

poorly and fails to ensure that support for children comes from both parents. But parental responsibility is not limited to the payment of support. Non-custodial parents can also make other important contributions to their children's well-being.

There are a large number of issues that impinge upon the ability and willingness of non-custodial parents to assume responsibility for their children's well-being. Researchers are encouraged to submit their own ideas for potential topics. The topics listed below are given only for purposes of illustration.

**In-Hospital Paternity**—All states are now required to have paternity programs in every hospital that provides birthing services. Reports indicate that the rates of paternity establishment vary widely among hospitals within and across states. Many parents remain unwilling to take advantage of the opportunity to establish paternity voluntarily. What are the concerns of mothers and fathers at the hospital? What strategies and outreach activities promote positive paternity establishment outcomes?

**Medical Support Awards**—What is the potential for medical support awards, especially for welfare dependent and other low-income children? Do low-income non-custodial fathers have access to family coverage? Do medical support awards result in custodial families having less cash support? Are there better alternatives for assuring health care coverage, especially in interstate cases (for example Medicaid buy-ins, making the custodial parent the primary insurer)?

**Informal Child Support**—Relatively little is known about informal child support payments. What kinds of support are contributed? How much is contributed? How reliable are these contributions? How do these contributions compare to formal child support obligations? Do payments and other contributions typically end if the relationship sours or ends? Are payments more reliable when the contributor is sure the money is going to the family, rather than to reimburse the government? What factors influence the provisions of informal support and the decision not to pursue formal support payments?

**Nurturing/Parenting in Separated Households**—The issues of nurturing and parenting when the parents do not live together are very complex. Much of what is known comes from our assessment of co-parenting failures: non-custodial fathers (and mothers) who just disappear; parents who feel they are being denied access to their children;

parents who have to be taught what it means to be a responsible parent. Interventions to fix these problems are being tried and some are being evaluated. We know very little about successful co-parenting in families where parents live apart. Who are the successful co-parents? How do they differ from unsuccessful co-parents? What factors contribute to this success? Is there a positive impact on their children's well-being? Can we learn anything from these successes that can help develop interventions when co-parenting doesn't work?

**Fathers in Prison**—Some studies are beginning to show that a significant proportion of the fathers of AFDC children are in prison or have criminal records. What are the implications of this for child support payments and for father involvement? How does the current child support enforcement system handle such cases? Are there innovative programs that we can learn from?

**Domestic Violence and Child Support**—The number of AFDC cases applying for and receiving good cause exemption for refusing to cooperate in establishing paternity and securing support has always been very small (less than 1% of the caseload). This rate is considerably lower than the estimated prevalence of domestic violence among low-income women. It may be that the child's father is not the perpetrator of the violence experienced by many of these women. Alternatively, this low rate may be a function of the ease with which AFDC applicants and recipients can avoid meeting the cooperation requirements. With stricter cooperation requirements, one of the likely outcomes of welfare reform, it is important to have a much better understanding of the dynamics between enforcement of support and the threat of physical retaliation by the child's biological father. What is the incidence of domestic violence among AFDC recipients? How much of the violence is attributable to the children's father? Can we expect requests for good cause exemptions to increase? Are there successful strategies for pursuing support and not placing families at risk?

Technical questions concerning this topic should be directed to Linda Mellgren at 202-690-6806.

#### *C. Research on Linkages Between Child Development and Changes in Family Economic Self-Sufficiency*

Anti-poverty policies have as their major aim the improvement of poor children's life circumstances and future prospects. These policies have generated programs designed to assist

poor children and their families in three primary ways: (1) programs which focus on enhancing child development and strengthening the parent-child relationship, (2) programs which primarily provide economic support and emphasize job development for parents, and (3) comprehensive child and family programs which are two generational in their service intervention focus and address families' needs in all areas including child development and economic self-sufficiency. Comprehensive program approaches are becoming more prominent now and are built on the belief that changes must be supported for both children and their families and that longer term improvements for children will not occur unless their families also change and achieve greater economic self-sufficiency.

Research has yielded some evidence as to the effectiveness of each of these program approaches, but the knowledge base is limited in a number of ways. Studies of employment and training programs have focused on outcomes for adults and have not usually examined impacts on children's development. Studies of child development programs, such as Head Start, have focused on child outcomes and rarely have examined economic of other outcomes for parents. Developmental theory suggests, however, that changes for children and changes for parents will be interrelated. Interventions which effectively promote children's well-being and the parent-child relationship may benefit parents' development in ways that are related to the economic well-being of their families. Conversely changes in family economic well-being, resulting from interventions or naturally occurring events, may affect the course of children's development.

There are research findings which suggest that it would be fruitful to develop these lines of inquiry further. Recent findings from experimental research by Olds and his colleagues (1994) indicate that low-income mothers who have participated in home visiting child development programs spend less time on welfare and earn more income two years after the intervention than low-income mothers who have not received such services. Findings from nonexperimental research on changes in income, poverty status and welfare status suggest that such changes have a number of consequences for children's development (Conger & Elder, 1994; Moore, Morrison, Zaslow, Gleib, 1994). Research the Department is now funding on the impacts of mothers' participation in the Jobs Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) Training