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Children With Nonresident Parents: Living Arrangements, Visitation, and Child Support

One third of all children in the United States have a nonresident parent. On the basis of 13,085 children with a nonresident parent drawn from the 1997 National Survey of America's Families, this study examines nonresident mothers' and fathers' involvement (visitation and child support) with children who reside in different household types: single-parent families, married and cohabiting stepfamilies, and families headed by grandparents, other relatives, or nonrelatives. The relationship between children's living arrangements and nonresident parent involvement is complex and depends on both the gender of the nonresident parent and the type of involvement. Because nonresident parent involvement is low regardless of household type, policies and programs designed to increase involvement should include children in a variety of family forms.

A consequence of increased divorce and non-marital childbearing in the past several decades is dramatic growth in the proportion of children living apart from a biological parent. The proportion of White children living with two parents declined from 90% in 1970 to 74% in 1998, and minority children, who are less likely to live with two parents to begin with, experienced similar declines (Teachman, Tedrow, & Crowder, 2000). The implication of these

trends is that one third of all children in the United States, or roughly 25 million children, have a nonresident parent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Because high rates of poverty and an elevated risk of social and academic problems are associated with single-mother families and stepfamilies, nonresident father involvement has been at the forefront of public policy in recent years (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000; Dalaker & Proctor, 2000; McLanahan, 1997). Despite the increased attention, only about half of children with a nonresident father receive any child support or see their fathers more than a few times a year (Graham & Beller, 2002).

Nonresident parenthood should no longer be thought of only in terms of fathers. The living arrangements of children with nonresident parents are becoming increasingly diverse (Casper & Bryson, 1998). More than one fourth (28%) of children living apart from a biological parent live apart from a biological mother or both biological parents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Similar to children with nonresident fathers, children with nonresident mothers or two nonresident parents have below-average levels of social and emotional well-being and above-average rates of poverty (Casper & Bryson, 1998; Downey, Ainsworth-Darnell, & Dufur, 1998; Meyer & Garasky, 1993).

Children with nonresident mothers are particularly likely to live in households that do not include a resident parent. Previous studies have found that roughly half of children with a nonresident mother lived with a grandparent or other relative (and no parent) compared to only 10% of children with a nonresident father (Sousa &

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Sorensen, 2006; Stewart, 1999b). Yet most studies of nonresident parent involvement have been limited to children with a resident parent and examine, for example, the effects of a stepparent (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1996). Despite lower child well-being and higher rates of poverty (King, Mitchell, & Hawkins, 2010; Sun, 2003), little is known about nonresident parent involvement for children with two nonresident parents who live with grandparents, relatives, or nonrelatives.

Although studies of nonresident parent involvement are increasingly capturing greater complexity in the living arrangements of children (Harris & Ryan, 2004; King et al., 2010; Sousa & Sorensen, 2006; Sun, 2003), gaps in our understanding remain. For example, studies have examined visitation but not child support (Harris & Ryan, 2004; King et al., 2010), the involvement of nonresident fathers but not nonresident mothers (Harris & Ryan, 2004), or differences in children's well-being but not involvement (Sun, 2003). Studies have not compared nonresident parent involvement for children in married versus cohabiting stepfamilies (Harris & Ryan, 2004; King et al., 2010), nor have they distinguished between different types of nonparent caregivers (Harris & Ryan, 2004; Sousa & Sorensen, 2006; Sun, 2003). Finally, several studies have been limited to adolescents (Harris & Ryan, 2004; King et al., 2010).

Using the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF), this study investigates the relationship between nonresident parental involvement (visitation and child support), parents' gender, and children's living arrangements (single parent, cohabiting stepparent, married stepparent, nonparent grandparent, nonparent other relative, and nonparent nonrelative). Because the sample available in the NSAF is so large, and because NSAF allows for so much complexity with respect to family structure, this analysis provides a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between children's living arrangements and nonresident parent involvement than previous research.

BACKGROUND

Gender of the Nonresident Parent

The relationship between the living arrangements of the child and parental involvement may vary by the gender of the nonresident parent (Buchanan et al., 1996). Nonresident mothers

and nonresident fathers have different patterns of involvement, and they may respond differently to the structure of their child's resident family. Among children who live with a resident parent, most studies have indicated that nonresident mothers have more frequent and higher quality contact and greater closeness with their children (Hawkins, Amato, & King, 2006; Nord & Zill, 1996; but see Stewart, 1999a, 1999b). This was found to be true among children who reside with grandparents, other relatives, and nonrelatives (King et al., 2010). With respect to financial involvement, most studies have indicated that nonresident mothers are less likely to pay child support than fathers (Greif & DeMaris, 1991; Meyer & Garasky, 1993; Scoon-Rogers & Lester, 1995; Sousa & Sorensen, 2006), except perhaps when there is a child support order (Braver, Wolchik, Sandler, Sheets, & Bay, 1993; Grall, 2009; Nord & Zill, 1996).

Children's Living Arrangements

Married stepparent. The presence of a stepparent may discourage involvement by a nonresident parent by acting as a substitute parent, by essentially taking over the parenting role and/or by disrupting the nonresident parent-child relationship. Evidence is mixed, however, and focused mostly on children with nonresident fathers as opposed to mothers. Several studies (Aquilino, 1994; Harris & Ryan, 2004; McKenry, McKelvey, Leigh, & Wark, 1996; Spruijt & Iedema, 1998) found less visitation and closeness with the nonresident parent when the child's resident parent had remarried, but others reported no effect of a resident parent's married or cohabiting partner on the nonresident parent-child relationship (Buchanan et al., 1996; Hawkins et al., 2006; Nord & Zill, 1996; Stephen, Freedman, & Hess, 1993). Similarly, whereas some studies found no relationship between a resident parent's remarriage and receipt of child support (Aquilino, 1994; Seltzer, 1991), other studies reported both positive (Nord & Zill, 1996) and negative (Hill, 1992) effects. Although it is possible that the nonresident parent may increase their efforts with respect to their children, a substitute parent perspective would suggest that children living with a married or cohabiting stepparent have less social and financial involvement with their nonresident parent than do children living with a single parent (Hypothesis 1).

Cohabiting stepparent. The effect of a resident parent's cohabiting partner (versus a married stepparent) on nonresident parent involvement is largely unknown. Studies that have included cohabiting partners have grouped them together with conventional married stepparents (Hawkins et al., 2006). Cohabiting stepparents may well behave as substitute parents but probably not to the extent of married stepparents. Marriage is associated with a stronger commitment than cohabitation (Nock, 1995). Buchanan et al. (1996) reported greater involvement, acceptance, and closeness between adolescents and their resident parent's new partner when they were married as opposed to cohabiting. Moreover, whereas married stepparents appear to take at least some responsibility for the financial support of their stepchildren (Ganong & Coleman, 1999), cohabiting couples with children are no more likely to pool their income than are cohabiting couples with no children (Winkler, 1997). A cohabiting partner would therefore be less likely to take over the parental role or interfere with the nonresident parent-child relationship. Thus, children living with a cohabiting stepparent may display greater involvement with a nonresident parent than do children living with a married stepparent (Hypothesis 2).

No parent, grandparent. Most research on grandparent-headed families (with no parent present) does not allow for comparisons between children living apart from both parents, children living apart from only mothers, and children living apart from only fathers (Casper & Bryson, 1998; Jendrek, 1994). Residing with kin as opposed to a parent may facilitate involvement. Tension between the child's resident and nonresident parent can be high (Amato & Rezac, 1994), and nonresident parents may have less contact with their child to avoid seeing their ex-spouse or partner. Likewise, nonresident parents may have more trust in a grandparent or other relative (even if it is their ex-spouse's kin) to spend child support money on the child than in an ex-spouse or partner with whom they may have a poor relationship.

A kin-enabler hypothesis would suggest that children who live with a grandparent or other relatives (and no parent) have more social and financial involvement with their nonresident parent than do children living with a single parent (Hypothesis 3). This may vary by the gender of

the nonresident parent, however. Kin caregivers such as grandparents are more often the relatives of the child's mother than the father (White & Riedmann, 1992). Prior studies indicate that, whereas involvement with nonresident fathers is less when the children live with people other than a resident parent, involvement with nonresident mothers is similar or greater (Hawkins et al., 2006; King et al., 2010). For example, Sousa and Sorensen's (2006) analysis of the NSAF showed that children who lived with nonparent caregivers were significantly less likely to have a child support order, were less likely to receive child support, and received less support than children who lived with a resident mother or a resident father.

No parent, other relative. Despite the fact that they are both the kin of the nonresident parent, relatives who are not grandparents may have a different effect on parental involvement than grandparents. Compared to other relatives, grandparents tend to step forward quickly when a son or daughter needs help with the children (Jendrek, 1994). Children residing with a relative (and no parent) as opposed to a grandparent (and no parent) may be indicative of looser social and financial ties, less involvement or support among family members, and lower well-being (King et al., 2010). The effect of a child living with a relative as opposed to a grandparent may also depend on whether the nonresident parent is a mother or a father. King et al. (2010) found that adolescents living with a grandparent had greater contact with nonresident fathers than children who lived with aunts and uncles (there was no difference in contact with nonresident mothers). Although children residing with other relatives may indicate closer family ties (e.g., as between adult siblings) and therefore greater involvement of the nonresident parent, most of the evidence suggests that involvement will be greater for children living with a grandparent (Hypothesis 4).

No parent, nonrelative. Children who live with nonrelatives are generally removed from their parents' homes because of abuse or neglect (Kortencamp & Ehrle, 2002). Nationally, the foster-care caseload doubled between 1985 and 1999 (Swann & Sylvester, 2006). A child living with a nonrelative caretaker may be indicative of a family or a parent who is deficient in some way. In a study of nonresident parent involvement

with children in foster care (Chipungu, Everett, Verdieck, & Jones, 1998), children had greater contact with nonresident parents when they lived with relatives (including grandparents) than with nonrelatives. Similarly, King et al. (2010) found that adolescents living with a grandparent had greater contact with nonresident mothers and fathers than did children who lived with two parent figures. A deficient-parent hypothesis suggests that children who live with a nonrelative (and no parent) have less social and financial involvement with their nonresident parent than do children living with a single parent (Hypothesis 5) or a grandparent or other relative (Hypothesis 6). It may be foster-care placement rather than the relationship of the nonparent caregiver to the child that is most relevant to nonresident parent involvement. Children in foster care, whether living with grandparents, other relatives, or nonrelatives, are there because of abuse or neglect or have otherwise come to the attention of child protective services (Ehrle & Geen, 2001, 2002; Kortenkamp & Ehrle, 2002). Children in foster care generally come from poor families who are unable to pay child support (Hatcher, 2009).

Finally, it is plausible that, in contrast to children living with a parent, children living with grandparents, other relatives, and nonrelatives may all experience similar low levels of social and financial involvement. Several studies found fewer visits with nonresident parents when the child lived with grandparents, other relatives, or others as opposed to a biological parent (Harris & Ryan, 2004; Hawkins et al., 2005; Stewart, 1999b). Children who live with grandparents and other relatives alike tend to come from high-risk family environments (Dubowitz et al., 1994; Hornby, Zeller, & Karraker, 1995). Sun (2003) for instance, found few differences in the well-being of children from different types of nonparent households—they all had lower well-being than children who resided with one or two biological parents. Grandparents generally take over the primary care of their grandchildren as a result of the mother's financial problems, long work hours, emotional problems, drug and alcohol abuse, incarceration, or illness (Fuller-Thomson, Minkler, & Driver, 1997). In fact, regardless of the children's living arrangements, nonresident mothers are often assumed to be unfit parents, whether or not that is the case (Herrerias, 1995). The situation of these children's fathers is often unknown and may be similar.

Control Variables

The multivariate analysis included sociodemographic factors routinely found to be associated with nonresident parent involvement: characteristics of the child (gender, age, race/ethnicity, number of siblings), the resident parent (age, education, income), and the nonresident parent (distance from the child, remarriage or new children, and number of years since they lived with the child) (Harris & Ryan, 2004; King et al., 2010; Sun, 2003).

METHOD

Data

This study is based on data from the 1997 NSAF, which provides information on the economic, health, and social characteristics of children and adults in 13 states. When weighted, survey responses are representative of the civilian, noninstitutionalized population of the United States younger than age 65 (Converse, Safir, Scheuren, Steinbach, & Wang, 2001). This data set is well suited for this investigation because it contains a large number of children living apart from a biological (or adopted) parent. The analysis used the Focal Child File, which includes information on up to two randomly selected children per household (one younger than 6 and one between the age of 6 and 17).

Information about the child is provided by the "most knowledgeable adult" (MKA), defined as the adult considered most knowledgeable about the focal child's health and education. This is typically the child's mother, but the MKA may also be a stepparent, grandparent, other relative, or unrelated adult. The child's biological father is most often the MKA in resident father families, followed by a stepmother. In other types of households, the MKA is almost always a female caretaker. It is well known that reports of involvement from resident mothers and nonresident fathers differ (Seltzer & Brandreth, 1994), with mothers tending to underreport involvement and fathers tending to overreport involvement. How other caretakers' reports of involvement compare to the nonresident parents' is currently unknown. Unfortunately, the NSAF only contains the MKA's report of involvement.

Analytic Sample

The analytic sample comprised 13,085 children between the ages of 0 and 17 years who

have at least one biological or adopted parent absent from the home. Whether children have a nonresident parent was determined by their current living arrangements, as reported by the MKA (children with nonresident parents who were deceased were omitted). For children with two nonresident parents, one nonresident parent was randomly selected. A small number of children whose parents have joint physical custody were also removed.

Variables

Dependent variables. The MKA reported on two aspects of nonresident parental involvement, in-person visitation and financial contributions. In-person visitation (excluding phone calls) with the child was measured in terms of (a) whether any visitation with the focal child occurred in the previous 12 months and (b) the amount that the parent visited in that period, from not at all to 1–11 times a year, 1–3 times a month, about once a week, more than once a week, more than 1 week but less than 3 months, 3 months or more, and unclassifiable. The last three categories were collapsed into extended visitation. Although the pattern of visitation that is unclassifiable is unknown, children with unclassified visits are assumed to have a high rather than low level of visits because of the ordering of this item on the questionnaire and because there is more variability in visitation when nonresident parents are more rather than less involved. Additional analyses indicated that the results are substantively similar (in size and significance) whether or not these children ($n = 70$) were included in the sample.

Financial involvement was measured in two ways. First, the MKA reports whether the child's nonresident parent made any financial contributions to support the child in the previous 12 months. Financial contributions do not include nonmoney payments (e.g., clothes, gifts, toys). The MKA also reports on whether the child was covered by a child support order, and supplemental analysis examined the hypothesized relationships among children with an order, the results of which are noted below. Second, the MKA reports the amount of child support coming into the household for each family member. Unfortunately, it was not possible to create a child-level measure of child support because sometimes the MKA provided this information about the adult who received the child support on

behalf of a child, and sometimes the respondent indicated the child on whose behalf the income was received (Adam Safir, personal communication, January 8, 2004). I therefore used the average monthly amount of child support the family received in the previous 12 months and then controlled for number of children in the family.

Children with a nonresident parent who were missing on visits ($n = 992$, or about 8% of the sample) or child support ($n = 985$, or about 8% of the sample) but whose nonresident parent was not clearly reported as deceased were included in the sample and coded as having no visits and as receiving no child support. Including the cases and coding them as no involvement could miscode nonresident parents missing on contact as not having contact when they actually do. Yet excluding children with nonresident parents who are missing this information would misrepresent the population of children with nonresident parents (Acock, 2005). Including the children with missing data affected the results for children with a nonresident mother in that a much higher percentage (about double) of children in the larger sample had no visits with their mother in the previous year and a lower proportion had a parent that paid child support. The effect was that the coefficient for the gender of the parent was reduced, thus providing a more conservative estimate of gender differences in involvement. With respect to children's living arrangements, the direction and magnitude of the coefficients remained very similar in direction and magnitude regardless of whether the missing cases were included in the sample (results available on request).

Independent variables. The gender of the nonresident parent was coded as a dichotomous variable (1 = *female*). The child's living arrangements were measured as follows: single parent; cohabiting stepparent; married stepparent; no parent, grandparent; no parent, other relative; and no parent, nonrelative. Of the sociodemographic variables consistently found to be associated with nonresident parent involvement, the variables available in the NSAF were included as controls: child's gender, age, race; siblings living elsewhere; number of children in the household; and MKA's gender, age, education, union status, family income (without child support), and religious service attendance. Unfortunately, no information about the child's nonresident parent was available beyond whether the child was born within a union.

Analytic Strategy

First, I present descriptive information about the living arrangements of children with nonresident parents and nonresident mothers' and fathers' relative levels of involvement. I then show the relationship among the gender of the nonresident parent, the living arrangements of the child, and involvement in a multivariate context. For continuous dependent variables (frequency of visitation and amount of child support) I used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. Dichotomous dependent variables (whether any visits were made and child support received) were analyzed with logistic regression. Because the NSAF employs a complex cluster sampling design, SAS macros (provided by NSAF staff) and special weighting procedures were employed so that the results are representative of American children and so that the standard errors are not inflated (Flores-Cervantes, Brick, & DiGaetano, 1997). Child weights were used to account for the fact that for households with more than one child, two children (one age 0–5 and one age 6–17) may have been selected (Brick, Shapiro, Flores-Cervantes, Ferraro, & Strickler, 1999).

RESULTS

Descriptive Results

Table 1 compares the living arrangements of children with nonresident mothers and children with nonresident fathers. Whereas roughly two thirds (68%) of children with nonresident

Table 1. *Living Arrangements of Children With Nonresident Mothers (n = 2,006) and Nonresident Fathers (n = 11,079), Percentage*

| Child's Living Arrangements | Nonresident | Nonresident |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Mother | Father |
| Single parent | 43.5 | 68.0* |
| Cohabiting stepparent | 7.6 | 6.7 |
| Married stepparent | 25.1 | 20.6 |
| No parent, grandparent | 11.9 | 2.6* |
| No parent, other relative | 7.8 | 1.4* |
| No parent, nonrelative | 4.1 | 0.7* |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Note: Weighted percentages and unweighted *ns*.

*Denotes significant difference between children with nonresident mothers and children with nonresident fathers ($p < .01$).

fathers resided in single-parent households, less than half (44%) of children with nonresident mothers lived with a single parent. A much larger proportion of children with nonresident mothers lived with grandparents (12%), other relatives (8%), and nonrelatives (4%) than children with nonresident fathers (3%, 1%, and 1% respectively). Similar percentages of children with nonresident mothers and fathers lived in married or cohabiting stepfamilies.

Although not the main focus of the analysis, Table A1 compares parental involvement for children with nonresident mothers and nonresident fathers (see Appendix on the Wiley Interscience Web site). Although a similar proportion of children with nonresident mothers and fathers had seen their nonresident parent in the previous year (65%), nonresident mothers had somewhat more frequent contact. A significantly greater proportion of children with nonresident mothers than fathers had contact more than once a week. A substantially greater proportion of children with nonresident fathers had received any cash support from their nonresident parent than children with nonresident mothers, 42% compared to 21%. Children with nonresident fathers also received significantly greater child support payments, \$132 compared to \$52 a month. Among children whose nonresident parents had been legally ordered to pay child support, fathers were still significantly more likely than mothers to pay and paid higher amounts. Results were similar when examined net of control variables (Table A2; see Appendix on Wiley Interscience Web site).

Multivariate Results

Table 2 and Table 3 show the relationship between children's living arrangements and nonresident parent involvement. For each of my dependent variables, Chow tests indicated that separate regressions should be run for children with nonresident mothers and children with nonresident fathers (McClendon, 1994). Table 2 shows the relationship between the child's living arrangements and involvement with nonresident mothers. Compared to children living with a single father, children living with a cohabiting or married stepmother were less likely to have seen their nonresident mother in the previous year and to have had less frequent visits with

Table 2. Unstandardized Coefficients from Regressions Predicting Involvement With Nonresident Mothers (N = 2,002) by Children's Living Arrangements

| | Visitation | | Child Support | |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| | Any | Amount | Any | Amount |
| Children's living arrangements | | | | |
| Single parent ^a | | | | |
| Cohabiting stepparent | -0.324** | -0.360** | 0.792** | 29.143** |
| Married stepparent | -1.421** | -0.823** | 1.115** | 79.264** |
| No parent, grandparent | 0.182** | 0.197** | 0.953** | 36.399** |
| No parent, other relative | -1.117** | -0.602** | 1.919** | 38.948** |
| No parent, nonrelative | -2.493** | -0.980** | 1.249** | 32.881** |
| Differences between groups ^b | C > M, R, N; C < G; M < G; M > R, N; G > R, N; R < N | C > M, R, N; C < G; M < G, R; M > N; G > R, N; R < N | C < M, G, R, N; M > G; M < R, N; G < R, N; R < N | C < M, G, R, N; M > G, R, N; G < R; G > N; R < N |
| Characteristics of the focal child | | | | |
| Gender | | | | |
| Male ^a | | | | |
| Female | -0.174 | -0.044 | -0.019 | 13.271 |
| Age | 0.059** | 0.004 | -0.033 | -2.466* |
| Race | | | | |
| Hispanic | -0.004 | -0.265 | -0.033 | -12.310 |
| White ^a | | | | |
| Black | -0.289 | -0.032 | -0.285 | -9.627 |
| Other | -0.398 | -0.554 | -0.122 | -14.541 |
| Birth status of child | | | | |
| Born within marriage ^a | | | | |
| Born outside of marriage | 0.321 | 0.175 | -1.299** | -49.672** |
| Missing on birth status | -1.458** | -0.929* | -3.026** | -61.448** |
| Has siblings living elsewhere | | | | |
| No ^a | | | | |
| Yes | 0.026 | -0.233 | -0.326 | 36.813 [†] |
| Number of children in household | 0.045 | -0.039 | 0.402** | 17.939* |
| Characteristics of MKA | | | | |
| Gender | | | | |
| Male ^a | | | | |
| Female | 0.154 | -0.071 | 0.133 | -13.034 |
| Age | -0.010 | -0.003 | -0.010 | 0.113 |
| Education | | | | |
| Less than high school | -0.615 | -0.448* | -0.594 [†] | -12.395 |
| High school ^a | | | | |
| Some college | -0.338 | -0.298 | 0.183 | 2.881 |
| College degree or more | -0.249 | 0.204 | 0.370 | 46.289* |
| Family income (w/o child support) | -0.015 | -0.033 | -0.067 | 3.135 |
| Religious service attendance | | | | |
| Never | 0.607* | 0.142 | 0.210 | -25.450 |
| Yearly | 0.159 | 0.028 | 0.739* | -2.675 |
| Monthly | -0.008 | -0.079 | 0.197 | -5.208 |
| Weekly ^a | | | | |
| R ² | | 0.139 | | 0.160 |
| -2 log likelihood | 2,246.209 | | 1,723.860 | |

Note: Analysis of any visits and any child support were conducted using logistic regression and analysis of amount of visits and child support were conducted using ordinary least squares regression.

^aDenotes reference group. ^bSignificant differences at $p < .01$ between family structure groups summarized. C = cohabiting stepparent; m = married stepparent; g = grandparent; r = other relative; n = nonrelative.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3. Unstandardized Coefficients from Regressions Predicting Involvement With Nonresident Fathers (N = 11, 079) by Children's Living Arrangements^a

| | Visitation | | Child Support | |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| | Any | Amount | Any | Amount |
| Children's living arrangements | | | | |
| Single parent ^a | | | | |
| Cohabiting stepparent | -0.220** | -0.265** | -0.078** | -25.887** |
| Married stepparent | -0.368** | -0.551** | 0.298** | 34.001** |
| No parent, grandparent | -0.236** | -0.012** | -1.455** | -103.809** |
| No parent, other relative | -0.982** | -0.719** | -1.024** | -63.519** |
| No parent, nonrelative | -1.875** | -0.531** | -0.529** | -53.767** |
| Differences between groups ^b | C > M, G, R, N; M < G; M > R, N; G > R, N; R < N | C > M, R, N; C < G; M < G, N; M > R; G > R, N; R < N | C < M; C > G, R, N; M > G, R, N; G < R, N; R < N | C < M; C > G, R, N; M > G, R, N; G < R, N; R < N |
| Characteristics of the focal child | | | | |
| Gender | | | | |
| Male ^a | | | | |
| Female | 0.073 | 0.026 | -0.030 | -14.085 |
| Age | -0.057** | -0.057** | -0.003 | -1.107 |
| Race | | | | |
| Hispanic | -0.383** | -0.234* | -0.809** | -67.923** |
| White ^a | | | | |
| Black | 0.273* | 0.091 | -0.682** | -58.352* |
| Other | -0.617† | -0.326 | -0.856** | -100.233** |
| Birth status of child | | | | |
| Born within marriage ^a | | | | |
| Born outside of marriage | -1.281** | -0.808** | -0.593** | -71.919** |
| Missing on birth status | -3.168** | -1.576** | -1.387** | -57.630* |
| Has siblings living elsewhere | | | | |
| No ^a | | | | |
| Yes | 0.405* | 0.059 | 0.428** | 4.492 |
| Number of children in household | 0.029 | 0.017 | 0.074 | 17.633** |
| Characteristics of MKA | | | | |
| Gender | | | | |
| Male ^a | | | | |
| Female | 0.223 | 0.212 | 0.622† | 120.534** |
| Age | 0.003 | 0.000 | 0.008 | 2.732** |
| Education | | | | |
| Less than high school | -0.193 | -0.019 | -0.208 | -56.447** |
| High school ^a | | | | |
| Some college | -0.010 | -0.073 | 0.154 | 6.771 |
| College degree or more | -0.006 | -0.018 | 0.061 | 19.268 |
| Family income (w/o child support) | 0.065* | 0.075** | 0.028 | 11.180** |
| Religious service attendance | | | | |
| Never | -0.171 | -0.104 | -0.124 | 10.897 |
| Yearly | 0.376** | 0.171* | 0.078 | 3.143 |
| Monthly | 0.250† | 0.079 | 0.179 | 14.610 |
| Weekly ^a | | | | |
| R ² | | 0.118 | | 0.140 |
| -2 log likelihood | 12,751.048 | | 13,700.263 | |

Note: Analysis of any visits and any child support were conducted using logistic regression and analysis of amount of visits and child support were conducted using ordinary least squares regression.

^aDenotes reference group. ^bSignificant differences at $p < .01$ between family structure groups summarized. C = cohabiting stepparent; m = married stepparent; g = grandparent; r = other relative; n = nonrelative.

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

her. However, these children were more likely to receive child support and received higher amounts than children with single fathers. Thus, the substitute-parent hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) is supported with respect to visitation only. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, visitation was significantly less frequent for children whose father was married as opposed to cohabiting. However, children with a married stepmother had a significantly greater likelihood of receiving child support from the nonresident mother and received more support than children with a cohabiting stepmother.

Compared to children living with a single father, children living with grandparents were significantly more likely to have seen their nonresident mother in the previous year and saw their mother more frequently, consistent with Hypothesis 3 (kin-enabler hypothesis). They were also more likely to receive child support and to have received more dollars. Contrary to Hypothesis 3, children who resided with a relative other than a grandparent had less frequent visitation with their nonresident mother than did children who lived with a single father, but consistent with Hypothesis 3, they were more likely to receive support and more dollars of support.

Children living with a grandparent had significantly greater visitation with their mothers than did children living with some other relative, consistent with Hypothesis 4, but they received less child support. Finally, children with nonresident mothers living with nonrelatives saw their mothers significantly less often than children living with a single father, but they were more likely to receive child support and received more support (in partial support of Hypothesis 5). Results with respect to Hypothesis 6 (deficient parent) were mixed. Children with grandparents (but not relatives) had greater visitation than did children with nonrelatives, but children living with nonrelatives were more likely to receive child support and received more dollars of support (other relatives only).

Table 3 shows these effects for children with nonresident fathers. Again, the substitute-parent hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) was consistently supported for visitation but not child support. Children living with a married or cohabiting stepfather were less likely to have seen their nonresident father in the previous year and saw their nonresident father less frequently than children living with a single mother. Whereas

children with married mothers received significantly more child support than did children living with single mothers, children with cohabiting mothers received significantly less. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, children living with a married stepfather were less likely to have seen their nonresident father than children living with a cohabiting stepfather; however, children living with a married stepfather were more likely to receive child support.

Hypothesis 3 (kin-enabler) was not supported for children with nonresident fathers. Children living with a grandparent or other relatives had less visitation with their nonresident father than did children living with a single mother. They were also less likely to receive child support and received lower amounts. Hypothesis 4 was supported—children living with a grandparent had significantly more visitation with their nonresident fathers than did children living with another relative and were more likely to receive child support and received more dollars per month.

Consistent with Hypothesis 5 (deficient parent), children living with a nonrelative saw their nonresident fathers less than children living with a single mother and were less likely to receive child support and received less dollars of support. Children living with nonrelatives had significantly less involvement with their nonresident fathers than children living with grandparents or other relatives (Hypothesis 6). Table 4 provides a summary of these effects.

Additional analyses were conducted to examine the effect of foster care placement (available on request). Dividing the children into voluntary foster care (child protective services arranged care but child not removed from the home), involuntary foster care (child removed from the home and taken into state custody), and no foster care did not reveal many significant differences. For example, the child's level of visitation with the nonresident mother was the same whether the child's grandparent (or relative) was a foster parent.

DISCUSSION

Children who have nonresident parents are residing in increasingly diverse living arrangements. This study examined the relationship between those arrangements and children's involvement with their nonresident parents, in terms of

Table 4. Summary of Relationships Between Children's Living Arrangements and Nonresident Parent Involvement, by the Gender of the Nonresident Parent

| Hypothesis | Gender of Nonresident Parent | |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Mother | Father |
| Substitute Parent | | |
| H1: Single parent > married (m) and cohabiting (c) | | |
| Visitation | Supported ^{m,c} | Supported ^{m,c} |
| Child support | Not supported ^{m,c} | Supported ^c |
| H2: Married < cohabiting | | |
| Visitation | Supported | Supported |
| Child support | Not supported | Not supported |
| Kin enabler | | |
| H3: Grandparent (g), other relative (r) > single parent | | |
| Visitation | Supported ^g | Not supported |
| Child support | Supported ^{g,r} | Not supported |
| H4: Grandparent > other relative | | |
| Visitation | Supported | Supported |
| Child support | Not supported | Supported |
| Deficient parent | | |
| H5: Single parent > nonrelative | | |
| Visitation | Supported | Supported |
| Child support | Not supported | Supported |
| H6: Grandparent (g), other relative (r) > nonrelative | | |
| Visitation | Supported ^g | Supported |
| Child support | Not supported | Not supported |

Note: Visitation includes any visits and frequency of visits. Child support includes any child support and amount of child support.

both visitation and child support. First, both nonresident mothers and nonresident fathers exhibited relatively low levels of involvement. More than one third of children in each group had not seen their nonresident parent in the previous year, and more than half had nonresident parents who had not paid child support in the previous year. Only about one third of children with a nonresident parent saw their parent on a weekly basis, and extended visits were rare. Despite these low levels, similar to other studies based on nationally representative data (Harris & Ryan, 2004; Hawkins et al., 2006; King et al., 2010), nonresident mothers had somewhat greater visitation with their children than did nonresident fathers. Nonresident fathers were more likely to pay child support and paid more dollars of support. These findings suggest that nonresident parenting roles still at least partially reflect traditional notions of motherhood (focused on social and emotional caretaking) and fatherhood (focused on breadwinning).

Children who have nonresident mothers versus fathers differed in their living arrangements—there was much greater diversity in the living arrangement of children with nonresident mothers. Whereas children with nonresident fathers resided almost exclusively in single-parent and stepparent households, one fourth of children with nonresident mothers lived with grandparents, other relatives, and nonrelatives. These arrangements were related to nonresident mothers' and fathers' patterns of involvement. No matter the gender of the nonresident parent, comparisons between children in single-parent families and stepfamilies supported the substitute-parent hypothesis for visitation (i.e., greater visitation with children in single-parent families than stepfamilies). Also as hypothesized, nonresident parents were more involved with children in cohabiting than in married stepfamilies. Results pertaining to child support did not support the substitute parent hypothesis. For children with nonresident mothers, the presence of a married

or cohabiting stepmother in the child's home was positively (as opposed to negatively) related to receipt of child support. It may be that the resident father's new partner pressures him to collect child support—custodial fathers who could get child support often do not pursue an award (Scoon-Rogers & Lester, 1995). Similarly, child support payments from nonresident fathers were greater for children with a mother who had remarried. The resident mother's new spouse may encourage her to go after the child support due to her, or the mother's remarriage may compel the nonresident father to pay child support in an effort to retain his place as the family head.

When children live apart from both of their parents, it is also important to understand the details of their care. Similar to the findings of King et al. (2010), the most common arrangement for children with two nonresident parents was to live with a grandparent. The kin-enabler hypothesis was supported for children with nonresident mothers and only when the kin were grandparents. Grandparents may facilitate mothers' involvement to a greater extent than resident fathers. Grandparent care may also be more of a temporary helping-out arrangement than other types of nonparent care, with more fluidity in the mother's nonresident status and visitation patterns. In less formal arrangements, there is also less likelihood that there is a legal agreement regulating or limiting contact. Nonresident fathers were less involved both socially and financially when the child lived with grandparents. This makes sense given that children more frequently reside with maternal than paternal grandparents (Szinovacz, 1998) and the fact that grandparent care in and of itself is indicative of a less involved father.

With respect to nonrelative care, results clearly supported the deficient-parent hypothesis for both mothers and fathers. The deficient-parent hypothesis may apply to children residing with relatives as well. Results indicated that nonresident mothers and fathers were more involved with children living with grandparents than with other relatives, consistent with prior work (King et al., 2010), and results showed few differences in involvement between children living with other relatives versus nonrelatives. Mothers' greater child support payments to other relatives and nonrelatives than to grandparents may indicate that grandparents are more likely to support the children financially and may be

related to nonresident mothers' more temporary status and a lack of a child support agreement. Additional research is needed to sort out these issues.

The NSAF provides very detailed information on the living arrangements of children with nonresident parents, but it is cross-sectional. The lack of information in the NSAF on characteristics of the nonresident parent and knowledge of the sequence of events that lands a child in a home that lacks one parent or two are important limitations. It is important to keep in mind that parental involvement patterns with children in different living situations may not be the result of that living environment per se. Nonresident parents may increase or decrease their involvement when their children have problems (Simons, Whitbeck, Beaman, & Conger, 1994), and children with poor relationships with their parents may be precisely the children who end up living with a grandmother, other relatives, or friends. Children's physical custody and patterns of nonresident parent involvement, especially for children with nonresident mothers, can also be unstable over time (Buchanan et al., 1996).

This study and others like it (King et al., 2010) show that the families of American children can be amazingly complicated. Children's access to social and financial support varies across family types and is especially tenuous for children in nonparent households. Although grandparents, other relatives, and nonrelatives can provide children with love and emotional support in addition to clothes, food, and so on, as a group, nonparent caregivers tend to be older, less educated, and less healthy than parent caregivers and to care for larger sibling groups (Casper & Bryson, 1998; Ehrle & Geen, 2002). Children in nonparent households receive less involvement from nonresident parents both socially (from mothers and fathers) and financially (from fathers). Overall, nonbiological parent families have fewer resources (e.g., income, education, cultural) than do families that contain a biological parent (Sun, 2003).

To reduce the number of children living in nonparent households, policies and programs could be developed to encourage fathers to take care of their children when mothers are unable. Policymakers also need to focus on getting fathers and mothers to pay support and visit their children when their children are living with grandparents, other relatives, and nonrelatives,

not just when they are living with a parent. Current policies provide little incentive for this. Hatcher (2009) found that any child support paid to foster parents by nonresident parents was deducted from the foster parents' stipends. When grandparents and relatives care for children, the child support order often remains in the name of the nonresident mother (Sousa & Sorensen, 2006), and when nonresident mothers pay support, amounts tend to be small. Children with nonresident parents are a diverse population, and different strategies are necessary to meet their emotional and financial needs.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article:

Table A1 Children's Involvement With Their Nonresident Mothers ($n = 2,006$) and Nonresident Fathers ($n = 11,079$), in Means and Percentages.

Table A2 Unstandardized Coefficients From Regressions Predicting Involvement by Sex of Nonresident Parent ($N = 13,085$).

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