

# Nonresident Father Involvement and Child Well-Being

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# Nonresident Father Involvement and Child Well-Being

Valarie King (PI)

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## Why study nonresident fathers?

Approximately half of all children in the United States will live  
in a household without their biological fathers at some point in  
their childhood.

## Children who grow up apart from their fathers are disadvantaged in many ways

- more likely to engage in health-compromising behaviors  
(drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, unprotected sex)
- less likely to graduate from high school and college
- more likely to experience teenage and/or nonmarital fertility
- lower levels of psychological well-being
- more likely to be idle (out of school and out of work)
- more likely to experience marital instability and lower earnings in  
adulthood

(e.g., Aquilino 1996; Astone & McLanahan 1991; Cherlin, Kierman, & Chase-Lansdale 1995; Dornbusch &  
Gray 1988; Haveman, Wolfe, & Spaulding 1991; Hogan & Kingawa 1985; Krein & Beller 1988; Li &  
Wojtkiewicz 1992; McLanahan & Sandefur 1994; Thornton 1991; Wu 1996; Wu & Martinson 1993).

## Aims

1. To understand how nonresident fathers participate in  
the lives of children and how paternal participation  
varies by characteristics that represent the increasing  
diversity of families in the U.S.

## Aims

2. To assess the importance of nonresident father involvement for child well-being and to determine the contexts in which such involvement is most beneficial to children.

## Data

1. National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health)
2. National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH)
3. National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY - mother/child)
4. Child Development Supplement (CDS) to the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID)

## Conceptual Framework:

### Fathers Social and Financial Capital

## Prior Research

- Focus on nonresident father involvement during the 1980's
- Assumed positive benefits of father contact and child support for child well-being
- Empirical findings were limited and contradictory

## Dissertation:

Is child support or visitation associated with better child outcomes?

Data:  
NLSY mother/child data (1988)  
over 2000 children had nonresident fathers

TABLE 1  
Scaled Assessment Measures (Weighted)

	$\bar{x}$	SD
Behavior Problems Index (BPI)	110.92	14.55
Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC), Scholastic Competence	167.06	41.33
Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC), Global Self-Worth	195.10	37.70
Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT), Mathematics	97.49	13.23
Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT), Reading Recognition	102.00	13.50

King V. (1994) Nonresident Father Involvement and Child Well-being: Can Dads Make a Difference? *Journal of Family Issues* 15, 78-96.

TABLE 2  
Individual Items for School-Related Behaviors,  
Trouble-Related Behaviors, and Emotional Health<sup>a</sup>

		$\bar{x}$	SD
School-Related Behavior Items <sup>b</sup>			
RANK:	Child's scholastic standing	3.45	1.00
SUSPEND:	Child has been suspended from school	.07	.26
REMEDIAL:	Child is in a special class for remedial work	.17	.38
ADVANCED:	Child is in a special class for advanced work	.13	.33
GOSCHOOL:	Child's behavior has required a parent at school	.17	.38
Trouble-Related Behavior Items <sup>c</sup>			
STAYOUT:	Child has stayed out later than parents said	.58	.49
HURT:	Child has hurt someone bad enough to need a doctor	.21	.41
LIED:	Child has lied to parents about something important	.54	.50
STEAL:	Child has taken something without paying for it	.12	.33
DAMAGE:	Child has damaged school property on purpose	.10	.31
SCHOOL:	Child had done something wrong at school that required a parent to come to school	.27	.44
SKIP:	Child has skipped a day of school without permission	.11	.31
STAYNITE:	Child has stayed out one night without permission	.19	.39
Emotional Health Items <sup>d</sup>			
PSYCH:	Child has seen a psychiatrist or other professional for behavioral or emotional problems (children 3 and older)	.07	.25
TOLDHELP:	Mother was told that her child needed mental help (all children)	.05	.22

King V. (1994)  
Nonresident Father  
Involvement and  
Child Well-being:  
Can Dads Make a  
Difference?  
*Journal of Family  
Issues* 15, 78-96.

## My Findings:

1. Visitation not related to any outcomes.
2. Child support positively related to academic outcomes.

## Other Researchers:

1. Visitation does not appear to strongly or directly influence child outcomes
2. Child support positively associated with academic outcomes and may be associated with fewer behavior problems.

**What kinds of nonresident father involvement influence child well-being?** (e.g., closeness, authoritative parenting)

**Under what circumstances (or for which children) does nonresident father involvement influence child well-being?** (e.g., boys vs. girls, advantaged vs. disadvantaged children)

**What aspects of child well-being are influenced by nonresident father involvement?** (e.g., internalizing problems, externalizing problems, academic performance, positive outcomes)

## Aims

1. To understand how nonresident fathers participate in the lives of children and how paternal participation varies by characteristics that represent the increasing diversity of families in the U.S.

**e.g., race and ethnicity**

**e.g., nature of mother-father relationship**

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## Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Nonresident Father Involvement

Journal of Marriage and Family 66 (February 2004): 1–21

## Findings:

1. Differences existed for many aspects of nonresident father involvement but no racial/ethnic group stood out as being higher or lower on father involvement.
2. Economic and demographic characteristics explained only some of these differences.
3. Father's education interacted with race/ethnicity.

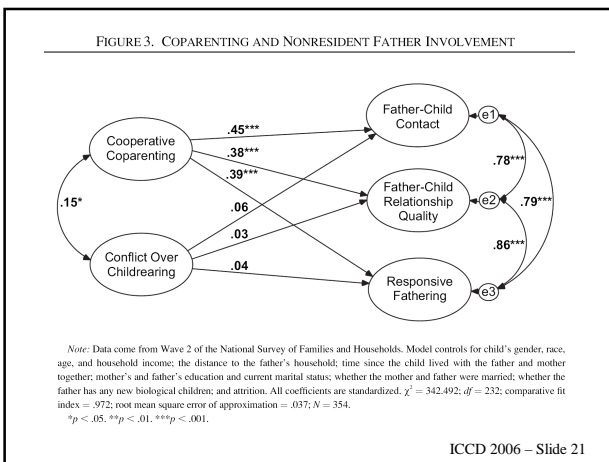
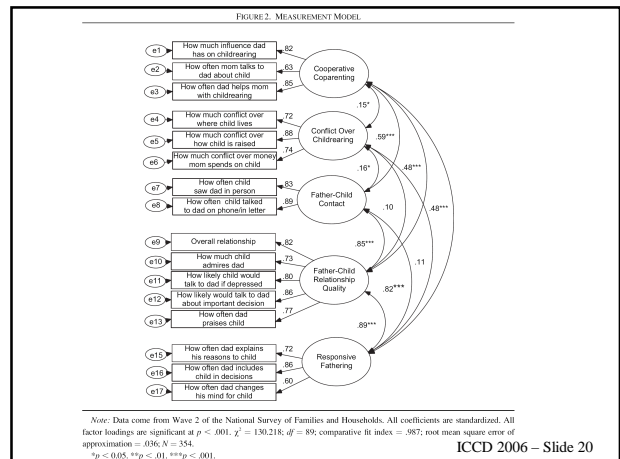
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## The Importance of the Coparental Relationship for Nonresident Fathers' Ties to Children

Journal of Marriage and Family 67 (December 2005): 1196–1212

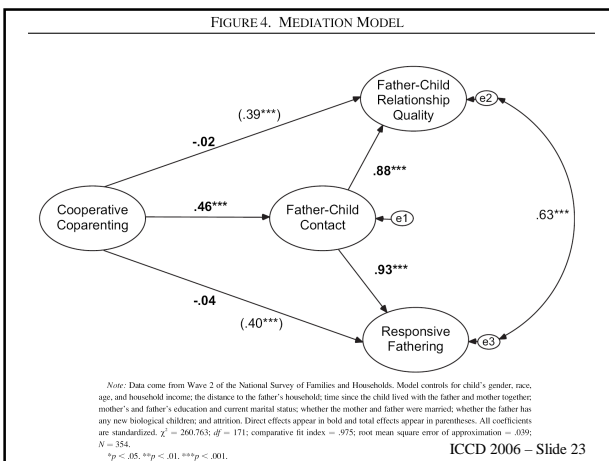
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## Findings:

1. Cooperative coparenting is a significant predictor of father contact, relationship quality, and responsive parenting.
2. Conflict not predictive.
3. Tests of group differences revealed no significant differences for blacks and whites, sons and daughters, parent's ever married or not, high or low income or parental education, or stepfather present or not.
4. Contact is a mediating variable between cooperative coparenting and father-child relationship quality & responsive fathering.

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## Aims

2. To assess the importance of nonresident father involvement for child well-being and to determine the contexts in which such involvement is most beneficial to children.

e.g., influence of high quality nonresident father-child relationships on adolescent outcomes

e.g., influence of relationships to both nonresident fathers and stepfathers on adolescent outcomes

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 JULIANA M. SOBOLEWSKI *University of Notre Dame\**

## Nonresident Fathers' Contributions to Adolescent Well-Being

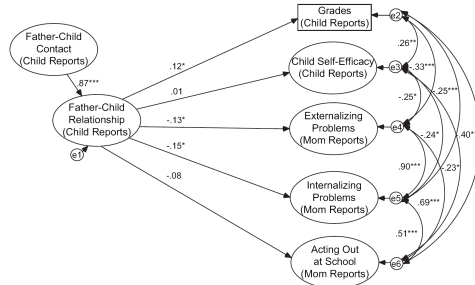
Journal of Marriage and Family 68 (August 2006): 537-557



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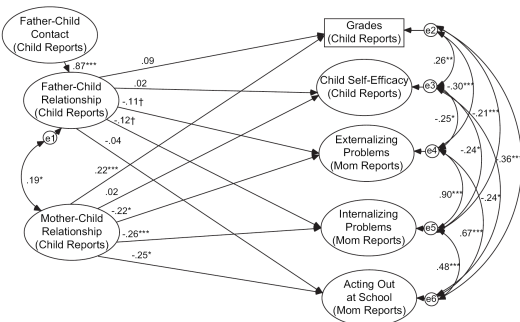
FIGURE 1. FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP ON CHILD OUTCOMES



Note: All coefficients are standardized.  $\chi^2 = 740.091$ ,  $df = 439$ ,  $CFI = .940$ ,  $RMSEA = .039$ . This model controls for whether father pays any support; child's household income, race, gender, and age; father's and mother's education; whether mother is married; whether mother and father were married; time since child lived with father and mother together; attrition; and whether mother's reports of father's information is missing.  
 $\dagger p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

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FIGURE 2. FATHER-CHILD AND MOTHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS ON CHILD OUTCOMES



Note: All coefficients are standardized.  $\chi^2 = 976.596$ ,  $df = 590$ ,  $CFI = .934$ ,  $RMSEA = .038$ . This model controls for whether father pays any support; child's household income, race, gender, and age; father's and mother's education; whether mother is married; whether mother and father were married; time since child lived with father and mother together; attrition; and whether mother's reports of father's information is missing.  
 $\dagger p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

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## Conclusions

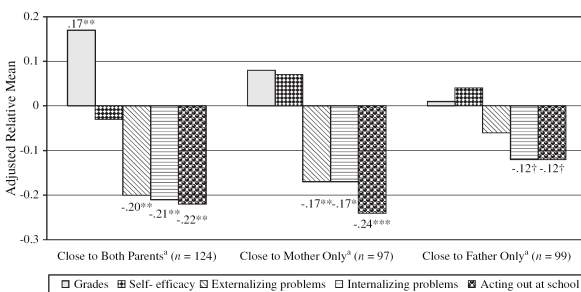
1. Strong ties to nonresident fathers can benefit adolescent well-being (fewer internalizing and externalizing problems).
2. Effects of father involvement on child well-being are clearly modest. Quality of the mother-child relationship has stronger and more consistent effects on child well-being.
3. Adolescents worst off when have poor relationships with both parents.



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FIGURE 4. CHILD OUTCOMES BY PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP PATTERN



Note: All scores are standardized.  $\chi^2 = 586.42$ ,  $df = 338$ ,  $CFI = .93$ ,  $RMSEA = .04$ . This model controls for whether father pays any support; child's household income, race, gender, and age; father's and mother's education; whether mother is married; whether mother and father were married; time since child lived with father and mother together; attrition; and whether mother's reports of father's information is missing. \*Close to neither parent is the reference group ( $n = 125$ ).  
 $\dagger p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

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## The Antecedents and Consequences of Adolescents' Relationships With Stepfathers and Nonresident Fathers

King, V. (in press)

Journal of Marriage and Family



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### Three Central Questions:

1. How common are different patterns of closeness to stepfathers and nonresident fathers? That is, how commonly can adolescents form close bonds to both stepfathers and nonresident fathers, how many are close to only one father, and how many are close to neither father?
2. What factors predict patterns of closeness to stepfathers and nonresident fathers?
3. What are the consequences for adolescent well-being of different patterns of relationships to stepfathers and nonresident fathers?

### Closeness to mothers, nonresident fathers, and stepfathers

- 1 = not at all close  
 2 = not very close  
 3 = somewhat close  
 4 = quite close  
 5 = extremely close
- = not close  
 = close

### Adolescents' Closeness to Mothers, Stepfathers, and Nonresident Biological Fathers

	Mothers	Stepfathers	Nonresident Fathers
Mean level of closeness <sup>a</sup> (SD)	4.60 (.70)	3.65 (1.16)	2.99 (1.47)
% Close <sup>b</sup>	91	60	41
% Not at all close <sup>c</sup>	0.1	6	25

Note: All values are weighted. N = 1149.

<sup>a</sup>Range from 1 to 5; all means differ from one another at  $p < .001$ . <sup>b</sup>Scores of 4 (quite close) or 5 (extremely close). <sup>c</sup>Scores of 1 (not at all close).

### Crosstabulation of Closeness to Stepfathers and Closeness to Nonresident Fathers

	not close to nonresident father	close to nonresident father
not close to stepfather	= close to neither father	= close only to nonresident father
close to stepfather	= close only to stepfather	= close to both fathers

(close = quite, extremely)  
 (not close = not at all, not very, somewhat)

### Percentage of Adolescents Close to Stepfathers and Nonresident Biological Fathers

Close to both fathers	25
Close to neither father	24
Close only to stepfather	35
Close only to nonresident father	16

Note: All values are weighted. N = 1149.

### Alternative Hypotheses of the Consequences of Closeness to Stepfathers and Nonresident Biological Fathers for Adolescent Well-Being

Hypothesis	Prediction for adolescent well-being				Predicted group differences
	Close to neither father (N)	Close only to nonresident biological father (F)	Close only to stepfather (SF)	Close to both fathers (B)	
Additive	0	+	+	++	B > SF, F > N
Redundancy	0	+	+	+	B, SF, F > N
Primacy of biology	0	+	0	+	B, F > SF, N
Primacy of residence	0	0	+	+	B, SF > F, N
Irrelevance	0	0	0	0	B = SF = F = N

**Unstandardized Coefficients From Regressions Predicting Adolescent Outcomes From Family Patterns (net of Control Variables)**

	Externalizing Problems	Internalizing Problems	Failing Grades
Close to both fathers (B)	-.37 <sub>a</sub> ***	-.31 <sub>a</sub> **	-.98 <sub>a</sub> **
Close only to stepfather (SF)	-.31 <sub>ab</sub> ***	-.20 <sub>ab</sub> *	-.59 <sub>a</sub> *
Close only to nonresident father (F)	-.11 <sub>b</sub>	-.03 <sub>b</sub>	-.63 <sub>a</sub> *
Close to neither father (N)	—	—	—
Significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between groups summarized	B > F, N SF > N	B > F, N SF > N	B, SF, F > N

Note: For each closeness group, coefficients within a column that do not share subscripts differ at  $p < .05$ .

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Conclusions**

1. Adolescents vary greatly in their ability to forge close relationships with one or both of their fathers, but when they can they appear to benefit.
2. Close ties with both stepfathers and nonresident biological fathers are associated with better adolescent outcomes, with ties to stepfathers being somewhat more influential than ties to nonresident fathers.
3. Need to go beyond examining family structure differences and to take the quality of children's relationships to all of their parents, regardless of residence, into account. Whether children have a stepfather or nonresident father may matter less than the kind of relationship that they forge with them.

**The Future**