

CHILD SUPPORT SETTLEMENTS: A COMPARISON BETWEEN 1973 AND 1985

Wendy L. Reiboldt, The Ohio State University¹

This paper examines factors related to women's receipt of child support awards before (1973) and after (1985) divorce law reform.

Approximately 60% of divorcing couples have children, making child support awards an important consideration in divorce cases. With the divorce law reform in Ohio in 1974, child support awards were expected to increase in frequency and amount. This law change would have important implications for the financial well-being of divorced women and their children.

The purpose of this study was to compare court record data of divorce settlements for women in 1973 and 1985 to determine factors that affect settlements to guide families and legal professionals toward appropriate choices during the divorce process. Specifically, this paper looks at differences between 1973 and 1985 by comparing receipt and amount of child support awards. Further, it examines the effect of marital investment, the legal process, assets and residence location on probability of award and amount of award of child support.

ANALYSIS

The sample consisted of a 10% random selection of divorce and dissolution cases in four Ohio counties in 1973 and 1985. Total sample size for 1973 and 1985 was 1028 and 1066, respectively. Specific to this study, 58% of cases in 1973 and 52% of cases in 1985 involved children. Child support was awarded in 85% of the cases in 1973 and 83% of the cases in 1985. Women received custody of the children in 90% of the cases in 1973 and 85% of the cases in 1985.

T-tests were run to test for differences between 1973 and 1985 in receipt and amount of child support awards. Stepwise regression was performed to determine factors contributing to the probability and amount of child support awarded before and after divorce law reform. Interaction variables were created in the regression procedure by multiplying a dummy variable "year" (1985) by each independent variable, using 1973 as the base year. This step was implemented to better perceive how year and the independent variables interact in the equation.

RESULTS

Results of the t-tests showed that there was not a significant difference in the proportion of women

receiving child support awards between 1973 and 1985. In 1973, 81% of women received child support awards while 79% received child support awards in 1985. There was a difference in the mean amount of child support awards between 1973 and 1985. The mean amount of child support awards was significantly less in 1985 (\$39.47) than in 1973 (\$53.89).

Results of the stepwise regression analysis did not find year alone to be significant. Year did interact with two variables in each model, influencing probability and amount of child support awarded.

In the model for factors affecting receipt of child support award, year interacted with marriage length, increasing probability of receiving an award by .06% for each year married in 1985. Year interacted with neglect, increasing the probability of award by .9% in 1985 when neglect was the grounds for divorce. Also entering the model for award of child support was marriage length, which decreased the probability of award by .1% for each year married in 1973, and neglect which increased the probability of award by 2% when neglect was the grounds for divorce in 1973.

In the model explaining amount of child support award, year interacted with marriage length and husband's motions. The marriage length interaction term increased amount of child support by \$2.55 for each year married in 1985. The husband's motions interaction term increased amount of child support by \$4.01 for each motion filed in 1985. Also entering the model was marriage length which increased amount of child support by \$5.60 for every year married in 1973, and husband's motions which increased amount of child support by \$171.43 in 1973.

SUMMARY

The change in laws governing child support apparently had little or no effect on increasing the financial security of children in this sample. Estimates for raising one child for 18 years in a medium income family is \$123 per week (Espenshade, 1984). Typically, child support payments have been inadequate, and divorce law reform appears to have failed at ameliorating the situation. The average child support award does not cover one-half the cost of raising a child, thus the burden is on the custodial mother (typically). Not only are cost of living increases left out of child support awards; it is apparent that increases in the cost of living and of raising children have not been considered by divorcing parties, attorneys and judges.

REFERENCES

Espenshade, T.J. (1984). Investing in Children. New Estimates of Parental Expenditures. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press.

¹Graduate Research Associate, Family Resource Management Department.