Nonresident Father Involvement and Child Well-Being
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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

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

<p>| TABLE 1 |
|-----------------|--------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Scaled Assessment Measures (Weighted)</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavior Problems Index (BPI)</td>
<td>110.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC), Scholastic Competence</td>
<td>147.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC), Global Self-Worth</td>
<td>195.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT), Mathematics</td>
<td>97.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT), Reading Recognition</td>
<td>102.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

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

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.
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.

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
Nonresident Fathers’ Contributions to Adolescent Well-Being

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.
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 = not close
3 = somewhat close
4 = quite close
5 = extremely close = close

Adolescents’ Closeness to Mothers, Stepfathers, and Nonresident Biological Fathers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mothers</th>
<th>Stepfathers</th>
<th>Nonresident Fathers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean level of closeness* (SD)</td>
<td>4.60 (.70)</td>
<td>3.65 (1.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Close*</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Not at all close*</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All values are weighted. N = 1149.
*Range from 1 to 5; all means differ from one another at p < .001.
*Scores of 4 (quite close) or 5 (extremely close).
*Scores of 1 (not at all close).

Crosstabulation of Closeness to Stepfathers and Closeness to Nonresident Fathers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicted group differences</th>
<th>Close to both fathers (B)</th>
<th>Close only to stepfather (SF)</th>
<th>Close only to nonresident biological father (F)</th>
<th>Close to neither father (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B = SF, F = N</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B, F &gt; SF, N</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B &gt; SF, F = N</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B = SF &gt; F, N</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B &gt; SF, F &gt; N</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of Adolescents Close to Stepfathers and Nonresident Biological Fathers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Close to both fathers</th>
<th>25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close to neither father</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close only to stepfather</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close only to nonresident father</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All values are weighted. N = 1149.
Unstandardized Coefficients From Regressions Predicting Adolescent Outcomes From Family Patterns (net of Control Variables)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Externalizing Problems</th>
<th>Internalizing Problems</th>
<th>Failing Grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close to both fathers (B)</td>
<td>-.52***</td>
<td>-.43**</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close only to stepfather (SP)</td>
<td>-.42***</td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close only to nonresident father (F)</td>
<td>-.11**</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to neither father (N)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significant differences (p < .05) between groups summarized:
- B > F, N
- B > F, N
- B, SF, F > N
- SF > N
- SF > 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