



U.S. Department of Health
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NON-RESIDENT FATHERS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT EARLY CHILDHOOD (2-6)

Definitions and Topics

- **Non-Resident fathers** are men who do not co-reside with their children.
- **Cognitive development** refers to a toddler or young children's ability to use language, learn vocabulary and use symbolic and representational thought.
- **Emotional development** refers to children's ability to be expressive, regulate their emotions, and control their behavior.
- **Externalizing behavior problems** include antisocial conduct such as fighting, non-compliance, poor performance in school, delinquent behavior, and substance use.
- **Father-child contact** refers to non-resident fathers' direct contact with their children (including visits), and indirect social contact (such as phone calls or mail correspondence).
- **Father engagement** refers to fathers' demonstration of warmth, use of authoritative (demanding and responsive) parenting, sensitivity, and participation in activities with the child.
- **Financial support** refers to child support payments or the provision of other forms of informal support and child-related resources.
- **Social development** refers to the ability of children to meet the societal expectations within daily routines (i.e., independently dressing, eating, using the restroom, and communicating), maintain a spontaneous interest in learning (i.e., participating in self-initiated activities), and developing interpersonal relationships (i.e., interaction with caregivers).

Cognitive Development

Father-Child Contact

- More frequency father visitation among nonresidential fathers is not associated with improved cognitive development for children four years old or older. The study examined the math and reading aptitude of 1,501 children ages 4 – 18 in 1988.
Source: King, V. (1994). Nonresident Father Involvement and Child Well-being: Can Dads Make a Difference? *Journal of Family Issues*, 15(1), 79-96.
- For black children, more frequent nonresident father visitation is associated with children's lower math aptitude. The study examined the cognitive development of 1,501 children ages 4 – 18 in 1988.
Source: King, V. (1994). Variation in the Consequences of Nonresident Father Involvement for Children's Well-being. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 56, 963-972.
- A study of 175 three year old children from low-income black families found that there is no association between greater amounts of nonresident father contact and children's improved receptive language skills.
Source: Black, M.M., Dubowitz, H. and Starr, R.H.Jr. (1999). African American Fathers in Low Income, Urban Families: Development, Behaviors, and Home Environment of Their Three year old Children. *Child Development*, 70(4), 967-978.

Take Time to Be a Dad Today

Father Engagement

- A study of 175 three year old children from low-income black families found that higher levels of non-resident father warmth and nurturing are associated with children's improved cognitive development as measured by their receptive language skills. This association, however, is small.
Source: Black, M.M., Dubowitz, H. and Starr, R.H.Jr. (1999). African American Fathers in Low Income, Urban Families: Development, Behaviors, and Home Environment of Their Three year old Children. *Child Development*, 70(4), 967-978.

Financial Support

- Non-resident fathers' greater financial support is associated with their child's improved reading recognition and math performance, and a better home intellectual environment as measured by the Peabody Individual Achievement Test and the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment Inventory. The study included 1,290 children between the ages of 5-10.
Source: Knox, V. (1996). The effects of child support payments on developmental outcomes for elementary school-age children. *The Journal of Human Resources*, 31(4), 816-840.
- Non-resident fathers' provision of child support is associated with children's improved cognitive ability as measured by the Peabody Individual Math and Reading Recognition achievement tests, which measure number recognition, geometry, trigonometry, word recognition, and pronunciation ability. The study included children, ages 5-8, of 845 divorced or never married mothers.
Source: Argys, L., Peters, E., Brooks-Gunn, J., and Smith, J. (1998). The impact of child support on cognitive outcomes of young children. *Demography*, 35(2), 159-173.
- Children of non-resident fathers who voluntarily provide financial support have higher verbal ability, as measured by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, than their counterparts whose non-resident fathers are court-ordered to provide child support. The study included children, ages 5-8, of 845 divorced or never married mothers.
Source: Argys, L., Peters, E., Brooks-Gunn, J., and Smith, J. (1998). The impact of child support on cognitive outcomes of young children. *Demography*, 35(2), 159-173.
- Greater amounts of financial support received from nonresidential fathers are associated with children's improved math and reading aptitude. The study examined the cognitive abilities of 1,501 children ages 4 – 18 in 1988.
Source: King, V. (1994). Nonresident Father Involvement and Child Well-being: Can Dads Make a Difference? *Journal of Family Issues*, 15(1), 79-96.
- A study of 175 three year old children from low-income black families found that greater amounts of nonresident father financial support are associated with improved cognitive development as measured by children's receptive language skills.
Source: Black, M.M., Dubowitz, H. and Starr, R.H.Jr. (1999). African American Fathers in Low Income, Urban Families: Development, Behaviors, and Home Environment of Their Three year old Children. *Child Development*, 70(4), 967-978.

Social/Emotional Development

Father-Child Contact

- Nonresident fathers' participation in a wide range of daily activities with their children including reading, watching TV, attending entertainment events, doing homework, visiting, and shopping is associated with children's improved psychological well-being measured by their adjustment to divorce, positive mood, and lower levels of depression. These results are based on a study of 115 children of divorce ages 5 to 13 living apart from their biological fathers in Southern California.
Source: Clarke-Stewart, K. & Hayward, C. (1996). Advantages of father custody and contact for the psychological well-being of school-age children. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 17, 239 – 270.

- More frequent non-resident father visitation is not associated with children's increased feelings of self-worth. The study examined the social and emotional development of 1,501 children ages 4 – 18 in 1988.
Source: King, V. (1994). Nonresident Father Involvement and Child Well-being: Can Dads Make a Difference? *Journal of Family Issues*, 15(1), 79-96.
- A study of 175 three year old children from low-income black families found that there is no association between greater amounts of nonresident father contact and young children's reduced behavior problems as measured by behaviors such as feeling afraid, disobedient, crying, and fighting.
Source: Black, M.M., Dubowitz, H. and Starr, R.H.Jr. (1999). African American Fathers in Low Income, Urban Families: Development, Behaviors, and Home Environment of Their Three year old Children. *Child Development*, 70(4), 967-978.
- A study of 1,172 households of children ages 5-18 found that higher levels of nonresident father visitation are associated with children's improved adjustment measured by items such as their willingness to try new things, feelings of happiness, cheerfulness, sadness or depression, and whether or not they get along with other kids, but only if mothers are satisfied with the non-resident fathers' level of involvement.
Source: King, V. and Heard, H. (1999). Nonresident father visitation, parental conflict, and mother's satisfaction: what's best for child well-being? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61(2), 385-396.
- A study of 1,172 households of children ages 5-18 found that higher levels of nonresident father visitation are associated with higher levels of children's well-being measured by how well their mother feels their life is going, but only if mothers are satisfied with the non-resident fathers' level of involvement.
Source: King, V. and Heard, H. (1999). Nonresident father visitation, parental conflict, and mother's satisfaction: what's best for child well-being? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61(2), 385-396.
- Daughters of non-resident fathers with regular child contact are less likely to have seen a doctor or therapist for emotional or behavioral problems. The study included 1,285 children between the ages of 5 and 18.
Source: Amato, P. and Rezac, S. (1994). Contact with nonresident parents, interparental conflict, and children's behavior. *Journal of Family Issues*, 15(2), 191-207.

Father Engagement

- A study of 1,431 children between 3 and 12 years old found that greater warmth from nonresident fathers is associated with children's positive pro-social development as measured by children's health, friendships, prospects for the future, and feelings of self-worth.
Source: Harper, S.E. and Fine, M.A. (2006). The Effects of Involved Nonresidential Fathers' Distress, Parenting Behaviors, Inter-Parental Conflict, and the Quality of Father-Child Relationships on Children's Well-Being. *Fathering*, 4(3), 286-311.

Financial Support

- For Hispanic children, greater amounts of financial support received from nonresidential fathers are associated with fewer child problem behaviors as measured by the Behavior Problem Index. The study measure of social and emotional development of 1,501 children ages children ages 4 – 18 in 1988.
Source: King, V. (1994). Variation in the Consequences of Nonresident Father Involvement for Children's Well-being. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 56, 963-972.

Externalizing behaviors

Father-Child Contact

- Nonresident fathers' greater participation in a wide range of daily activities with their children including reading, watching TV, attending entertainment events, doing homework, visiting, and shopping is associated with children's engagement in fewer problem behaviors including kicking or hitting, complaining, ignoring parents, and acting defiant. These results are based on a study of 115 children of divorce ages 5 to 13 living apart from their biological fathers in Southern California.

Source: Clarke-Stewart, K. & Hayward, C. (1996). Advantages of father custody and contact for the psychological well-being of school-age children. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 17*, 239 – 270.

- A study of 188 black three and four year old children of low-income single mothers found that, among children living with employed mothers, more frequent nonresident father contact was associated with fewer child problem behaviors including fighting, hitting, demanding attention, restlessness, and an inability to sit still. There was no association between more frequent nonresident father contact and fewer problem behaviors among children living in households with unemployed mothers.

Source: Jackson, A.P. (1999). The Effects of Nonresident Father Involvement on Single Black Mothers and Their Young Children. *Social Work, 44*(2), 156-166.

- For black children, more frequent nonresident father visitation is associated with increased problem behaviors for children as measured by the Behavior Problem Index. The study examined the problem behaviors of 1,501 children ages 4 – 18 in 1988.

Source: King, V. (1994). Variation in the Consequences of Nonresident Father Involvement for Children's Well-being. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 56*, 963-972.

- Daughters of non-resident fathers with regular child contact are less likely to have behavior problems, as measured by children's in-school behavior and criminal behavior. The study included 1,285 children between the ages of 5 and 18.

Source: Amato, P. and Rezac, S. (1994). Contact with nonresident parents, interparental conflict, and children's behavior. *Journal of Family Issues, 15*(2), 191-207.

Financial Support

- For Hispanic children, but not black and white children, greater amounts of financial support received from nonresidential fathers are associated with fewer child problem behaviors as measured by the Behavior Problem Index. The study measure of social and emotional development of 1,501 children ages children ages 4 – 18 in 1988.

Source: King, V. (1994). Variation in the Consequences of Nonresident Father Involvement for Children's Well-being. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 56*, 963-972.