

Impacts of Workforce Services for Young, Low-Income Fathers:

Findings from the Texas Bootstrap Project

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Executive Summary

Background

In 2001, the Texas Office of the Attorney General (OAG) partnered with the Texas Fragile Families Initiative (TFF) and secured a Section 1115 grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), to implement the Texas Bootstrap Project (Bootstrap) demonstration. The Bootstrap program was designed to provide enhanced services to young, low-income noncustodial fathers at selected TFF sites (Austin, Houston, Laredo, and San Angelo) to help them access resources to assist them in becoming responsible parents and meeting the needs of their children. The OAG contracted with the Ray Marshall Center (RMC) for the Study of Human Resources at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin to evaluate the impacts of this program.

Research Questions

Four specific research questions are addressed in this impact evaluation. These questions test for the economic effects of necessary Bootstrap services on low-income noncustodial fathers by comparing the outcomes for Bootstrap participants to those of a carefully selected comparison group of other young, low-income fathers on the OAG's child support caseload. The research questions are:

- To what extent does receipt of Bootstrap services increase workforce development and skills training participation by noncustodial fathers?
- To what extent does receipt of Bootstrap services increase employment rates and earnings for noncustodial fathers?
- To what extent does receipt of Bootstrap services increase consistent payment of child support by noncustodial fathers?
- To what extent does receipt of Bootstrap services reduce the use of TANF benefits by custodial mothers?

Research Methods

Since the use of a random assignment design for the Bootstrap project demonstration was not possible, a ‘quasi-experimental’ approach to comparison group selection was utilized. Quasi-experimental methods represent the best approach available, short of random assignment, for selecting near-equivalent comparison groups. For each Bootstrap participant the potential comparator from the OAG child support caseload with the closest matching characteristics (known as the ‘nearest neighbor’) was selected to be in the comparison group. Outcomes for the Bootstrap and comparison groups were then compared in order to compute net impacts.

Findings and Conclusions

The results reported herein strongly suggest that the Bootstrap program was successful in achieving its goals of improving outcomes for young, low-income noncustodial fathers and the mothers of their children. However, these results should be interpreted cautiously due to a number of factors, some of which could be clarified by future research:

- This was not a random-assignment experiment, but a quasi-experiment designed to mimic the best properties of an experiment. As such, we cannot be absolutely certain that Bootstrap *caused* the observed impacts.
- Local sites had difficulty in recruiting participants, and some noncustodial fathers attempted to enroll but there were no suitable workforce development activities available to serve them.
- Other program factors — such as a variation of services among sites and the immature development of the program — made it impossible to specify which services contributed most strongly to the observed outcomes.
- The time frame for follow-up observation was relatively short.

Keeping these caveats in mind, the results suggest that young, low-income noncustodial fathers can potentially benefit from a package of services designed to help them become more able to support their children financially. Specifically, the results indicated that:

- Fathers participating in Bootstrap showed greater participation in workforce development and skills training than comparison group members did;
- Bootstrap led to substantially greater net employment rates among participants, but to reduced earnings among those who were employed;
- Bootstrap participants were substantially more likely to pay child support than comparison group members, and more likely to pay it consistently over time; and
- Custodial mothers associated with Bootstrap participants showed smaller rates of welfare receipt subsequent to the program than was true of the comparison group.

These impacts were largely positive, with the single exception of reduced earnings levels among those fathers who were employed. However, this could be a direct function of a greater number working in entry-level jobs at lesser rates of pay. Future research should investigate whether over the longer term the kinds of jobs the participants acquire lead to advancement and increasing earnings, or whether their earnings levels remain stagnant.

Much of the debate and policy development surrounding welfare reform research over the past decade have focused almost exclusively on the mothers. The present results suggest that there is substantial room for economic improvement among members of the population of low-income fathers, and that a basic package of services offered to some of these fathers appears to promote such improvement. Future policy development should include robust strategies for increasing the earnings capacity of young, low-income noncustodial fathers.

I. Introduction

In 2001, the Texas Office of the Attorney General (OAG) partnered with the Texas Fragile Families Initiative (TFF) and secured a Section 1115 grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), to implement the Texas Bootstrap Project (Bootstrap) demonstration.¹ The Bootstrap program was designed to provide enhanced services to eligible TFF fathers at select sites (Austin, Houston, Laredo, and San Angelo) to help them access resources to assist them in becoming responsible parents and meeting the needs of their children. The specific goals of Bootstrap were to 1) enhance the ability of low-income fathers to pay child support by providing them with job skill training and 2) improve their parenting skills by offering an array of services aimed at helping them overcome barriers to becoming successful parents.

The purpose of the Bootstrap impact evaluation was to determine the efficacy of providing a combination of fatherhood and workforce services to assist young, low-income noncustodial parents who may not pay child support due to a lack of financial resources. The grant requirements specified that the project must include an evaluation component. The OAG contracted with the Ray Marshall Center (RMC) for the Study of Human Resources at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin to evaluate the impact of this program. Thus, the present impact analysis was designed to answer the following question:

To what extent does the Bootstrap project improve the economic outcomes of its participants, as compared to low-income, noncustodial fathers who have active cases in the OAG system but do not receive Bootstrap services?

By February 2003 it became evident that Bootstrap was unlikely to reach its enrollment targets by the end of the recruitment period. Because of this issue, the time period for enrollments was extended (ultimately from nine months to fifteen months) and the enrollment targets for the individual sites were adjusted. The available data collection period

¹ Funding was provided under Priority Area 3, "Projects of broad collaborative efforts and outreach by child support agencies with a wide range of human services programs in the community in order to promote family self-sufficiency." See <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/new/dcl0132.htm>.

for the impact evaluation was reduced to only three months after program entry for fathers who enrolled near the deadline. Finally, in late February 2004, OCSE granted another no-cost extension that restored at least a 9-month observation period after all recruitment was completed.

Due to the smaller overall number of Bootstrap participants, RMC researchers reduced the scope of the impact analysis and eliminated an examination of site-specific impacts.² At the request of the OAG, they also redirected some of their efforts toward a second, process-focused evaluation in order to gain a better understanding of the reasons for the local sites' slower-than-expected enrollment rates. The findings from the evaluation of the enrollment process are available in a separate report entitled *Factors Affecting Participation in Programs for Young Low-Income Fathers: Findings from the Texas Bootstrap Project*.³ The present report summarizes the impacts of the Bootstrap demonstration project for those individuals who actually enrolled in the program.

Structure of the Report

This report is organized into five chapters and two appendices. The present chapter provides introductory material. Chapter II describes the program being evaluated and gives a brief review of relevant research literature. Chapter III states the research questions and research methods used for this analysis. Chapter IV discusses research findings. The final chapter draws conclusions from the impact evaluation findings and provides recommendations for policymakers and program designers. The appendices provide more detailed information about the literature review, statistical methods, and data sources used to conduct this evaluation.

² The sample sizes are inadequate to support site-specific impact estimates.

³ Looney and Schexnayder, 2004.

II. Bootstrap and Related Initiatives

History of Bootstrap Demonstration

In 1998, a number of Texas charitable foundations organized and funded the Texas Fragile Families Initiative (TFF) to help community organizations, nonprofits, and health providers increase their capacity to serve young, low-income fathers. They hired the Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP), an Austin non-profit policy research organization, to provide technical assistance to the 11 local programs supported by these funds and to evaluate the implementation of this initiative. The program began in July 2000 and lasted through May 2003.

In August 2001, TFF decided to pursue additional funding to provide more intensive job-readiness activities for program participants. In collaboration with TFF, the Child Support Division of the Texas Office of the Attorney General (OAG) acquired a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Child Support Enforcement (HHS) and created the Bootstrap project.

Four of the 11 Texas Fragile Family Initiative locations were selected as Bootstrap demonstration sites: Austin, Houston, Laredo, and San Angelo (see Figure 2.1). TFF staff selected the sites using informal criteria they hoped would create a broad sample and targeted sites that were likely to be successful. They also took regional socioeconomic differences into consideration when selecting sites in order to create a more diverse pool from which to draw participants. Finally, emphasis was also placed on selecting communities that had child support offices and one-stop workforce centers that seemed likely to support the initiative.

Fathers who participated in Bootstrap received TFF basic services as well as enhanced services designed to help them meet their child support obligations and achieve success in the workforce.

Texas Fragile Families Initiative Basic Services

The basic services offered at all TFF sites were intended to help low-income fathers become better able to financially support their children and to help them become more responsible parents who were more involved in their children's lives.

The exact mix of basic services offered varied from one site to the next, depending on the nature of the host organization, local circumstances, target populations, and referral sources. However, the core services offered at virtually all sites fell into three major areas. First, *workforce development and skills training services* typically included basic education and GED classes, career assessment and planning, job readiness, job placement, on-the-job training, job retention, and other similar services. Second, *child support services* often included paternity establishment support and general help negotiating the child support system. Finally, *relationship services* included counseling (individual or family), father/child activities, mentoring, and the like.

Other basic TFF services were offered at one or several, but not necessarily all TFF sites. These included classes on topics such as parenting skills and child development. Peer support groups were available to fathers at several sites. Some offered logistical assistance such as transportation and child care. And finally, many sites provided referrals for additional services such as drug and alcohol counseling, crisis intervention, and domestic violence.

Figure 2.1: Texas Bootstrap Project Site Summaries

Austin, TX

Location characteristics: State capital; located in Central Texas

Population characteristics: 656,562 residents; 65.4 percent White, 10.0 percent Black, 4.7 percent Asian, 30.5 percent Hispanic (of any race); Median Household Income: \$42,689

Project Operator: Tandem Prenatal and Parenting Program collaboration members (People's Community Clinic, Austin Child Guidance Center, Austin Families, Any Baby Can Family Resource Center, LifeWorks, and the Resource Network)

Houston, TX

Location characteristics: Gulf Coast; fourth most-populous U.S. city

Population characteristics: 1,953,631 residents; 49.3 percent White, 25.3 percent Black, 5.3 percent Asian, 37.4 percent Hispanic (of any race); Median Household Income: \$36,616

Project Operator: Baylor Teen Clinics (free health clinics sponsored by the Baylor College of Medicine) at two sites – Ben Taub General Hospital and the Precinct One Cullen Community Center

Laredo, TX

Location characteristics: Situated on U.S. - Mexico border; second fastest-growing city in the U.S.

Population characteristics: 176,576 residents; 82.3 percent White, XX percent Black, 94.1 percent Hispanic (of any race); Median Household Income: \$29,108

Project Operator: Buckner Children and Family Services (faith-based organization)

San Angelo, TX

Location characteristics: Small West Texas city; home to Goodfellow Air Force Base

Population characteristics: 88,439 residents; 77.1 percent White, 4.7 percent Black, 1.0 percent Asian, 33.2 percent Hispanic (of any race); Median Household Income: \$32,232

Project Operator: Healthy Families San Angelo, a home-based family support program

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2004; Looney and Schexnayder, 2004

Texas Bootstrap Project Enhanced Services

The Bootstrap demonstration provided enhanced services to eligible fathers in addition to the basic services offered through regular TFF sites to allow for more intensive participation in work-related activities. Program activities and participation requirements are described in Figure 2.2.

One of the most unique Bootstrap services was a parental responsibility stipend designed to encourage full participation in the program. Each participating father could receive a total of up to \$1,300, based upon his level of involvement in work activities and satisfactory completion of required activities.

The initial Bootstrap design also included mediation and federal bonding. Mediation services helped participants address disputes regarding access and visitation, custody, and child support payment. Bootstrap participants with a prior criminal conviction or those considered by employers to be ‘high risk’ were eligible for a federal employment bond that was subsidized by the program. The process study indicated that mediation was utilized in several instances; however the federal bonding program was not used at any of the sites.

Finally, Bootstrap also required greater cooperation with the child support system than was true of the original TFF demonstration and regular participation in TFF fatherhood activities.

Figure 2.2: Bootstrap Participation Requirements

The required activities to receive a Bootstrap stipend (and, thus, to participate) were as follows:

1. Father signs participation contract;
2. Father establishes paternity if he has not already done so (i.e. opens a case at the OAG to establish an order/request DNA testing, signs voluntary acknowledgment of paternity, responds to current paternity suit);
3. Father pays his current child support obligation if he has an order and provides documentation to the local TFF site; and
4. Father participates fully in TFF fatherhood program activities (i.e. peer support groups, meetings with case manager, father/child activities) for a minimum of six hours per month.⁴

Additionally, participation in Bootstrap required a minimum of ten hours of work activity each week. Eligible activities included GED preparation, high school credit classes,

⁴ Texas Fragile Families Initiative (TFFI), 2002b

job training programs, on-the-job training, formal apprenticeships, structured job search activities (per WIA "sequence of service" requirements), technical skill certification courses, structured work experiences (including internships and job shadowing), and soft skill courses such as resume writing, interview skills, or basic computer skills instruction.⁵ Fathers who were already working were eligible if they began a work activity that led to skill improvements. Bootstrap administrators on a case-by-case basis approved additional work activities. The array of services available at each site varied.

The Bootstrap stipend provided by the program was based on the number of hours participants spent engaged in work activities. Initially, the rates were as follows:

- 12-20 hrs per week: \$150/mo
- 20-30 hrs per week: \$300/mo
- 30+ hrs per week: \$400/mo

Amounts could be adjusted on a case-by-case basis.⁶ Ultimately, sites were given flexibility to distribute stipend funds as they saw fit if they obtained the approval of Bootstrap administrators.⁷ The maximum total stipend available to each father was \$1,300.

Characteristics of Bootstrap Participants

The Bootstrap program specifically targeted young, low-income, noncustodial fathers. To be eligible for the program, fathers had to be 17-25 years old, not married to their child's mother, un- or under-employed, in the process of establishing a child support order, and a U.S. citizen. Fathers who were cohabitating with their child's mother were eligible, as were fathers who were married with a child from a previous relationship.

Table 2.1 provides a summary of the participation patterns of fathers who participated in Bootstrap. For the purposes of this analysis, fathers were included in the Bootstrap participant population when they fulfilled sufficient program requirements to receive a stipend payment for at least one month during the program. The typical Bootstrap participant received stipends for about three or four months, and totaled \$600 to \$700 in stipends across

⁵ TFFI, 2002b

⁶ TFFI, 2002a

⁷ Romo, 2003

their participation period. More detailed demographic characteristics of Bootstrap participants are also listed in Chapter II under the section “Comparison group selection.”

Table 2.1: Bootstrap Participation Patterns

Number of Bootstrap participants receiving a stipend	79
Length of participation, from first to last stipend receipt, median	3 months
Length of participation, from first to last stipend receipt, mean	3.61 months
Length of participation, from first to last stipend receipt, range	1 to 9 months
Total stipend received, median	\$630
Total stipend received, mean	\$694

The Bootstrap enrollment period ran from March 2002 to September 2003. RMC researchers collected earnings data on participants through March 2004.

Relevant Findings from the Process Study

As documented in the process study, a variety of factors led to slower-than-expected enrollment rates and may have deterred some potential participants from enrolling in Bootstrap.⁸ Of the 151 fathers referred to the program, 81 never participated.

Securing work activity opportunities for Bootstrap participants proved to be very difficult. According to interview participants, attempts to establish apprenticeship, on-the-job training, and soft skills training partnerships with other organizations fell through in several instances. Fathers struggled to navigate services at local workforce centers and in some cases were inadvertently denied services.⁹ According to RMC analysis of program data, at least eight fathers who were referred to Bootstrap never enrolled because work activities could not be secured.

Staff at the sites felt that the eligibility criteria selected for the Bootstrap program limited the number of fathers who could participate. The original enrollment goals were set with the expectation that approximately half of the 25 anticipated participants at each site

⁸ See Looney and Schexnayder (2004) for a more complete analysis of difficulties enrolling fathers in Bootstrap.

⁹ Rogers, 2002

would be TFF fathers placed in the Bootstrap program within two months of Bootstrap's implementation. However, all sites reported that far fewer TFF clients qualified for Bootstrap than they had originally anticipated. Several eligibility requirements created potential mismatches for the TFF population.¹⁰ For example, while the target age groups for TFF (16–25) and Bootstrap (17–25) were similar, the age range for TFF-enrolled fathers was 12 to 41, leaving some TFF fathers ineligible based on age criteria. Likewise, almost 30 percent of TFF fathers had partners who were pregnant and thus weren't eligible for Bootstrap services until after the child was born. Finally, the child support requirements were a deterrent for some fathers who otherwise qualified.

Given this difficulty of enrollment, there is a distinct possibility that the participants themselves differ from non-participants in ways that are difficult to measure (e.g., motivation or other factors). Some of these differences could be accounted for by the matching procedure, but any remaining immeasurable differences could partially account for the differential outcomes attributed to program impacts.

Related Research Initiatives

A review of the responsible fatherhood research literature identified several program evaluations that studied economic outcomes similar to those investigated in this study. Workforce development participation, employment rates, earnings, child support payments, and reliance on public assistance. The following summary focuses exclusively on initiatives that, like Bootstrap, attempted to achieve these outcomes by offering services directly to noncustodial fathers.

The literature review identified seven relevant research initiatives. Program evaluation information was available for the Minority Male Opportunity and Responsibility Program (MMOR), the OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs evaluation, Parents' Fair Share (PFS), Support Has A Rewarding Effect (SHARE), STEP-UP with Mentoring for Young Fathers (STEP-UP), a Texas noncustodial parent referrals program, and the Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project (YUFPP). Table 2.2 provides an overview of these initiatives; additional details about each program are included in Appendix A.

Extensive analysis of this literature revealed the following:

¹⁰ Looney and Schexnayder, 2004, pp. 24-25

- **Program implementation issues affected every evaluation.** Types of problems encountered included longer than expected startup periods, recruitment challenges, and concerns that programs didn't fully mature within the allotted timeframe.
- **Research limitations obstructed efforts to establish causal relationships between specific services and outcomes.** Despite attempts by some researchers to establish causation using experimental evaluation designs, several research limitations inhibited their efforts. Common issues included prohibitively small sample sizes (due to recruiting challenges), short time frames for evaluation that limited the amount of time available for follow-up, research designs that clustered programs with disparate services into a single group for evaluation, and the previously discussed program implementation issues.
- **Cross-program evaluation is challenging.** It is difficult to distinguish best practices in the responsible fatherhood arena because there are no common performance measures across initiatives and because different initiatives tend to target different subpopulations. It is currently difficult to determine whether the positive outcomes reported by one initiative can be replicated elsewhere.

Overall, program outcomes were generally positive. The existing literature suggests that:

- **Responsible fatherhood programs encourage participation in workforce activities.** About half of fathers in the Teen Unwed Fathers pilot project participated in job-readiness classes and a smaller number participated in job training activities.¹¹ Over 61.3 percent of PFS group members participated in at least one work-related activity compared with 24.9 percent of control group members.¹² The Texas referrals project reported similar outcomes: a total of 83 parents who received referrals participated in workforce activities compared to 32 parents who did not receive referrals.¹³
- **Responsible fatherhood programs increase employment, at least in the short term.** Across the board, it appears that employment tended to increase after contact with responsible fatherhood programs, at least for the most disadvantaged fathers. However, it should be noted that research limitations prevented researchers from knowing the long-term impact of responsible fatherhood initiatives on employment rates.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 62-67

¹² Miller and Knox, 2001, p. 36

¹³ O'Shea et al, 2001, p. 34

Table 2.2: Summary of Related Initiatives

Program	Research Design	Program Activities	Target Population
MMOR (1991-1994)	Random assignment experiment; pre-post comparison	Case management; Job Club; counseling; educational programs; referrals	Minority males ages 18-34 who were receiving/eligible for public assistance, suffered from chronic unemployment, were the parent of at least one child, and had reading and math levels between the third and seventh grades
OCSE Responsible Fatherhood/Section 1115 Programs (1998-2000)	Pre-post comparison	Varied across sites: assistance with child support and child access; peer support; employment assistance; case management; parenting classes	Noncustodial fathers - States were allowed to determine their own eligibility standards
PFS (1994-2001)	Random assignment experiment	Peer support; employment and training; enhanced child support enforcement; mediation	Fathers who were under- or unemployed and had child support orders in place but were not making regular payments; the children for whom they owed support had to be current or past recipients of welfare
SHARE (1998-2001)	Pre-post comparison; subgroup comparison	Welfare to Work (WtW) activities: job readiness; job placement; post-employment services; job retention; support services	Unemployed/unable to pay noncustodial parents with children who received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and who received court referrals
STEP-UP (1992-1995)	Random assignment experiment	Counseling/case management; mentoring; stipends for education/job training	Low-income fathers ages 16-22 with limited employment history and limited educational backgrounds
Texas noncustodial parent referral program (1999-2000)	Quasi-experimental nearest-neighbor approach	WtW activities: job readiness; job placement; post-employment services; job retention; support services	Noncustodial parents who were behind on child support payments
YUFPP (1991-1993)	Pre-post comparison	Basic skills/GED courses; employment and training; fatherhood development curriculum; case management	Fathers ages 16-25

- **Responsible fatherhood programs may increase earnings.** Likewise, near-term data indicated that responsible fatherhood programs increased earnings for most noncustodial parents. Earnings increases were greatest for those without a high school diploma, lacking substantial work history, and/or the unemployed. Earnings may temporarily decline slightly for some parents who leave employment to participate in responsible fatherhood programs.¹⁴
- **Frequency of child support payments sometimes increases.** Among YUFPP participants, the number of fathers making child support payments increased from 3 to 22.¹⁵ In the year after enrollment in the OCSE program, “far more” noncustodial parents made child support payments. The rates of increase were 31 percent for Colorado, 29 percent for Missouri, 26 percent for Washington, 19 percent for Massachusetts, 17 percent for Maryland, 11 percent for Wisconsin, and 4 percent for New Hampshire.¹⁶ PFS and SHARE also reported increases. The results of the Texas study, however, were equivocal. In Bexar County, both the amount and frequency of child support collections increased. The net average collection increased by \$116 and the percent of months with collections increased by 21.5 percent. However, in Harris County, the program had no impact.¹⁷

None of the responsible fatherhood program evaluations examined custodial parents’ use of public assistance.

The literature review suggests that researchers working in this field face an array of evaluation challenges. As demonstrated in both the process evaluation report and succeeding sections of this impact report, the Bootstrap evaluation was subject to many of the same challenges that previous researchers encountered.¹⁸

¹⁴ Martinez and Miller, 2000, p. 41

¹⁵ Achatz and MacAllum, 1994, p. 93

¹⁶ Policy Studies Inc./Center for Policy Research, 2003

¹⁷ O’Shea et al, 2001, p. 35

¹⁸ Looney and Schexnayder, 2004

III. Research Questions and Methods

Research Questions

Four specific research questions are addressed in this impact evaluation.¹⁹ These questions test for the economic effects of Bootstrap services on low-income noncustodial fathers by comparing the outcomes for Bootstrap participants to those of a carefully selected comparison group. As described in detail below, the comparison group was selected from similarly situated noncustodial fathers on the OAG's child support caseload who did not receive any TFF services.²⁰ The research questions are:

- To what extent does receipt of Bootstrap services increase workforce development and skills training participation by noncustodial fathers?
- To what extent does receipt of Bootstrap services increase employment rates and earnings for noncustodial fathers?
- To what extent does receipt of Bootstrap services increase consistent payment of child support by noncustodial fathers?
- To what extent does receipt of Bootstrap services reduce the use of TANF benefits by custodial mothers?

These questions and the expected Bootstrap effects are summarized in Table 3.1. Based on the literature review, the expected outcomes for research questions one through three were in keeping with previous research. Research question four, concerning the use of TANF benefits by custodial parents, will add to the body of research on responsible fatherhood initiatives by introducing a new outcome domain: economic effects on the custodial mother.

¹⁹ The original research question concerning effects of Bootstrap participation on paternity establishment was dropped due to a Bootstrap programmatic change that required potential Bootstrap participants to establish child support cases as a condition of eligibility for the program.

²⁰ The comparison of outcomes between Bootstrap participants and those receiving basic TFF services had to be omitted due to inadequate sample size.

Table 3.1: Research Questions

Research Question	Expected Bootstrap Effect
1. Workforce development and skill training participation by father?	+
2. Employment and earnings of father?	+
3. Consistent payment of child support?	+
4. Use of TANF by mother?	-

Research Methods

This section briefly describes the procedures used to evaluate the economic effects of Bootstrap’s services on young, low-income, noncustodial fathers.

Comparison Group Selection

Since the use of a random assignment design for the Bootstrap project demonstration was not possible, an alternative approach to comparison group selection was utilized. Social science researchers have developed a number of ‘quasi-experimental’ approaches for creation of a comparison group when random assignment is infeasible.²¹ Although the methods have their weaknesses, they are the best approach available, short of random assignment, for selecting near-equivalent comparison groups.

The preferred approach to creating a ‘quasi-experimental’ comparison group that is as similar as possible to the treatment group involves selection of multivariate ‘nearest neighbors.’ This involves comparing each Bootstrap member to all potential comparison group members on a number of characteristics using a formula to compute multivariate distance. The potential comparator with the closest matching characteristics, known as the ‘nearest neighbor,’ is then selected to be in the comparison group. This process is continued until all members of the treatment group have had their own nearest neighbors chosen. Outcomes are then compared for the two groups in order to compute net impacts.²²

²¹ National Research Council, 2001

²² See, for example, Heckman (1992, pp. 201-230) and Heckman and Hotz (1989, pp. 862-874).

Potential comparison group members were chosen from the universe of noncustodial fathers with open child support cases in the Texas OAG's database. All comparison group members were chosen from the same county of residence and at the same point in time as Bootstrap participants. Beyond this, twenty-two additional characteristics of the father, the mother, the child support case, and their respective histories just prior to program entry were used in the matching algorithm to select for each participant a similarly situated comparison group member. The results from the matching procedure are displayed in Table 3.2, including the mean values on the matching dimensions for the Bootstrap group and the comparison group selected using this method.

Based on this highly similar pattern of means, the quasi-experimental comparison group selection procedure appears to have successfully produced a comparison group of matching noncustodial parents who were largely identical to the Bootstrap participants before their entry into the program. Statistical tests found that the resulting groups did not differ significantly on any of the twenty-two dimensions, even when using a critical significance (alpha) level of 0.10. This indicates that even using a very sensitive test, the two groups did not differ significantly on any of these measured dimensions just prior to entering the program.

Table 3.2: Mean Pre-program Values for Bootstrap and Selected Comparison Groups on Matching Dimensions²³

	Bootstrap Mean	Comparison Mean	Difference
Father's age	21.4	21.8	-.3
Father Black	45.8%	45.8%	.0%
Father Hispanic	40.7%	40.7%	.0%
Father's first earnings, months prior to program entry	28.4	29.8	-1.4
Father's percent of time employed, since first	72.3%	71.8%	.6%
Father's average earnings level, since first	\$449.00	\$461.00	-\$12.00
Father previously in any workforce development	10.2%	10.2%	.0%
Mother's age	21.3	21.5	-.1
Mother Black	47.5%	47.5%	.0%
Mother Hispanic	42.4%	42.4%	.0%
Mother White	8.5%	10.2%	-1.7%
Mother's number of child support cases	1.59	1.40	.19
Number of children	1.29	1.27	.02
Youngest child age	1.90	2.03	-.14
Oldest child age	2.37	2.53	-.16
Recent birth, within last year	23.7%	13.6%	10.2%
All children born out of wedlock	93.2%	96.6%	-3.4%
Mother's first TANF receipt, months prior to program entry	10.3	10.4	-.2
Mother's percent of time on TANF, since first	24.7%	21.5%	3.1%
First child support collection, months prior to program entry	3.8	5.0	-1.2
Percent of time child support collections made, since first	31.7%	28.7%	3.1%
Average monthly child support collections, since first	\$83.00	\$56.00	\$27.00

Notes: *** indicates statistically significant difference at the .01 level; ** at .05 level; * at .10 level. Numbers may not add up exactly due to rounding.

²³ As detailed in Appendix B, the comparison group selection was done only for the 60 Bootstrap participants who could be unambiguously identified in OAG administrative records. Of these, one was removed for having a poor match, and the remaining 59 were used for all outcome analysis. Variables are defined in Appendix B.

Data Sources

The goal of this analysis is to answer each research question by performing statistical tests on data gathered to measure the outcomes of interest. In order to perform these statistical tests, it was necessary to gather data not only on the outcomes, but also on the characteristics of the cases and clients in the Bootstrap and comparison groups. Table 3.3 summarizes the variables analyzed and the data sources from which they were obtained.

Table 3.3: Specific Variables to be Analyzed

Variables to be Analyzed	Data Source
Workforce development and skill training participation by father	Texas Workforce Commission administrative data for the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) program
Employment and earnings of father	Texas Unemployment Insurance (UI) wages, Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS) out-of-state wages
Consistent payment of child support	OAG child support collections data
Use of TANF by mother	DHS data on TANF program participation

Additional information on the sources of data used for this project is included in Appendix B of this report.

Estimation of Net Effects

The comparison group design justifies the application of a large body of available statistical methods designed for estimating the net effects of experiments and quasi-experiments. RMC researchers used these standardized, widely accepted techniques to estimate net effects of the Bootstrap project on various hypothesized outcomes. The analysis included the estimation of *adjusted net effects* through linear regression. Adjusted net effects are computed: 1) to adjust the impact measure for the slight differences between the pre-treatment attributes of the Bootstrap and comparison groups that inevitably occur, and 2) to provide impact estimates with smaller standard errors. Adjusted net effects can not, however, adjust for any differences on immeasurable dimensions.

IV. Findings

As described above, the quasi-experimental comparison group selection procedure succeeded in producing a comparison group of matched noncustodial fathers who were virtually identical in all measurable ways to the Bootstrap participants before their entry into the program. The impact estimates reported below were further adjusted for the very slight differences that remained between the two groups.

Because of this successful match, the impacts reported in this section can be taken as evidence *strongly suggestive* of a causal connection between Bootstrap participation and the observed outcomes. Although we are less certain that Bootstrap services *caused* these outcomes than would be true if we had conducted a true experiment, we are far more certain about the true cause of the observed differences than if we had simply observed pre-post changes in outcomes or a comparison group selected unscientifically from a convenience sample.

Workforce Development and Skills Training Participation by Noncustodial Fathers

The first outcome analysis examines this question: To what extent does receipt of Bootstrap services increase workforce development and skills training participation by noncustodial fathers? Although these men could have participated in any of several programs, including one-stop or employment services, among others, participation data covering the complete follow-up period were only available for the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) program. Thus, these results represent only a portion of the workforce development and training services these fathers may have obtained.

As shown in Table 4.1, the Bootstrap program is associated with greater levels of fathers' participation in this workforce development program subsequent to program entry. This result is in line with expectations based on the goals of the program. Interestingly, the same result is obtained whether one looks at any workforce development participation or at training programs specifically. Although the percent of time spent in workforce development or training seems low overall, this likely represents only a fraction of the services received if

all such programs had been taken into account. It is reasonable to expect, based on this outcome, that Bootstrap participants participated in other workforce development programs at greater rates than their comparison counterparts, but the data to confirm this are currently unavailable.

Table 4.1: Bootstrap Impact on Father’s Workforce Development

	Bootstrap Adjusted Mean	Comparison Adjusted Mean	Bootstrap Impact
Father in any WIA workforce development	2.9%	.8%	2.1%***
Father in WIA training program	2.9%	.8%	2.1%***

Note: *** indicates statistically significant difference at the .01 level; ** at .05 level; * at .10 level

Employment and Earnings of Noncustodial Fathers

The next analysis answers the question: To what extent does receipt of Bootstrap services increase employment rates and earnings for noncustodial fathers? This question was answered with two measures, one that gauges the percent of time fathers were employed subsequent to program entry, and another that measures the monthly earnings levels of those who were employed for a given time period.²⁴

Interestingly, as can be seen in Table 4.2, the Bootstrap program’s impact on the fathers’ employment rates and earnings levels went in opposite directions. Although nearly twelve percent more Bootstrap participants were employed at any given time after program entry, those who were employed earned approximately \$85 less per month than their comparison group counterparts. The increased employment effect is consistent with program goals, but the reduced earnings level is a little more difficult to explain. It is possible that the reduced earnings level of those employed is a direct result of a greater share of Bootstrap participants gaining employment, albeit in low-wage jobs. We cannot confirm this speculation with the available sources, however, due to lack of specific data on hourly wages.

²⁴ Monthly earnings and employment rates were approximated from quarterly data.

On the whole, these two opposing impacts tend to cancel each other, so that the net Bootstrap impact on average monthly earnings of participants, whether employed or not, is near zero.

Table 4.2: Bootstrap Impact on Father’s Employment and Earnings

	Bootstrap Adjusted Mean	Comparison Adjusted Mean	Bootstrap Impact
Father's average monthly earnings, of those employed	\$812.00	\$897.00	-\$85.00 **
Father's percent of time employed	63.0%	51.3%	11.7%***

Note: *** indicates statistically significant difference at the .01 level; ** at .05 level; * at .10 level

Consistent Payment of Child Support

The next set of analyses attempts to answer the following: To what extent does receipt of Bootstrap services increase consistent payment of child support by noncustodial fathers? Four measures address this question. The first two measures gauge the frequency and dollar amount of the collections made, and another two are directed at the consistency with which such payments were made over time.

As illustrated in Table 4.3, Bootstrap participation was associated with more than a twelve percentage-point increase in the frequency of child support collections. Although these collections are still infrequent in an absolute sense, occurring in only about a third of the months following program entry, the increased frequency for Bootstrap participants represents about a fifty percent gain in collections rate relative to the comparison group. The Bootstrap program was not found to be associated with an increase in the average amount of child support collections, when looking only at those months in which payments were received. Although it is not appropriate to do a statistical test on the average collection across all months, the two impact estimates taken together suggest a slight increase, of approximately \$15 per month, in average monthly collections from Bootstrap participants.

In an attempt to gauge the *consistency* of child support collections, measures were constructed that counted, for each three month period subsequent to program entry, the proportion of times collections were made in 1) at least two out of the three months, and 2) in

all three months. As shown in Table 4.3, the Bootstrap impact on consistency of child support payment was significant and positive for the first measure but not significant for the second. Bootstrap participants were almost eleven percentage-points more likely to pay child support in at least two out of three months than were their comparison group counterparts. Once again the relative gain is quite impressive, representing about a 44 percent increase in the frequency of consistent payment, but the low absolute level of consistency shows there is still more work to be done before this becomes a reliable source of income for many of these custodial mothers.

Table 4.3: Bootstrap Impact on Child Support Collections

	Bootstrap Adjusted Mean	Comparison Adjusted Mean	Bootstrap Impact
Percent of time child support collections made	36.7%	24.3%	12.4%***
Monthly average child support collections, of those paying	\$218.00	\$266.00	-\$48.00
Consistent payment of child support, at least 2 out of 3 months	35.4%	24.6%	10.8%***
Consistent payment of child support, 3 out of 3 months	19.9%	16.2%	3.7%

Note: *** indicates statistically significant difference at the .01 level; ** at .05 level; * at .10 level

Use of TANF by the Custodial Mother

The final test attempted to answer this question: To what extent does receipt of Bootstrap services reduce the use of TANF benefits by custodial parents? This measure simply counts the percent of post-program-entry months in which the custodial mother received TANF benefits, with receipt of benefits for any part of the month considered as receipt for the entire month.

Consistent with expectations and program goals, this measure revealed that the custodial mothers associated with Bootstrap program participants were less likely than controls to be receiving TANF at any given point in time following program entry. This 3.4 percentage-point decrease in TANF receipt, although small in an absolute sense, represents

about a 25 percent decrease in TANF receipt relative to that of members of the comparison group. This suggests that, in the time period measured, the Bootstrap program successfully led to decreased reliance on TANF among custodial mothers associated with Bootstrap participants.

Table 4.4: Bootstrap Impact on use of TANF by Mother

	Bootstrap Adjusted Mean	Comparison Adjusted Mean	Bootstrap Impact
Mother's percent of time on TANF	10.0%	13.4%	-3.4%***

Note: *** indicates statistically significant difference at the .01 level; ** at .05 level;
* at .10 level

In summary, Bootstrap services were associated with greater participation in workforce development and skills training, and with increased employment rates but at lesser wages. Bootstrap was also associated with increased frequency of child support payments, as well as increased consistency of payment. Finally, the custodial mothers associated with Bootstrap participants showed lesser rates of TANF receipt subsequent to program entry.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

The results reported herein strongly suggest that the Bootstrap program was successful in achieving its goals of improving outcomes for young, low-income noncustodial fathers and the associated mothers of their children. However, these results should be interpreted cautiously due to a number of factors, some of which could be clarified by future research:

- First, this was not a random-assignment experiment, but a quasi-experiment designed to mimic the best properties of an experiment. Although tests show that the comparison group was nearly identical to the Bootstrap participant group just before the study began, this extends only to those characteristics of individuals that can be measured with the available data sources. Only a true experiment can ensure equivalence of two groups on both measurable and immeasurable characteristics. Thus, only a true experiment can unequivocally conclude that the program *caused* the differences observed subsequent to the program.
- Second, but related to the first, is the issue of recruitment and enrollment difficulties. Since there was difficulty recruiting participants, and since some noncustodial fathers attempted to enroll but there were no suitable workforce development activities available to serve them, this increases the possibility that immeasurable differences in the participants themselves (e.g., motivation or other factors) might have accounted for some of the differential outcomes.
- Third, the services offered varied from one site to the next. Since there was insufficient sample size to allow tests of whether the Bootstrap impact varied from one site to another, there is no way of knowing exactly which services or combinations of services contributed to the impacts observed.
- Fourth, the program was not quite mature, so it is difficult to know whether similar outcomes would be observed if one were to implement this demonstration program on a larger scale, across multiple sites and sustained for longer periods of time.

- Finally, the time frame for follow-up observation was relatively short. Some of these outcomes might be expected to fade over a longer follow-up interval, while others might be expected to grow stronger. In particular, effects of training or other programs that increase earnings potential could take some time before they begin to show positive outcomes.

Keeping these caveats in mind, the results suggest that young, low-income noncustodial fathers can potentially benefit from a package of services designed to help them become more able to support their children financially. The fathers participating in Bootstrap showed greater participation in workforce development and skills training. Although not all sources of workforce development and training were included in this measure, this outcome serves as an indication that the workforce referral function of Bootstrap was to some extent working as it was designed. On the other hand, the lack of available workforce development opportunities that prevented some from enrolling, as documented in the process report, points out the need to continue to enhance the availability of these services for low-income noncustodial fathers.

The results also suggest that Bootstrap led to substantially greater employment rates among participants. Although this impact was to some extent muted by the finding of reduced earnings levels among those fathers who were employed, this could be a direct function of a greater number working in entry-level jobs at lesser rates of pay. Future research should investigate whether over the longer term the kinds of jobs the participants acquire lead to advancement and increasing earnings, or whether their earnings levels remain stagnant.

In addition to the employment gains, Bootstrap participants were substantially more likely to pay child support, and more likely to pay it consistently over time. Recent research²⁵ suggests that payment of child support is strongly related to increased welfare exits and reduced recidivism, as well as reduced poverty rates. Also consistent with this is the finding that the custodial mothers associated with Bootstrap participants showed reduced rates of welfare receipt subsequent to the program. This is further evidence that Bootstrap not only improved economic conditions for the noncustodial fathers, but that these benefits

²⁵ Schroeder, King, and Hill, 2004.

were passed on to the custodial mothers, and presumably to the children, in the form of more consistent payment of child support and reduced reliance on public assistance.

Much of the debate and policy development surrounding welfare reform research over the past decade or more have focused almost exclusively on the mothers. The present results suggest not only that there is substantial room for economic improvement among members of this population of low-income fathers, but also that a basic package of services offered to some of these fathers appears to promote such improvement. Future policy development should include robust strategies for increasing the earnings capacity of young, low-income fathers.

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Appendix A

This appendix summarizes information about the evaluations included in the literature review for this study. Table A-1 provides a summary of the evaluation designs used for each of these initiatives. Following the table are descriptions of each of the programs evaluated and a summary of their relevant outcomes. The appendix concludes with Table A-2, which summarizes these outcomes.

Table A-1: Outcome Evaluation Designs for Select Responsible Fatherhood Programs

Program	Research Design	Outcome Measures	Data Sources
Bootstrap	Quasi-experimental nearest neighbor approach	Paternity establishments, workforce development participation, employment rates, earnings, child support payments, and reliance on public assistance	Program and state administrative data (including Responsible Fatherhood Management Information System or RFMIS)
MMOR	Random assignment experiment; pre-post comparison	Employment; reading and math competency; family function; health risks	Interviews/surveys; tests; program data
OCSE Responsible Fatherhood/Section 1115 Programs	Pre-post comparison	Employment; income; involved parenting; child support compliance	Program and state administrative data (including RFMIS); telephone interviews
PFS	Random assignment experiment	Employment; earnings; child support payments; child involvement	State administrative data (Unemployment Insurance, Child Support); surveys; ethnographic data
SHARE	Pre-post comparison; subgroup comparison	Employment; earnings; child support	State administrative data (employer-reported earnings; child support payments; receipt of TANF/FS benefits)
STEP-UP	Random assignment experiment	Employment/occupation improvements; income improvements; educational improvements; family improvements; other relationship improvements; health improvements; motivation	Pre-post survey; program data; other sources unclear
Texas noncustodial parent referral program	Quasi-experimental nearest-neighbor approach	Participation in workforce services; child support	Program and state administrative data
YUFPP	Pre-post comparison	Education; employment; parenting	Intake questionnaire; baseline telephone interviews; follow-up telephone interviews; monthly activity logs; ethnographic data

Minority Male Opportunity and Responsibility Program

Evaluation:

Summary Of Final Evaluation Findings From FY 1991 Demonstration Partnership Program Projects²⁶

Project period:

November 1991 to August 1994

Host organization:

Social Development Commission of Milwaukee

Site:

Milwaukee, WI

Target population/eligibility requirements:

Minority males ages 18-34 who were currently receiving or eligible for public assistance, suffered from chronic unemployment, were the parent of at least one child, and had reading and math levels between the third and seventh grades as determined by the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). Eligibility rules were not strictly enforced.

Scale:

Evaluation included 168 men: 79 in the full experimental track and 89 in the control track.

Services:

Program participants were divided into two tracks: a 'Job First' control group and 'Basic Skills' experimental group. Experimental track participants received extensive case management, a weekly full-service Job Club, a full range of counseling, educational programs and referrals, referrals for other services. Control subjects only received job referrals and informal 'job club' supports.

Relevant outcomes:

Employment outcomes were "significantly more favorable for the case management clients than those in job placement:" 28 percent of case management participants v. 10 percent of job placement participants were documented as employed (p=.003) at the end of the program. At the time of follow-up, 47 percent of experimental group members v. 12 percent of control members were employed (p=.002).

²⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1997a

OCSE Responsible Fatherhood/Section 1115 Programs

Evaluation:

Policy Studies Inc./Center for Policy Research study of OCSE Responsible Fatherhood Programs²⁷

Project period:

October 1998 to December 2000

Host organization:

Office of Child Support Enforcement provided Section 1115 grants and waivers to eight states to implement and test responsible fatherhood programs.

Sites:

Sites included San Mateo County, CA; El Paso County, CO; City of Baltimore, MD; City of Boston, MA; Cape Girardeau County, MO; Belknap, Hillsborough, and Merrimack Counties, NH; Pierce County, WA; and the City of Racine, WA.

Target population/eligibility requirements:

States were allowed to determine their own eligibility standards.

Scale:

The programs served a total of 1,800 noncustodial fathers, 1,674 of which were included in the evaluation.

Services:

Services varied across sites and included assistance with child support and child access, peer support, employment assistance, case management, parenting classes, and related services.

Relevant outcomes:

The evaluation found that there were statistically significant increases in the number of noncustodial fathers who were employed: employment rates increased by 33 percent in Maryland, 29 percent in Missouri, 16 percent in Wisconsin, and 8 percent in Massachusetts. All of the other sites but one also reported increases but they were not statistically significant. There were also statistically significant increases in client earnings for the quarter prior to enrollment and the second quarter post-enrollment: earnings increased by 250 percent in Maryland, 58 percent in Wisconsin, 41 percent in Colorado, and 25 percent in Massachusetts although the researchers noted that the increases were largely due to earnings among those previously unemployed. Increases at the other sites were not statistically significant. In the year after enrollment in the program, “far more” noncustodial parents making child support payments. The rates of increase were 31 percent for Colorado, 29 percent for Missouri, 26 percent for Washington, 19 percent for Massachusetts, 17 percent for Maryland, 11 percent for Wisconsin, and 4 percent for New Hampshire.

²⁷ Policy Studies Inc./Center for Policy Research, 2003

Parents' Fair Share

Evaluation:

MDRC final evaluation from Parents' Fair Share²⁸

Project period

1994-2001

Host organizations:

Varied. Local partnerships consisted of child support agencies, employment and training providers, and community-based service organizations.

Sites:

Sites included LA, Jacksonville, FL; Springfield, MA; Grand Rapids, MI; Trenton, NJ; Dayton, OH; and Memphis, TN.

Target population/eligibility requirements:

Fathers who were under- or unemployed and had child support orders in place but were not making regular payments. In addition, the children for whom they owed support had to be current or past recipients of welfare.

Scale:

5,500

Services:

Core services included peer support, employment and training, enhanced child support enforcement, and mediation.

Relevant outcomes:

PFS outreach activities led to increased child support collections. Sixty-one and three-tenths percent of PFS group members participated in at least one activity compared to 24.9 percent of the control group.²⁹ Among men with no high school diploma and little recent work experience, PFS “increased the extent of their employment during the year and helped them get better jobs than they would have otherwise.” In contrast, “more-employable fathers” did not experience earnings increases on average and experienced “a slight reduction in employment” attributed to leaving the workforce to participate in PFS.³⁰

²⁸ Miller and Knox, 2001; Martinez and Miller, 2000.

²⁹ Martinez and Miller, 2000, p.36

³⁰ Ibid, p. 41

SHARE

Evaluation:

Mathematica evaluation of employment and child support outcomes from the SHARE program.³¹

Project period:

July 1998 to September 2001

Host organization:

Tri-County Workforce Development Council

Sites:

Three WA counties (Yakima, Kittitas, Klickitat); WA Department of Social and Health Services, and the office of the Yakima County Prosecuting Attorney

Target population/eligibility requirements:

Unemployed/unable to pay noncustodial parents with children who received TANF and who received court referrals.

Scale:

567 noncustodial parents were issued contempt citations and notified the individuals that they were required to attend a court hearing; 280 appeared, 172 of which were referred to a WtW program

Services:

WtW programming (job readiness, job placement, post-employment services, job retention and support services).

Relevant outcomes:

Noncustodial fathers who were referred to SHARE “worked more, earned more, and paid more child support.”

³¹ Perez-Johnson, Kauff, and Hershey, 2003

STEP-UP with Mentoring for Young Fathers

Evaluation:

OCSE program evaluation³²

Project period:

Sept 30, 1992 to Feb 28, 1995

Host organization:

STEP-UP

Sites:

Phoenix, AZ

Target population/eligibility requirements:

Low-income fathers ages 16-22 with limited employment history and limited educational backgrounds.

Scale:

120 (30 men received mentoring, 30 received ed stipends, 30 received both, 30 received none)

Services:

Counseling/case management, mentoring, and stipends for education/job training.

Relevant outcomes:

44 percent of mentored fathers and 32 percent of non-mentored fathers obtained jobs sometime during the project period. The average hourly income of mentored fathers rose by \$2.67 and the average hourly income of non-mentored fathers was increased by \$2.36. Fully 73 percent of fathers who completed the mentoring program were employed at the end of the demonstration versus 48 percent of the un-mentored control group.

³² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1997b

Texas Noncustodial Parent Referral Program

Evaluation:

Ray Marshall Center impact evaluation³³

Project period:

January 1999 – June 2000

Host organization:

Section 8 of House Bill 3272 of the 76th Texas Legislature (1999) required the Texas Workforce Commission and Texas Office of the Attorney General, along with the Office of Court Administration to study and report to the legislature regarding the effectiveness of referring obligors to an employment assistance program as a means of increasing child support collections.

Sites:

The RMC evaluation included programs in Bexar and Harris Counties.

Target population/eligibility requirements:

Noncustodial parents who were behind on child support payments.

Scale:

1,054 (96 from Bexar and 958 from Harris) were matched with similar noncustodial parents who did not receive referrals.

Services:

WtW activities (job readiness, job placement, post-employment services, job retention and support services)

Relevant outcomes:

In Bexar County, the amount and regularity of child support collections increased. The net average collection increased by \$116 and the percent of months with collections increased by 21.5 percent. In Harris County, the program had no statistically significant impact. The researchers concluded that the results of the program were equivocal.

³³ O'Shea et al, 2001.

Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project

Evaluation:

Public/Private Ventures Evaluation³⁴

Project period:

March 1991 to August 1993

Host organizations:

Varied by site. Included community-based organizations, Private Industry Councils, and “community-based managing services.”

Sites:

Annapolis, MD; Cleveland, OH; Fresno, CA; Philadelphia, PA; Racine, WI; and St. Petersburg, FL.

Target population/eligibility requirements:

Fathers ages 16-25.

Scale:

459 fathers; 155 were included in the final evaluation (not a scientific sample)

Services:

YUFPP services included basic skills/GED courses, employment and training services, fatherhood development curriculum, and case management.

Relevant outcomes:

Across all sites, about half (n=79) of the 155 fathers surveyed participated in job readiness activities. Only 10 fathers completed job training and 5 were still enrolled at completion. Only four fathers completed or were still enrolled in OJT at the end of the program. Employment increased from 23 percent at baseline to 54 percent at follow-up. Average weekly pay increased from \$150 to \$250. Thirty-one fathers declared paternity while in the program or afterward, the number of fathers with orders increased from 44 at baseline to 52, and the number of fathers making child support payments increased from 3 to 22. However, the evaluators cautioned that a causal relationship between these outcomes and the programming offered by YUFPP should not be assumed because there was no control group for comparison.

³⁴ Achatz and MacAllum, 1994

**Table A-2: Summary of Outcomes for Select Responsible
Fatherhood Program Evaluations**

Program	Paternity Establishments	Workforce Development Participation	Employment Rates	Earnings	Consistent Child Support Payments	Custodial Parent Use of TANF
MMOR			+			
OCSE Responsible Fatherhood/Section 1115 Programs			+	+	+	
PFS		+	+ (for hardest to serve)	+ (for hardest to serve)	+	
SHARE			+	+	+	
STEP-UP			+			
Texas noncustodial parent referral program		+			Inconclusive	
YUFPP	+	+	+	+	+	

Appendix B

Comparison Group Selection

This section describes the procedures and variables used in the quasi-experimental selection of a comparison group from the population of noncustodial fathers in the OAG caseload. The selection of nearest neighbors to comprise the comparison group was complicated by the fact that, due to the addition of a program requirement that Bootstrap participants must have OAG cases opened in order to participate, the point of entry for many young fathers into the program occurred very close to the time of their first appearance in the OAG administrative databases. Since these databases represented the source from which most ‘nearest neighbor’ matching data were available, it was highly desirable to have complete participant data as of the point of entry. This problem was addressed by retroactively using archival administrative data to capture the states of both the participants and their potential neighbors as close as possible to their time of entry into the program.³⁵ This approach should ensure adequate contemporaneous and comparable data with which to evaluate the similarity of potential comparison group members.

A related problem occurred due to the possibility that Bootstrap led participants to open OAG cases earlier than they might have in the absence of the program. This complicated the selection of potential comparison group members, since many of those young fathers who would be most comparable to the young Bootstrap participants may not yet have opened a case with the OAG. This problem was solved by allowing noncustodial fathers to potentially serve as comparison group members during a period of up to six months before they opened their first OAG case. The assumption was that if Bootstrap led some participants to open OAG cases early, then we would have to look at potential comparators in the time just before as well as after their cases opened in order to find the best matches.

³⁵ Since potential comparison group members by definition did not have a time of entry into the program, their characteristics were compared as of the month of entry for the Bootstrap member to whom they were being compared.

Matching Procedure

Nearest-neighbor matching is an iterative computational process, done for one Bootstrap participant (or target) at a time, as follows. First, the universe of potential neighbors for the target participant is restricted to those with an exact match on important categorical dimensions, including county of residence and time of entry into the program. Next, the target participant is compared against every remaining potential neighbor on a number of important near-continuous dimensions, with the standardized absolute distances summed to arrive at a measure of total multivariate distance.³⁶ When all potential neighbors have been compared to the target, the one with the shortest distance, or the person most like the target in multivariate space, is selected as the nearest neighbor. This neighbor is retained for the comparison group, then removed from further matching consideration, and the process is repeated for the remaining Bootstrap participants until the selection of the comparison group is complete.

Basic Dimensions for Matching

Beyond the county of residence and time of entry variables already mentioned, the basic dimensions for selecting a comparison group consisted of variables from the following categories:

- Father's demographics at program entry;
- Father's employment, earnings, and workforce development participation history;
- Child support case features and collections history;
- Mother's demographics and TANF assistance history;

³⁶ Mahalanobis, 1936, pp 49-55.

Details of specific variables from these categories are listed below in Table B-1.

Table B-1: Matching Dimensions

Category	Variable	Details
Father's demographics	Father's age	Age in years, as of program entry
	Father Black	Indicator of whether father's race/ethnicity is Black
	Father Hispanic	Indicator of whether father's race/ethnicity is Hispanic
Father's earnings and workforce development histories	Father's first earnings	Time since father's first observed earnings, in months, within 36 months prior to program entry
	Father's percent of time employed	Percent of quarters in which father has any earnings, since first observed
	Father's average earnings level	Average earnings per month, including only months since first observed
	Father previously in any workforce development	Indicator of whether father participated in WIA within 36 months before program entry
Mother's demographics	Mother's age	Age in years, as of program entry
	Mother Black	Indicator of whether mother's race/ethnicity is Black
	Mother Hispanic	Indicator of whether mother's race/ethnicity is Hispanic
	Mother White	Indicator of whether mother's race/ethnicity is White
	Mother's number of child support cases	Number of open child support cases on which the mother is the custodial parent (including the one with the Bootstrap participant), as of program entry
Child support case features, for the case involving the Bootstrap participant and mother of his child	Number of children	Number of children on the case
	Youngest child age	Age of youngest child on case, in years
	Oldest child age	Age of oldest child on the case, in years
	Recent birth	Indicator of whether any child on the case was born within one year of program entry
	All children born out of wedlock	Indicator of whether all children on the case were born out of wedlock
Mother's benefit receipt history	Mother's first TANF receipt	Time since mother's first observed TANF receipt, in months, within 36 months prior to program entry
	Mother's percent of time on TANF	Percent of months in which mother received TANF benefits, since first
Child support collections history	First child support collection	Time since first child support collection, in months, within 18 months prior to program entry
	Percent of time child support collections made	Percent of months in which child support collections made, since first
	Average monthly child support collections	Average amount of child support collections made, since first

Other Considerations for Young Participants

Due to their young ages, many of the entering Bootstrap participants and their partners had been expected to have little or no history with the child support system, with other government assistance, nor with earning wages upon entry into the program. Thus, for example, one would expect very few of them to have much of a child support collections history, or to have had children with multiple other partners. This does not mean, however, that due to lack of data, these dimensions should be ignored. On the contrary, these are important dimensions for which the chosen comparison group members should be as similar as possible. As discussed in the main report, the OAG caseload of noncustodial parents (NCPs) had numerous potential neighbors whose child support cases were in the early stages of progression, so it was possible to choose very similar nearest neighbors. To enhance the possibility of getting good matches for those with little history, several historical indicators were created specifically for this young population to judge how far into the past their experience extended. These measures, which were part of the set of matching dimensions, included: time since first TANF, time since first child support collection, and time since first earnings. The final set of matching dimensions, and well as the mean values on these dimensions for the Bootstrap and selected comparison groups, is listed in the main report Table 3.2.

Match Implementation

The first step in implementation of the match procedure involved locating all OAG case information for the seventy-nine Bootstrap participants who had received a stipend. Unfortunately, only sixty of these participants could be identified among OAG noncustodial parents. Fifty-eight were located using a social security number (SSN) match, and another two were identified using a name and birth date match for those not linked by SSN. The remaining nineteen participants were excluded from further analysis.

The initial pool of potential comparison group members consisted of all NCPs with open cases in the eight counties in which these sixty Bootstrap participants resided, plus all

other NCPs in the OAG database whose county could not be identified.³⁷ A total of 1,827,809 NCPs were thus included in the initial pool of potential comparison group members, or on average about 30,000 potential comparators for each Bootstrap participant.

A multivariate distance metric was used in the matching procedure to determine how similar a pair of persons (Bootstrap and potential comparator) was in multivariate space. The metric consisted of a weighted multivariate distance measure as described in the statistical analysis plan (Schroeder & Schexnayder, 2002, 2003), and similar to that subsequently tested by Zhao (2004). This weighted matching metric placed the greatest emphasis on those dimensions for which the largest differences were found between the Bootstrap and unselected comparison groups as a whole. This metric was found by Hollenbeck, King, and Schroeder (2003) to produce the best-matched, or most similar comparison groups when using small samples (less than 500 participants). Subsequent to the match procedure but before computing impacts, and also as described in the analysis plan, one pair of individuals (one Bootstrap and one comparison group member) was removed from further analysis because of their having been a poor match.

Since the impact evaluation hinges critically on post-program differences in outcomes for Bootstrap participants and the comparison group, it was vitally important to ensure that the groups were as equivalent as possible before any services were received. Thus, after the selection procedure one would expect to observe, if the selection were done well, that the measurable characteristics of the groups at program entry should differ only by chance. In order to test the hypothesis that the characteristics of the groups differed only due to chance, RMC researchers performed t-tests on the matching dimensions characterizing the groups. As described in the main report, no significant differences were found, indicating that the match was successful at producing a similar comparison group on all measurable dimensions.

Time Periods

Data from most sources were collected starting in April 1999, or at least three years prior to the beginning of Bootstrap client intake. The only exception to this was for child support payment data, which was only complete beginning in September 2000, or

³⁷ Several Bootstrap participants had no county listed in the OAG database, so for selection of the comparison group these were compared against all other OAG NCPs who had no county listed.

approximately 18 months prior to the first intake. Child support collections data were available through September 2003, earnings data through March 2004, Workforce Investment Act (WIA) participation data through June 2004, and TANF participation through September 2004.

Identifiers

Due to heavy reliance on client SSNs for linking across administrative data sources, persons whose SSNs were missing or invalid were necessarily be dropped from all analyses. This was not expected to be much of a problem for the Bootstrap participants, since the collection of participant SSNs was a contract requirement. Furthermore, SSN completion rates in the OAG case data have historically been adequate for this purpose³⁸, so no problem is anticipated for the comparison group either. In all, only four Bootstrap participants did not have SSNs reported in the Responsible Fatherhood Management Information System (RFMIS) data system (described below), contributing to the number who had to be dropped from all analyses (described above).

Data Sources

The following sections provide details of the data collected from each supplying agency.

Texas Office of the Attorney General

Child Support Data

In Texas, the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) has responsibility for helping custodial parents receive child support from the noncustodial parent of their children. The OAG has developed automated data systems to facilitate the administration of this program. These data systems include archival detail on support orders, paternity establishments, enforcement actions, case demographics, amounts of support paid and owed by noncustodial parents, and share of the support collected that is disbursed to the state and custodial parent.

³⁸ O'Shea et al, 2001.

The data are keyed to OAG client and case numbers that can easily be linked to NCP and CP SSNs for linking to other data sources.

FPLS Wage Data

Since mid-1998, a Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS) database has been maintained at the federal level, as required by provisions of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). This database contains both new hire information, from the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH), and quarterly UI wages, regardless of the state to which they were reported, for anyone listed in the Federal Case Registry (FCR). The FCR is an ongoing aggregation of all contributing state case registries, which contain all individuals that each state wishes to track for purposes of child support enforcement. On a regular basis, the states send in their case registries, as well as all UI wage and new hire data, and they receive back any matches from their own case registries to other states' hire and wage data. These data allow states to know when someone who owes child support gets a job in another state, so they can begin the legal process of collecting from that person. These data are an excellent source for tracking employment and wages of NCPs for research purposes. These data were used to supplement the UI wage data to improve the accuracy of employment and earnings measures.

Texas Department of Human Services Data

Tracking receipt of benefits such as TANF was done using administrative files produced by the Texas Department of Human Services (DHS). SAVERR, the DHS primary data system, is the main repository of client and case information. For TANF and related programs, DHS maintains monthly snapshots of the recipient client and caseloads. These serve as the main source of information regarding who received what benefits in what time periods. Clients are identified in these sources by a DHS client number as well as by SSN, and they are linked to case level information through DHS case numbers.

Texas Workforce Commission data

Unemployment Insurance Wage Data

As part of the administration of the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) requires covered employers to report the amount of pay they give each employee each quarter. The data records identify each employee by social security number (SSN), and are thus easily linked to members of the Bootstrap and comparison groups.

Workforce Development Participation Data

TWC administers a number of workforce development programs that offer education, training, and job search services to indigent unemployed persons. Some of these programs track clients' levels of participation, in the form of actual days or hours spent in the activities, while others only provide date ranges. Unfortunately, not all these programs' data sources were made available covering the entire study period. Thus, the only program for which workforce participation data was collected is the Workforce Investment Act (WIA, formerly the JTPA program). Other programs that may have offered services to these populations include:

- Welfare-to-Work (WtW) program data,
- One-stop and Employment Services registration data.

Texas Fragile Families Data

The Texas Fragile Families data system (now known as the Responsible Fatherhood Management Information System, or RFMIS) provided intake, assessment, and monthly participation data on all Bootstrap participants. Measures recorded at intake included identifiers and demographics such as living arrangements, education, and brief services needed from the program. Assessment measures included contact information, employment details and history, and employment and parenting issues. From the service plan form, measures included projected services in the areas of education, training, child support,

parenting, visitation, and others. And finally, a case closing form included the date of and reason for the case closing.

Statistical Measures to Answer Research Questions

The following sections of this report describe the statistical measures that were applied to each of the research questions. The questions, and the measures that address them, are listed in a rough chronological order, indicating how soon impacts can be expected from a program like this.

Participation in Workforce Development Services

One potential early impact of the Bootstrap project was increased participation in workforce development or skills training services. Participation data on the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) program were analyzed to determine whether increased rates of participation were observed. Participation was gauged in terms of percent of post-entry months in which any workforce development services were received.

Employment and Earnings

Previous work in the area of welfare and employment has shown that UI wage data are likely to be superior to self reported income data; therefore, UI wages were used to measure employment. UI wage data cover over 95 percent of all employment in the state of Texas. Some jobs are not covered (including self-employment, and most agricultural employment), and some employers under-report their employees to avoid taxes. Any underreporting due to these reasons should fall equally on both the Bootstrap and comparison groups. Where possible, the measurement of employment and wages also included those wages reported to other states and retrieved through the FPLS data system, as described above. This provided a more accurate measure of wages and employment for the population of NCPs, many of whom work out-of-state from time to time.

Child Support Collections

One of the more important outcomes expected from the Bootstrap project was an increase in consistent payment of child support. Child support collected from noncustodial fathers was gauged in a number of ways. One method examined the frequency of collections by counting the proportion of months in which any collection was made. Another measure looked at the average dollar amount of collections. The average monthly collections *among those paying child support* gives an approximation of how much one who receives a child support payment for a given month expected to receive.

Measures of child support consistency of payment were also created on the premise that poor families need consistent payments in order to rely on child support as a source of income. Consistent payment of child support was calculated based on frequency of payment across three-month intervals, with two levels of consistency being defined: 1) receipt of child support in at least two out of every three months, and 2) receipt of child support in all three out of every three months.

TANF Benefits

Receipt of TANF by the custodial mothers associated with Bootstrap participants was summarized by computing the percent of time spent receiving benefits subsequent to entry into the program. Receipt of TANF for part of one month was considered as receipt for the entire month.