

Do child maintenance policies improve children's economic well-being in both developing and developed countries? The case of Colombia and the US

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ABSTRACT

Demographic statistics across countries show that children are being increasingly raised in lone-parent households. Children in lone-parent households have higher risks of poverty and material hardship in a wide range of countries. Moreover, some literature suggests that lone parenthood may have severe long term effects on children implying that interventions aimed at improving income security of lone parents have the potential to enhance children's economic well-being in the long run. This paper focuses on the role of child maintenance (child support) policies in promoting economic well-being in two very different countries, Colombia and the US. Based on policy documents and national microdata the paper (1) describes the level of poverty among lone-parent families in both countries; (2) describes current child maintenance policy in each country, and (3) discusses main child maintenance outcomes, paying particular attention to the extent to which child maintenance is an important source of income for lone parents above and below the poverty threshold. We primarily use descriptive analyses to explore whether there have been changes in poverty and in the receipt of child maintenance over a ten-year period within each country. We also plan to conduct simulation analyses to estimate the extent to which child maintenance is preventing poverty within each country, and whether this is changing over time. The Colombian microdata comes from the Quality of Life Survey, which was applied to a representative sample of Colombians households in 1997, 2003 and 2008, and has not been used for studying child maintenance outcomes. The US data come from the Current Population Surveys of 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008. The paper concludes by discussing the similarities and differences between the two countries in using child maintenance policy to promote economic well-being for children in lone-parent families.