seems reasonable to question whether a private agreement can be said to exist if no payment is received, even though a commitment to pay was at one time made. Furthermore some mothers may have pursued a claim for support but the CSA has assessed the father to have a zero liability. Administrative statistics based on data from the CSA show that around a third of calculated assessments were for zero amounts at June 2006 (Department for Work and Pensions, 2006), whereas FACS data in 2004 suggest that this was the case with only around eight per cent of CSA awards. Thus a substantial number of mothers may have an award but not be due payments. Mothers in such circumstances might consider themselves *not to have award* even though ‘technically’ an award has been made. Other mothers, those claiming means-tested benefits, because they receive no payments under the old CSA system may consider themselves again not to have an award, or at least may respond as such when questioned in a survey. Therefore, FACS data may undercount both private and CSA awards and this may explain the apparent discrepancy between survey and administrative data sources at least in respect of the CSA. Further potential problems with FACS data mentioned in the introductory remarks surrounds the potential for confusion among respondents as to whether their award is a court order or a private agreement.

As previously noted, the data come from responses obtained from mothers. In both the British and US literature attempts have been made to account for the discrepant reports given by separated mothers and fathers in different surveys to questions regarding the level of contact between non-resident fathers and their children, and the payment of child support. For example, Bradshaw, et al (1999) for the UK attempt to account for the divergence between reported receipt of child support by mothers and payments by fathers. Atkinson and McKay (2005) report considerable differences between the accounts of non-resident parents and parents with care as to whether support was paid or not, but fewer differences in reported levels of contact. Wikeley, et al (2001), one of the few studies to draw a matched sample of non-resident parents and parents with care found that separated mothers and fathers accounts of contact and payments often differed.

These findings raise concerns as to the reliance on mothers’ reports of award status, contact and the non-resident fathers’ employment status used here. Some consolation in relying on mothers’ reports can be derived, however, from the conclusions drawn from US studies suggesting that non-resident fathers tend to over-state payment of

separated in the 2004 FACS cross-section data set. This comparison revealed no significant differences.

child support while mothers give accurate accounts (Del Boca, 2003; Schaeffer, Seltzer and Kawitter, 1991).

Analytical approach

The main analyses discussed in this paper comprise a series of multivariate regression models. Two types of regression models are estimated. First, probit regression models are used to explore the relationship between a series of explanatory variables and the probability that a mother has ‘no award’. Second, a multinomial logistic regression model is estimated to examine the net effects of the same variables on the type of award mothers’ have. Both types of model are estimated on the pooled sample described previously.

The dependent variable in the multinomial logit model identifies whether the mother has a private agreement, a CSA award, or no award; cases where mothers had court orders or more than one type of award¹⁴ were excluded from the analysis. Table 1 below, examines the percentages of mothers due support by various forms of award/agreement by year, along with the un-weighted total sample sizes in each year and the total pooled sample size.

¹⁴ Mothers reporting court orders are likely to have been misclassified or their awards pre-date the Child Support Agency and are therefore of less importance in terms of current policy. Mothers with combined awards make up a small proportion of the sample, around six per cent and for the sake of clarity are omitted. A multinomial logistic regression model with five outcomes – court order only, private agreement only, CSA award only, no award and combinations was also estimated alongside the three outcome model reported here. The coefficient estimates in the two models for the outcomes common to both are very similar.

Table 1: Orders, agreements and awards for child support for lone mothers and step families (where mother main respondent) (FACS 2001-2004)

	2001	2002	2003	2004	Pooled sample size (un-weighted)
	<i>Column Percentages</i>				
Court order only	4	5	4	4	421
Private agreement only	19	20	21	23	1,918
Child Support Agency assessment only	19	20	19	20	1,862
Combinations (multiple awards)	7	6	6	6	586
No award	51	48	50	47	4,621
Un-weighted sample size	2,363	2,430	2,355	2,260	9,408

Notes: weighted estimates

In terms of the regression models, it is assumed that whether an award for child support is in place is determined by:

- The non-resident father's ability to pay and other aspects of his circumstances;
- The strength of ties between the non-resident father, the resident mother, and his children reflecting the father's willing to pay;
- The economic circumstance of the mother and children;
- Following previous research, the demographic characteristics of the mother which are important in their own right but also due to assortive mating (Garfinkel, Gleib and McLanahan, 2002) are likely to vary with certain important characteristics of the non-resident father; and
- The policy and institutional context.

Generally, it might be expected that non-resident fathers with higher incomes would be more likely to establish child support arrangements - they have more resources to devote to their children! Moreover, any amount awarded would be higher for fathers on larger incomes thus creating a greater incentive for mothers to pursue a claim. Furthermore, higher income fathers are more likely to have been married to their ex-partner, possibly signifying stronger ties with the mother and children, and thus an increased probability that an award has been made or agreement reached. Alternatively, married fathers may be less able to avoid enforcement. It is also possible that due to assortive mating higher income fathers are more likely to have partnered with mothers better able to negotiate arrangements for child support.

A major limitation of FACS data, other than those previously noted, is that the income or earnings of the non-resident father is not recorded. Instead, the employment status of the non-resident father as reported by the resident mother is used as an indicator of the father's ability to pay. A further complication is that quite a large proportion of mothers did not know the employment status of the non-resident father. These mothers were kept in the analysis and identified as a separate category. Employment status, however, is only a weak indicator of ability to pay, with fathers on low earnings likely to find it difficult to always meet their obligations.

The father's strength of ties with his children and ex-partner were captured by variables which describe the extent of contact between the non-resident father, his children and his ex-partner; a variable which records the length of time since the parents separated; and a variable which recorded prior marital status. Generally, it might be expected that fathers with closer ties would be more likely to have an agreement or award for child support in place. Alternatively, those in very close contact might provide forms of informal support which could be placed in jeopardy should more formal arrangements be pursued. Therefore for some mothers there may be less of an incentive to obtain formal arrangements where contact is frequent. Furthermore, where there is 'shared-care' of children and contact is frequent, non-resident fathers may be assessed through the CSA as having a zero maintenance liability; in these circumstances mothers may tend to under report awards.

As the time since separation grows¹⁵, it might be reasonable to expect that the chances of a mother having an award will decline. This is so because the ties between a non-resident father and his children might be expected to grow weaker.

The inclusion of a variable measuring the extent of contact raises the issue of whether contact is a cause of award status, or a consequence of it? Put a different way, it is difficult to determine the direction of causality. For example, fathers subject to a CSA award where no prior contact between the father and his children had occurred may subsequently seek contact in order to determine whether the maintenance paid is used in a manner they approve of. Alternatively, and more consistent with the models estimated here, fathers in regular contact may be more likely to co-operate in establishing an award in the first place.

The economic position of the parent with care and her family are captured through the mother's work status and whether she claims Income Support¹⁶. Similarly to contact, the problem of reverse causation also affects the interpretation of coefficients associated with Income Support and mother's employment status. Families where the

¹⁵ As mothers may have had more than one previous relationship, the variable which measures time since separation does so for the mother's last relationship only

¹⁶ Family income though available has not been used in the analysis here. This is because it has not proved possible to accurately subtract out maintenance receipts from total family income in the waves of FACS data analysed, specifically where there is partial compliance.

mother does not work and/or where she claims Income Support are in greater need. Where non-resident fathers are motivated to make provision for their children in response to need, it might be expected that employed mothers might be less likely to have an award. Conversely, working mothers may possess certain skills or attributes which make them more effective in pursuing a claim. Alternatively, mothers with an award and in receipt of maintenance may supply fewer hours as a result of an ‘income effect’ on their labour supply.

The effect of an Income Support claim on award status is complicated by the fact that claimants are effectively compelled to co-operate with the CSA. Therefore for two reasons: their greater need and the operation of the CSA, it might be expected that mothers claiming Income Support would be more likely to have an award. However as discussed previously, because of the way child support payments are treated in Income Support there is little incentive for these mothers to pursue a non-resident father or co-operate with the Agency, and mothers claiming Income Support may under-report awards. Furthermore, for women out of work and for those claiming IS their ex-partners may have relatively low earnings and be more likely to claim benefits themselves. In addition, the data reveal that quite a sizeable proportion of mothers on Income Support continue to hold private agreements, suggesting a weak enforcement environment for mothers who claim state benefits – though it is important to remember that these data may undercount awards particularly among IS claimants.

The socio-demographic characteristics of mothers controlled for in the analysis include age, age of youngest child, ethnic group, highest qualification, housing tenure, number of children due support, current partnership status and region. The inclusion of these variables is motivated by findings from previous research. Current partnership status controls for the effect of re-partnering.

The inclusion of dummy variables capturing successive years in the analysis can to some extent control for the effects of policy changes over time. During the period over which the data were collected one major policy change took place - the 2003 CSA reforms. It is possible that the year dummy variables included in the models might capture some of the effect of these reforms. Furthermore, child support services delivered through the Agency are done so through six offices located in different parts of the UK and serving different regions¹⁷. The regional dummy variables in the models may, to a limited extent, pick-up differential performance by these offices.

Previous studies suggest that geographical distance between the home in which the children live and that of the non-resident father, whether he has re-partnered, is living with other children for whom he has responsibility, and whether he is currently

¹⁷ The Child Support Agency’s regional offices are located in Belfast (covering the East of England and Northern Ireland) Dudley (the English Midlands) Falkirk (Scotland and North East England) Hastings (South East England) Plymouth (South West England) and Birkenhead (covering Wales and North West England).

married to a different partner, may all be important determinants of award status. Unfortunately FACS data do not allow these factors to be controlled for directly in the analysis and their omission is likely to lead to some biases.

Descriptive analysis

Tables 2, 3 and 4 examine award status by various socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the mother. The data come from the 2004 FACS survey. The analysis distinguishes between the type of award a mother had and whether she had an award at all. Where mothers report having an award they are grouped on the basis of whether they had a court order, private agreement, CSA award, or some combination of these.

Table 2, reveals that mothers with court orders, reflecting policy changes, tended to be quite a bit older than mothers with other types of award and those mothers with no award tend to be younger. As a result, mothers with no award have younger children. A third of mothers with a CSA award were living with a partner, whilst 27 per cent with a private agreement were doing so and less than a quarter of mothers with no award. Mothers with no award also tended to be poorly qualified: 28 per cent had no formal qualifications, compared to 19 per cent of mothers with a CSA award and 13 per cent of mothers with a court order. One in ten of mothers with no award were from a non-white ethnic group. This compared to only three percent of mothers with a CSA award and five percent of mothers with a private agreement.

The analysis of award status by region revealed some interesting variations. Most notable of which were the high proportions of mothers without awards in London and Wales. In both regions two thirds of mothers eligible for child support were without an award. In Wales, this appeared to be due to low rates of both private agreements and CSA awards, whereas in London, it appears mainly due to the low rate of CSA awards, by far the lowest proportion of any region. The rate at which mothers reported having a CSA award was also low in the East Midlands.

Table 2: Awards by mother's basic socio-demographic indicators, FACS 2004

	Court Order only	Private Agreement only	Child Support Agency Award only	Combination	No Award/ Agreement or Order
	<i>Column percentages</i>				
Age of mother					
Under 25	1	8	11	10	19
25 to 29	3	14	12	10	16
30 to 39	34	45	51	44	41
40 or over	62	34	26	37	24
Age of youngest child					
2 or under	9	25	24	24	32
3 to 4	6	15	11	15	13
5 to 11	38	40	41	38	35
12 to 16	39	17	22	19	17
17 or over	8	3	2	5	2
Current partnership status					
Couple/re-partnered	36	27	33	34	23
Lone parent	64	73	67	66	77
Ethnic group					
White	96	95	97	96	90
Non-white	4	5	3	4	10
Highest qualification of the mother					
None	13	14	19	18	28
GCSE	42	56	63	62	56
A Level	15	12	10	5	9
Degree	26	15	6	13	6
Other	5	3	1	1	1
Un-weighted sample size	97	520	454	130	1,059

	Court Order only	Private Agreement only	Child Support Agency Award only	Combination	No Award/ Agreement or Order
	<i>Row percentages</i>				
Region					
North East	2	21	24	6	47
North West	4	23	21	4	47
Yorks and Humber	4	25	20	6	44
East Midlands	4	21	15	4	56
West Midlands	7	20	25	9	39
South West	5	27	21	9	39
Eastern	3	23	27	7	40
London	3	22	8	3	64
South East	7	29	20	6	38
Wales	3	14	15	4	64
Scotland	2	28	21	4	45

Base: 2260 families, with dependent children, with at least once child with a living parent residing outside the household – female respondents only thereby excluding lone fathers. Those who respond to the marital status question indicating that they are widows are also excluded.
Weighted estimates

Table 3 examines mothers' award status by their economic position defined on the basis of their housing tenure, employment status and whether they claimed Income Support.

Table 3: Awards by economic circumstances of the mother FACS 2004

	Court Order	Private Agreement	Child Support Agency Award	Combinations	No Award/ Agreement or Order
	<i>Column percentages</i>				
Mother's tenure					
Social	14	24	45	34	55
Private	9	12	14	12	15
Owner occup.	77	60	38	52	26
Other	0	4	4	3	4
Mother's work status					
Working 30+ hours	44	38	21	36	20
Working 16-29 hours	25	34	33	28	18
Working less than 16 hours	4	6	4	6	5
Not working	27	23	43	29	57
Income Support status					
Not received	92	86	65	84	51
Received	8	14	35	16	49
Un-weighted sample size	97	520	454	130	1,059

Base: 2260 families, with dependent children, with at least once child with a living parent residing outside the household – female respondents only thereby excluding lone fathers. Those who respond to the marital status question indicating that they are widows are also excluded.
Weighted estimates

The results reveal that mothers without awards are significantly disadvantaged compared to other mothers due support, particularly compared to those mothers with court orders and private agreements. Over half of them are social tenants compared to less than a quarter of those with a private agreement. Nearly six in ten are out of work, compared to 43 per cent of mothers with a CSA award and 23 per cent of mothers with a private arrangement. Moreover, half receive Income Support compared to just over a third of CSA award mothers.

**Table 4: Awards by previous relationship and position of the non-resident father
FACS 2004**

	Court Order	Private Agreement	Child Support Agency Award	Combinations	No Award/ Agreement or Order
	<i>Column percentage</i>				
Mother lived with NRP any time since 12 months before birth of eldest child?					
No	10	15	20	15	36
Yes	90	85	80	85	64
	<i>Column percentages: all mothers with a previous relationship</i>				
Whether married in last relationship?					
Yes	84	60	57	64	47
No	16	40	43	36	53
Mean length of last relationship in months	113	104	77	79	76
Length of time in months since end of last relationship (excluding current relationship for those in a couple)	99	58	77	82	78
Un-weighted sample size – those with a previous relationship	89	444	366	111	683
	<i>Column percentages</i>				
Contact NRP and child(ren)					
Daily	3	10	5	5	10
Weekly	31	60	31	49	29
Fortnightly	16	12	13	13	6
Monthly	11	6	8	10	6
Yearly	13	8	11	8	9
Less often	6	1	5	2	4
No contact	21	2	26	14	36
Contact NRP and PWC					
Daily	1	10	4	3	9
Weekly	19	50	22	40	22
Fortnightly	12	10	7	11	5
Monthly	8	10	7	9	5
Yearly	12	7	12	6	8
Less often	9	2	6	3	5
No contact	39	11	42	28	46
Mean number of children with a living non-resident parent in family	1.5	1.7	1.8	1.7	1.6

	Court Order	Private Agreement	Child Support Agency Award	Combinations	No Award/ Agreement or Order
NRP employment status					
Employed NRP	71	83	63	76	37
Employment status of NRP unknown	14	6	20	14	37
Un-weighted sample size – all mothers	97	520	454	130	1,059

Base: 2260 families, with dependent children, with at least once child with a living parent residing outside the household – female respondents only thereby excluding lone fathers. Those who respond to the marital status question indicating that they are widows are also excluded.
Weighted estimates

It appears that mothers without an award live in less favourable economic circumstances compared to other families eligible for child support. They have higher levels of welfare receipt and lower rates of employment. However, it must also be acknowledged that mothers with CSA awards are also a relatively disadvantaged group. They too have high rates of Income Support receipt and low levels of working.

Table 4, considers award status by various aspects of the mother’s last relationship: whether she was married, the length of time her last relationship lasted and the length of time since she separated from her last partner. Contact between the mother and the non-resident father, and the children and the non-resident father, are also examined, as is his employment status.

Over a third of mothers with no award had never lived with the father of their children¹⁸. This compares to one fifth of mothers with a CSA award and 15 per cent of mothers with a private agreement. Mothers with no award who had lived with the non-resident father were less likely to have been married to him, and their last relationships on average did not last as long, particularly compared to mothers with private agreements. However, mothers with private agreements tended to have had relationships which ended more recently.

Four in ten mothers without an award reported that at least one of their children had daily or weekly contact with the father, while over a third reported no contact between their children and the non-resident father. Very different patterns of contact were reported by mothers with private agreements. Seven in ten reported daily or weekly contact and only two per cent no contact.

¹⁸ That is in the period commencing 12 months prior to the birth of the first child up to the date of interview

Only 37 per cent of mothers without an award knew that the non-resident father was in work. This is in stark contrast to the 83 per cent of mothers with a private agreement who could say the same. Only six per cent of mothers with a private agreement were unaware of the work status of the non-resident father, compared to well over a third of mothers without an award. The rate of employment of non-resident fathers reported by mothers with a CSA award was higher than those reported by mothers without an award but lower than those reported by mothers with private agreements.

To summarise, those mothers with CSA awards tend to be more like mothers without awards, though less disadvantaged. Mothers who report private agreements are more likely to be owner-occupiers and much less likely to claim Income Support. They tend to have split from their former partners more recently and there were higher rates of contact between the children and the non-resident father as well as between the mother and the non-resident father. Mothers with private agreements were more likely to have lived with their former partner and their relationships had lasted longer.

Probability of mothers having no award

These descriptive analysis suggest that mothers without an award for child support are more disadvantaged and that the characteristics of mothers vary by type of award. However, without resorting to multivariate regression analysis it is difficult to describe the net effect of these characteristics on the probability of having an award. In this section, results from two simple probit regression models are reported, exploring the net effects of variables on the probability that a mother has no award; in the section which follows regression analysis is used to examine the different types of awards mothers have.

Table 5, presents the results from the two models. The sample upon which Model 1 is estimated comprises all mothers caring for a child with a non-resident father liable to pay child support. The sample is the pooled sample, containing mothers from all four waves of FACS, giving a total sample size of around 9,300. Model 2 is estimated on a sub-sample of mothers who had lived with the father of their children. The second model allows additional information about the last relationship of the mother to be included in the analysis. Because the samples are longitudinal, the same mother can appear up to four times in the sample and this is taken into account in the estimation of standard errors and associated hypotheses tests.

Table 5: Effects of explanatory variables on the probability of the mother having no award (probit regressions)

	Model 1 – all mothers eligible for child support	Model 2 – mothers who lived with the NRP
	Marginal effects	Marginal effects
Year (2001)		
2002	-.015	-.026*
2003	-.007	-.017
2004	-.031**	-.047**
Age group of the mother (under 25 years)		
25 to 29	-.003	-.008
30 to 40	-.038	-.074**
Over 40	-.041	-.096**
Age of youngest child (under 2)		
3 to 4	-.017	-.018
5 to 11	.001	.024
12 to 16	-.008	.012
17 or over	.077*	.130***
Number of children due support (One)		
Two	-.055***	-.040**
Three or more	-.068***	-.037
Mother's Ethnic group (white)		
Black	.023	.044
Asian	.140**	.160**
Other (including mixed race)	.157***	.133**
Current partnership status (couple)		
Lone parent	-.013	-.030
Highest qualification of the mother (no qualifications)		
GCSE	-.054***	-.041*
A Level	-.079***	-.067**
Degree	-.034	-.023
Other	-.041	-.042
Region (North East)		
North West	.038	.070
Yorks & Humber	.078**	.087*
East Midlands	.070*	.105**
West Midlands	-.020	-.006
South West	-.079**	-.053
Eastern	.023	.041
London	.097**	.146***
South East	.026	.058

	Model 1 – all mothers eligible for child support	Model 2 – mothers who lived with the NRP
Wales	.107***	.118**
Scotland	.028	.040
Mother's Income Support receipt (no claim):		
On Income Support	.091***	.098***
Mother's work status (works 30 hours or more)		
16-29 hours	-.045**	-.058**
Less than 16 hours	.001	-.016
No work	.025	.027
Tenure (social tenant):		
Private tenant	-.005	-.003
Owner Occ.	-.097***	-.117***
Other	-.125***	-.096**
Frequency of contact between non-resident father and children (Daily)		
Weekly	-.092***	-.095***
Fortnightly	-.115***	-.143***
Monthly	-.010	-.030
Annually	-.013	-.032
Less often	.086**	.069
No contact	.113***	.097***
Employment of non-resident father (not employed)		
Employed	-.272***	-.261***
Status unknown	.033	.022
Length of time since end of last relationship (5 to 10 years)		
Less than 12 months	.119***	.093***
1 to 3 years	-.031	-.049**
3 to 5 years	.002	-.009
10 to 15 years	.001	.017
15 years or more	.067	.096**
No previous partnership (never lived with father)	.115***	n/a
Length of time last relationship lasted (less than three years)		
3 to 10 years		.030
10 to 15 years		.061*
Over 15 years		.127**
Whether mother was married to the non-resident father (Yes, married)		
No, not married		.068***

Reference or contrast categories in parentheses

Model 1 percentage correct predictions 72 per cent, sample size 9,277, Pseudo r-squared 0.19

Model 2 percentage correct predictions 72 per cent, sample size 6,988, Pseudo r-squared 0.17

Standard errors are adjusted for repeated observations on the same mother

* .05 < p < .10, ** .01 < p < .05, *** p < .01

The coefficients reported in the Table 5 for both models are marginal effects. These show the change in the probability of a mother having no award if she were to move to the category indicated from a reference or contrast category. In Table 5, the reference or contrast category for each variable is identified within the brackets next to the variable names in bold. Coefficients with a positive sign indicate an increased probability of having no award, while those with a negative sign a reduced probability. The discussion focuses on results from Model 1, referring to those from Model 2 where there are notable differences.

In Model 1, net of other effects, mothers in 2004 displayed on average a three per cent lower probability of being without an award than equivalent mothers in 2001. Model 2 reveals a slightly greater increase, suggesting never-partnered mothers excluded from Model 2 have not benefited as much from the increase in award rates. The observed improvements in award rates may be capturing the effects of reforms introduced through the 2000 Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act (though see results from the multinomial logit regression in the next section).

US studies find that mother's age is positively related to the probability of an award. In Model 1, the probability of no award did decline with age though the effects were not statistically significant at conventional levels. In Model 2, older mothers were more likely to have an award. The age effects were also statistically significant in Model 2.

All things being equal, compared to mothers with one child, those with two or more children were more likely to have an award. This suggests possibly that either women with larger families were more likely to pursue a non-resident father for child support, may be because of greater need, or because of greater need fathers are more likely to co-operate with attempts to establish an award. This finding is in line with findings from the US.

As was the case in US studies, ethnic group was also an important determinant of award status. Relative to Whites, Blacks displayed a slight but not statistically significant increased probability of no award. However, among 'Asian' mothers and those categorised as 'Other' (including mixed-race mothers) the probability of no award was substantially higher than it was for Whites. In Model 1, the probability of no award for Asian mothers was 14 per cent *higher* than for Whites, while the probability of no award for those categorised as 'Other' (including mixed race mothers) 16 per cent higher.

The regional differences in award rates noted previously were also apparent in the regression results. All things being equal, mothers in Yorkshire and Humberside, the

East Midlands, London and Wales had an increased probability of no award compared to mothers in the North East of England. Mothers in the South West were more likely to have an award. This regional variation in award rates could be due to variations in patterns of family breakdown, parenting apart or socio-economic factors. As previously suggested, these results might be picking-up variations in the performance of CSA regional offices. In Model 2, the relative disadvantage for mothers in Yorkshire, East Midlands, London and Wales compared to those in the North East appear to be greater.

Despite the requirement for mandatory cooperation with the CSA, all things being equal, mothers claiming Income Support were less likely to report an award than those not claiming. In Model 1, the probability of not having an award for mothers on Income Support was nine per cent higher. It has been widely recognised that there is little incentive for lone mothers claiming Income Support to pursue a claim, a problem acknowledged by the Henshaw Redesign (Department for Work and Pensions, 2006b). Moreover, although the inclusion of the father's employment status attempts to control for his ability to pay, it can only do so imperfectly. Thus some of the increased probability of no award for mothers on Income Support found in these models may reflect a relatively low capacity to pay among fathers and the possibility that mothers on Income Support have a tendency to under report awards.

Mothers who worked 30 hours or more were less likely to have an award than mothers who worked part-time hours¹⁹. In Model 1, part-time mothers had a probability of no award five per cent lower, all things being equal, than mothers working full-time. This may suggest that for some mothers establishing their financial independence is important and this motivation manifests itself in full-time work and a reduced tendency to seek child support. Alternatively, mothers working part-time may have been more likely in the past to have claimed Income Support than those working full-time, and thus more likely to have had contact with the CSA. An 'income effect' may also be discernable, whereby mothers reduce their hours in response increased income from maintenance payments. As mentioned previously, however, the direction of the relationship between mothers' work and award status is difficult to interpret.

Contact is an important variable in both models and the results are similar in both, but again the direction of the effect is not clear. Does contact reveal stronger ties between an absent father and his children and thus a greater willingness to enter into formal arrangements for child support? Alternatively, does entering into an agreement to pay support raise the probability that a father will seek contact or be given access to his children? Fathers in such circumstances, compelled to cooperate and possibly pay support might subsequently seek contact. Or, fathers may feel making payments gives them the right to spend more time with their children (Atkinson and McKay, 2005). Alternatively, mothers might prevent contact until the father agrees to pay support.

¹⁹ Part time hours are 16 to 29 hours per week. Full-time hours are 30 or more hours per week.

Model 1 reveals quite a complex relationship between contact and award status. Where fathers are in weekly or fortnightly contact with their children the probability of having no award for mothers is nine and 12 per cent lower respectively than those in daily contact. In other words, those who reported daily contact were less likely to have an award than those reporting weekly or fortnightly contact. However, the probability of no award for mothers was much higher where fathers had no contact with their children.

Thus the probability of an award being in place is highest where contact between fathers and their children is weekly or fortnightly, then daily and least likely where there is no contact. Daily contact between fathers and their children in all likelihood signifies some form of shared care. In such circumstances, mothers may be unwilling to pursue formal child support arrangements that could place such support and daily contact in jeopardy. Alternatively, the possibility that many fathers in daily contact have zero award assessments and thus mothers fail to acknowledge the existence of an award when questioned may partly explain these results.

All things being equal, where the father's employment status was known and he was in work, the chances of an award were substantially higher for mothers. Again the direction of causality is a little ambiguous. Fathers' previously out of work might seek employment in order to meet their child support obligations. Alternatively, a father may avoid entering employment as this may increase the chances of the mother pursuing an award and or give rise to a positive liability where an award is in place. On the other hand and probably more likely, employment status may be strongly correlated with willingness as well as ability to pay and thus with award status. The results from Model 1 show that the probability of no award for mothers *with* a non-resident father in work (where his employment status is known) was over 25 per cent *less* on average than it was where the non-resident father was out of work.

There was a slight increase in the probability of no award as the length of time since separation grew. Compared to those who had been separated for between five to 10 years, there was a slightly *reduced probability* of no award for those who had been separated for one to three years, and an *increased probability* for those separated for over 15 years. Neither of these effects, however, were statistically significant at conventional levels. The exception to this pattern was that compared to those separated for between five and ten years, those separated for less than 12 months had an increased probability of no award. This suggests that mothers and fathers take time after separation to establish arrangements. Mothers who had never lived with the father(s) of their children also had an increased probability of no award.

Model 2, estimated on a sample of mothers who had formerly lived with a partner, includes two additional variables which measure the length of the mother's last relationship and whether they were married. Unexpectedly, length of former relationship appears to be positively related to the probability of no award. Mothers whose former relationship lasted for over fifteen years had an *increased* probability of reporting no award of 13 per cent after controlling for other factors. This seems

counter intuitive. It would be reasonable to expect that mothers separated from long standing relationships would be more likely to have reported having an award for child support, not less likely as these results suggest.

In contrast to these results, a simple tabulation of length of last relationship by award status shows that those whose last relationships were longer were *more* likely to have awards not less likely. Viewed alongside the results in Table 5, this suggests that it is *not* length of relationship itself with might raise the likelihood of an award but the types of mothers and fathers that have longer relationships. Once the characteristics of these mothers and fathers are controlled for, those with longer relationships appear to be less likely to have an award in place. However, it is still not clear why, after controlling for the full set of variables, those who had longer relationships were less likely to have awards.

Finally, model 2 contained a variable which recorded whether the mother and the non-resident father were previously married. In some cases the mother and non-resident father may still be legally married at the time of interview. Where fathers were married to the mother it might be expected this would signal a greater commitment to both the mother and children, and thus a greater likelihood of ongoing support post-separation and therefore a higher probability of an award being in place. Alternatively, married men may be more likely to come into contact with formal institutional structures than non-married men, which compel them to enter into agreements. Results from Model 2 reveal that the probability of no award was 7 per cent higher for mothers who were not married to their former partners.

These simple probit regression models show that the probability of having a child support award was linked to the number of children due support, ethnicity, the region in which the mother lived, her Income Support status, tenure and work status. In addition, where there was contact between the father and his children, and the father worked, mothers were more likely to report having arrangements in place. All things being equal those who had split from the father of their children in the last 12 months were less likely to report having an award than those who had been separated for between five to 10 years, as were those who have never lived with the father.

Relative risks of different types of award

In this next section, a multinomial logit regression model is used to examine the type of child support award a mother has by the same set of explanatory variables used in the previous regression models. The results are reported in Table 6. The effect of a given variable is expressed as the relative risk of having a certain type of award compared for example to no award. A coefficient greater than one indicates the variable concerned increases the relative risks of, for instances, having a private agreement as opposed to no award, relative to a contrast or reference category. Coefficients of less than one indicate a reduced risk.

The relative risk of having a private agreement as opposed to no award in 2004, was approximately 1.3 times (or 28 per cent higher) the risk of having a private agreement rather than no award in 2001. Similarly, the odds of having a CSA rather than no award in 2004 compared to 2001 were 1.13 times or 13 per cent higher. The latter effect, however, was not statistically significant at conventional levels. So the increase in award rates in 2004 compared to 2001 (see previous section) is more likely to be due, all things being equal, to an increase in private agreements. There is some evidence that mothers are more likely to have CSA awards in 2004 than 2001, though we can be less sure about this.

As the age of youngest child rose the risk of having a private agreement as compared to no award fell. The risk of having a private agreement compared to CSA award also fell. This suggests that as the age of the youngest child rises, mothers are more likely to have CSA awards or no award than a private agreement.

Mothers with three or more children had relative risks 1.7 times greater than those with one child of reporting a CSA award rather than no award. The number of children did not help distinguish between private agreements and no award, therefore mothers with larger families tended therefore to have CSA awards.

Table 6: Model 2 - Relative risk of private agreements and Child Support Agency awards compared to no award – multinomial logit model (relative risk ratios)

	Private agreements over no award	Private agreements over CSA awards	CSA awards over no award
Year (2001)			
2002	1.107	1.031	1.074
2003	1.060	0.985	1.076
2004	1.277***	1.129	1.131
Age group of the mother (under 25 years)			
25 to 29	1.014	.9810	1.034
30 to 40	1.130	1.001	1.130
Over 40	1.194	1.236	.966
Age of youngest child (under 2)			
3 to 4	.938	.809	1.159
5 to 11	.843	.719**	1.173
12 to 16	.739*	.590***	1.253
17 or over	.497***	.600*	.829
Number of children due support (One)			
Two	.993	.721***	1.377***
Three of more	.861	.514***	1.674***
Mother's Ethnic group (white)			
Black	1.145	1.430	.800
Asian	.538	1.264	.426**
Other (including mixed race)	.745	1.990	.374**
Current partnership status (couple)			
Lone parent	1.072	1.117	.959
Highest qualification of the mother (no qualifications)			
GCSE	1.164	.877	1.327***
A Level	1.361*	1.157	1.177
Degree	1.167	1.319	.884
Other	1.259	1.662	.757
Region (North East)			
North West	1.017	1.252	.813
Yorks & Humber	.951	1.472	.646**
East Midlands	1.039	1.622*	.641**
West Midlands	1.177	1.131	1.040
South West	1.885***	1.495	1.261
Eastern	1.063	1.390	.765
London	1.313	2.989***	.439***
South East	1.334	1.970**	.677**

	Private agreements over no award	Private agreements over CSA awards	CSA awards over no award
Wales	.864	1.626	.531***
Scotland	1.532*	2.197***	.697*
Mother's Income Support receipt (no claim)			
On Income Support	.483***	.506***	.954
Mother's work status (works 30 hours or more)			
16-29 hours	1.097	.691***	1.588***
Less than 16 hours	1.044	1.003	1.041
No work	.678**	.561***	1.209
Tenure (social tenant):			
Private tenant	1.019	1.028	.991
Owner Occ.	1.908***	1.694***	1.126
Other	1.700**	1.038	1.638**
Frequency of contact between non-resident father and children (Daily)			
Weekly	1.242*	.740**	1.679***
Fortnightly	1.076	.448***	2.401***
Monthly	.643**	.378***	1.700***
Annually	.534***	.261***	2.044***
Less often	.171***	.111***	1.534**
No contact	.061***	.040***	1.520***
Employment of non-resident father (not employed)			
Employed	3.403***	1.258*	2.706***
Status unknown	.746**	.883	.845
Length of time since end of last relationship (Less than 12 months)			
1 to 3 years	1.656***	.632***	2.621***
3 to 5 years	1.148	.436***	2.630***
5 to 10 years	.832	.254***	3.276***
10 to 15 years	.865	.354***	2.444***
15 years or more	.512**	.294***	1.739**
No previous partnership (never lived with father)	.746*	.437***	1.703***

Reference or contrast categories in parentheses

Pseudo r-squared 0.20, sample size 8,285.

Standard errors are adjusted for multiple observations on the same mother

* .05 < p < .10, ** .01 < p < .05, *** p < .01

Compared to Whites, Black mothers appeared more likely to report having a private agreement and less likely to report a CSA award, though neither of these effects were statistically significant at conventional levels. Asian mothers were less likely to report

having a CSA award than no award, as are mothers from ‘other’ ethnic groups (including mixed-race mothers).

Regional variations are found in the types of awards mothers report. The comparisons made are relative to the position of mothers in the North East of England. Mothers in South West England and Scotland were more likely to report private agreements than no award. In London there was no statistically significant difference between having no award and a private agreement - these two outcomes were equally likely. However, mothers in London were much less to have a CSA award. Compared to the North East, CSA awards were also less commonplace in Wales, Yorkshire, the East Midlands, the South East of England and Scotland.

Mothers claiming Income Support are equally likely to report a CSA award or no award, but much less likely to record having a private agreement. Mothers working part-time (16 to 29 hours) are more like to report a CSA award over no award than those working full-time. This, as discussed, might be due to the fact that mothers who work part-time are more likely to have previously claimed Income Support and thereby had contact with the CSA. Looking specifically at mothers who do not work, they are equally likely to report a CSA award or no award – there is no statistically significant difference in the risks of these outcomes – but they are much less likely to report a private agreement compared to mothers working full-time. Owner occupiers, relative to social tenants, were much more likely to record having a private agreement than no award as well as more likely to report having a private agreement over CSA award.

As with the probit regressions, the relationship between contact and award type is complex. Broadly, as contact between a father and his children gets less frequent, with the exception of weekly as opposed to daily contact, private agreements become less commonplace. Where contact between the father and his children is annual rather than daily, the risks of the mother reporting a private agreement as opposed to no award are reduced by nearly a half. Where the father has no contact the equivalent risk of a private agreement is reduced by 94 per cent. For mothers, any contact less frequent than daily *raises* the relative risk of having a CSA award compared to no award.

These results suggest that fathers’ who have less contact with their children are less likely to make private agreements. In such circumstances, all things being equal, CSA awards and no agreements are more commonplace.

Where at least one former partner (and father of the mother’s children) is known to be in work the relative risks of having a private agreement rather than no award are nearly three and half times those where no former partner is known to work. Where non-resident fathers are known to work mothers are most likely to record a private agreement, then a CSA award, followed by no award. Where the employment status of a former partner or partners is unknown, mothers have a reduced risk of reporting a private agreement over no award.

Finally, the length of time that has elapsed since the couple split is an important determinant of the type of award a mother has. Compared to mothers who had split in the last 12 months, mothers who had split for between a year and three years had odds of having a private agreement compared to no award 1.7 times greater. However, as the length of time since separation extends beyond three years there was no statistically significant difference in the risk of having a private agreement over no award – both were equally likely. Where couples had been separated for 15 years or more, the risks of having a private agreement as opposed to no award were about a half. As length of time since separation grew, the risks of having a CSA award relative to private agreement increased. Among couples for had been separated for more than 12 months CSA awards, all things being equal, were the most common form of arrangement holding other factors constant.

Conclusions

The regression models show that controlling for the changes in characteristics of families eligible for child support, the probabilities of mothers having an award were higher in 2004 than they were in 2001. Although there is some evidence that the proportion of mothers with CSA awards was greater in 2004 than 2001, most of the increase appears to be due to private agreements.

Descriptive statistics reveal that mothers without an award are more disadvantaged than other mothers due child support. They are more likely to be out of work, claiming Income Support and therefore living on a low income. Mothers who report having CSA awards also look relatively disadvantaged but it is families with no award which give greatest cause for concern.

The results from the probit regressions were broadly in line with previous findings from the US. In Britain, there was no compelling evidence that Blacks were less likely to have an award than Whites, though both Asian mothers as well as mothers classified as ‘Other’ (including mixed-race mothers) were less likely to report having awards. Mothers who had never lived with the non-resident father were less likely to have an award, as were those who *had* lived with a partner but were not married. These results are similar to those found in the US. Contrary to the position in the US, mothers’ re-partnering appeared to have no effect on award status in Britain; though unfortunately information on fathers’ re-partnering was not available. Furthermore, mothers’ educational attainment did not seem particularly important in determining award status.

As was the case the US, the regression models reveal that mothers with larger families were *more* likely to have an award. In addition, results showed that mothers working part-time are more likely to have an award than those working full-time. Mothers on Income Support were less likely to report having an award.

Where non-resident fathers were in daily contact with their children, mothers were *less* likely to record having an award compared to where contact was weekly and fortnightly. Fathers in daily contact may provide other forms of support which mothers possibly prefer to formal arrangements. Alternatively, fathers in daily contact may provide higher levels of shared or overnight care and therefore have a greater chance of a zero CSA assessment. This in turn again may lead to mothers' under-reporting awards. Where contact was less frequent than annual or there was no contact the chances of having an award for mothers were much reduced. Finally mothers who had recently split from a relationship were less likely to report an award.

The descriptive analyses also reveal that mothers with private agreements appeared to be in quite different circumstances to those with CSA awards and those with no award. Results from the multinomial logit model confirms this and provided further insights. Mothers with private agreements had smaller and younger families. They were unsurprisingly less likely to claim Income Support. They were also less likely to live in social housing and less likely to be out of work. As contact between fathers and their children fell away and as time since separation passed, mothers became less likely to report having private agreements. By contrast, mothers with CSA awards tended to have larger families and older children, and work part-time rather than full-time.

Under the current system of child support in Britain, there remain a large number of mothers without an award for child support. Many of these mothers have no prospect of receiving formal support payments unless their award status changes. They and their families are often poor, many are dependent on means-tested benefits such as Income Support and they are less likely to work.

Given the high rate of benefit dependency among these women (half were on Income Support) and due to assortive mating effects, many have little incentive to pursue an award. Under the proposals put forward by Sir David Henshaw and outlined in the recent White Paper, child support payments would attract a bigger disregard in the calculation of Income Support entitlement; the objective being to create an incentive for women to obtain an award and receive payments. However, even with such an incentive, it is not clear how many will obtain private agreements. Moreover, women may continue to avoid child support arrangements because they may jeopardise informal arrangements which they value. Still others may shun the opportunity to obtain an award because such a step might encourage unwanted contact.

The CSA has been criticised on many levels. However, as time since separation passes awards obtained via the Agency remain 'on the books' and binding on the father. The evidence presented here suggests that private agreements are less common than CSA awards and less common than having no award among mothers who have been separated for longer.

As has been established, private agreements are more common where couples have recently split, children are younger and the bonds between fathers and their children

strong. Where the opposite is the case, relationships have been over for some time, children are older and family ties weaker, these results suggest that under the current child support system, mothers are less likely to be found with private agreements than with other arrangements.

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