



U.S. Department of Health  
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Office of Family Assistance

# NRFC Research Review

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## NON-RESIDENT FATHER AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT LATE ADOLESCENCE (15–18)

### Definitions and Topics

- **Non-Resident fathers** are men who do not co-reside with their children.
- **Academic performance** refers to adolescents' grades, test scores, cognitive abilities, and overall school performance and functioning.
- **Externalizing behavior problems** involve 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.
- **Internalizing behavior problems** refers to lower psychological well-being and emotional distress such as depression, irritability, and somatic concerns.
- **Social development** refers to adolescents' self-efficacy, feelings of self-worth, and development of positive relationships with peers and other adults outside the family.

### Externalizing Behaviors

#### Father-Child Contact

- A study of 1,172 households of children ages 5-18 found that higher levels of nonresident father visitation are associated with fewer behavior problems for children measured by items such as whether or not the child has been suspended or expelled, ran away from home, or is difficult to raise, 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.
- For black children, higher levels of non-resident father visitation are associated with more problem behavior 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.

*Take Time to Be a Dad Today*

- Adolescents who stay overnight more often with their nonresident fathers are less likely to smoke regularly. The study consisted of 1,932 adolescents in grades 7-12.  
Source: Menning, C.L. (2006). Nonresident fathers' involvement and adolescents' smoking. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 47*, 32-46.

## Father Engagement

- Higher levels of nonresident father support are associated with fewer delinquent behaviors for adolescent sons in white single-mother families. This study consisted of 600 adolescents ages 15 to 18.  
Source: Thomas, G., Farrell, M.P., & Barnes, G.M. (1996). The effects of single-mother families and nonresident fathers on delinquency and substance abuse in Black and White adolescents. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 58*, 884-894.
- A study of 189 adolescents ages 10 to 18 with a nonresident father and living with a stepfather found that higher nonresident father-adolescent relationship quality was associated with reduced externalizing behaviors including acting impulsive, acting without thinking, and feeling restless.  
Source: White, E., & Gilbreth, J. G. (2001). When children have two fathers: Effects of relationships with stepfathers and noncustodial fathers on adolescent outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 63*, 155-167.
- Higher quality nonresident father-child relationships are associated with fewer externalizing behaviors for adolescents including bullying others, disobeying at home, a strong temper, and acting impulsive. This study examined 453 adolescents ages 10 – 18 who were living apart from their biological fathers. Father-child relationship quality was measured by whether or not the child would talk to their father if they were unhappy or needed advice, how much they admired their father, whether or not they received praise or complements from their father, and the quality of the overall father-child relationship.  
Source: King, V. & Sobolewski, J.M. (2006). Nonresident fathers' contributions to adolescent well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 68*, 537-557.
- More responsive parenting by nonresident fathers is associated with fewer adolescent externalizing behaviors including bullying others, disobeying at home, a strong temper, and acting impulsive. This study examined 453 adolescents ages 10 – 18 who were living apart from their biological fathers.  
Source: King, V. & Sobolewski, J.M. (2006). Nonresident fathers' contributions to adolescent well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 68*, 537-557.
- Nonresident fathers that talk to their adolescent children about things going on at school have children with lower levels of delinquency. This study was based on 1,535 adolescents in grades 7 – 12 who were living apart from their biological fathers.  
Source: Stewart, S. D. (2003). Nonresident parenting and adolescent adjustment: The quality of nonresident father-child interaction. *Journal of Family Issues, 24*, 217-244.
- Adolescents who feel close to their nonresident fathers are less likely to smoke regularly. The study consisted of 1,932 adolescents in grades 7-12.  
Source: Menning, C.L. (2006). Nonresident fathers' involvement and adolescents' smoking. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 47*, 32-46.
- Adolescents who engage in more shared activities such as going shopping, going to a movie, and working on a school project with their nonresident fathers are less likely to smoke regularly. The study consisted of 1,932 adolescents in grades 7-12.  
Source: Menning, C.L. (2006). Nonresident fathers' involvement and adolescents' smoking. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 47*, 32-46.

- Higher levels of nonresident father support are associated with less heavy drinking and illicit drug use among white adolescent males in single-mother families. This study consisted of 600 adolescents ages 15 to 18.

Source: Thomas, G., Farrell, M.P., & Barnes, G.M. (1996). The effects of single-mother families and nonresident fathers on delinquency and substance abuse in Black and White adolescents. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58, 884-894.

## Financial Support

- For Hispanic children, nonresident fathers' financial support is associated with fewer child problem behaviors as measured by the Behavior Problem Index. The study examined the 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.

## Internalizing Behaviors

### Father-Child Contact

- Nonresident fathers that visit their children frequently have adolescent children with lower levels of depression compared to children of nonresident fathers that visit their children infrequently or never visit their children. This study was based on a sample of 895 12<sup>th</sup> grade respondents who were living with a divorced single mother.

Source: Barber, B.L. (1994). Support and advice from married and divorced fathers: Linkages to adolescent adjustment. *Family Relations*, 43, 433-438.

- Non-resident fathers who have more regular contact with their children have daughters that 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 189 adolescents ages 10 to 18 with a nonresident father and living with a stepfather found that higher levels of nonresident father-adolescent relationship quality are associated with fewer internalizing behaviors including feeling unhappy, sad, depressed, and worthless.

Source: White, E., & Gilbreth, J. G. (2001). When children have two fathers: Effects of relationships with stepfathers and noncustodial fathers on adolescent outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 63, 155-167.

- More positive nonresident father-child relationship quality is associated with fewer adolescent internalizing behaviors such as feeling worthless, inferior, unhappy, depressed or nervous. This study examined 453 adolescents ages 10 – 18 who were living apart from their biological fathers. Father-child relationship quality was measured by whether or not the child would talk to their father if they were unhappy or needed advice, how much they admired their father, whether or not they received praise or complements from their father, and the quality of the overall father-child relationship.

Source: King, V. & Sobolewski, J.M. (2006). Nonresident fathers' contributions to adolescent well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68, 537-557.

- More responsive parenting by nonresident fathers is associated with fewer adolescent internalizing behaviors such as feeling worthless, inferior, unhappy, depressed or nervous. This study examined 453 adolescents ages 10 – 18 who were living apart from their biological fathers.

Source: King, V. & Sobolewski, J.M. (2006). Nonresident fathers' contributions to adolescent well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68, 537-557.

- Adolescents who feel close to their nonresident fathers have lower levels of emotional distress. This study was based on 1,535 adolescents in grades 7 – 12 who were living apart from their biological fathers.  
Source: Stewart, S. D. (2003). Nonresident parenting and adolescent adjustment: The quality of nonresident father-child interaction. *Journal of Family Issues*, 24, 217-244.
- Nonresident fathers that talk to their adolescent children about things going on at school have children with lower emotional distress. This study was based on 1,535 adolescents in grades 7 – 12 who were living apart from their biological fathers.  
Source: Stewart, S. D. (2003). Nonresident parenting and adolescent adjustment: The quality of nonresident father-child interaction. *Journal of Family Issues*, 24, 217-244.

## Academic Achievement/ Performance

### Father-Child Contact

- The frequency of nonresident father visitation is not significantly associated with children's 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.
- For black children, nonresident fathers' more frequent visitation is associated with lower math aptitude for children. 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.
- Adolescent boys that have more frequent contact with their nonresident fathers have higher grade point averages. This study included 50 white middle class males ages 14 to 17.  
Source: Jones, K. (2004). Assessing psychological separation and academic performance in nonresident-father and resident-father adolescent boys. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 21, 333-354.

### Father Engagement

- Children of non-resident fathers who are involved in their schooling are more likely to receive A's and less likely to repeat a grade or be suspended or expelled than their counterparts with non-resident fathers who are not involved in their child's schooling. The study included 5, 064 children in 1<sup>st</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade with a nonresident father.  
Source: Nord, C. and W., Jerry. (2001). *Fathers' and mothers' involvement in their schools by family type and resident status*, NCEs 2001-032. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
- Higher nonresident father-child relationship quality is associated with better grades for sons. This study examined 453 adolescents ages 10 – 18 who were living apart from their biological fathers. Father-child relationship quality was measured by whether or not the child would talk to their father if they were unhappy or needed advice, how much they admired their father, whether or not they received praise or complements from their father, and the quality of the overall father-child relationship.  
Source: King, V. & Sobolewski, J.M. (2006). Nonresident fathers' contributions to adolescent well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68, 537-557.

- Higher nonresident father-child relationship quality is associated with less acting out at school for sons. This study examined 453 adolescents ages 10 – 18 who were living apart from their biological fathers. Father-child relationship quality was measured by whether or not the child would talk to their father if they were unhappy or needed advice, how much they admired their father, whether or not they received praise or complements from their father, and the quality of the overall father-child relationship.  
Source: King, V. & Sobolewski, J.M. (2006). Nonresident fathers' contributions to adolescent well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68, 537-557.
- Nonresident fathers that talk to their adolescent children about their school work or grades have children with higher academic performance as measured by their GPA. This study was based on 1,535 adolescents in grades 7 – 12 who were living apart from their biological fathers.  
Source: Stewart, S. D. (2003). Nonresident parenting and adolescent adjustment: The quality of nonresident father-child interaction. *Journal of Family Issues*, 24, 217-244.
- Nonresident fathers' greater involvement in a variety of activities with their adolescent children including playing sports together, discussing school and grades, going shopping, and working on school projects, and increases in fathers' involvement in such activities over time, are associated with children's lower likelihood of dropping out of high school. This study included approximately 2,500 adolescents in grades 7-12 who were living apart from their biological fathers.  
Source: Menning, C.L., (2006). Nonresident fathering and school failure. *Journal of Family Issues*, 27, 1356-1382.
- A study of adolescents living with their biological mother and a stepfather found that higher levels of closeness to nonresident fathers are associated with better grades. Adolescents are even less likely to have failing grades if they are close to both their nonresident father and their stepfather. The study examined of 1, 152 adolescents in grades 7 – 12.  
Source: King, V. (2006). The antecedents and consequences of adolescents' relationships with stepfathers and nonresident fathers. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68, 910-928.

## Financial Support

- Nonresident fathers' payment of child support is associated with children's increased 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.
- Adolescent children with nonresident fathers that pay child support are less likely to drop out of high school. This study included approximately 2,500 adolescents in grades 7-12 who were living apart from their biological fathers.  
Source: Menning, C.L., (2006). Nonresident fathering and school failure. *Journal of Family Issues*, 27, 1356-1382.
- Children of non-resident fathers who paid child support in the prior year are more likely to receive A's and less likely to repeat a grade or be suspended or expelled than their counterparts with non-resident fathers who did not pay child support. The study included 5, 064 children in 1<sup>st</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade with a nonresident father.  
Source: Nord, C. and W., Jerry. (2001). *Fathers' and mothers' involvement in their schools by family type and resident status*, NCEES 2001-032. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

## Social Development

### Father-Child Contact

- 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 global 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.

- Frequency of non-resident father visitation was not significantly associated with children's 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.

### Financial Support

- For Hispanic children, the amount of financial support received from nonresident fathers is associated with fewer child problem behaviors as measured by the Behavior Problem Index. The study examined the social and emotional 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.