



# Fathers Under Fire: The Revolution in Child Support Enforcement

*Judith A. Seltzer*

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"This important and highly informative collection of studies on nonresident fathers and child support should be of great value to scholars and policymakers alike." —*American Journal of Sociology*

Over half of America's children will live apart from their fathers at some point as they grow up, many in the single-mother households that increasingly make up the nation's poor. Federal efforts to improve the collection of child support from fathers appear to have little effect on payments, and many critics have argued that forcing fathers to pay does more harm than good. Much of the uncertainty surrounding child support policies has stemmed from a lack of hard data on nonresident fathers. *Fathers Under Fire* presents the best available information on the financial and social circumstances of the men who are at the center of the debate. In this volume, social scientists and legal scholars explore the issues underlying the child support debate, chief among them on the potential repercussions of stronger enforcement.

Who are nonresident fathers? This volume calls upon both empirical and theoretical data to describe them across a broad economic and social spectrum. Absentee fathers who do not pay child support are much more likely to be school dropouts and low earners than fathers who pay, and nonresident fathers altogether earn less than resident fathers. Fathers who start new families are not significantly less likely to support previous children. But can we predict what would happen if the government were to impose more rigorous child support laws? The data in this volume offer a clearer understanding of the potential benefits and risks of such policies. In contrast to some fears, stronger enforcement is unlikely to push fathers toward. But it does seem to have more of an effect on whether some fathers remarry and become responsible for new families. In these cases, how are subsequent children affected by a father's pre-existing obligations? Should such fathers be allowed to reduce their child support orders in order to provide for their current families? Should child support guidelines permit modifications in the event of a father's changed financial circumstances? Should government enforce a father's right to see his children as well as his obligation to pay support? What can be done to help under- or unemployed fathers meet their payments? This volume provides the information and insight to answer these questions.

The need to help children and reduce the public costs of welfare programs is clear, but the process of achieving these goals is more complex. *Fathers Under Fire* offers an indispensable resource to those searching for effective and equitable solutions to the problems of child support.

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