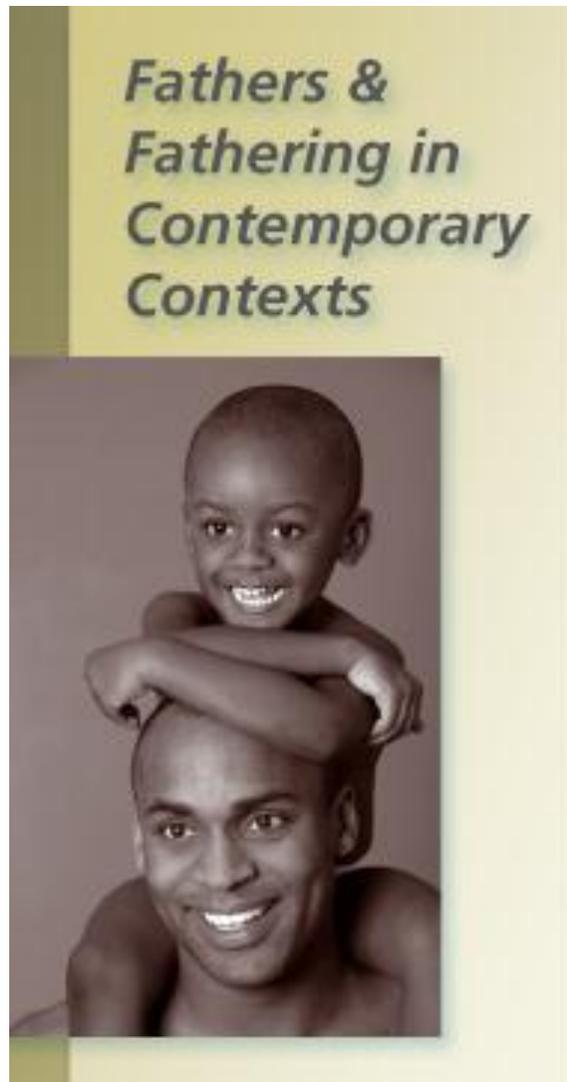


Fathers & Fathering in Contemporary Contexts

Summary

**May 23-24, 2012
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, Maryland**



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Key Findings

Defining and describing fatherhood has become more complex

- Fatherhood is multi-dimensional encompassing:
 1. Resident status.
 2. Biological ties (to children).
 3. Relational ties (to mothers).
 4. Symbolic meaning or attachment to an identity.
- Fatherhood is also a dynamic process because dimensions of fatherhood and father involvement can change over time.
- Fatherhood increasingly crosses household boundaries with rises in nonmarital childbearing, family instability, and multiple partner fertility.

Father involvement has enduring effects on children's well-being independent of maternal involvement

- Motivation, fathering skills, social support, and structural barriers play a role in determining father involvement.
- Both the quantity and quality of father involvement have implications for child well-being.
- Resident fathers' verbal interaction is beneficial for children's academic achievement and effects are comparable to mothers' interaction.
- Nonresident father involvement is linked to child well-being, however, these effects are often modest and depend more on the quality of the father-child relationship than resident status.

Relationships with birth mothers influence fathering

- Increasing shares of births occur to unmarried parents. These unmarried relationships are often unstable, which can impede effective co-parenting.
- Adolescent fathers often face considerable barriers to father involvement. Maternal support and co-parenting can bolster their level of involvement.

Implications

Research

- Scholars need better data obtained directly from fathers.
- Researchers should consider the additive and multiplicative effects of mother and father involvement, especially as increases in educational homogamy could result in widening class differences in children's well-being.
- Research on specific subpopulations (e.g., immigrant and same-sex fathers) provides an opportunity to disentangle cultural and gender effects, however, scholarship is limited by modest sample sizes when studying these unique populations.
- Additional research should consider the mechanisms through which father involvement is linked to children's well-being.

Policy and Programs

- Programs that are developed to encourage nurturing fathering (and co-parenting) should target both mothers and fathers and consider targeting men before they become fathers.
- Reducing structural and institutional barriers to fatherhood (such as inflexible strategies or lack of paternity leave) could foster father involvement and thereby enhance child well-being.
- Child support orders must consider the role of custody arrangements (i.e., increasing shared or partial custody) and issues tied to multiple partner fertility, and should be aligned with the nonresident father's economic status.

