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Paternal Involvement and Children's Behavior Problems

Although a large number of studies have examined associations between paternal involvement and children's outcomes, most are based on a single source of data or fail to control for maternal involvement. We used data from the National Survey of Families and Households (n = 994) to test the hypothesis that positive father involvement is associated with fewer behavior problems in children. To avoid same-source bias, we used fathers' reports of involvement with children and mothers' reports of children's behavior problems. To determine if fathers make a unique contribution to their children's behavior, we controlled for mothers' reports of maternal involvement. Structural equation models revealed that positive paternal and maternal involvement were independently and significantly associated with children's behavior problems. Estimated effects were similar for biological fathers, stepfathers, White fathers, Black fathers, and Latino fathers.

We examine the notion that fathers' positive involvement with children in two-parent households—as reflected in shared activities, supportive behavior, and feelings of affection—has benefi-

cial implications for children's behavior and development. Although many people assume that a positive father-child relationship benefits children, the evidence for this assumption is surprisingly weak. Many studies demonstrate statistically significant associations between paternal involvement and child outcomes. (See Biller, 1993; Lamb, 1997; Popenoe, 1996; and Snarey, 1994, for reviews.) Two major limitations, however, are common in this research. First, many studies use the same source of information on fathers' behavior and children's outcomes. For example, children may report how close they feel to their fathers, as well as their own self-esteem. Observed associations in these single-source studies are likely to be inflated by shared-method variance. Second, many studies fail to control for the quality of the mother-child relationship when estimating the impact of the father-child relationship. Mothers who are especially effective parents also may be supportive of paternal involvement with children. If this is true, then observed associations between paternal involvement and child outcomes may be spurious. To determine if fathers are uniquely important to children's well-being, it is necessary to include the quality of the mother-child relationship in analyses.

The study presented here contributes new evidence of the links between paternal involvement and child outcomes using the 1987–1988 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). To avoid problems with shared-method variance, we use fathers' reports of involvement with children

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and mothers' reports of children's behavior. To see if paternal involvement is associated independently with children's behavior, we control for the level of maternal involvement. In addition, we consider whether estimated father effects vary between biological fathers and stepfathers and between fathers from different racial and ethnic groups.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As children develop, they actively use the resources in their social and physical environments. Because fathers and mothers are usually (but not always) the central members of children's social networks, children's development is bound closely with the quantity and quality of resources that parents provide. Perspectives in sociology (Coleman, 1988) and developmental psychology (Lamb, 1997) assume that fathers contribute to their children's development, not only through the provision of financial capital, but also through the quality of their interactions with children. For this reason, Coleman used the presence of the father in the household as a key indicator of children's social capital. Later studies, however, have extended Coleman's work to focus on specific paternal behaviors because fathers who are inattentive or abusive do not provide social capital to their children.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that optimal outcomes for children are associated with a particular cluster of parental behaviors, including showing affection, being responsive to children's needs, encouraging children to do well, giving everyday assistance, providing supervision, exercising noncoercive discipline, and serving as role models of positive behavior. (See Maccoby & Martin, 1983, and Rollins & Thomas, 1979, for reviews.) In general, parents benefit their children by combining a high level of support and a moderately high level of noncoercive control—a pattern referred to as authoritative parenting (Baumrind, 1968). Parents who behave in an authoritative manner facilitate children's development by conveying a basic sense of trust and security, reinforcing children's self-conceptions of worth and competence, and promoting the learning of social norms as well as practical skills.

Of course, in the United States, fathers and mothers have tended to make different contributions to children. Fathers have provided social status and income, and mothers have provided child care and nurturance. For this reason, early developmental research tended to focus almost exclusively on the quality of mother-child relationships.

Some observers have continued to argue that fathers and mothers are biologically predisposed to specialize in different tasks, with mothers especially adept at providing early child care (Becker, 1991; Rossi, 1984). A more common view, however, is that cultural and historical factors shape gender differences in parenting (Thomson & Walker, 1991). According to this latter view, it is the quality of resources that parents provide, rather than the gender of the parent, that matters to children. Presumably, children benefit when mothers (as well as fathers) provide financial capital to their households. The same reasoning suggests that children benefit when fathers (as well as mothers) engage in authoritative parenting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A large number of studies have tested the hypothesis that positive paternal involvement benefits children. Given the amount of research on this topic, we limited our review to articles, chapters, and books published since 1980. In addition, we focused on studies that examined child (or adolescent) outcomes in four broad categories: cognitive ability and academic achievement, conduct problems, psychological adjustment and self-esteem, and social competence and peer relations. Finally, we restricted our search to studies of children living with both biological parents. (Relations between children and nonresident fathers are sufficiently different to justify a separate review and analysis.) In evaluating the evidence, we paid particular attention to whether studies used independent sources of data for independent and dependent variables and whether studies controlled for maternal involvement in estimating the effects of paternal involvement.

Our literature search (based largely on computerized data bases) uncovered 68 studies published since 1980 that examined associations between paternal behavior and child outcomes in two-parent families. Although we certainly missed some published studies, there is little reason to suspect that our sample of studies does not reflect larger trends in the literature. Of these 68 studies, 56 (82%) found significant associations between positive father involvement and offspring well-being in the hypothesized direction. This pattern appears to support the hypothesis that paternal support is beneficial to children. However, methodological limitations of these studies restrict our ability to reach firm conclusions about the importance of fathers.

Of the 68 studies, 23 examined associations between paternal and child variables using a single source of data and without controlling for maternal behavior. Of these, 20 (87%) yielded significant results in the hypothesized direction. For example, Barnes (1984) found that adolescents' ratings of paternal nurturance were negatively related to adolescents' reports of deviance, including drug use, truancy, and stealing. Similarly, Cooksey and Fondell (1996) found that fathers' reports of time spent with children were positively associated with fathers' reports of children's grades. But because the same individuals provided information on both the independent and dependent variables in these studies, the findings may be contaminated by shared-method variance. And because these studies did not control for maternal involvement, the observed associations involving fathers may be spurious.

Twelve studies used a single source of data but controlled for maternal behavior. Of these studies, nine (75%) yielded evidence of father effects. For example, Coombs and Landsverk (1988) found that adolescents' ratings of closeness to fathers were negatively associated with adolescents' reports of substance use, even when closeness to mothers was controlled. Other studies in this group, however, found that significant bivariate results involving paternal involvement were no longer significant after introducing controls for maternal involvement. For example, Wright, Peterson, and Barnes (1990) found that young adolescents' reports of communication with fathers were associated with less promiscuous sexual behavior, but this association was no longer significant when the researchers added communication with mothers to the equation. Furthermore, the studies in this group are vulnerable to the shared-method variance problem.

Twenty-four studies used independent sources of data but did not control for maternal behavior. These studies employed two strategies. The first was to use one source of data for the independent variable and a second source for the dependent variable. For example, Forehand and Nousiainen (1993) found that children's ratings of paternal acceptance predicted teachers' ratings of social competence and conduct. The second strategy was to collect reports from multiple sources and use structural equation methods to form latent variables based on the agreement between different sources. Structural equation models also allow researchers to include correlated errors between variables based on the same source. For example,

Conger et al. (1992) used reports from parents, children, and observers to create latent variables reflecting paternal nurturance and child adjustment and found these to be positively correlated. Overall, of these 24 studies, 92% yielded significant findings. These studies increase our confidence that fathers' and children's behavior are correlated in the real world—not just in people's minds. However, these studies do not tell us if fathers' contributions have an impact above and beyond that of mothers. To determine that, it is necessary to turn to studies that used multiple sources and that controlled for maternal characteristics.

Only nine studies relied on independent sources of data for independent and dependent variables and controlled for maternal characteristics. Of these, five (55%) yielded significant results. For example, Forehand, Long, Brody, and Fauber (1986) found that, with the quality of the mother-child relationship controlled, the quality of the father-child relationship (reported by parents and adolescents) predicted offspring's grade point average (reported by teachers). Similarly, Galambos and Silbereisen (1987) found that fathers' pessimism with life was associated with lower job expectations among offspring, even with mothers' pessimism controlled. Overall, however, these methodologically rigorous studies, as a group, yield weaker evidence of father effects than do other studies. It seems clear that additional studies that use independent sources and that control for maternal characteristics are sorely needed. (The complete list of 68 studies is available from the authors.)

CONTRIBUTION OF THE PRESENT STUDY

This study uses the 1987–1988 NSFH to test the hypothesis that positive father involvement is associated with fewer behavior problems in children. Although the data are now over 10 years old, the NSFH remains one of the most detailed sources of information on family life available, and there is little reason to believe that the effects of fathers on children have shifted during the last decade.

Several other studies have used the NSFH to examine this hypothesis. The study most relevant to the present one was conducted by Mosley and Thomson (1995). These researchers found that "paternal engagement" was related to a variety of positive outcomes among children, including fewer behavior problems. Furthermore, these associations were significant, even with maternal engagement in the equations. However, although

the Mosley and Thomson study was methodologically more sophisticated than most, it contains some limitations. First, the main respondent in the study (who was sometimes the mother and sometimes the father) provided information on the independent variable (his or her involvement with children), as well as the dependent variables (child outcomes). Data on the other parent came from the spouse questionnaire. This approach means that in many cases fathers were reporting on their own involvement with children, as well as their children's outcomes. Consequently, some component of the association between independent and dependent variables may have been due to shared-method variance. Second, because they relied on ordinary least squares regression, Mosley and Thomson were not able to adjust for measurement error. This adjustment is especially useful because many items in the NSFH form scales with only modest reliability. Third, Mosley and Thomson studied biological fathers only and did not consider whether stepfather involvement benefits children. And fourth, although Mosley and Thomson found that associations between father involvement and child outcomes were similar among Whites and African Americans, they did not extend their analysis to Latino fathers—even though a substantial number are available in the NSFH data.

Our study builds on the Mosley and Thomson (1995) study in several ways. First, to deal with the issue of same-source bias, we used only cases in the NSFH in which the mother (rather than the father) was the main respondent. Readers should realize that the main respondents in the NSFH provided information about their own involvement with children, as well as information about their children's behavior. Spouses provided information only about their own involvement with children. Consequently, we were able to use mothers' reports of children's behavior problems (obtained from the main interview) as the dependent variable and fathers' reports of involvement with children (obtained from the spouse questionnaire) as the independent variable. This approach allowed us to see if fathers' reports of involvement were related to mothers' reports of children's behavior. This strategy also allowed us to control for mothers' reports of involvement with children (obtained from the main interview). However, because mothers reported their own involvement, as well as their children's behavior, same-source bias is likely to affect this correlation. We were able to take this problem into ac-

count in the analysis (albeit imperfectly) by allowing the error terms for maternal involvement and children's behavior problems to correlate.

We used structural equation methods to adjust for measurement error in all variables. Furthermore, some previous research indicates that positive involvement with stepfathers (as well as biological fathers) is associated with the well-being of stepchildren (Amato, 1994a; Bogenschneider, 1997). For this reason, we included data on stepfathers (using a multigroup structural equation model) to see if the implications of paternal involvement differ between biological fathers and stepfathers. Finally, only a few studies have examined father involvement among non-White populations (Brody, Stoneman, & Flor, 1995; Furstenberg & Harris, 1993; Mosley & Thomson, 1995). For this reason, we used multigroup models to see if the link between positive father involvement and children's behavior differed among White fathers, Black fathers, and Latino fathers.

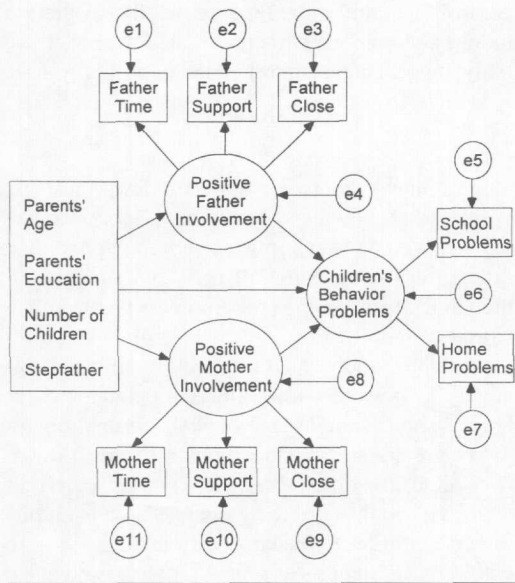
METHODS

The Sample

The 1987–1988 NSFH consists of a cross-sectional national probability sample of 13,017 respondents, including a main sample of 9,463 respondents and an oversample of 3,374 persons. In addition to the main interviews, spouses of married or cohabiting respondents completed a written questionnaire. The overall response rate was 74% for the main respondent and 83% for spouses. (See Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988, for more details.) We limited the sample to married couples in which the wife served as the main respondent and the husband completed the spouse questionnaire. In addition, to remain in the sample, couples had to have at least one child between 5 and 18 years old living in the household. These restrictions, along with a listwise deletion of missing cases, reduced the effective sample size to 994 couples.

The NSFH data set includes a series of weights that take into account the sample design and patterns of nonresponse. Although weighting the data is necessary for descriptive purposes, it is less essential for studies employing multivariate designs. To determine the effects of weighting, we carried out the main analysis twice—with and without weighting—and found that the results did not differ substantively. For this reason, we present the results using unweighted data.

FIGURE 1. STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL SHOWING RELATIONS AMONG POSITIVE FATHER INVOLVEMENT, POSITIVE MOTHER INVOLVEMENT, AND CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS



The Model

Our analysis is based on the structural equation model shown in Figure 1. The key independent variables (positive father involvement and positive mother involvement) are latent variables based on three observed indicators, and the dependent variable (children's behavior problems) is a latent variable based on two observed indicators. The model also includes four control variables.

Variables

Independent variables. We created three measures of positive paternal involvement with children. Information on the father-child relationship was taken entirely from the father (spouse) questionnaire. (These questions refer to the father's general relationships with all of the children in the household. The spouse questionnaire did not include items dealing with a particular focal child.) Father time consisted of six questions that asked about the amount of time fathers spend with their children eating breakfast, eating dinner, engaging in activities away from home, playing together, having private talks, and helping with homework. Response options ranged from 1 (*never or rarely*) to 6 (*almost every day*), and the mean response served as the scale score ($\alpha = 0.62$). Father

support was created from two items dealing with how often fathers praised and hugged their children. Response options ranged from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*very often*), and the mean response served as the scale score ($\alpha = 0.53$). Father close consisted of fathers' ratings of the quality of their relationships with each child in the household. The responses ranged from 1 (*very poor*) to 7 (*excellent*), and the mean rating served as the measure of overall closeness. We used these three scores as observed indicators of a latent variable reflecting positive paternal involvement with children.

We measured mother time ($\alpha = .70$), mother support ($\alpha = .45$), and mother close in the same manner, except that information was obtained from the mother's interview. These three scores served as observed indicators of a latent variable reflecting positive maternal involvement with her children.

Dependent variables. Our main dependent variable was derived from mothers' reports of behavior problems among all children aged 5–18 years living in the household. The latent variable in our structural equation model, children's behavior problems, was based on two observed indicators. The first indicator consisted of four items reflecting school problems: currently not attending school (but had not yet graduated), repeated a grade, suspended or expelled from school, and exhibited a problem that required the parent to meet with a teacher or principal. The second indicator consisted of four home problems: ran away from home, in trouble with the police, has seen a doctor for emotional or behavioral problems, or was especially difficult to raise. For each indicator, the sum of problems (0–4) across all children in the household served as the score. Splitting the eight problems into two sets made it possible to incorporate measurement error into our model. This is comparable to estimating reliability through a split-half method (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1988). The dependent variable, like the independent variables, refers to all the children in the household, rather than to a particular focal child. The measure of behavior problems focuses on relatively serious problems and misses many everyday problems, such as fighting with siblings or talking back.

Control variables. We used four control variables in our analysis. Parental age was based on the mean of the mother's and father's ages because the correlation between the two was high ($r = .80$). Similarly, parental education was based on the

mean number of years of schooling completed by mothers and fathers because these variables were strongly associated ($r = .61$). Family size was based on the mother's report of the number of children between the ages of 5 and 18 years living in the household. It was necessary to control for family size on logical grounds: As the number of children in the family increases, so does the likelihood that at least one child will exhibit a particular problem. Stepfather status was based on the mother's report of whether her husband was a stepfather to any children living in the household (0 = *not a stepfather*, 1 = *a stepfather*). Of the 994 fathers in the study, 257 (26%) were stepfathers.

In preliminary analyses, we used a more complex set of controls to take into account the ages and gender of children in the household, including separate variables for the number of boys aged 5–12 years, girls aged 5–12 years, boys aged 13–18 years, and girls aged 13–18 years. As we expected, the number of teenage children in the household was a better predictor of behavior problems than the number of younger children. The presence of teenage children, however, was

also positively correlated with parental age ($r = .51$). Perhaps for this reason, results based on the more complex set of family composition variables were virtually the same as those based on a single control for family size. Consequently, to yield a more parsimonious structural equation model, we relied on the single control variable for family size.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations between variables. Looking at the means, we see that mothers scored higher than fathers on the measures of time and support, although the mean ratings for closeness were similar. Consistent with the central hypothesis, father time, father support, and father close all were negatively associated with children's behavior problems. With a sample size of 994, correlations of .07 or greater are statistically significant ($p < .05$, two-tailed), so all of these associations are larger than one would expect by chance. For example, fathers' ratings of closeness correlated at $r = -.16$ with mothers' reports of school problems and at $r =$

TABLE 1. CORRELATION MATRIX, MEANS, AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

	Father Time	Mother Time	Father Support	Mother Support	Father Close	Mother Close	Parents' Age	Parents' Education	Number of Children	Stepfather	School Problems	Home Problems
Father time	1.00											
Mother time	.33	1.00										
Father support	.40	.19	1.00									
Mother support	.09	.34	.24	1.00								
Father close	.35	.16	.33	.03	1.00							
Mother close	.12	.25	.16	.17	.40	1.00						
Parents' age	-.14	-.22	-.05	-.02	-.07	-.03	1.00					
Parents' education	.05	.09	.15	.17	-.09	-.01	.07	1.00				
Number of children	.07	.07	.10	-.01	-.03	.40	.03	-.11	1.00			
Stepfather	-.15	-.09	-.14	.03	-.24	-.21	-.20	-.06	-.02	1.00		
School problems	-.09	-.16	-.13	-.09	-.16	-.19	.06	-.13	.22	.16	1.00	
Home problems	-.17	-.14	-.07	-.04	-.22	-.23	.10	.06	.14	.17	.42	1.00
<i>M</i>	3.53	4.49	3.10	3.44	6.01	6.20	37.63	12.76	1.85	.26	.49	.22
<i>SD</i>	1.17	1.11	.55	.42	1.06	.94	7.10	2.33	.94	.44	.77	.52

Note: $n = 999$.

-.22 with mothers' reports of home problems. This finding is of particular interest, given that our measures of father involvement were based on fathers' reports and our measures of children's problems were based on mothers' reports. Nevertheless, comparable measures of maternal involvement were also negatively and significantly correlated with children's problems. Furthermore, measures of paternal involvement and maternal involvement were positively correlated. Father time and mother time correlated at $r = .33$, father support and mother support correlated at $r = .24$, and father close and mother close correlated at $r = .40$. These results indicate the necessity of controlling for maternal involvement to determine if paternal involvement is independently related to children's behavior.

We used the Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) program to estimate the structural equation model (Arbuckle, 1997). We anticipated that it would be necessary to include correlations between error terms to fit the model adequately. Indeed, our first exploratory model, which included no correlated error terms, fit the data poorly. Based on modification indices, we sequentially freed the correlations among five pairs of error terms. These changes resulted in substantial improvements in the fit of the model. The final model (shown in Table 2) was statistically significant ($p < .001$), which might suggest a poor fit of the model to the data, but this result was an artifact of the large sample. More important, the goodness-of-fit indices were high (GFI = .98, AGFI = .95), suggesting that the final model represented the data well.

The first two rows in Table 2 show the key findings from the analysis: Positive father involvement ($b = -.21$, $p < .001$) and positive mother involvement ($b = -.18$, $p < .01$) were both negatively and significantly associated with children's behavior problems. In other words, if fathers reported being highly involved in their children's lives, then mothers reported relatively few child problems, even with mothers' involvement in the model. Three of the four control variables were also associated with children's behavior problems. Parental education was associated with fewer problems—a finding consistent with previous research (Amato & Booth, 1997; Parcel & Menaghan, 1994). Family size was positively associated with problems, although this may reflect a logical, rather than a substantive, relationship. Finally, children had more behavior problems if a stepfather lived in the household—a finding consistent with previous research (Amato, 1994b).

TABLE 2. RESULTS OF STRUCTURAL EQUATION ANALYSIS

Parameters	Estimates
Standard regression weights	
Father involvement → behavior problems	-.21***
Mother involvement → behavior problems	-.18**
Parents' age → behavior problems	.08
Parents' education → behavior problems	-.11*
Number of children → behavior problems	.30***
Stepfather → behavior problems	.19***
Parents' age → father involvement	-.22***
Parents' education → father involvement	.15***
Number of children → father involvement	.04
Stepfather → father involvement	-.33***
Parents' age → mother involvement	-.28***
Parents' education → mother involvement	.15***
Number of children → mother involvement	.08*
Stepfather in household → mother involvement	-.15***
Standardized factor loadings	
Father involvement → father time	.63***
Father involvement → father support	.60***
Father involvement → father close	.58***
Mother involvement → mother time	.85***
Mother involvement → mother support	.41***
Mother involvement → mother close	.30***
Behavior problems → school problems	.67***
Behavior problems → home problems	.66***
Correlations between error terms	
e1 ↔ e11	.31***
e2 ↔ e10	.23***
e3 ↔ e9	.36***
e4 ↔ e8	.31***
e6 ↔ e9	-.20***

Note: All significant tests are two-tailed. $\chi^2 = 118.30$, $df = 30$, GFI = .98, AFGI = .95, $n = 994$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The control variables also yielded significant associations with father and mother involvement. Parents' age was negatively associated with the involvement of both parents. This result may reflect the fact that older parents tend to have adolescent children who require less attention and spend more time away from home. Parents' education was positively associated with father involvement and mother involvement, suggesting that better-educated parents are more active in their children's lives—a finding that is consistent with other studies (Amato & Booth, 1997; Marsiglio, 1991). Family size was weakly but significantly associated with maternal involvement but not with paternal involvement. Finally, families with a stepfather were marked by less father and mother involvement. These findings are consistent with research showing that stepfamilies tend to be less cohesive than two-parent families (Henderson, Hetherington, Mekus, & Reiss, 1996).

In addition, the model includes significant correlations between the error terms for father and

mother time (e1 and e11), support (e2 and e10), and closeness (e3 and e9). These associations reflect the fact that the pairs of indicators were based on identical items. The positive correlation between the error terms for father involvement and mother involvement (e4 and e8) reflects the covariation between the latent variables that cannot be accounted for by their joint association with the control variables. It is probable that mothers' and fathers' levels of involvement tend to be similar because parents influence each others' behavior, share childrearing values, or are alike in other ways. Finally, the negative correlation between the error terms for children's problems and mother close (e6 and e9) reflects the fact that both variables are derived from the same source (mothers). With this correlation in the model, correlations between the error term for children's problems and the other indicators of mother involvement (mother time and mother support) were not significant.

To search for subgroup differences, we constructed data matrices separately for families with biological fathers only and stepfathers. In one AMOS model, we allowed the parameters for the paths between father involvement and children's problems to vary. In a second model, we fixed the parameters to be the same. The difference in chi-square values between the two models was not significant ($p > .10$). That is, allowing the parameters to differ did not result in a significant improvement in the fit of the model. This result is equivalent to testing for an interaction between stepfather status (any stepchildren vs. no stepchildren) and father involvement. This result means that the estimated effect of father involvement on children's problems was similar for biological fathers and stepfathers.

Finally, we carried out analyses for White fathers ($n = 791$), Black fathers ($n = 117$), and Latino fathers ($n = 86$). Allowing the parameters between father involvement and children's behavior to vary between groups (Whites vs. Blacks; Whites vs. Latinos) did not result in significant improvements in the fit of the models ($p > .10$). These results suggest that the apparent beneficial effects of positive paternal involvement hold across all three racial and ethnic groups.

DISCUSSION

Many studies have demonstrated that the quality of the father-child relationship is positively related to aspects of children's well-being. However, many of these studies are based on a single source of data. For this reason, it is not possible to deter-

mine if the associations exist in reality or only in people's minds. Furthermore, many studies fail to control for the quality of the mother-child relationship when estimating the effects of the father-child relationships. Only a handful of studies have used multiple sources and controlled for mother effects, and the results of these studies do not yield a consistent set of findings.

The study presented here makes a straightforward contribution to the literature on fathers. Using a national probability sample, we were able to demonstrate that paternal involvement (reported by fathers) is negatively related to the number of behavior problems exhibited by their children (reported by mothers), and this finding holds when we control for the level of maternal involvement. Compared with much prior research, our study provides relatively strong evidence of a link between paternal involvement and children's behavior.

Our study also makes a second contribution to the literature on fathers. Multigroup structural equation models revealed that the estimated effects of stepfather involvement were not significantly different from the estimated effects of biological father involvement. When stepfathers reported being highly involved with their stepchildren, biological mothers reported relatively few child problems. This finding is consistent with a couple of prior studies that suggest that stepfathers have the potential to be important resources for children (Amato, 1994a; Bogenschneider, 1997). In addition, with some exceptions (Brody et al., 1995; Furstenberg & Harris, 1993; Mosley & Thomson, 1995), few prior studies have estimated father effects in non-White populations. Our study suggests that the positive estimated effects of father involvement hold for Latinos and African Americans, as well as for Whites. The beneficial effects of paternal involvement, therefore, appear to generalize across a variety of contexts.

The study contains several limitations, however. First, we were not able to investigate fathers' involvement with individual children. Instead, our measure was based on involvement with all of the children in the household. This approach was necessary because the NSFH spouse questionnaire from which we obtained information about fathers did not ask questions about the focal child. To maintain comparability with the independent variable, our dependent variable referred to the total number of problems exhibited by all of the children in the household (aged 5-18 years), rather than by the focal child. Our study, therefore, was carried out at a family level of analysis. Nevertheless, our

approach yields conclusions similar to those of Mosley and Thomson (1995), who used NSFH data on the focal child.

A second limitation is due to the cross-sectional nature of the data. Because interviewers obtained data on parental involvement and children's behavior at the same time, it is not possible to establish the causal order between variables. Although our structural equation model assumes that parental involvement affects children's behavior, it is also possible that children's behavior affects parents. Children who exhibit relatively few problems may encourage greater levels of parental time, support, and affection (Belsky, 1991). Our study is not alone in this limitation, however. Most prior studies of fathers and children also have been cross-sectional. One way that future studies can address this limitation is to use structural equation methods with longitudinal data to model reciprocal influences over time between fathers and children—a strategy that we did not observe in any of the studies reviewed for this article. A second possibility is to use experimental methods to vary paternal behavior and observe the consequences for children. This strategy has been used to demonstrate mother effects. For example, Pappalardo and Maccoby (1985) varied maternal behavior experimentally and found that children were more compliant when mothers behaved in a responsive manner than when they behaved in a nonresponsive manner. Similar experiments could be designed to demonstrate father effects.

A third limitation involves the fact that mothers provided information about their own involvement with children, as well as information about children's behavior problems. For this reason, same-source bias probably affected our estimate of mother effects, although we were able to deal with this problem to a certain extent by allowing correlated error terms. Given the structure of the NSFH data, it was necessary to have the same source of data on mothers and children in order to have independent sources of data on fathers and children. A design in which children provide information about paternal and maternal behavior and some other source (parents, teachers, or other observers) provides information about children's behavior would allow better estimates of the unique effects of fathers and mothers on children.

In conclusion, although most researchers believe that fathers play an important role in their children's lives, the evidence is limited. An ideal study would include data on a focal child, a longitudinal design, and multiple sources. Given the

importance of this issue—to scholars, policymakers, and individual fathers and mothers—additional research along these lines would be useful.

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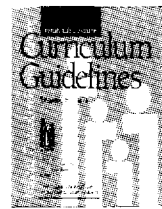
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