

CORNELL EVOLVING FAMILY CONFERENCE:

NEW DATA ON FATHERS:

AN EXAMINATION OF RECENT TRENDS IN FATHERHOOD AND FATHER INVOLVEMENT

Abstracts

Session 1: The Transition to Fatherhood

Stepfathers as Father Allies: Managing the Multi-father Family

William Marsiglio and Ramon Hinojosa, Sociology, University of Florida

Drawing on qualitative in-depth interviews with 46 stepfathers, we explore how stepfathers characterize the biological father and their relations with him. We focus specifically on instances in which stepfathers directly and indirectly act like a *father ally*, i.e., they presumably help the father sustain or improve his relationship with his child. Our analysis generates theoretical insights about father ally properties (*development, purpose, awareness level, reciprocity routines, building trust/respect, and social capital*) while discussing conditions that facilitate its expression (*male bonding, threshold of discomfort, stepfather's relationship security, father's perceived worthiness, and having biological children*). Using a gender lens, we consider how stepfathers conceptualize and display a cooperative interactive style reflecting a less traditional masculine self. Our study illustrates some of the interpersonal complexities associated with stepfamily fatherhood in the United States.

Low-income men's perspectives on fathering transitions across multiple family systems

Kevin Roy, Family Studies, University of Maryland

Research on nonresidential fathering should rely on more than snapshot measures that can obscure men's roles in children's lives (Eggebeen, 2002). Mott (1990) argues that conceptualizing father absence or presence is limiting; he suggests that researchers consider involvement as "in flux," or transitory, as men move in and out of children's lives within a family system. However, as more men live apart from their biological children and create new families with new partners, our understanding of father involvement should address sets of men's complex responsibilities across multiple family systems as well (Manning & Smock, 1999; Manning, Stewart, & Smock, 2003). Further research is needed to understand effects of multiple partner fertility on father involvement, and in particular, to explore men's perspectives on the process, meaning and context of complex fathering roles across multiple families.

Session 2: What do Fathers Do and Provide?

Coresidential Father Involvement with Early Adolescent Children

Sandra Hofferth, Family Studies, University of Maryland, and Joseph Pleck, Human and Community Development, University of Illinois

Early adolescence is a crucial period; it marks the decline of exclusive family influence/control and increased independence from family, greater involvement with peers, and more varied nonfamily influences. Most research examining father influence has focused upon the earliest periods of the child's life, focusing on father-child relationships during the early years. However, research clearly shows father influence on children increasing at least up until age 12, when the father is more likely to play with the child and to make major decisions on the child's behalf. Besides not addressing father involvement at this stage, few studies of fathers have also included maternal influences. This paper examines factors in the life of fathers, mothers, and children that may influence father and mother involvement in the lives of 10-14 year old children. It makes an important contribution by including both maternal and paternal factors as influences on maternal and paternal involvement with children.

Involvement is based upon a modified model developed by Lamb and colleagues that points to two important forms of father (and mother) involvement: 1) time fathers spend engaged with or accessible to children overall or in specific activities, specifically sharing ideas and attending key events; and 2) responsibility they take for them, including making decisions and supervision. Researchers have expanded the concept of involvement to include affective and cognitive dimensions, and we follow this example by adding 3) a positive emotional relationship, including closeness and communication.

This paper utilizes the Belsky ecological framework for guiding our choice of variables determining father and mother involvement in children's lives. Belsky's major domains include a) father (and mother) characteristics (e.g., mother's age at first birth, maternal depression, parental education, and race/ethnicity); b) child characteristics (e.g., age and gender); and c) environmental sources of stress and support (e.g., number of siblings and spouse income). We hypothesize three variables as proximal influences on involvement: 1) marital relationship as measured by marital conflict; 2) relationship of dad to child (whether dad is stepfather or biological father); and 3) work pressures, measured by mother's work hours.

The data come from a supplement about the children of female respondents to the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. Information was obtained from 1986 on and these children responded to a self-report questionnaire when they were 10-14 years of age, beginning about 1990. The question series from 1994 through 2002 was used to maximize the number of usable measures about father and mother involvement. A total of 3319 cases were identified as having responded in at least one of these years. In the case of multiple reports, only one report was selected per child. The method used was structural equation modeling with missing data included and the parameters estimated by maximum likelihood. Model fit was good.

Mother and father involvement each formed separate factors; only one factor was confirmed for each. The errors in the equivalent variables across mothers and fathers

were correlated and, in addition, mother and father factors were correlated. The results of the structural equation model show that high conflict between partners reduces the involvement of both mothers and fathers with their early adolescent child. In stepfamilies fathers are less involved, but mothers' involvement is not affected. Greater maternal work hours reduce maternal involvement but do not affect that of fathers. After controlling for all variables, race/ethnicity has no influence on parent involvement and minimal influence on mediators. Maternal depression reduces the involvement of both parents with their child.

The findings show that mother and father involvement are influenced by some similar (conflict, depression) and some different personal and structural factors (work hours, dad biological relationship to child) and that their involvement with their early adolescent child is highly correlated.

Father's Pre-Natal Behaviors, Pregnancy Intendedness, and Links to Involvement with Infants

Jacinta Bronte-Tinkew, Child Trends

Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), 9-month father surveys (N = 6,816), this paper examines the association between male pregnancy intentions and prenatal behaviors and postbirth father involvement, and assesses whether these associations differ according to the gender of the child. Postbirth fathering behaviors focus on father engagement (cognitively stimulating activities, physical care, warmth, nurturing activities, and caregiving activities). Men's pregnancy intentions are significantly related to two domains of father engagement. Specifically, men who did not want the pregnancy are less likely to exhibit paternal warmth following the birth, whereas men who wanted the pregnancy sooner than it occurred are more likely to exhibit nurturing behaviors. Fathers' prenatal behaviors are associated with all five domains of postbirth father involvement, except for men's presence in the delivery room and whether or not he saw the child in the hospital. The association between pregnancy intentions (wantedness of the pregnancy) and men's caregiving activities following birth was stronger for male than for female children. Findings suggest that prenatal programs that encourage fathers to actively participate in the pregnancy may be beneficial to later child well-being.

Fathers' Co-Parenting in Low-Income Families: Early Contexts, Frames, and Preferences

Maureen Waller, Policy Analysis & Management, Cornell University

This paper draws on in-depth interviews I conducted with 62 new mothers and fathers in low-income families when their child was age 1 and 4 to examine fathers participation in co-parenting in the early years of their child's life. In particular, it investigates the contexts in which patterns of stable co-parenting, early co-parenting, and later co-parenting occurred and the frames parents use to understand each of these co-parenting arrangements. It also explores parents preferences for legal parenting agreements which within each of situation. Parents suggested that fathers became involved in stable co-parenting in the context of co-residential relationships in which they had similar

employment situations as mothers. Other fathers who were less economically and personally stable than mothers transitioned from early co-parenting after their relationship with the mother dissolved, whereas nonresidential fathers became involved in later co-parenting after their personal and economic situation improved relative to mothers. Each co-parenting arrangement was perceived differently by parents, with stable co-parenting typically being framed as a commitment, early co-parenting as an exchange of resources, and later co-parenting as compensation for mothers reduced share in parenting. Particular preferences for child support, custody, and visitation also emerged within these three co-parenting situations with implications for policies directed toward low-income families.

Session 3: The Impact of Fathers on Child Development

Fathers' Involvement and Young Children's Behavior in Fragile Families

Marcia J. Carlson, Social Work and Sociology, Columbia University, Sara S. McLanahan, Sociology and Public Affairs, Princeton University, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Child Development and Education, Columbia University

This paper uses new data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to examine how fathers' involvement with children is associated with children's behavioral problems at age 5. We examine the frequency of fathers' time with children, the extent to which fathers effectively co-parent with mothers, and the frequency that fathers engage with children in specific activities for both married and unmarried fathers (and by residence status). Overall, we find greater evidence that fathers' involvement at children's age 3 is associated with behavioral scores at age 5 when fathers live with their children. The greatest effects of non-residential fathering are observed for co-parenting: the more that fathers effectively cooperate with mothers in parenting, the lower their children's behavioral problem scores. We discuss the implications of our findings for both research and public policy.

Does Father's Absence impact African American Youth's Psychosocial Development?, Jelani Mandara, Human Development and Social Policy, Northwestern University

The research on African American father's absence is one of the most controversial and politically charged topics in the social sciences. Many have argued that their absence from the day-to-day socializing of their children will have detrimental consequences for their children, whereas others have argued that their importance is questionable at best. Dr. Mandara will attempt to address this issue by presenting the results from several of his studies using small community samples and large national data sets. The studies show that father-absent boys have lower levels of self-control and self-esteem, more behavioral problems and drug use, as well as perceive themselves to be less masculine than father-present boys. Controlling for several SES factors and mothers responsiveness does not reduce the effects. Some of the studies show that those living with stepfathers are as likely to have these problems as those without fathers in the home at all. But for girls, SES factors can easily account for any effects of father's absence. Dr. Mandara will argue that the old saying in African American communities that, "Mothers love their sons and

raise their daughters” is true for many African American mothers, and these differential parenting styles in father-absent homes partially explain the differential effects of father’s absence on African American boys and girls.

Session 4: The Impact of Fatherhood on Men

How Do Men’s Work Lives Change After Fatherhood?

Nan Marie Astone, Population and Family Health Sciences, John Hopkins University, Jacinda Dariotis, Population and Family Health Sciences, John Hopkins University, Freya Sonenstein, Population and Family Health Sciences, John Hopkins University, Joseph Pleck, Human and Community Development, University of Illinois, and Elizabeth Peters, Policy Analysis and Management, Cornell University

In this paper we examine how various aspects of men’s work lives change when they become fathers and whether or not these changes vary by the marital status of the birth and by ethnicity. Our data are from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY79). We use fixed effects models to measure intra-individual change in employment status, number of hours worked and wages. Preliminary findings suggest that becoming a father within marriage is associated with an increase in the number of hours worked among both European and African American men. Becoming a father outside marriage is also associated with an increase in the number of hours worked among European American men, but not African Americans.

Paternity Leave and Fathers’ Involvement with Their Young Children

Lenna Nepomnyaschy and Jane Waldfogel, Social Work, Columbia University

Unlike many European countries, the United States has no paid leave policy for either mothers or fathers to take time off from work following the birth (or adoption) of a child. Despite this, recent evidence suggests that the majority of fathers do take some time off work after a child is born. However, little is known about the determinants, circumstances or consequences of paternal leave-taking. In this paper, we use the first wave of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), a new nationally representative panel study of over 10,000 children born in 2001, to examine these questions. First, we describe how much leave fathers are taking and which characteristics of the mother, father and child are associated with the likelihood of taking paternity leave and with the length of leave. Next, we examine the extent to which leave-taking and the amount of leave taken are associated with fathers’ involvement with their children when they are approximately nine months old. To do so, we make use of ECLS-B questions asked directly of resident fathers pertaining to their participation in a range of child care-taking activities, as well as a rich set of measures related to parents’ demographic characteristics, economic circumstances and levels of social and community support.

Is there a Biological Basis of Fatherhood?

Anne Storey, Psychology, Memorial University of Newfoundland

I will discuss evidence that hormones play a role in the changes that men experience as they become fathers. This discussion will be set in a wider comparative context of male responses in other biparental (both parents provide care) species. Hormonal changes are viewed as the interface between the social environment (partner and offspring) and neurophysiological changes that affect subsequent behavior. Three hormones have been implicated in human paternal responsiveness; prolactin, testosterone and cortisol. Prolactin levels change in response to infant contact and this hormone may be involved in motivating parental interactions. The role of testosterone is complex and there is evidence that this hormone both inhibits and enhances paternal care. Cortisol, a ‘stress’ hormone, may be involved in emotional aspects of parenthood and in adjustment of parental workload. Finally, I will focus on the important issue of individual variability in paternal behavior and hormonal responsiveness.

Session 5: Fatherhood and Incarceration*Teaching Parenting Skills to Incarcerated Fathers*

Carl Mazza and Nathan Moore, Sociology and Social Work, Lehman College – City University of New York

Over two million children in the U.S. have a parent in prison. Over two thirds of these parents are fathers. Incarceration provides a unique separation between parent and child. The parent is taken away from the child against his will. Where there is communications between parent and child, it is overseen by the state. This narrative-based paper concerns the first-hand experiences of teaching and developing a 16-week parenting course in both maximum and medium security prisons. We discuss the growth in insight and parenting abilities of the students/incarcerated fathers as well as the obstacles that need to be addressed in order to develop and sustain healthy, nurturing father-child relationships from prison. We also address the trauma of re-entry on the newly re-constituted family and the role confusion that often accompanies release from prison and the attempt to become a “full-time” father.

Incarcerated Fathers: Pathways from Prison to Home

Christy Visher, The Urban Institute

Released prisoners face multiple challenges when they return home to their families and communities. We know from prior research that strong family support can play an important role in helping men and women transition from prison to home and can actually reduce the likelihood of recidivism. We also know that assuming traditional roles within a family, such as parent or spouse, can aid in the reentry transition process and has been linked to positive outcomes after release. In this paper, we attempt to develop a better understanding of how the role of father may affect the transition from prison to home, specifically, factors that are important to a successful reentry transition, such as employment, substance use, and mental health. Using data gathered from the Urban

Institute's *Returning Home* project, we analyze surveys of about 300 fathers shortly before their release from prison and several months after, and describe the characteristics of incarcerated fathers, the contact they have with their children while they are incarcerated, and obstacles to maintaining such contact. We also discuss the factors that predict these fathers' attachment to their children after release from prison, and the impact of attachment to children on other positive and negative post-release outcomes for these men.

Session 6: Fatherhood and Public Policy

Implementation Perspectives on the Partners for Fragile Families Project

Pamela Holcomb, Urban Institute

The topic of responsible fatherhood is currently receiving a high level of attention in the public policy arena. Significant federal funding has recently become available to fund programs that promote responsible fatherhood by supporting healthy marriage activities, promoting responsible parenting and fostering economic stability. This paper will provide lessons insights into how to develop, structure and operate programs designed to promote responsible fatherhood and improve child well-being based on the experiences of the Partner for Fragile Families (PFF) Demonstration. The PFF demonstration targeted young disadvantaged fathers and included 13 programs located in nine states. The paper will present major findings from the Evaluation of the PFF demonstration, drawing primarily on the evaluation's implementation study of each PFF project and a limited number of ethnographic case studies of the participants.

Fathers, Domestic Violence, and Implications for Change

Melvin N. Wilson, Psychology, University of Virginia

Domestic violence, specifically men who batter their intimate partners, has posed a serious dilemma for interpersonal relationships, child development, and family life. Over the past three decades social policies and treatment programs have been implemented with varying success. The current presentation has three goals. First it will briefly considered policy and treatment efforts. Next, the presentation will describe a group approach to men who batter and a sample of men using personality assessments. Finally, I will present an interesting alternative approach that has promising policy implication for the treatment of domestic violence and for possible preservation of the families.