

Biological resident fathers in Early Head Start by type of father involvement

Natasha Cabrera, U of Maryland

Jacqueline Shannon, New York University

Bella Guner, U of Maryland

10-31-03

The Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project Fatherhood Study

The 1995 Early Head Start (EHS) evaluation includes a study of the implementation and impacts of the EHS program and a longitudinal study of infants and toddlers in low-income families. EHS is a comprehensive, two-generation program that provides intensive services from before birth until age 3 years. The EHS study includes approximately 3,000 families living in 17 communities across the country, who met the EHS income eligibility criteria, and who had a child younger than 12 months of age.

As part of the experimental research design, families who applied to EHS were randomly assigned either to the EHS study group and received program services or to the control group and received the services available in their communities. Data on family demographics and service needs were collected prior to random assignment. The evaluation included measures of a broad range of child and family outcomes and extensive information about the programs and the individual families' experiences with them. Families were interviewed at 6, 15, and 26 months after random assignment and at program exit. Child assessments, parent interviews, and parent-child interaction assessments were conducted when the children were 14, 24, and 36 months old.

The EHS families and the control group were enrolled first, and fathers were recruited after mothers identified them. (The primary caregiver in 95% of the cases was

the child's mother.) Questions for the mother about father and father figure involvement with the children were included at baseline, in the first follow-up parent interviews, and in child assessments conducted when the children were 14, 24, and 36 months old. In 1997, data collection was expanded in 12 of the 17 research sites to include interviews with fathers and, in seven of the 12 sites, to include father-child videotaped interactions. The result of these efforts was four strands of father research: (1) the Father Involvement with Toddlers Study (FITS), (2) the Father and Child Interaction during Toddlerhood Study (FACITS), (3) the Father and Newborn Study (FANS), and (4) the Participation in Fatherhood Programs and Services Use Study (PASS).

Findings reported by the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families indicate that there were modest program impacts on key child outcomes, the parent-child relationship, parenting, and quality of the home environment provided by parents when the children were 2 and 3 years old (ACF, 2002). A final report on program impacts when the children were 3 years old was released to Congress in 2002 (Love et al., 2002).

Measures

Measures for this study include demographic characteristics and father involvement.

Demographic characteristics. We used the mothers' reports to identify the mother-father relationship and father residency status as married, cohabiting, boyfriend (nonresident but romantically involved with the mother), friend (nonresident but divorced/separated), and no relationship (mother reports having no relationship, romantic or otherwise, with the biological father). We also used mothers' reports to collect data on the mothers' and fathers' ages, race/ethnicity, and education; AFDC status (whether the

mother received welfare or AFDC during any quarter up to 15 months after random assignment); poverty level, (whether the mother was above the federal poverty level 15 months after random assignment); mothers' and fathers' urban/rural background; fathers' and mothers' employment status; and children's ages and genders.

Father Involvement. Father involvement was assessed using a quantitative interview that included constructs related to Lamb's et al's (1987) three types of father involvement (accessibility, engagement, and responsibility), as well as questions about father's warmth toward his child.

The present analysis

The purpose of this analysis is to describe father involvement in a sample of families enrolled in the Early Head Start evaluation when their children are 2 years old. We describe father involvement (engagement, responsibility, and warmth) by type of father (resident biological married, resident biological nonmarried); we also look at differences in involvement patterns by fathers' race, education, income, and child's gender. The present analysis includes only resident biological dads who are married or unmarried to the mother of the children. We exclude nonresident biological fathers because it is outside the scope of the panel. We also do not report on father figures or "social fathers" because there are few of them when the children in this sample were 2 years of age.

Accessibility was measured from mother report because using data from father report would underestimate father's accessibility to their child due to missing data on fathers. For resident fathers, we use mothers' report of fathers' residency in the house as an index of fathers' general accessibility to the child.

Engagement was measured by asking mothers: "How frequently has your child's father done the following four activities with your child?" 1) read, 2) feed/prepare meals, 3) play with child, and 4) go for a walk outside/take child to the playground. Responses were rated on a 6-point scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (a few times a year) to 6 (several times a week). Also, fathers were asked a series of 33 questions about the activities they did with their children in the past month. The questions included the following: "How often did you read to your child?" "How often did you take your child to visit relatives?" "How often did you feed your child?" and "How often did you play chasing games with your child?" The items were rated on a 6-point scale from 1 ("not at all") to 4 (few times a week) to 6 ("more than once a day").

Responsibility was measured by asking fathers, "How much influence do you have in making major decisions about your child's education, religion and health care needs?" Responses were rated using a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 0 ("no influence") to 2 ("a great deal of influence").

Warmth is measured by asking fathers, "Holding and cuddling CHILD is fun". This item is rated on a 4-point scale from 1 ("never") to 4 ("All of the time").

Results

Accessibility was measured from mother report because using data from father report would underestimate father's accessibility to their child. For resident fathers, we use mothers' report of fathers' residency in the house as an index of fathers' general accessibility to the child. Hence all fathers reported here are accessible to the child by definition.

Engagement is reported here using both mothers and fathers report. We cannot make comparisons across mothers and fathers because we asked fathers more questions about their involvement with their children than we asked mothers and we rate their involvement using different scales. We show results for both mothers and fathers. Table 1 shows the means for mothers (4 items) and fathers (33 items) for engagement behavior by income. We find little to no variation by income, education, child's gender, or race. Mothers report that married and unmarried fathers engage in reading, feeding, playing and going for walks with their children more than "once a week" (Married: Mean=5.28; Unmarried: Mean =5.26). Although the scale and number of questions differed, married and unmarried fathers, similar to mothers, report engaging in activities with their children (singing, reading, dancing, playing games, going for walks, feeding, dressing etc) more than "a few times a month" (Married: Mean=3.61; Unmarried: Mean = 3.72). Similarly, on our *Warmth* measure, regardless of education, income, race, and child's gender, both married and unmarried fathers report that "holding and cuddling their child" is fun almost "all of the time" (Married: Mean=3.81; Unmarried: Mean = 3.86)

Responsibility examined father's perceptions of their level of influence regarding their child. Both married and unmarried fathers reported that they have almost "a great deal of influence" in making major decisions about such things as education, religion, and health care for their child (Married: Mean=1.8; Unmarried: Mean = 1.6). However, married men tended to perceive themselves as having slightly more responsibility than unmarried men. Specifically, unmarried men within the lowest (LE \$1000) and highest (\$3600 to \$5600) income brackets perceived themselves as having less influence than those who were married within these same income brackets.

In summary, within our group of low-income, resident biological fathers participating in the EHS study all married and unmarried men were accessible to their children since we defined accessibility as fathers residing with their children. We found little to no differences in fathers' level of engagement and warmth with their children based on marital status and across the various demographic factors. There were some small differences in fathers' level of responsibility but statistical significance for these differences has not established at this point.

**AVERAGE LEVELS OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT
BY FATHER AND CHILD CHARACTERISTICS**

INCOME	N	BIODAD3							
		M RPT MARR BIO		M RPT UNMARR BIO		F RPT MARR BIO		F RPT UNMARR BIO	
		ENGAGED		ENGAGED		ENGAGED		ENGAGED	
		N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
LE \$1000	283	99	5.10	43	5.28	98	3.70	43	3.80
\$1001-\$2000	434	165	5.33	53	5.28	163	3.54	53	3.70
\$2001-\$3600	170	66	5.39	19	5.34	66	3.64	19	3.79
\$3601-\$5600	30	10	5.50	5	4.45	10	3.50	5	3.19
GT \$5600	2	1	5.75			1	4.10		
All	919	341	5.28	120	5.26	338	3.61	120	3.72

**AVERAGE LEVELS OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT
BY FATHER AND CHILD CHARACTERISTICS**

EDUCATION	N	BIODAD3							
		M RPT MARR BIO		M RPT UNMARR BIO		F RPT MARR BIO		F RPT UNMARR BIO	
		ENGAGED		ENGAGED		ENGAGED		ENGAGED	
		N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
LT HS	777	369	5.12	172	5.23	157	3.51	79	3.68
HS GRAD	272	136	5.38	43	5.29	65	3.75	28	3.74
SOME COLL	382	204	5.39	33	5.14	124	3.62	21	4.02
All	1431	709	5.25	248	5.23	346	3.59	128	3.74

**AVERAGE LEVELS OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT
BY FATHER AND CHILD CHARACTERISTICS**

CHILD'S SEX	N	BIODAD3							
		M RPT MARR BIO		M RPT UNMARR BIO		F RPT MARR BIO		F RPT UNMARR BIO	
		ENGAGED		ENGAGED		ENGAGED		ENGAGED	
		N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
MALE	740	358	5.23	137	5.32	173	3.59	72	3.72
FEMALE	720	362	5.26	126	5.11	175	3.61	57	3.78
All	1460	720	5.24	263	5.22	348	3.60	129	3.74

**AVERAGE LEVELS OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT
BY FATHER AND CHILD CHARACTERISTICS**

RACE	N	BIODAD3							
		M RPT MARR BIO		M RPT UNMARR BIO		F RPT MARR BIO		F RPT UNMARR BIO	
		ENGAGED		ENGAGED		ENGAGED		ENGAGED	
		N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
NON-HISPANIC WHITE	633	313	5.38	84	5.29	185	3.54	51	3.59
NON-HISPANIC BLACK	224	77	5.34	71	5.35	38	3.90	38	3.85
HISPANIC	470	252	5.06	68	5.13	112	3.60	38	3.84
OTHER	52	31	5.38	7	5.39	12	3.50	2	3.91
All	1379	673	5.26	230	5.27	347	3.60	129	3.74

**AVERAGE LEVELS OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT
BY FATHER AND CHILD CHARACTERISTICS**

INCOME	N	BIODAD3			
		F RPT MARR BIO		F RPT UNMARR BIO	
		WARMTH		WARMTH	
		N	Mean	N	Mean
LE \$1000	123	85	3.88	38	3.95
\$1001-\$2000	212	159	3.82	53	3.75
\$2001-\$3600	82	66	3.76	16	3.94
\$3601-\$5600	15	10	3.70	5	4.00
GT \$5600	1	1	3.00		
All	433	321	3.82	112	3.86

**AVERAGE LEVELS OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT
BY FATHER AND CHILD CHARACTERISTICS**

EDUCATION	N	BIODAD3			
		F RPT MARR BIO		F RPT UNMARR BIO	
		WARMTH		WARMTH	
		N	Mean	N	Mean
LT HS	219	145	3.81	74	3.88
HS GRAD	90	64	3.83	26	3.73
SOME COLL	137	118	3.81	19	3.95
All	446	327	3.81	119	3.86

**AVERAGE LEVELS OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT
BY FATHER AND CHILD CHARACTERISTICS**

CHILD'S SEX	N	BIODAD3			
		F RPT MARR BIO		F RPT UNMARR BIO	
		WARMTH		WARMTH	
		N	Mean	N	Mean
MALE	226	160	3.81	66	3.86
FEMALE	222	169	3.82	53	3.85
All	448	329	3.81	119	3.86

**AVERAGE LEVELS OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT
BY FATHER AND CHILD CHARACTERISTICS**

RACE	N	BIODAD3			
		F RPT MARR BIO		F RPT UNMARR BIO	
		WARMTH		WARMTH	
		N	Mean	N	Mean
NON-HISPANIC WHITE	230	182	3.77	48	3.85
NON-HISPANIC BLACK	67	34	3.79	33	3.79
HISPANIC	136	100	3.90	36	3.92
OTHER	14	12	3.83	2	4.00
All	447	328	3.81	119	3.86

**AVERAGE LEVELS OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT
BY FATHER AND CHILD CHARACTERISTICS**

INCOME	N	BIODAD3			
		F RPT MARR BIO		F RPT UNMARR BIO	
		RESPONSIBILITY		RESPONSIBILITY	
		N	Mean	N	Mean
LE \$1000	141	98	1.73	43	1.47
\$1001-\$2000	218	165	1.82	53	1.64
\$2001-\$3600	85	66	1.80	19	1.79
\$3601-\$5600	15	10	2.00	5	1.40
GT \$5600	1	1	2.00		
All	460	340	1.80	120	1.59

**AVERAGE LEVELS OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT
BY FATHER AND CHILD CHARACTERISTICS**

EDUCATION	N	BIODAD3			
		F RPT MARR BIO		F RPT UNMARR BIO	
		RESPONSIBILITY		RESPONSIBILITY	
		N	Mean	N	Mean
LT HS	237	158	1.77	79	1.61
HS GRAD	94	66	1.68	28	1.61
SOME COLL	145	124	1.90	21	1.67
All	476	348	1.80	128	1.62

**AVERAGE LEVELS OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT
BY FATHER AND CHILD CHARACTERISTICS**

CHILD'S SEX	N	BIODAD3			
		F RPT MARR BIO		F RPT UNMARR BIO	
		RESPONSIBILITY		RESPONSIBILITY	
		N	Mean	N	Mean
MALE	245	173	1.80	72	1.63
FEMALE	234	177	1.80	57	1.60
All	479	350	1.80	129	1.61



**AVERAGE LEVELS OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT
BY FATHER AND CHILD CHARACTERISTICS**

RACE	N	BIODAD3			
		F RPT MARR BIO		F RPT UNMARR BIO	
		RESPONSIBILITY		RESPONSIBILITY	
		N	Mean	N	Mean
NON-HISPANIC WHITE	237	186	1.79	51	1.51
NON-HISPANIC BLACK	75	37	1.68	38	1.68
HISPANIC	152	114	1.84	38	1.68
OTHER	14	12	1.92	2	1.50
All	478	349	1.80	129	1.61