

## Variation in the Consequences of Nonresident Father Involvement for Children's Well-Being

*Using data from subsets ranging in size from 777 to 1,501 children from the child supplement to the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), a series of multivariate regression models were tested to determine whether the effects of nonresident father involvement on child well-being vary by race, mother's education, or whether the child was born within or outside of marriage. The results show few interactive effects, and no identifiable set of conditions emerged that increased or reduced the importance of father involvement for child well-being.*

Given current rates of divorce and nonmarital childbearing, nonresident paternal parenting is becoming increasingly common. Recent research efforts show a parallel trend toward an increasing focus on nonresident father involvement. In particular, researchers have been interested in both the antecedents of nonresident father involvement (e.g., Furstenberg, Nord, Peterson, & Zill, 1983; Seltzer, 1991) and its consequences for children (e.g., Furstenberg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987; King, 1993, 1994).

Early research and concern over the relationship between nonresident fathers and their chil-

dren was often predicated on the assumption that father involvement would have positive benefits for children, but supporting evidence has been limited. The majority of studies based on large national surveys have found little association between father visitation and child well-being (Baydar & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Furstenberg et al., 1987; King, 1993, 1994; Zill, 1988). Stronger effects of father involvement have been found for the payment of child support. Although not significant for all measures of well-being (Baydar & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Furstenberg et al., 1987; King, 1993, 1994; McLanahan, Seltzer, Hanson, & Thomson, 1991), there is some evidence that the payment of child support has beneficial effects for children in the domains of educational achievement (Graham, Beller, & Hernandez, 1991; King, 1993, 1994; Knox & Bane, 1991) and behavioral adjustment (Furstenberg et al., 1987; McLanahan et al., 1991).

Although several studies have examined the question of whether nonresident father involvement has positive benefits for children, the majority of these studies have failed to examine the possible interactive effects of father involvement. For example, most of the studies use all-white samples, and the few that do have data for minorities do not examine whether the effects of father involvement differ for whites and blacks (or other minorities).

As Arditti (1994) pointed out, there has been a lack of attention to the diversity of circumstances encountered by families in which there is a non-

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resident father. Determining how important social stratifiers such as race and class influence nonresident parenting has been virtually ignored in the literature. This neglect has important consequences because it may be that father involvement is beneficial only under certain circumstances or for certain groups of children.

Only two studies to date have considered this issue. Furstenberg et al. (1987) examined whether the effect of father contact or the payment of child support varied with the child's sex, current marital status of the mother, or the mother's income. They reported few interactive effects and found no conditions that amplified or reduced the importance of nonresident father involvement for child well-being. Other important variations, however, such as by race or by whether the child was born within marriage, were not explored.

A recent study by Amato and Rezac (1994) explored several other potentially important moderating factors for the effect of nonresident parental contact on children's behavior problems. They also reported few interactive effects. However, when they examined variations by parental conflict, an interesting finding emerged. They found that, among boys from divorced families, contact with the nonresident parent decreased behavior problems when parental conflict was low but increased behavior problems when conflict was high. However, this relationship did not hold for girls or for boys born outside of marriage. Although this study considered a wide variety of moderating factors such as race and gender, it focused on only one type of child outcome and was limited to examining the effect of contact.

In this article I explore whether the effect of father involvement varies by the child's race, mother's education, or whether the child was born outside of marriage. These three factors are important social stratifiers that reflect differences in power and privilege (Arditti, 1994), and influence patterns both of nonresident father involvement (Furstenberg & Nord, 1985; Mott, 1993; Seltzer, 1991; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988) and of child well-being (Moore & Snyder, 1991; Mott, 1993). In addition to being important structural indicators, these variables also serve as proxies for unmeasured family processes such as childrearing practices (Buriel, 1993).

Both the effect of father visitation and of child support on several different measures of child well-being are examined in an attempt to discover conditions that promote the importance of nonresident father involvement for the well-being of

children. Clearly, visitation and the payment of child support only partially depict nonresident father involvement, but they are central features of it. It is through visitation that the nonresident father is able to maintain a paternal relationship with his children (Fox, 1985). The payment of child support, even if it is only a small amount, is often crucial for the mother and her children and may mean the difference between living below or above the poverty line (Arendell, 1986).

#### PATTERNS OF VARIATION

There are significant racial differences in family patterns such as marriage, divorce, and childbearing, as well as in general life circumstances. For example, black families are more likely to be headed by women and to be living in poverty than white families. Blacks have higher rates of unemployment, divorce, and nonmarital childbearing (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992). And black women are less likely than white women to be awarded child support (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990). The patterns for Hispanics generally fall between those of whites and blacks, signifying the harsher economic circumstances that minorities often face in comparison to whites. Given such different family circumstances, it is possible that the effect of fathers staying involved in their children's lives may differ as well. Similarly, whether a child was born within or outside of marriage may affect father involvement or any benefits from it. Seltzer (1991) found that being born in marriage was associated with higher levels of father involvement. She argues that marriage formalizes a parent's commitment to the responsibilities of childrearing and that coresidence is likely to encourage more frequent involvement after divorce. On the other hand, Furstenberg and Talvitie (1980), in a study of black pregnant teenagers, found that outside fathers who never married were not very different from divorced fathers in terms of contact and financial support. They concluded that, at least for their sample of black teenagers, marriage had a minimal effect in bolstering parental obligation. These seemingly contradictory findings may be due to subgroup differences. Perhaps the importance of marriage for paternal commitment differs for blacks and whites. But such hypotheses can only be explored by examining subgroup differences and similarities directly.

Maternal education is a well-documented correlate of both father involvement (e.g., Seltzer,

1991; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988) and child well-being (e.g., Moore & Snyder, 1991; Mott, 1993), although the mechanism through which it works is less clear. A mother's education is one indicator of her resources in terms of her income. It is also a reflection of her knowledge and ability. Values, beliefs, and parenting styles are also associated with education (e.g., Buriel, 1993). Perhaps maternal education moderates the effect of father involvement for child well-being. Father involvement may make the biggest difference when the mother's own resources are scarce. Or perhaps the often-limited involvement of many fathers is not enough to compensate in these situations.

#### DATA

The data for this analysis come from the child supplement to the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). This longitudinal survey is based on a national probability sample of 12,686 men and women who were initially interviewed in 1979 when they were between the ages of 14 and 21. An oversample of minorities and disadvantaged whites were included within this sample. In addition to annual interviews with these respondents, data on the children of the NLSY women were collected in 1986 and 1988. As of 1988, data had been collected for 7,346 children (see Baker & Mott, 1989).

A child sample weight is available for use with these data. It adjusts for the oversampling of blacks, Hispanics, and economically disadvantaged whites, as well as for sample attrition over time. Weighted data are used in the descriptive section of this article (Tables 1-3). The regression models (Tables 4-6) use unweighted data. These models either include controls for, or were examined separately by, variables on which sampling stratification occurred.

My analysis focuses on children who were living in households with their mothers and had a father living elsewhere in 1988. The analyses in this article are based on different subsets of children because the child assessment measures were given to different groups of children based on their age. The largest subset of children examined here are those who were 4 years and older in 1988 for whom the Behavior Problems Index was completed ( $n = 1,501$ ). The smallest subset of children are those who were 8 and older and completed the Self-Perception Profile for Children ( $n = 777$ ).

The availability of several different child assessment measures is important because the effect

of father involvement may differ by the type of child outcome examined. The oversampling of blacks and Hispanics will permit multivariate analyses to be performed by race. The major limitation of this data set is the relatively young age of the mothers. The children who were assessed tend to be born to younger mothers, and this is particularly true of the older children. For example, the mean age of the mother at the time of the child's birth was 20 for the subset of children 4 years and older and 18 for the subset of children 8 years and older. Thus, although the NLSY contains a national probability sample of women, their children are not fully representative of all children in their age group (Mott, 1993).

#### MEASURES

##### *Independent Variables*

Two measures of father involvement are available and will be treated as the main independent variables of interest: visitation and the payment of child support. In the 1988 survey round, mothers were asked how many times in the past 12 months their child had seen his or her father. Their answers were coded as follows: 0 = never, 1 = once in the past year, 2 = about two to six times in the past year, 3 = about seven to 11 times in the past year, 4 = about one to three times a month, 5 = about once a week, 6 = about two to five times a week, 7 = almost every day. In 1988 mothers were also asked how much money in the form of child support they received in the past calendar year (1987), and answers were recorded in dollar amounts. In the regression models to follow, dollar amounts were converted into thousands of dollars.

The models to follow are presented by race, birth status, and mother's education. Race is coded as a three-category variable in the NLSY: Hispanic, black, and non-Hispanic/nonblack. I refer to this last category as white. A variable reflecting whether a child was born within or outside of marriage was created using the detailed marital histories in the NLSY. The highest level of education completed by the mother was recorded in the 1988 survey round. Mothers were coded as belonging to one of three groups: mothers who have less than a high school education, mothers who completed high school, and mothers who have attended at least some college.

Several other independent variables will serve as controls in the regression models to follow.

They include the following: the child's sex, birth order, region of residence, and distance from the father, as well as the mother's religion, household income (from all sources except child support), age at birth of the child, age at birth of her first child, current marital status, and time since divorce. Dummy variables were also created for children who had missing data for household income, distance, and time since separation. All children born outside of marriage were coded as missing for time since separation. The best proxy for these children would be their age. Time since separation was not added as a control variable for those models examining the effect of father involvement by the mother's marital status at the time of the child's birth.

#### Dependent Variables

Five major child assessments are employed in this study (see Baker & Mott, 1989; Mott, Baker, Haurin, & Quinlan, 1990; and Mott & Quinlan, 1991, for more detailed information about these assessments).

**Behavior Problems Index (BPI).** This index measures the incidence of behavior problems in children. It consists of a series of 28 items and is based on maternal reports of their children 4 years and older. Higher scores represent a greater level of behavior problems.

**Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC): Scholastic Competence.** This index is based on a self-report questionnaire of six items that measure a child's perceived competence in the academic skill domain. It was completed by all children 8 years and older.

**Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC): Global Self-Worth.** This index is also based on a self-report questionnaire of six items that measure a child's sense of general self-worth. It was completed by all children 8 years and older.

**Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT): Mathematics.** All children 5 years and older completed this test which measures mathematical ability. It consists of 84 multiple-choice items of increasing difficulty.

**Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT): Reading Recognition.** This 84-item assessment was completed by all children aged 5 and older and measures ability in oral reading.

Normed standard scores, available for the BPI and the PIAT measures, are used in this analysis. Only raw scores are available for the SPPC assessments. (The original SPPC scores, which ranged from 6 to 24, were multiplied by 10 on the NLSY data tape to remove decimals resulting from the proration method used in the small number of cases that had some missing items.)

## RESULTS

### Levels of Father Involvement and Child Well-Being by Subgroup

Table 1 presents the frequency of visitation between fathers and their children by each subgroup examined in this study for the sample of children who were 4 years old and over and whose mothers completed the Behavior Problems Index. Comparisons by race show that black children generally have more frequent visitation with their fathers than either whites or Hispanics. The dif-

TABLE 1. FREQUENCY OF FATHER VISITATION BY RACE, BY BIRTH STATUS, AND BY MOTHER'S EDUCATION (WEIGHTED PERCENTAGES)

Frequency of Visits	Race			Birth Status		Mother's Education		
	Hispanic	Black	White	Marital	Nonmarital	<HS	HS	>HS
Never	38.8	30.3	33.2	25.4	40.0	33.2	32.0	32.9
Once/year	10.8	11.9	7.1	9.5	9.0	9.5	9.9	7.2
2-6x/year	11.6	14.7	11.6	13.6	11.9	14.2	9.0	17.7
7-11x/year	4.7	4.7	5.4	5.7	4.5	5.2	6.2	2.5
1-3x/month	13.5	11.8	18.5	18.6	12.4	14.7	17.0	14.4
Once/week	7.8	8.4	13.0	14.5	7.0	9.2	12.3	11.1
2-5x/week	9.8	7.6	8.0	9.2	6.7	6.6	8.4	10.1
Every day	3.0	10.5	3.2	3.4	8.5	7.4	5.3	4.1
n	228	721	552	620	881	666	570	265

Note: The sample comprises children ages 4 and older in the model for the Behavior Problems Index. Column totals may deviate slightly from 100% because of rounding error.

ferences between blacks and whites or Hispanics are most notable at the extremes of visitation: Compared with white or Hispanic children, black children are least likely to have a father who never visits and are most likely to have a father who visits almost every day.

Comparisons by birth status reveal that children born within marriage experience significantly higher levels of visitation, with one notable exception: A higher percentage of children born outside of marriage see their fathers almost every day compared with children born within marriage. Finally, children who have mothers who graduated from high school or attended college experience more frequent visitation with their fathers than children who have mothers who never graduated from high school. This relationship holds except for the very highest level of visitation where children with mothers who never graduated high school are more likely to have a father who visits almost every day compared with children whose mothers graduated high school or attended college.

Who exactly are these fathers who visit their children almost every day, and why are reversals of the general patterns seen here for this group? As is evident from Table 1, as well as from additional analyses not presented here (see King, 1993), the majority of these fathers are black and have children who were born outside of marriage. These two factors are also associated with the lower educational attainment of mothers.

Unfortunately the data do not tell us anything about what is actually going on in these types of arrangements. We do not know what type of relationship the child or the mother has with such fathers. However, research by Anderson (1989), Liebow (1967), and Stack (1974) can offer us some clues. These studies of poor urban blacks found that relationships between nonresident fathers and their children are quite varied. At one extreme are fathers who refuse to acknowledge paternity and have no contact with their children. At the other extreme, which we are interested in here, are fathers who have contact with their children every day. A major determinant of these father-child relationships appears to be the father's relationship with the mother:

It is almost as if the men have no direct relationship with their children independent of their relationship with their mother . . . . These children are never sent to spend a weekend, a Sunday, or even a few hours alone with their fathers. If . . . the father does visit the child's household, it is

primarily to see the mother rather than the child. As a rule, children born of short-term unions see their fathers only if and when the father and mother maintain or reestablish a personal relationship. (Liebow, 1967, pp. 89-90).

Thus some of these NLSY fathers who have contact with their children almost every day may be involved in an ongoing personal relationship with the child's mother. This situation is very different from one following a divorce where the personal relationship between husband and wife is usually severed. Another possibility is that some of these fathers may be fulfilling an institutionalized role that puts them in contact with their children every day. An example would be a father who continues to drive his child to school every morning after a divorce. It is unclear how common such an arrangement might be.

Many other possibilities exist as well but we have no direct information on who these fathers are or why they visit their children every day. Research examining father contact postdivorce has more often been concerned with understanding why many fathers have infrequent contact with their children as opposed to exploring why some fathers have very high levels of contact (e.g., Arendell, 1992; Dudley, 1991). The tentative hypotheses discussed here require further investigation.

The amount of child support received by each subgroup is displayed in Table 2. Not surprisingly, white children enjoy significantly higher levels of child support than both black and Hispanic children. This is due in part to the greater economic resources of white families, as well as to the fact that a larger proportion of the white children were born within marriage compared with the black and Hispanic children. Children born within marriage receive significantly higher levels of child support. This is due in large part to the worse economic situation associated with nonmarital births and to the fact that such women are less likely to have a child support award.

Finally, as mother's education goes up, their ability to receive child support payments increases as well. This may be due in part to the greater ability of educated women to secure child support payments. These women have greater resources to take their husbands to court to enforce the payment of child support. Additionally, the mother's education is likely to be positively related to the father's educational level, which in turn reflects his ability to pay child support.

TABLE 2. AMOUNT OF CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS BY RACE, BY BIRTH STATUS, AND BY MOTHER'S EDUCATION (WEIGHTED PERCENTAGES)

Amount of Support	Race			Birth Status		Mother's Education		
	Hispanic	Black	White	Marital	Nonmarital	<HS	HS	>HS
\$0	73.2	73.0	55.1	54.2	72.9	69.6	59.9	57.6
\$1-999	10.2	13.7	16.9	16.0	14.2	15.1	16.7	11.9
\$1000-1999	6.5	6.3	8.4	8.9	5.9	5.2	9.9	7.2
\$2000-2999	3.1	3.1	11.4	10.6	4.3	6.5	7.4	9.8
\$3000+	7.0	4.0	8.2	10.3	2.7	3.7	6.1	13.5
<i>n</i>	228	721	552	620	881	666	570	265

Note: The sample comprises children ages 4 and older in the model for the Behavior Problems Index. Column totals may deviate slightly from 100% because of rounding error.

Similar results are found for the other age groups of children. The oldest age group, those 8 and over taking the SPPC assessments, show slightly lower levels of visitation and child support overall, but the subgroup patterns are the same (results not shown). These slightly lower levels were expected given that nonresident father involvement tends to decline over time (Furstenberg & Harris, 1992; Seltzer, 1991; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). These subgroup differences in levels of father involvement are generally consistent with those found in other studies (e.g., Mott, 1993; Seltzer, 1991; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990).

Table 3 presents the mean scores of each assessment measure by subgroup. In general, the modest differences that appear among the subgroups were expected and have been found in other research. Whites, children born within marriage, and children of highly educated mothers tend to score higher on these types of child well-being measures (e.g., Moore & Snyder, 1991; Mott, 1993).

### The Effects of Father Involvement for Child Well-Being

In a previous article, I examined whether father visitation or child support was significantly associated with the measures of well-being for the sample of children as a whole (King, 1994). Father visitation was not statistically significant for any of the assessments. The payment of child support was statistically significant for three of the outcomes, the SPPC Scholastic Competence assessment and the PIAT reading and mathematics assessments. The coefficients were in the expected direction, with higher levels of child support positively associated with higher perceived scholastic competence and with higher reading and math scores. I concluded that there was only limited evidence to support the hypothesis that nonresident father involvement has positive benefits for children, and that the strongest evidence is for the effect of child support in the domain of academics. The purpose of the present article is to examine if, and how, these results differ for different groups of children. As will soon be evident, there are few significant interactive effects and

TABLE 3. MEAN SCORES ON THE CHILD ASSESSMENT MEASURES BY RACE, BY BIRTH STATUS, AND BY MOTHER'S EDUCATION (WEIGHTED)

Assessment	Race			Birth Status		Mother's Education		
	Hispanic	Black	White	Marital	Nonmarital	<HS	HS	>HS
BPI <sup>a</sup>	109.4	110.3	111.7	110.3	111.5	112.1	111.9	106.2
SPPC-S <sup>b</sup>	162.7	167.8	167.2	168.2	166.1	163.4	172.2	166.1
SPPC-SW <sup>c</sup>	187.3	197.7	194.2	196.1	194.2	191.1	200.2	195.2
PIAT-M <sup>d</sup>	96.8	93.3	100.7	99.4	95.5	94.5	99.2	100.6
PIAT-RR <sup>e</sup>	102.0	98.7	104.4	103.5	100.4	97.7	104.6	105.9

<sup>a</sup>Behavior Problems Index

<sup>b</sup>Self-Perception Profile for Children: Scholastic Competence

<sup>c</sup>Self-Perception Profile for Children: Global Self-Worth

<sup>d</sup>Peabody Individual Achievement Test: Mathematics

<sup>e</sup>Peabody Individual Achievement Test: Reading Recognition

the few that do appear are not always in the predicted direction.

*The Effects of Father Involvement for Child Well-Being by Race*

The effects of father visitation on child well-being by race are reported in the top half of Table 4. (Sample sizes on which the following results are based are available upon request.) For black children, father visitation is actually associated with higher levels of reported behavior problems. There is no association between visitation and behavior problems for whites or Hispanics. Testing for differences between coefficients reveals that the coefficient for blacks is significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from the coefficient for whites and for Hispanics. Whites and Hispanics are not significantly different.

Father visitation is negatively associated with SPPC Scholastic Competence scores for Hispanics, although it is of borderline significance. The coefficient for Hispanics is significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from the coefficient for blacks but not whites. Father visitation is also negatively associated with PIAT math scores for blacks, and the coefficient is significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from the coefficient for whites. In sum, there are only a few significant racial differences in the effects of father visitation on these measures of well-being,

and in those cases they are negative effects with increasing father visitation associated with poorer outcomes.

The bottom half of Table 4 reports the effects of child support on child well-being by race. Here we see that child support is positively associated with scholastic competence and with math and reading scores for whites, similar to the findings found previously for the full sample (King, 1994). The coefficients for blacks and Hispanics are not statistically significant for these three measures. At first glance it would appear that the payment of child support benefits only white children. However, this conclusion is not sustained when we test for differences between coefficients. The coefficient for whites is not significantly different from the coefficient for blacks, or for Hispanics, for any of these three measures, although it does approach significance for the reading scores. The null hypothesis, that the effects of child support for these three measures are the same for whites, blacks, and Hispanics cannot be ruled out.

Hispanic children do appear to benefit from child support in terms of reporting fewer behavior problems, and the coefficient for Hispanics is significantly different ( $p < .01$ ) from the coefficient for blacks and for whites. This is slim evidence for a racial interaction and it is not clear why this result should be significant when none of the others are, indicating the possibility that this occurred by chance.

TABLE 4. UNSTANDARDIZED OLS COEFFICIENTS FOR THE EFFECTS OF FATHER VISITATION AND CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS ON CHILD'S WELL-BEING BY RACE (UNWEIGHTED)

	Blacks	Whites	Hispanics
Visitation			
BPI	.63*	-.40	-.51
SPPC-S	1.36	-.62	-5.28†
SPPC-SW	-.52	.36	-3.44
PIAT-M	-.55*	.39	.36
PIAT-RR	-.05	-.21	.20
Child support			
BPI	.24	.20	-2.72*
SPPC-S	.16	5.30*	-1.57
SPPC-SW	-.37	1.64	-4.55
PIAT-M	.41	1.11**	-.53
PIAT-RR	.34	1.61**	-.66

Note: In addition to father visitation and child support, the regressions included variables describing the child's sex, birth order, birth status, region of residence, and distance from father, as well as the mother's education, religion, household income net of child support, age at birth of the child, age at birth of first child, current marital status, and time since divorce.

† $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

*The Effects of Father Involvement for Child Well-Being by Birth Status*

Table 5 presents the effects of father visitation and child support on child well-being for children born within marriage and for children born outside of marriage. The effect of father visitation is not statistically significant at the .05 level for any of the measures of well-being, although it comes close for PIAT math scores where higher visitation is associated with lower math scores for children born outside of marriage. Child support is significantly associated with scholastic competence and math and reading scores for children born in marriage but not for children born outside of marriage. However, the coefficients for children born in marriage are not significantly different from the coefficients for children born outside marriage on any of the five measures. Again, the null hypothesis, that the effects of child support are the same for children born within and outside of marriage, cannot be rejected.

TABLE 5. UNSTANDARDIZED OLS COEFFICIENTS FOR THE EFFECTS OF FATHER VISITATION AND CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS ON CHILD'S WELL-BEING BY BIRTH STATUS (UNWEIGHTED)

	Marital	Nonmarital
Visitation		
BPI	-.38	.39
SPPC-S	-1.13	.44
SPPC-SW	-.57	-.99
PIAT-M	.38	-.40†
PIAT-RR	-.05	-.16
Child support		
BPI	-.35	.15
SPPC-S	4.83*	1.46
SPPC-SW	-.02	.67
PIAT-M	.70†	.51
PIAT-RR	.94*	.61

Note: In addition to father visitation and child support, the regressions included variables describing the child's sex, race, birth order, region of residence, and distance from father, as well as the mother's education, religion, household income net of child support, age at birth of the child, age at birth of first child, and current marital status.

† $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ .

Additional analyses that further subdivided children into groups based on race and birth status failed to change these results (results not shown).

#### *The Effects of Father Involvement for Child Well-Being by Mother's Education*

Turning to differences by mother's education in Table 6 reveals that the coefficient for father visitation is statistically significant in only one case: Father visitation is negatively associated with PIAT math scores for children of college educated mothers, and this coefficient is significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from the coefficient for children of high school educated mothers, but not from the coefficient for children whose mothers have less than a high school education. Child support is positively associated with scholastic competence scores for children with mothers who have less than a high school education, and the coefficient for this group is significantly different from the coefficient for children whose mothers completed high school ( $p < .05$ ), but not from the coefficient for children whose mothers have attended college. Child support is also positively associated with math and reading scores for children with mothers who have attended college, but these coefficients are not significantly different from the coefficients for children whose mothers completed high school or who have less than a high school education. Again there are few signif-

TABLE 6. UNSTANDARDIZED OLS COEFFICIENTS FOR THE EFFECTS OF FATHER VISITATION AND CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS ON CHILD'S WELL-BEING BY MOTHER'S EDUCATION (UNWEIGHTED)

	< HS	HS	College
Visitation			
BPI	.27	.04	-.02
SPPC-S	-.75	.57	2.39
SPPC-SW	.11	-1.36	-2.78
PIAT-M	-.29	.29	-.99*
PIAT-RR	-.12	.15	-.75
Child Support			
BPI	-.12	-.33	.34
SPPC-S	6.71**	-.60	4.83
SPPC-SW	.08	-3.11	3.84
PIAT-M	.50	-.22	1.19*
PIAT-RR	.66	.24	1.37*

Note: In addition to father visitation and child support, the regressions included variables describing the child's sex, race, birth order, birth status, region of residence, and distance from father, as well as the mother's religion, household income net of child support, age at birth of the child, age at birth of first child, current marital status, and time since divorce.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

icant differences between these groups and no consistent story emerges from these data.

#### CONCLUSION

In this article I tested whether the effects of visitation or child support for child well-being varied with the child's race, mother's education, or whether the child was born within or outside of marriage. There appear to be few interactive effects, and the few that did appear were not always in the predicted direction. In separate analyses not presented here, I also examined whether the effects of father visitation or child support varied with the child's sex, mother's current marital status, mother's household income, or the time since separation (for children of divorce). There were few interactive effects (see King, 1993). The conclusions of earlier analyses, that there is only limited evidence to support the hypothesis that non-resident father involvement has positive benefits for children, remain the same. No identifiable set of conditions emerged that increased or reduced the importance of father involvement for child well-being. This is true despite the fact that these different subgroups exhibit different patterns of father involvement and of child well-being.

More research is needed on the effects of other potentially important moderating conditions. The findings of several small studies suggest that the quality of the father-child or mother-father rela-

tionship may be an important factor (Hess & Camara, 1979; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1978, 1982; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Similarly, Amato and Rezac (1994) found parental conflict to be important, at least for boys from divorced families. On the other hand, McLanahan et al. (1991) found that the positive effects of child support for child well-being outweighed the negative effects of parental conflict. Although these studies are suggestive, much more research is needed in this area. The potential of parental conflict and the quality of the father-child relationship to moderate the effects of father involvement deserves more rigorous research than has been conducted to date.

It should be kept in mind, however, that if factors such as parental conflict do moderate the effect of father involvement on child well-being, then broad public policies aimed at helping children with absent fathers may have limited effects and more targeted policies could be difficult to implement. For example, it may be the case that in low-conflict families where everyone is getting along fairly well with one another, father involvement may improve child well-being. But such situations are not the norm after divorce where levels of parental conflict can be quite high (Arendell, 1986; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1978, 1982). In this situation many children would not benefit from increasing father involvement and some might even be harmed by it. Policies promoting nonresident father involvement would then only be effective in improving child well-being if they could be targeted toward those families where father involvement would most likely have positive benefits. Such targeted policies would be much harder to implement than policies aimed at helping divorced families in general.

Given the limited effects of father involvement for child well-being, policies designed to help children of divorce might be more effective if they target factors which are already known to be associated with child well-being. For example, the relationship between the mother and her child and the effectiveness of a mother's functioning after the divorce are known to be important correlates of a child's postdivorce adjustment (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Furstenberg et al., 1987). Therefore, policies aimed at helping mothers would have a bigger payoff for children than those aimed at trying to change fathers' behavior.

It must be remembered that the children of the NLSY are not fully representative of all children given that they were born to younger mothers.

Some caution is warranted, therefore, in generalizing these results to the larger population of children. On the other hand, this disadvantaged sample of women and children may more closely resemble the population that is most often targeted for public policy intervention. In addition, these results are consistent with other studies using nationally representative data that do not have this problem. Taking these studies together, it appears that there are few positive net effects of nonresident father involvement for children's well-being.

#### NOTE

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