

## Predictors of Social and Emotional Involvement of Non-Residential Fathers

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### Abstract

Public policy initiatives to promote nonresidential father involvement tend to focus on economic involvement over social and emotional involvement. The 2006 reauthorization of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) included funding for 'responsible fatherhood' programming and the recently introduced Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2009 (RFHFA) would increase this funding. Using the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being dataset, this paper hypothesized that paternal, maternal, child and relational factors would predict non-residential father social and emotional environment by building on a model by Coley and Hernandez (2006). Instead, only paternal and relational factors were significant. Findings suggest a need for more policy initiatives that address fathers involved in the criminal justice system, increasing the early involvement of fathers in their infants' lives and the need for increased attention toward domestic violence. If passed, RFHFA would address each of these factors.

## Introduction

In 1996, congress attempted to “end welfare as we know it” by passing the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). Contrary to the early conception of public assistance as a way to assist mothers in parenting their children away from paid work, this bill’s objectives included decreasing the number of people receiving welfare by increasing the number of welfare recipients that are employed and by increasing the involvement of absent fathers (Ricucci, Meyers, Lurie, & Han, 2004; Skocpol, 1992). Prior to PRWORA, legislation focusing on ‘absent fathers’ solely focused on his financial support of his children through child support enforcement. The 2006 PRWORA reauthorization included \$150 million of funding for responsible fatherhood and healthy marriage programs<sup>1</sup> each year for five years from FY2006 to FY2010 (Dressel & Bouchet, 2009). Some are cynical about the intent of this funding in that they believe that the sole aim of this programming is to promote child support payments and marriage among low-income fathers (Coles & Green, 2010). Others, however, believe the purpose of this funding is to promote the social and emotional involvement of absent fathers (Dressel & Bouchet, 2009).

Although the first social policy targeted at single mothers occurred in the form of mother’s pensions in the early 1900s, child support enforcement targeted at absent fathers did not become mandatory for states until 1984 (Glass, 1990; Skocpol, 1992). Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), created by PRWORA to replace Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), conditions a woman’s eligibility for cash assistance on the

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<sup>1</sup> As an important aside, this funding (during the George W. Bush administration) was strongly criticized by domestic violence advocates because the funding failed to sufficiently address issues of domestic violence even while purporting to promote ‘healthy marriage’. The RFHA of 2009 better addresses the concerns raised by these advocates (Ooms, et al., 2006).

establishment of paternity (Coles & Green, 2010). Under TANF, states have a direct incentive to establish paternity in order to enforce child support because they can retain 100% of the child support payment to cover their TANF costs (Mills, 2010). Due to this aspect of the policy and for many other reasons, there is some evidence that child support enforcement may be a disincentive for father involvement, especially for low-income fathers who experience punitive sanctions for non-compliance (Argys & Peters, 2003; Nepomnyaschy, 2007; Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel, 2007; Rich, Garfinkel, & Gao, 2004). Further, some 'absent' fathers may be more involved with their children than the policies assume or than is detected by the state (Dressel & Bouchet, 2009; Jarrett, Roy, & Burton, 2002; Mincy & Nepomnyaschy, 2005; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002).

Since the 1960s, there has been an increasing interest in research pertaining to fathers and father involvement (Seward, et al., 2006; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002). Many point to the changing 'job description' of fathers throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a main reason for the increased scholarship (Seward, et al., 2006; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002). Fathers' 'job descriptions' have changed due to an increase in divorce rates, an increase in never married mothers, an increase in women's employment and evolving gender norms (Anderson, Kohler, & Letiecq, 2002). Others believe that public policy and media attention directed toward 'absentee' fathers (also known as 'deadbeat dads') has inspired the need to understand how and why fathers are or are not involved (Carlson & McLanahan, 2002; Curran & Abrams, 2000; Jarrett, et al., 2002).

### ***Focus of this Study***

The dependent variable in this study is the **social and emotional involvement of non-residential biological fathers** who were interviewed at or around their child's first birthday. Several studies have focused on non-residential fathers' economic support of their children (e.g., see Nepomnyaschy, 2007; Rich, Garfinkel, & Gao, 2007; Sigle-Rushton & Garfinkel, 2002). Instead, this study's focus on non-residential father's social and emotional involvement will fill an important gap in the literature as its benefits are less well documented (Carlson & McLanahan, 2002). For the purposes of this study, social and emotional involvement is defined by the framework put forth by Lamb, Pleck, Charnov and Levine (as cited in Palkovitz, 2002 and others). In this framework, father involvement is defined by measuring his levels of **accessibility, engagement and responsibility**.

This study's focus on social and emotional instead of economic involvement of non-residential fathers has been inspired by the following: (1) The Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2009, if passed, hopes to increase the quality of social and emotional father involvement in addition to his economic support<sup>2</sup> (2) studies have identified positive relationships with a father or father figure as important to the healthy development of children (Lamb, 2002; Palkovitz, 2002) and (3) there is some evidence that *involved* nonresidential fathers tend to contribute economically to their children's lives (Lamb, 2002). Therefore, it is important to understand the predictors of a nonresidential father's social and emotional involvement with his children.

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<sup>2</sup> Congressman Danny Davis said the following in a press release about the 2007 version of the bill: "This legislation provides the tools to strengthen relationships between fathers and their children and encourages fathers to become good nurturers and providers. The fullest positive participation by fathers helps to create a caring environment capable of fostering optimal child development, promotes humanistic cultural and community traditions while reducing poverty, teenage pregnancies, juvenile delinquency and incidents of child abuse and neglect. In the process of assuming responsibility for fatherhood, fathers themselves acquire new self confidence, new parenting skills, higher educational accomplishments and greater economic independence." (Bayh, 2007)

### ***Models by Coley & Hernandez (2006) and Palkovitz (2002)***

In their study of the predictors of paternal involvement for resident and non-resident low-income fathers<sup>3</sup>, Coley & Hernandez (2006)<sup>4</sup> drew upon Belsky's 1984 model of the determinants of parenting. Belsky identified child characteristics, parent characteristics and other contextual factors<sup>5</sup> as key to parental involvement. Coley & Hernandez (2006) complemented this model by adding factors determined by theories on human and social capital and by also assessing the influence of income and extended family. Further, Palkovitz (2002) recommends including a father's 'variability in contexts' in any study of father involvement. That is, to analyze his level of involvement, one must also assess "his involvement in an interdependent and dynamic array of relationships to the child and other in the family and community context" (p.122). Similar to the Coley & Hernandez model, Palkovitz (2002) identified a more extensive list of sources of 'variability in contexts': father's demographic and personal factors, child characteristics, and relational factors (including with the mother of the child and his family of origin).

Building on these models, this study will develop a conceptual model of predictors of the social and emotional involvement of non-residential fathers. This model proposes that child characteristics, paternal and maternal characteristics, relational factors, and contextual factors will predict the level of social and emotional involvement of non-residential fathers with infants. This study will attempt to address limitations of the Coley & Hernandez model by adding key omitted variables. Coley & Hernandez's (2006) key

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<sup>3</sup> Coley & Hernandez used data from a component of the Welfare, Children and Families: A Three-City Study. For this component of the study, in home interviews were conducted with each mother and father separately (N=239 which consisted of 120 nonresident fathers and 119 resident fathers).

<sup>4</sup> Coley & Hernandez operationalized 'father involvement' as developmentally appropriate cognitive stimulation, emotional support, paternal competence, and instrumental involvement. The children in their sample were between 2 and 4 years old.

<sup>5</sup> Coley & Hernandez (2006) operationalized 'social and contextual factors' as "the parental relationship and other proximal contexts, such as employment" (p.1042).

finding was that parental conflict was negatively related to father involvement. However, conflict was defined as conflict over parenting and financial issues and did not address other types of interpersonal conflict between parents. Also, Coley & Hernandez did not include important controls that have been found to be significant in other literature including whether paternity has been established and whether the non-residential fathers ever lived with the child. I am also including control variables for whether the mother received welfare or has a formal child support agreement with the father<sup>6</sup>. By including these additional factors, I hope to address what I perceive are important limitations of the Coley and Hernandez (2006) model.

The organization of this paper is as follows: First I will present a review of the literature. Second, I will pose the primary research questions, discuss the method, variables and sample for this study. Third, I will analyze the data and report the findings. Fourth, I will close with a discussion of policy implications.

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<sup>6</sup> Coley & Hernandez's (2006) article was published in the journal *Developmental Psychology* so it would be unrealistic to expect them to include a policy-related variable.

## Literature Review

This section will review the literature pertinent to the independent variables that may influence levels of father involvement including paternal characteristics, child characteristics, maternal characteristics, and relational factors.

### *Paternal Characteristics*

Studies have identified that there is a positive relationship between both the father's **age** and **educational status** and his involvement with his children (Cabrera, et al., 2002; Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Palkovitz, 2002). That is, the older he is and the more highly educated, the higher his involvement. **Race/Ethnicity** may also be a factor affecting levels of father involvement. Again, the research is mixed (Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Palkovitz, 2002; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002). Despite the stereotype of the 'absent black father' or 'deadbeat dad', some research has found that non-resident black fathers were more involved than non-resident white fathers (Cabrera, Mitchell, Ryan, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2008; Coles & Green, 2010).

**Income** and **employment** have also been found to be a significant predictor of father involvement, though results have not been consistent. Most research identifies that employed non-residential fathers are more involved due to their ability to fulfill the ascribed role as provider (Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Palkovitz, 2002; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002). There appears to be three explanations for this: (1) mothers "pay to play" role as gatekeepers, i.e., mothers who limit nonresidential fathers contact if he does not provide financial support ; (2) fathers' definition of a 'good father' is to provide financial support so when they are unable to do so they disengage and (3) fathers who can provide financially tend to be more involved partially so they can monitor that their money is being

well-spent (Jarrett, et al., 2002; Nepomnyaschy, 2007; Sigle-Rushton & Garfinkel, 2002). Yet, there may also be an inverse relationship between employment and level of involvement for non-residential fathers (Coley & Hernandez, 2006). That is, the more hours a father works allows less time for involvement yet the more stable his work schedule, the more possibility for increased involvement. Therefore, this study will account for these factors by measuring the father's **employment stability**.

Though fathers with these characteristics are commonly underrepresented in national studies, it is important to consider how mental health and criminal activity influence a father's level of involvement (Cabrera, et al., 2002; Nelson, Clampet-Lundquist, & Edin, 2002; Palkovitz, 2002). Factors related to a father's **mental health**, such as the presence of depression or anxiety, has been shown to be negatively related to father involvement (Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, Matthews, & Carrano, 2007; Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Lamb, 2002). This is an area with limited research, especially when compared to research on maternal depression (Bronte-Tinkew, et al., 2007). Also, a father's level of **criminal activity** is expected to be negatively related to father involvement (Lamb, 2002; Nelson, et al., 2002).

The father's **family of origin** and number of **other children** both in his household and outside of his household may also influence his involvement with his nonresidential children (Cabrera, et al., 2002; Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Palkovitz, 2002). The nature of his relationship with his father figure<sup>7</sup> may positively or negatively influence his level of involvement. That is, a father with an engaged father is more likely to be engaged but a father without a father figure in childhood may emulate his absence or he may become

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<sup>7</sup> Father figure includes biological father or 'social' father (i.e., a father figure that is not his biological father).



more engaged out of a desire to avoid his father's mistakes (Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Jarrett, et al., 2002; Lamb, 2002; Nelson, et al., 2002). Also, a father with other children to care for in his home or elsewhere may be less available to his child or children that live apart from him (Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Jarrett, et al., 2002).

As briefly mentioned, this study will control for the following factors related to his past history with the child. First, **previous residence** with the child may positively influence his level of involvement as a nonresidential father (Palkovitz, 2002). Second, whether or not **paternity** has been established may be important due to the parental certainty hypothesis poses that "the extent to which fathers are invested in their offspring will be affected by the extent to which they are certain of their paternity" (Roggman et al., 2002, p. 8). Third, his **early involvement** during the pregnancy and at birth is expected to be positively related to his involvement one year later (Garfinkel, McLanahan, Tienda, & Brooks-Gunn, 2001; Lamb, 2002; Nelson, et al., 2002).

### ***Child Characteristics***

Research on the influence of a child's **gender** on father involvement has been mixed (Cabrera, et al., 2002; Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Palkovitz, 2002). Some studies have found that gender has no effect on his level of involvement while others have found the opposite (Coley & Hernandez, 2006; McBride, Schoppe, & Rane, 2002; Nelson, et al., 2002).

Specifically, research on father-infant attachment indicates that fathers' interaction with male children is greater than with female children (Lamb, 2002). A child's **temperament** or personality may also influence a father's level of involvement (McBride, et al., 2002; Palkovitz, 2002). However, much of the research has relied on mother's report of the child's temperament (McBride, et al., 2002). Research with predominantly white, residential

fathers identified that there may be an **interaction effect between gender and temperament** (McBride, et al., 2002). That is, fathers appear to be less involved with less sociable female children but even a difficult temperament has no effect on their level of involvement with male children (McBride, et al., 2002). I am curious whether this dynamic also occurs among predominantly black non-residential fathers. This study will use the fathers' report of his perception of his child's temperament to assess whether child characteristics influence his level of social and emotional involvement similarly with this sample.

### ***Maternal Characteristics***

There is some evidence that the mother's educational status, employment and income influence the level and quality of father involvement (Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Lamb, 2002). Research has found that maternal **employment** may be positively related to father involvement, especially if he is unemployed, because the nonresidential father may be a source of child care (Bailey, 1994; McBride, et al., 2002). Yet, **income** may be related to a decrease in father involvement because she may need his financial contribution less. Maternal **mental health** issues like depression or anxiety are important to consider because increased maternal mental health issues may require more involvement by the father (Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Lamb, 2002).

### ***Maternal and Paternal Relational Factors***

Relationship factors including the **length of time they knew each other prior to the pregnancy**, the **number of children they share**, their **past and current relationship status**, and **whether or not he or she has a new partner** are key considerations when

predicting father involvement (Cabrera, et al., 2008; Jarrett, et al., 2002; Lamb, 2002; Palkovitz, 2002).

### ***Maternal and Paternal Conflict Factors***

As previously mentioned, Coley & Hernandez (2006) used a very limited definition of 'father-mother conflict'. In their model, they defined conflict by measuring the frequency the father and mother disagreed about "how to raise their child, the father's interactions with the child, and the father's financial contributions" (p.1045). This study includes similar measures of **parental cooperation**, except father's financial contributions due to lack of information. However this component is enhanced by including an aspect related to relationship quality and another related to the presence of past or present domestic violence. Fathers who have perpetrated domestic violence and no longer live in the household may be less socially and emotionally available to their children (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Edleson & Williams, 2007). They may be less involved physically due to a variety of factors including that perhaps the mother disallows his involvement or the court has restricted his involvement (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Edleson & Williams, 2007). Some research has found, however, that partner abusive men wish to remain involved in their children's lives either because they want to continue to control the child's mother through interactions with the child or because they genuinely want to be connected to their children (Perel & Peled, 2008; Salisbury, Henning, & Holdford, 2009).

### Research Questions

- What are the predictors of social and emotional involvement by non-residential fathers?
- Does the mother's welfare receipt, the existence of a formal child support, and early involvement in a child's life influence a father's level of involvement?
- How do relationship factors between the mother and father affect a father's level of social and emotional involvement?

### Method/Data

The data for this study are from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing (FFCW) study. This longitudinal study was conducted in 20 cities nationwide with a random sample of married and unmarried mothers and fathers (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, & McLanahan, 2001). At baseline, new mothers and fathers were interviewed in the hospital<sup>8</sup> shortly after the birth of their baby. The FFCW researchers set quotas that matched the percentages of married and unmarried births in that city (Reichman, et al., 2001). Parents who were excluded from the study included:

“those who planned to place the child for adoption, those for whom the father of the baby was not living at the time of the birth, those who did not speak English or Spanish well enough to complete the interview, mothers who were too ill to complete the interview (or their babies were too ill...), and those whose baby died before the interview could take place” (Reichman et al., 2001, p.322).

To date, the FFCW study has collected data from the parents at or around the child's 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> birthdays. The FFCW has three primary focal areas: the well-being of children of unmarried parents, the impact of welfare reform on families and fathers' roles in these families (Reichman, et al., 2001).

At baseline, questions were in the following categories: prenatal care, the interpersonal relationships between parents, assumptions about fathers' rights and

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<sup>8</sup> Mothers were interviewed within the first 48 hours. Fathers who were present at the birth were also typically interviewed within this timeframe. Fathers who were not present were usually contacted within a couple of weeks (when the mother gave contact information and consent for him to be contacted). (Reichman, et al., 2001)

responsibilities, attitudes about marriage, parents' social support and extended kin, awareness of community resources, and parents' health status, education level, employment and sources of income (Reichman et al., 2001). Additional data collected at follow-up included use and receipt of community services, welfare and child support; measures of parent relationship including conflict and domestic violence, and assessments of the well-being of their child (Reichman, et al., 2001).

This paper will utilize data from both the baseline and time 1 (at or around the child's 1<sup>st</sup> birthday). At baseline the entire sample consisted of 4,898 mothers and 3,830 fathers. Approximately 75% of the new parents were not married at baseline (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, & Mclanahan, 2002). The response rates at time 1 were as follows: "91 percent for married mothers, 90 percent for unmarried mothers, 82 percent for married fathers and 70 percent for unmarried fathers" (Fertig, Garfinkel, & Mclanahan, 2007).

This analysis is of a restricted sample that includes of 712 nonresidential fathers that were interviewed at time 1. Men were excluded in the following order: fathers who were married and living with the mother all or most of the time – according to both mother and father (N=1381); fathers who reported having sole custody of the child (N=138); fathers who reported that the child lives with him all of the time (N=1128); fathers who currently live with mother or live with her all or most of the time (N=148) and the remaining fathers who were 'unknown' (N=6). This study will run two models with linear regression. Model 1 will include each variable included in Coley & Hernandez's model. Model 2 will introduce the additional variables I have identified as possibly influencing a father's level of involvement.

## Variables and Descriptive Statistics

### *Dependent Variables*

Three variables measuring the non-resident fathers' accessibility, engagement and responsibility were combined to create the dependent variable of **father involvement**.

According to Lamb et al. (as cited in Palkovitz, 2002) **accessibility** refers to how often he is available to the child, **engagement** refers to his interactions related to caretaking, teaching, or playing and **responsibility** refers to plans and arrangements for care of the child.

In this study, **accessibility** is measured by whether the father saw the child in the 30 days prior to his interview (1=yes, 0=no). **Engagement** is measured by whether or not the father reported playing games like 'peek-a-boo', singing songs, reading stories, playing with, or hugging the child. The question (below) asks 'how many days a week do you usually...', however each response was recoded (1=reported engaging in this behavior, 0=reported not engaging in this behavior). Therefore, a higher score indicates a higher level of engagement. The range is from 0 to 5.

- Now I would like to ask you some questions about things you do with (CHILD). For each activity, please tell me how many days a week you do this in a typical week. How many days a week do you usually? (as reported by father)

	Days per week							
Play games like "peek-a-boo" or "gotcha" with (CHILD)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sing songs or nursery rhymes to (CHILD)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Read stories to (CHILD)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Play inside with toys such as blocks or legos with (CHILD)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Hug or show physical affection to (CHILD)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

The third variable, **responsibility**, was measured by adding up the mother's response to whether the father looks after the child when she needs him to or whether he takes the

child where he or she needs to go (like daycare or the doctor) (3=often, 2=sometimes, 1=rarely, 0=never). The father's response about whether he has talked to the child's doctor or child care provider in the past year was coded so that yes = 1 and no = 0. In this item, a higher number indicates a higher level of responsibility. The range is from 0 to 8.

- Fathers can help in many different ways. Please tell me how often (FATHER) helps you with the following: (as reported by Mother)

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
How often does he look after (CHILD) when you need to do things?	3	2	1	0
How often does he take (CHILD) places (he/she) needs to go such as to daycare or the doctor?	3	2	1	0

- During the past year, did you ever talk to (CHILD's) doctor about how (he/she) is doing? This could be as part of a visit or a separate call. (as reported by father)
- During the past year, did you ever talk to (CHILD's) child care provider about how (he/she) is doing? (as reported by father)

The resulting **father involvement** variable (which multiplies accessibility by engagement plus responsibility) has a range of 0 to 13<sup>9</sup>. The mean for this variable is 6.1. Twenty-two percent scored a '0' on the scale, which means they either have not seen the child, or if they have, they received a '0' on both the accessibility and the responsibility variable.

**Table 1: Father Involvement Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	Range	Mean	SD	N
Accessibility	0 - 1	0.79	0.41	704
Engagement	0 - 5	3.23	2.06	689
Responsibility	0 - 8	3.01	2.67	669
Father Involvement	0 - 13	6.14	4.21	649

### *Independent Variables*

Although this study focuses on nonresidential fathers, 73% of dads in this sample have lived with the child at some point since birth. Also, 72% of fathers report that legal

<sup>9</sup> I realize that this variable gives more emphasis to 'responsibility', then 'engagement' then 'accessibility'. Future iterations of this paper will likely evenly weight each component of this variable.

paternity has been established and 73% of fathers visited the mother in the hospital at the time of birth. Only 30% of fathers in this sample report that there is a formal child support agreement and approximately 40% of mothers in this sample report receiving TANF in the past 12 months. Therefore, indicator variables on prior residence with the child, the establishment of paternity, visiting in the hospital at birth, formal child support agreement and mothers' receipt of welfare were created (1=yes, 0=no) and added to Model 2<sup>10</sup>.

**Table 2: Indicator Variable Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	Mean	SD	Range	N
Prior residence with child	0.73	0.44	0 – 1	712
Paternity established	0.72	0.45	0 – 1	702
Mother has received welfare in the past year	0.40	0.49	0 – 1	669
Formal Child Support Agreement	0.30	0.45	0 – 1	697

*Paternal Characteristics*

The father's demographic characteristics were held constant including age, educational status, and race/ethnicity. **Age** is measured in years. **Educational status** is measured by father's self-report (1=less than a high school diploma, 2=high school diploma or G.E.D., 3=some college or technical school, and 4=college degree or higher). In this sample, 36% did not graduate high school, 40% received their high school diploma or GED, 20% attended some college and 3% have a college degree or higher. In this sample, 66% of fathers identify as African-American, 19% identify as Latino/Hispanic, 11% identify as Caucasian and 5% identify as 'other'. Therefore, an indicator variable was created for **race/ethnicity** with African-Americans as the reference group (1=yes, 0=no).

**Income** was measured by a constructed variable that indicated their **federal poverty level category**. This variable ranges from 1 to 5, with a higher number indicating

<sup>10</sup> Model 3 only includes the variables in Coley & Hernandez's (2006) study.



less poverty (1 = 0 – 49%, 2 = 50 – 99%, 3 = 100 – 199%, 4 = 200 – 299%, and 5 = 300%+) <sup>11</sup>. This measure is often used for eligibility purposes for federal- or state-funded services (like state children health insurance or reduced and free lunch) and takes into account the family's income and number of dependents. The father's **formal employment stability** will be measured by how many weeks he has worked in formal employment in the past 12 months. To account for the quadratic nature of increased work and time for father involvement, weeks worked squared was also included.

**Criminal activity** will be measured by the father's report. Respondents answered a question asking if they have ever been convicted as a crime (yes = 1, no = 0). They were also asked 'how many times have you been convicted of a crime?'. A variable was created that multiplied their responses to these questions. The range was from 0 – 30, however 67% reported never being convicted of a crime and 97% had been convicted 5 or fewer times. A variable was created that ranged from 0 to 6+. To gauge **criminal activity** or **criminal justice system involvement in the past year**, an indicator variable was created that accounted for whether he has been convicted of something in the same year as the interview or whether he had charges pending at the time of the interview.

**Mental Health** was measured by the constructed variables that measure his levels of depression and anxiety. Participants were given a score based on their responses to the Composite International Diagnostic Interview questions, which consisted of 15 depression-related questions and 14 anxiety-related questions. Indicator variables for the presence of depression or anxiety were created (1=present, 0=not present).

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<sup>11</sup> For more information on this calculation for the year 2000 (around when this study was conducted), please visit <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/00poverty.htm>

To measure the nature of the father's relationship with his biological father or father figure, a variable that measures **his father's involvement** while he was growing up was created (0=did not know biological father, 1=knew him, not involved, 2=somewhat involved, 3=very involved). For those fathers who did not have a 'very involved' father, a variable was created to indicate whether the father had a **father figure**. Finally, fathers rated their **current relationship** (i.e., how well do you get along with your father?) with their biological father or, where applicable, their father figure (1=not very well, 2=pretty well, 3=very well).

The variables **number of children in the household** and **number of biological children not currently living with him** were introduced as his involvement with his residential children may affect his involvement with his nonresidential children. His **early involvement during pregnancy and at birth** was measured by the following reports at baseline: the mother's report of whether he helped pay for anything baby-related during her pregnancy (1=yes, 0=no), his report of whether he was present at the baby's birth (1=yes, 0=no), and the mother's report of whether he visited the hospital after the baby was born (1=yes, 0=no). Responses to each variable were added up with a range of 0 to 3.

**Table 3: Paternal Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	Mean	SD	Range	N
Age	27.13	7.26	17 – 60	710
Race/Ethnicity (African-American)	0.66	0.47	0 – 1	712
Education level	1.90	0.82	1 – 4	699
Federal Poverty Level Category	2.88	1.46	1 – 5	704
# of weeks worked in formal employment in the past year	31.82	22.23	0 – 52	706
# of weeks worked in formal employment squared	1505.84	1210.82	0 – 2704	706
Criminal convictions in the past year	0.04	0.19	0 – 1	709
Criminal activity – lifetime	0.72	1.33	0 – 6	703
Mental health (presence of depression or anxiety)	0.22	0.42	0 – 1	712
Biological father level of involvement	1.81	1.1	0 – 3	711
Other father figure	0.35	0.48	0 – 1	712
Current relationship quality with biological or other father	0.39	0.87	0 – 3	679
Number of children in household	0.65	1.09	0 – 7	711
Number of other children not in household	0.79	1.34	1 – 10	710
Supported mother during pregnancy and at birth	0.66	0.35	0 – 0.999	707

### *Child Characteristics*

The child's **gender** was identified at baseline. As it is hypothesized that fathers will be more involved if the child is male, an indicator variable with male as the reference group was created (0=female; 1=male). In this sample, 52% of infants were male and 48% were female. The father's perception of the child's **temperament** will be measured by his responses to the following questions at time 1:

- Using a scale from 1 to 5, tell me how well each statement describes (CHILD).

	Not at All Like My Child			Very Much Like My Child	
(He/She) often fusses and cries	1	2	3	4	5
(He/She) is very sociable	1	2	3	4	5
(He/She) gets upset easily	1	2	3	4	5
(He/She) reacts strongly when upset	1	2	3	4	5
(He/She) is very friendly with strangers	1	2	3	4	5

Children who receive a rating of '4' or higher on the 'often fusses and cries', 'gets upset easily' and 'reacts strongly when upset' questions will be categorized in an indicator variable as 'difficult' children. Also, children who were rated '1' on 'very sociable' will be categorized as 'difficult'. In this sample, 58% of children were rated by their fathers as 'difficult'. An interaction term was created that combined 'male' and 'difficult'. Approximately 30% of children that fell into both of these categories.

**Table 4: Child Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	Mean	SD	Range	N
Gender - Male	0.52	0.40	0 - 1	712
Temperament - Difficult	0.58	0.49	0 - 1	712
Gender * Temperament Interaction	0.30	0.46	0 - 1	712

*Maternal Characteristics:*

Mothers' age, race/ethnicity, educational status, income, employment stability, mental health and number of children in the household are measured in the same way as the fathers'. Mother's were not asked about current or past criminal convictions or charges, therefore criminal activity of the mother could not be included.

**Table 5: Maternal Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	Mean	SD	Range	N
Age	24.47	5.45	15 - 44	669
Race/Ethnicity (African-American)	0.65	0.48	0 - 1	711
Education level	1.94	0.90	1 - 4	712
Federal Poverty Level Category	3.67	1.27	1 - 5	669
# of weeks worked in formal employment in the past year	25.04	21.61	0 - 52	669
# of weeks worked in formal employment squared	1093.47	1165.63	0 - 2704	669
Mental health (presence of depression or anxiety)	0.19	0.39	0 - 1	712
Number of children in household	2.41	1.45	0.50	614

*Maternal and Paternal Relational Factors:*

At baseline, each mother and father reported the **length of time** they knew each other prior to the pregnancy. Their reports were averaged to create this variable. An indicator variable was introduced for mothers and fathers that knew each other for less than one year prior to the pregnancy (45%). Mother and father report was also averaged to account for the **number of children the mother and father share**. To measure the effect of their **past and current relationship status**, the father's report of their relationship status at child's birth and at the time of the interview is used. Relationship status was coded so that 0=No relationship, 1=Friends, 2=Separated, 3=Romantically Involved, and 4=Married. Table 2 demonstrates the change in relationship status between baseline and time 1, or in approximately one year.

**Table 6: Change in Relationship Status**

<b>Relationship Status</b>	<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Time One</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
No Relationship	7.0% N=50	22.2% N=158	+15.2%
Friends	19.0% N=125	47.2% N=336	+28.2%
Separated	1.3% N=9	3.5% N=25	+2.2%
Romantically Involved	69.0% N=492	25.4% N=181	-43.6%
Married	3.0% N=21	0.7% N=5	-2.3%
Don't Know/Refused	0.7% N=5	1.0% N=7	+0.3%

When the child was born, 7% of fathers report 'no relationship', 19% report 'friends', 1% report 'separated', 68% report being 'romantically involved' and 3% report being married. At time 1, 22% report 'no relationship', 47% report 'friends', 4% report 'separated', 25% report being 'romantically involved' and 0.7% report 'married'. An

indicator variable was introduced to indicate whether the father or the mother had a **new partner** at time 1 (36% of fathers had a new partner and 31% of mothers did).

**Table 7: Maternal and Paternal Relational Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	Mean	SD	Range	N
Average length of time they knew each other prior to pregnancy	0.55	0.95	0 – 5.62	605
Knew each other less than one year prior to pregnancy <sup>12</sup>	0.45	0.50	0 – 1	614
Relationship status at baseline	2.42	1.04	0 – 4	707
Relationship status at time one	1.35	1.11	0 – 4	705
Mom has a new partner	0.31	0.46	0 – 1	663
Dad has a new partner	0.36	0.48	0 – 1	684

#### *Maternal and Paternal Conflict Factors*

In this study, **parental cooperation** is measured by averaging each parent's individual responses to the following questions. A higher number indicates higher parental cooperation (3=Always True, 2=Sometimes true, 1=Rarely true and 0=Never). This question was only asked of parents who reporting being in 'any kind of relationship at baseline or at follow-up'.

- The following questions are about how parents work together in raising a child. Please tell me how often the following statements are true for you and (FATHER).

Would you say it's always true, sometimes true, or rarely true?				
	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
When (FATHER) is with (CHILD), he acts like the father you want for your child.	3	2	1	0
You can trust (FATHER) to take good care of (CHILD).	3	2	1	0
He respects the schedules and rules you make for (CHILD).	3	2	1	0
He supports you in the way <u>you</u> want to raise (CHILD).	3	2	1	0
You and (FATHER) talk about problems that come up with raising (CHILD).	3	2	1	0

<sup>12</sup> The N is higher in this variable because the 'less than one year' variable was constructed if the 'length of time' variable was less than 1 whereas 'average length of time prior to pregnancy' was an average of the two reports, which meant missing observations were not included.

**Father-mother relationship quality** is measured by each parent's subjective response to the question below. Responses are be coded so that a higher number indicates a better relationship (1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Good, 4=Very good, 5=Excellent).

- In general, would you say that your relationship with (FATHER) is excellent, very good, good, fair or poor?

Lastly, a **domestic violence** variable was introduced to indicate whether there has ever been physical, emotional, financial or sexual abuse in the relationships of currently or previously romantically involved parents<sup>13</sup> (1=yes, 0=no). For this variable, domestic violence was coded as 1 if the mother answered affirmatively to any of the following questions:

- Did he try to keep you from seeing or talking with your friends or family? (emotional)
- Did he try to prevent you from going to work or school? (emotional)
- Did he withhold money, make you ask for money or take your money? (financial)
- Did he slap or kick you? (physical)
- Did he hit you with his fist or an object that could hurt you? (physical)
- Did he try to make you have sex or do sexual things you didn't want to do? (sexual)
- Were you ever cut, bruised, or seriously hurt in a fight with (FATHER)? (physical)

**Table 8: Maternal and Paternal Conflict Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	Mean	SD	Range	N
Mother's report of parental cooperation	9.12	5.76	0 – 15	616
Father's report of parental cooperation	7.55	6.6	0 – 15	642
Mother's report of relationship quality	2.52	1.29	1 – 5	522
Father's report of relationship quality	2.88	1.31	1 – 5	578
Presence of domestic violence	0.33	0.47	0 – 1	712

<sup>13</sup> Currently married or romantically involved parents were asked how often he behaves this way ('often', 'sometimes' or 'never'). Parents who were married or romantically involved when the child was born were asked how often he behaved this way in the last month of the relationship ('often', 'sometimes' or 'never'). All mothers were asked whether she was ever cut, bruised or seriously hurt in a fight with (FATHER). One hundred mothers responded 'yes'.

Table 9: Linear Regression	Model 1: Father, Mother & Child <sup>14</sup>			Model 2: Full Model		
	$\hat{\beta}$	S.E.	p	$\hat{\beta}$	S.E.	p
<b>Father Characteristics</b>						
Age	0.0185	0.04	0.608	0.0460	0.06	0.408
African-American	-0.0806	0.50	0.872	0.2623	0.68	0.698
Education level	-0.0274	0.23	0.905	-0.3234	0.30	0.282
Federal poverty level category (↑=↑\$)	0.0064	0.01	0.509	0.0171	0.01	0.190
# of weeks worked past year	0.0465	0.04	0.228	0.0848	0.05	0.119
# of weeks worked squared	-0.0003	0.00	0.666	-0.0010	0.00	0.303
Criminal conviction past year	-2.9265	1.11	<b>0.009</b>	-4.247	2.13	<b>0.047</b>
# criminal convictions ever	-0.2685	0.13	<b>0.043</b>	0.1044	0.19	0.583
Mental health	-0.16	0.40	0.683	-0.2655	0.57	0.640
Bio. father level of involvement	0.3441	0.18	<b>0.057</b>	0.3790	0.27	0.167
Other father figure	0.3771	0.59	0.520	-0.2660	0.85	0.726
Current relationship with father	-0.0378	0.27	0.887	0.4268	0.35	0.220
# of children in HH	0.3249	0.13	<b>0.012</b>	0.5549	0.21	<b>0.008</b>
# of other children (not in HH)	-0.2194	0.13	<b>0.082</b>	-0.3383	0.17	<b>0.044</b>
Supp. during pregnancy/birth	2.1189	0.45	<b>0.000</b>	2.6264	0.65	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Child Characteristics</b>						
Male	-0.0873	0.31	0.778	-0.6966	0.72	0.337
Difficult Temperament	0.0682	0.34	0.841	0.0563	0.68	0.934
Interaction (gend., temp.)				-0.0962	0.87	0.912
<b>Maternal Characteristics</b>						
Age	-0.0039	0.05	0.938	0.0506	0.06	0.432
African-American	0.3312	0.50	0.502	0.0915	0.67	0.891
Education level	-0.0681	0.23	0.768	-0.2170	0.30	0.468
Federal pov. cat. (↑=↑\$)	0.0054	0.01	0.626	0.0048	0.01	0.748
# of weeks worked pst yr	-0.0009	0.03	0.976	0.0015	0.04	0.968
# of weeks worked squared	-0.0001	0.00	0.899	-0.0000	0.00	0.984
Mental health	-0.1991	0.38	0.604	-0.4872	0.56	0.388
# of kids in household	-0.1612	0.12	0.181	-0.0839	0.18	0.637
<b>Maternal and Paternal Relationship</b>						
Ave. length of time before pregnant				0.2256	0.19	0.238
Knew each other less than one year				0.6388	0.41	0.117
Ave. # of shared children				-0.1303	0.28	0.639
Relationship status at birth				-0.2087	0.24	0.383
Current relationship status				-0.0211	0.23	0.727
Father has new partner				-0.7370	0.45	0.106
Mother has new partner				-0.7885	0.43	<b>0.070</b>
<b>Maternal and Paternal Cooperation and Conflict</b>						
Parental Cooperation						
Mother report	0.3827	0.03	<b>0.000</b>	0.2376	0.08	<b>0.005</b>
Father report	-0.0524	0.02	<b>0.027</b>	-0.0439	0.03	0.158
Relationship quality						
Mother report				0.5130	0.20	<b>0.014</b>
Father report				0.0051	0.18	0.977
Domestic violence				-1.0264	0.51	<b>0.044</b>
<b>Indicator Variables</b>						
Father lived with child				3.1367	0.67	<b>0.000</b>
Paternity is established				-0.0005	0.53	0.999
Mother receives welfare				-0.2954	0.44	0.504
Formal child support agreement				-0.4957	0.43	0.249
<b>Intercept</b>	0.2516	0.20	0.801	-2.9401	2.12	0.167
	N = 480, R <sup>2</sup> = 0.48, F = 21.81 Prob > F = 0.0000			N = 293, R <sup>2</sup> = 0.52, F = 7.74 Prob > F = 0.0000		

Note: **Bold** indicates statistical significance at the 0.01 or 0.05 level. **Bold italics** indicates statistical significance at the 0.10 level. All reported standard errors are Robust HC3 Standard Errors due to concerns about heteroscedasticity.



## Results

Table 9 reports the results of the linear regressions of both models. Model 1 reports the estimates of Coley & Hernandez model and Model 2 reports the estimates of the full model. First, consider the results of Model 1. Although Model 1 cannot be directly compared to the Models by Coley & Hernandez because they used a different sample and they did not use a linear regression model, I would like to note their significant findings for their nonresidential sample: (1) that parental conflict is negatively related to father involvement; (2) a male child predicted higher involvement; (3) older maternal age and maternal psychological distress predicted lower involvement; and (4) paternal employment stability, contact with his biological father, and his participation during pregnancy and at birth predicted higher involvement while his criminal activities predicted lower involvement.

In this study's Model 1 (as reported in Table 9), parental cooperation was statistically significant, however in different directions depending on the person reporting. For the mother's report, a one-point increase in cooperation resulted in a 0.38 increase in father involvement ( $p=0.000$ ). However, for the father's report, a one-point increase in cooperation resulted in a 0.05 decrease in his involvement ( $p=0.027$ ). Granted, the amount of increase or decrease is very small on a 13 point scale, however the difference may make sense and both are highly significant. It may be that mothers that consider the nonresidential father trustworthy and respectful may allow the nonresidential father more contact with the child. Also, the positive parental cooperation indicators also suggest a positive relationship between the two parents, which may also explain the direction of the increase when mother reports. On the other hand, non-residential fathers who believe the

mother “acts like the mother you want for your child” or that she “can be trusted to take good care of the child”, for example, may be less involved due to her perceived parental competence, which allows him to rationalize his decreased involvement.

Similar to Coley & Hernandez’s findings, the father’s recent and past criminal involvement was negatively related to his level of involvement. For those fathers that had ever been criminally convicted, each additional conviction decreased his involvement by 0.27 ( $p=0.043$ ). The involvement of fathers that had been recently convicted (11% of those that had ever been convicted), perhaps not surprisingly, had a decreased level of 2.9 ( $p=0.009$ ). Future research should assess whether these fathers who were convicted were in jail or still in the community but on probation. Fathers whose biological fathers were involved during childhood were more likely to be involved with their children ( $p=0.057$ ). Also, each point increase in his involvement during the pregnancy and at birth resulted in a 2.12 increase in his current involvement ( $p=0.000$ ). Contrary to Coley & Hernandez’s findings, child gender, maternal age, maternal mental health and paternal employment stability were not found to be significant predictors of father involvement in Model 1. However, also contrary to Coley & Hernandez’s findings, the number of children fathers who have children in their own household was a significant predictor of his involvement but those fathers who had other non-residential children were less involved ( $p=0.012$ ,  $p=0.082$ , respectively).

Model 2 introduced several variables related to the relationship between the mother and the father plus four indicator variables that were excluded from Coley & Hernandez’s model. Five of the eight variables that were significant in Model 1 remained significant in Model 2: parental cooperation, criminal activity, support during pregnancy,

number of children in the household and number of children outside of the household. Only the mother's (and not the father's) report of parental cooperation remained significant ( $p=0.005$ ). A one unit increase in cooperation resulted in a 0.24 increase in involvement. Also, only whether they had been convicted in the past year (and not whether they had ever been convicted) remained significant ( $p=0.047$ ). Specifically, a unit increase in criminal convictions resulted in a 4.2 reduction in his level of current involvement.

A one unit increase in support during pregnancy resulted in a 2.63 increase in his level of current involvement ( $p=0.000$ ). Fathers' children in the household remained positively related to involvement whereas children in other households remained negatively related to his involvement, but more so ( $p=0.008$ ,  $p=0.044$ , respectively). That is, a one child increase in number of children in the household resulted in a 0.55 increase in his involvement with the nonresidential child whereas a one child increase in the number of children outside of his household resulted in a 0.34 decrease in his current involvement. Biological father involvement did not remain significant in Model 2 ( $p=0.167$ ).

Only one indicator variable was significant, but it was highly significant. The current involvement of fathers who previously lived with the child increased by 3.13 ( $p=0.000$ ). However, if the mother has a new partner, his current involvement decreased by 0.79, this was significant at the 0.10 level ( $p=0.070$ ). This is understandable, although whether the father had a new partner was not significant at the 0.10 level ( $p=0.106$ ). Maternal characteristics were not significant in either model. However, additional relationship factors were significant in Model 2. First, the higher quality of the relationship as reported by the mother resulted in an increase in involvement of 0.51 ( $p=0.014$ ).

Second, the presence of current or past domestic violence decreased his involvement by 1.03 ( $p=0.044$ ).

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study developed a conceptual model of predictors of the social and emotional involvement of non-residential fathers. Although it was predicted that child, maternal, and paternal characteristics along with relational and contextual factors would predict father involvement, it was found that only paternal characteristics (criminal involvement in the past year, number of children in the household and outside of the household, and whether or not he previously lived with the child) and relational factors (mother's report of parental cooperation and relationship quality, the presence of domestic violence, and whether the mother has a new partner) were significant predictors of non-residential fathers' social and emotional involvement with their children.

These results have important implications for future research and public policy. First, studies that utilize the father's report have been lacking due primarily to inaccessibility of many fathers but also due to a distrust that a father will report honestly due to social desirability issues (Roggman, Fitzgerald, Bradley, & Raikes, 2002). Also, comparisons of the mother and father's reports find that the existence of parental conflict results in greater discrepancies between a mother and father's report (Coley & Morris, 2002; Mikelson, 2008). This study shares these concerns. However, by including fathers in studies, we can have access to more data about their life and experiences that mothers cannot accurately share with a researcher. Yet, it much of the mothers' reported items were significant. There are trade-offs to all methods, but future fatherhood research should remain committed to including both mother and father reports, and if appropriate,

child reports for triangulation. Second, researchers should take issues related to conflict between parents seriously in fatherhood studies. Coley & Hernandez's exclusion of many relational factors including previous residence, the existence of a new partner, and domestic violence (among others) limited their understanding of how the dynamics between a mother and father influences a nonresidential father's level of involvement. Future research should include questions about relational factors and domestic violence as these factors affect a father's level of involvement (for better or worse).

I hypothesized that the mother's receipt of welfare or the existence of a formal child support order would affect his level of involvement; however these do not appear to be significant factors in this model. However, future research should include not only whether there was a child support agreement, but whether or how often he paid support formally or informally. Still her receipt of welfare and the existence of an agreement did not seem to significantly impact his level of social and emotional involvement. One study that also used the Fragile Families dataset found that women who received welfare but did not have a child support agreement were at greater risk for domestic violence perpetration by nonresidential fathers (Fertig, et al., 2007).

This study finds that domestic violence perpetration is associated with less social and emotional involvement. However, that does not mean he is not still physically involved in his children's life. This finding demonstrates that policies that promote father involvement must take issues of domestic violence into consideration, as there may be situations when a father's involvement should be restricted instead of promoted (Lamb, 2002). Therefore, an important recommendation from this study is that policymakers should consider ways to promote social and emotional father involvement while including

safeguards for victims of domestic violence. There are situations where the promotion of father involvement may have negative consequences for both the mother and the children. In addition, this study demonstrates that a father's criminal activity and early involvement in his child's life are key factors for policymakers to consider.

Therefore, the findings of this study support the intentions of the Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2009. It provides funding (at least \$100 million) for responsible fatherhood, healthy relationship and domestic violence intervention programming. It would require states to give child support payments directly to the recipient without retaining any portion. It would ban regressive policies like recuperation of Medicaid costs and would suspend child support obligations during periods of incarceration. It would allow for adjustment in arrearages and reduce them if it is deemed to be in the 'best interests of the child'. It would assist low-income fathers in obtaining and maintaining employment and they would not be allowed to graduate from the employment training program until they had paid child support for a minimum of six months. It would provide tax credits for noncustodial parents who consistently pay child support on time for the entire tax year. The Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2009 (RFHFA), if passed, not only would address many of the problems with non-compliance with child support, but it would also address father involvement in the context of issues of domestic violence, criminal involvement and early involvement in children's lives ("Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2009, S.1309," 2009). If these issues are properly addressed, children will benefit from the positive accessibility, engagement and responsibility of their non-residential fathers. Fathers and mothers will benefit too.

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