

Post-Divorce Father-Adolescent Relationship Quality

- Prior research
- Developmental approach to understanding post divorce relationship quality
 - Fathers as less involved parents
 - Adolescents and young adults distance themselves from parents
 - Parental divorce exacerbates the developmentally linked parent-child relationship quality decline
 - Adolescent experiences and young adult transitions that have the potential for positively and negatively affecting post-divorce father-child relationship quality
 - Mother-offspring bond
 - Extra-familial experiences (school attachment, group membership)
 - Sense of wellbeing
 - Transitions to adult roles (leaving home, educational achievement, working for pay, becoming a parent and marrying or cohabiting)

Three goals

1. Estimate the extent to which fathers of adolescents are less involved parents
2. Compare changes in youth closeness to parents in intact and dissolved marriages
3. Assess the extent to which life experiences are associated with change and stability in father-offspring closeness among youth whose parents divorce
 - 1) why some high-quality father-adolescent relationships remain the same and others decline
 - 2) why some low-quality father-adolescent relationships are stable and others improve.

Methods

- The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health
 - A longitudinal survey of high school and middle school students in the United States.
- From students interviewed in 1995 and 2000 we drew the data from those
 - 1) whose biological parents divorced between the two waves (N=570)
 - 2) whose biological parents' marriage remained intact between the two waves (N=4,800)
- Measure of closeness
 - "How close do you feel to your father/mother?" answers on a five point scale with categories *not at all (1), very little (2), somewhat (3), quite a bit (4)* and *very much (5)*.
 - Change and stability obtained by subtracting Wave 1, closeness from Wave 3 closeness. Four groups were created (1) increase in closeness, (2) decline in closeness, (3) no change low closeness, (4) no change high closeness

Methods (cont.)

- Pre-divorce experiences measures that may influence father-child relationship
 - Mother-offspring bond
 - School attachment
 - Group membership
 - Sense of wellbeing
- Emerging adulthood experience with potential to influence
 - Leaving home
 - Post high school training
 - Working for pay 10 hours a week or more
 - Lived with biological child
 - Union status, married, cohabiting, or single

Results: Father as less involved parent

Table 1. Pre-divorce Levels of Parent-Offspring Closeness

How close do you feel to your biological father/mother?	Pre-Divorce Father-Offspring Closeness	Pre-Divorce Mother-Offspring Closeness
Not at all	1.4	.3
Very little	1.9	2.9
Somewhat	13.6	6.9
Quite a bit	25.7	18.9
Very much	57.4	71.1

Offspring is more likely to be closer to mother. Evidence suggests that fathers are often less involved parents.

Table 2. Change and Consistency in Offspring's Closeness to Fathers and Mothers

Trajectory of Change	Fathers		Mothers	
	Divorce	No Divorce	Divorce	No Divorce
Decrease	56.5	28.5	26.5	23.6
Increase	14.1	19.7	18.1	16.5
Consistently High	25.1	48.2	54.1	58.4
Consistently Low	4.3	3.6	1.2	1.5
X ² (df=3)	183.19***		4.19	

Large decline in father-offspring closeness among those who divorced (more decrease, less increase, fewer maintain consistently high quality relationship). However, a significant minority were able to maintain a close relationship. Mother-child relationship quality was largely unaffected by divorce.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Patterns of Change in Father-offspring Closeness

Predictors	Consistently High vs. Decrease		Increase vs. Consistently Low	
	1 ^a	2 ^b	3 ^a	4 ^c
	B (eB)	B (eB)	B (eB)	B (eB)
Controls				
Offspring Age		.17 (1.19)		-.25 (0.78)
Offspring Gender ^d		.43 (1.54)		-.06 (0.94)
Parents' Education		-.07 (0.93)		-1.75 (0.17)
Pre-divorce Adolescent Variables				
Mother-offspring Bond	2.05* (7.78)	1.27 (3.56)		-.97 (0.38)
Involvement in group activities	.01 (1.01)		.17 (1.19)	
School Attachment			-.30 (0.74)	
Adolescent Well-being	.37 (1.45)	.69* (1.99)	.53 (1.70)	.48 (1.62)

^a Each variable entered separately, all models include controls

^b Model includes only those variables significant in Column 1 and controls

^c Model includes only those variables significant in Column 3 and controls

^d Reference category = Male ^e Reference Category = Single

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Compared to offspring whose relationship declined following divorce, those who maintained a close relationship with their father had a stronger mother-offspring bond and a greater sense of well-being.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Patterns of Change in Father-offspring Closeness (cont.)

Predictors	Consistently High vs. Decrease		Increase vs. Consistently Low	
	1 ^a	2 ^b	3 ^a	4 ^c
	B (eB)	B (eB)	B (eB)	B (eB)
Transition to adulthood variables				
Left home		-.05 (1.05)	1.13 (0.32)	
Post-high school education	.42 (1.52)		-2.15** (0.12)	-1.75 (0.17)
Employed	.20 (1.22)		.16 (1.17)	
Live with biological children	-.19 (0.83)		2.38* (10.80)	1.42 (4.14)
Married ^e	.29 (1.34)		.25 (1.28)	-.41 (0.66)
Cohabiting ^e	-.97 (0.38)		4.96*** (142.59)	4.54*** (93.69)

^a Each variable entered separately, all models include controls

^b Model includes only those variables significant in Column 1 and controls

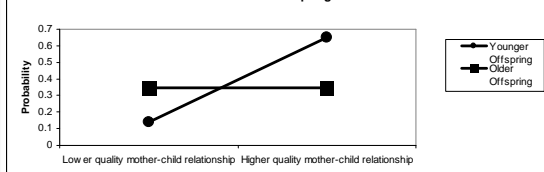
^c Model includes only those variables significant in Column 3 and controls

^d Reference category = Male ^e Reference Category = Single

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

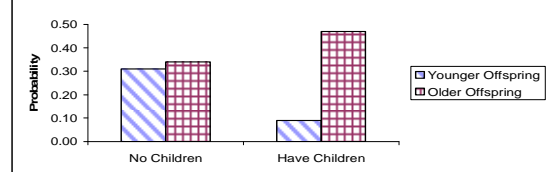
Among those respondents who began the study with a poor relationship, increased closeness is associated with cohabiting, becoming a parent, and having few or no educational achievements.

Figure 1. Effect of Mother-Child Relationship on the Probability of Maintaining a High Level of Father-Offspring Closeness for Younger and Older Offspring



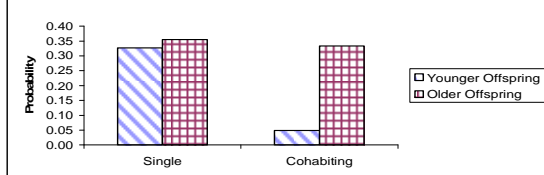
High mother affect increased probability of maintaining high level of closeness with fathers among younger children more than among older offspring.

Figure 2. The effect of having children on the probability of maintaining a high level of father-offspring closeness for younger and older offspring



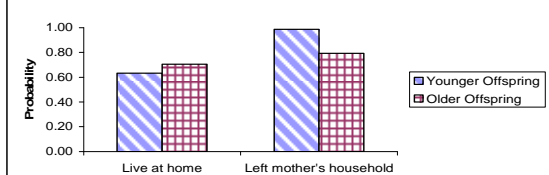
Becoming a parent was linked to maintaining high father-offspring closeness more among older youth than among younger individuals.

Figure 3. The effect of cohabitation on the probability of maintaining a high level of father-offspring closeness for younger and older offspring

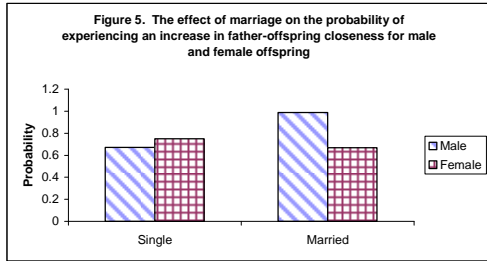


Cohabiting was linked to maintaining high father-offspring closeness more among older youth than younger youth.

Figure 4. The effect of leaving home on the probability of experiencing an increase in father-offspring closeness for younger and older offspring



Leaving home at an earlier age was linked to maintaining high father-offspring closeness more so than leaving at an older age.



The transition to marriage was linked to having high father-offspring closeness more for males than for females.

Final Points

We examined other variables that we thought had potential for affecting father-child relationship quality (risky behavior, depressive symptoms, child health, religion) but they did not.

Many claim that mothers often negatively manipulate child's relation with fathers. We found no evidence for it. Studies by King and Arendell suggest it is not widespread.

Conclusion

Despite the dreary prospects for father-offspring relationship quality following divorce, there are bright spots. Early positive experiences and later transitions to adult roles are important in maintaining and improving post-divorce father-offspring relationship quality.