

INTERIM REPORT ON THE FORD FOUNDATION PROJECT

"Decision-Making in Paternity Decisions of  
Young, Unmarried Parents"

University of Minnesota No. 0627--5773  
Contract #880-0964

Principal Investigator: Esther Wattenberg  
Co-Investigators: Michael D. Resnick and Rose Brewer

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Purpose

This 18-month research project was initiated with a Notice of Grant Award received September 15, 1988.

The research project is designed to explore a wide network of variables that move young, unmarried, parents (YUP's) toward avowal or disavowal of a paternity action. These factors will then be examined for their relevance to policy and practice.

Implementation

1. The Development of the Questionnaire (see Appendix 1).

A structured questionnaire containing 95 items was developed by the project's three co-investigators. Consultation was obtained from with community groups (e.g., school social workers, county personnel, social and health agencies<sup>1</sup>) to grasp a sense of what was known and not known about paternity decisions from the perspective of those who work with young, unmarried, parents (YUP's) in community agencies. Reading levels of the population were also explored. Questionnaire revisions were made following a period of pre-testing by graduate student interviewers, resulting in the final version in Appendix 1.

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<sup>1</sup>Notes on community group consultations, on file.

A thorough exploration of the literature in search of theory based on existing empirical studies on young, unmarried parents preceded the formulation of the survey instrument. The questionnaire was then organized to elicit from the YUP's "norms" of their behavior and differences between avowers and disavowers. The questionnaire was divided into five general categories:

- (1) demographic information
- (2) maternal and paternal responses on decision-making
- (3) perceptions of the father's/mother's relationship with the baby
- (4) respondents' concepts of "responsibility"
- (5) experiences with service and information agencies.

In addition, questions were interspersed on how study participants respond to influences and attitudes of family, friends, and the community. Also inserted into the questionnaire, designed to tap the Locus of Control construct, were respondents' perceptions of the future for themselves and their child. Separate questions (27) were developed to test how much knowledge (or misinformation) the YUP's had about the process of paternity establishment and the law with regard to paternity and child support. These items were placed at the beginning of the interview. Separate interview schedules for male<sup>s</sup> and female respondents were developed.

## 2. Sampling Method

We had several consultations with Hennepin County on the data base, and a random sample of 500 matched pairs of YUP's where the mother was 21 or under and had a child 12 months of age or younger was identified. (The mother's name was in the AFDC data file and the father's name in the IV-D file.) A letter outlining the project and promising confidentiality (see Appendix 2) was drafted by us and sent out on Hennepin County letterhead, and a 5 x 7 card was enclosed to be returned directly to the

project, if the YUP was willing to be contacted. From the original mailing, approximately 20% of the letters were returned, unopened, to Hennepin County, "address unknown" (179). Unqualified people also responded because of various computer errors (17). Out of this original group, a subset of 70 pairs of YUP's under 18 were sent an additional letter encouraging them to respond. This was an effort to reach the youngest population of parents.

On July 20, a final mailing was undertaken, this time eliminating the lengthy letter on official Hennepin County letterhead, and capsulizing the project description and the confidentiality pledge in a one-page, brightly colored, flyer (see Appendix 3).

Since the working sample exceeded our initial projections, our original estimates have been revised. (See original sample: out of 720 mothers [YUM's], 324 would provide information on the father, with 130 young, unmarried, fathers [YUF's] agreeing to participate.) At this writing, we have more than met the expectations of having 130 young, unmarried, fathers as participants. Eighty-seven paired interviews have been completed and 54 consenting matched pairs await assignment or are in the process of being interviewed. The mobility factor introduces a volatile note in capturing, with certainty, our final number in the data base.

### 3. Selection of Interviewers

Notice of research assistantships to work on this project were posted in the Departments of Social Work, Sociology, Public Health, and Afro-American Studies, as well as in the Graduate Assistants' Office at the University of Minnesota.

Selection of same race, same gender interviewers were made. Two interviewers were selected from community-based organizations. In all,

eight were selected, working, generally, ten hours per week. The selection criteria included experience with the population, commitment to task completion, interest in the project, and assessment of personal characteristics indicating capacity for quick rapport and reliability in data gathering.

#### 4. Orientation and Staff Meetings

The following are items included in the orientation package for new interviewers: Matrix, "Summary of Paternity Forms" and an explanation to clarify paternity procedures (see Appendix 4); "The Child Support Enforcement Program," an excerpt from Twelfth Annual Report, Child Support Enforcement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; "Teenage Fathers: Working with the Neglected Partner in Adolescent Childbearing" by Joelle Hevesi Sander and Jacqueline L. Rosen in Family Planning Perspectives, Vol. 19, No. 3, May/June 1987, pp. 107-110; "Establishing Paternity for Non-Marital Children," by Esther Wattenberg in Public Welfare, Vol. 45, No. 3, Summer, 1987, pp. 8-13 & 48; an abbreviated version of the original Ford proposal, "Research Project on Decision-Making in Paternity Decisions of Young, Unmarried Parents;" and "Child Support and Young Fathers," from Adolescent and Young Adult Fathers: Problems and Solutions, Children's Defense Fund, May 1988, pp. 16-20.

A telephone number for legal assistance was given to interviewers in the event that interviewees would need such assistance.

Staff meetings of interviewers and co-investigators take place every two weeks.

Items for discussion include sites for interviews (home, park, restaurant, library), and the fact that social services agencies have

donated space, available upon request. In fact, fast food restaurants are the sites of choice of most respondents. A feeling of neutrality and safety appears to influence the choice. Interview and tracking techniques are shared. Questions raised by study participants about their life situations are also discussed, and speculations on the meaning of the data gathered are reviewed. (The co-investigators have also completed several study interviews to more fully grasp the nature of the exchanges that take place in the structured interview setting.) To further clarify paternity procedures, a presentation was given by the Director of the Paternity Unit, Hennepin County.

5. Data Collection

The following provides the number of interviews conducted, to date, and the breakout of categories:

An Interim Census of Interview Completions  
and Assignments

Completed Interviews = 220

Completed Dyads = 87 (174 Interviews)

BLACK DYADS (31)			WHITE DYADS (32)		
<u>Avowers</u>		<u>Disavowers</u>	<u>Avowers</u>		<u>Disavowers</u>
Declaration of Parentage Signed	Court Adjudicated		Declaration of Parentage Signed	Court Adjudicated	
15	9	7	16	*7	9

\*Two couples have been married since initial interview.

*BI-RACIAL DYADS (24)		
<u>Avowers</u> Declaration of Parentage Signed		<u>Disavowers</u> Court Adjudicated
15	3	6

\*There are 16 couples who are Black/White;  
 6 couples Native American/White;  
 1 couple Hispanic/White; and  
 1 couple Asian/White

Interviews Completed In Addition to Dyads = 32

White Males Completed -- Partners Assigned - 7  
 5 Avowers (3 have signed the Declaration of Parentage;  
 2 have been Court Adjudicated or in the process)  
 2 Disavowers

Black Males Completed -- Partners Assigned -- 5  
 4 Avowers (all have signed the Declaration of Parentage only)  
 1 Disavower

Black Females Completed -- Partners Assigned -- 8  
 4 Avowers (2 have signed the Declaration of Parentage;  
 2 have been Court Adjudicated or in the process)  
 4 Disavowers

White Females Completed -- Partners Assigned -- 12  
 8 Avowers (5 have signed the Declaration of Parentage;  
 3 have been Court Adjudicated or in the process)  
 4 Disavowers

In addition to the above, there are approximately 12 diads identified but unassigned, as yet.

Interviews Completed/No Partner Available = 14

14 Interviews were completed where either the partner changed his/her mind about participating or was no longer available for an interview.

We contacted approximately 64 women who expressed a willingness to be interviewed but whose partner was either not willing or unavailable for an interview.

Approximately 40 women have responded who have no phone, and it is our experience that when contacted by mail, one-third of these become viable candidates.

Moreover, approximately 28 women have either been contacted and are checking with their partners or are yet to be contacted since they were not home when our initial call was made.

#### 6. Data Collection to be Completed

- A gap has been identified in the sampling frame requiring outreach efforts to the very young and disavowers. Outreach for YUP's, particularly those 16 and under, will be initiated. Schools, social agencies, maternal and child health clinics, and street workers will be contacted. A "snowball" technique will be used to secure interviews with YUP dropouts from the school system.
- Outreach plans to increase the number of "disavowers" are under consideration.

#### 7. Deviation from Original Plan

An unexpectedly large number of bi-racial YUP's have appeared in the data base. As can be seen from the above, an additional category has been created for this group.

Further, we have made a determination to interview a sample of young, unmarried, mothers (YUM's), who would not or could not identify the father, to determine why these partners are unavailable.



8. Preliminary Observations from Data Collection

- Importance is granted by a significant number of respondents to the "social" recognition of "legitimacy" through signing the Declaration of Parentage. However, the court procedures for paternity adjudication are generally shunned.
- There is a compelling need to clarify the definition of "paternity."
- Mobility of the population requires skilled and intuitive tracking ability: failed meetings/sick children/chaos requires patience in rescheduling.
- The number of phones disconnected and addresses "unknown" reveals the deteriorating economic condition of many young families.
- Importance of \$25: subject remuneration is an indispensable incentive for this very poor population.
- Keen interest of interviewees in the project itself.
- Interviews typically take from 2-4 hours: more time is needed for a summary; graduate students are excellent interviewers: the interview process is very intense; combining academic work and interview efforts maintains balance.
- Illustrative cases of the "roving inseminator," the father of several children by different mothers, has fallen into the sample.
- Preliminary scanning of data indicates that this study will provide some fresh insights on questions such as: Does the family structure repeat itself? How do hospital procedures contribute to the avowal or disavowal of paternity? A clearer definition of what is considered an "unfit" father will emerge.

## 9. Additional Observations

The data analysis stage has not yet been reached. These observations are preliminary, tentative, and subject to revision.

- The assumptions, if such still prevail among researchers, that YUM's and YUF's fall into tidy groupings will be shattered. The urge to stereotype for simplicity's sake will be challenged. This is a group rich in its diversity and surprising in its survival strengths.
- Multiple living arrangements, extraordinary mobility, and economic stresses are prevalent.
- A small, but significant portion of fathers are in prison or treatment.

## 10. Further Questions<sup>2</sup> to be Answered from the Data Analysis

- From the mother's perspective, what constitutes an "unfit" father? From the father's perspective, what are unacceptable behaviors for a mother? What are the characteristics that rule out a stable relationship? To what extent do these perceptions influence the first phase of the paternity process (Declaration of Parentage) and the second phase (court adjudication)?
- Are decisions on paternity independent of policies and procedures (eligibility for AFDC; court delays; hospital information, and so on)? If not, what policies and procedures promote or inhibit the decision for paternity adjudication?

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<sup>2</sup>See Proposal for the initial set of research questions.

- Has the decision to pursue paternity decisions been influenced by AFDC-UP? (The unemployed parent may now be included in the AFDC grant, under the Family Protection Act.)
- What influence is the father's living arrangements on the paternity decision (living under one roof; in the neighborhood; in another county; out-of-state)?

#### 11. Community Activities

- P.I. serves on a task force of the State Planning Agency examining inter-agency cooperation in providing services to minor mothers.
- A presentation on paternity issues for minor parents presented to the Minnesota Family Support and Recovery Council, September 12, 1989.
- A presentation was made to the Wilder Foundation on the Black family and issues related to young, unmarried family formation and paternity decisions, September 20, 1989 at Wilder Forest by co-investigator, Rose Brewer.
- Select aspects of the study methodology and findings will be presented by Michael Resnick, co-investigator, at the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association in October, 1989, and at the Society for Adolescent Medicine in March, 1990.
- P.I. serves on a planning Task Force of the Children's Defense Fund for a Spring, statewide conference on paternity issues. A Supreme Court Judge has been added to the task force, indicating the growing concern about the increasing numbers of out-of-wedlock children without paternity adjudication.

## Conclusion

This project is regarded as "exploratory." There are, presently, no hardcore theoretical and empirical bases for understanding the route to decisions on paternity adjudication of YUP's. In this highly uncharted area, our research is guided by a general sense of how to explain the social phenomenon of avowers and disavowers. Our data collection is an interplay between the small amount of existing information and a primary data collection effort to generate new information on what factors are key to YUP's decisions to adjudicate paternity. Therefore, this study warrants the use of exploratory methodologies and questions. We expect that the results of our rich, detailed interviews on this diverse population will expand our scope of knowledge, while permitting an examination of the few existing hypotheses. We anticipate that the findings will yield guidance for policy and programs, and set directions for future research.

DRAFT REVISED 3/16/89

Date

Address

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

We would like to invite you to participate in a University of Minnesota research project in which you will be paid \$25 for participation. This research project deals with the reasons that young, unmarried parents do or do not legally establish the relationship of the father to their child. Your name was randomly selected from a list of young, unmarried parents provided by Hennepin County

If you decide to be part of this research project, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will take from 1 to 2 hours. The place will be chosen for your convenience. You will then be paid \$25.00 for this interview. A graduate student from the University of Minnesota will be the interviewer.

The interview is absolutely confidential. Your name will not be connected in any way with any of the responses. Your comments will be folded into a general report, without any name designation. We are only interested in what you have to say about the decision you made about establishing or not establishing paternity (naming the father) for your child.

Approximately 200 young, unmarried parents will be interviewed throughout Hennepin County, and a summary report will be written based on the ideas, reasons, and observations of young parents on issues of paternity.

The recommendations from this report may help to improve procedures and services, as well as inform policy makers about the concerns of young parents.

We can assure you that if you decide not to participate, this will not in any way change your eligibility in any of Hennepin County's programs.

Once again, we can assure you of complete confidentiality.

Your ideas and observations are very important to this project.

Please send in the enclosed card, today. On it, write a telephone number where we can reach you and when the best time is to call. If you do not have a telephone, we can contact you by mail. Remember to give us your current address on the enclosed card. A stamped, self-addressed envelope is included for your convenience.

We hope to hear from you soon.

If you need any more information about the project, please call Mary Kaye Weller at 625-1551. She will be happy to answer your questions.

Sincerely,

Esther Wattenberg  
School of Social Work and  
Center for Urban & Regional Affairs

Michael Resnick  
Adolescent Health Program

Rose Brewer  
Afro-American Studies and  
Sociology

EW:mkw  
Enc.

# **AN INVITATION**

**TO PARTICIPATE IN**

**A Study of Young  
Mothers and Fathers  
by the  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA**

**YOU WILL EARN \$25**  
**FOR A TWO-HOUR INTERVIEW**  
**Arranged at your convenience.**

**Your Participation Could Be Very Helpful For  
Your Child's Future  
And Other Children Of Young Parents**

**The Information We Receive From You  
Will be ABSOLUTELY CONFIDENTIAL**

**YOUR NAME WILL NOT BE USED IN ANY REPORT**

**If you are willing to be interviewed by a graduate student from  
the University of Minnesota and earn \$25, please return the  
attached card or call Mary Kaye Weller  
at 625-1551 for more information.**

## SUMMARY OF PATERNITY FORMS

	<b>Declaration of Parentage</b>	<b>Birth Certificate</b>	<b>Legitimation Affidavit</b>	<b>Paternity Adjudication</b>
<b>Who signs the form?</b>	The mother and father are both required to sign.	A doctor or certified mid-wife and the local registrar. Parent's are optional.	Father Mother	Custodial parent fills out application on payment of \$5.00 or automatic if custodial parent is on AFDC.
<b>Which signatures are notarized?</b>	Both mother and father		Father Mother	
<b>When is the form signed?</b>	Any time after birth.	Filled out within five days of birth of the child	Any time after the parents marry each other.	After the baby is born upon application for AFDC, or NPA services.
<b>Where can the form be signed?</b>	Hospital, Dept of Health, County Atty's Child Support Office	At the hospital	County Atty or State Dept or Health: Office of Vital Stats.	Usually in the IV-D or Child Support Enforcement Office or AFDC office.
<b>What legal effect does the form have?</b>	<p>1) Creates a presumption of paternity as per M.S.A. 257.55.</p> <p>2) Establishes various inheritance benefits.</p> <p>3) County may pursue child support (but in theory this may not accord with the law).</p> <p>4) Does not set custody or visitation.</p> <p>5) Does not equal a paternity adjudication</p>	<p>1) It is a quasi legal record of birth and proof of age. It may also include relevant information on the child's health</p> <p>2) It neither establishes paternity nor creates a presumption of paternity. (This seems to be a common misconception).</p> <p>3) In the future, if father wants his name on birth certificate, he will have to sign Declaration of Parentage.</p>	<p>1) Allows State Registrar of Vital Statistics to issue a new birth certificate. A small fee will be charged for the new certificate.</p> <p>2) Marriage together with the filing of this form creates a presumption of paternity under Minn. Stat. § 257.55. It does not establish paternity.</p>	<p>Establishes paternity. Allows the court to deal with custody and visitation rights of the father and a child support payment for the child. Establishes various benefits for the child.</p>



Some Explanatory Statements for the Questions  
on How Paternity is Established

The Declaration of Parentage provides for:

1. the father's name on the birth certificate
2. access to a string of benefits, such as social security (see question 20)
3. creates the presumption of father's legal tie to the child.

Note: It does not provide visitation, custody, or child support.

There are three ways of establishing paternity:

1. Declaration of Parentage
2. Marriage
3. Court adjudication

Only the court can give the father an enforceable right to visit the child.