Introduction

The last four decades have witnessed how mother-father relationship contexts have become more diverse and complex. Many of these children are born into “fragile families” where unmarried parents are romantically involved and raising their children together (Carlson, McLanahan, & England 2004). As a result, fathers today are expected to be involved with their children, regardless of the relationship context with the mother of their children. Therefore, the degree to which parents engage in positive interactions with one another and are able to effectively collaborate in parenting activities is likely to influence child well-being.

In addition, religious institutions have historically played a central role in shaping the character and quality of intimate relationships between married parents (Christiano, 2000). Thus, the practical and emotional support many churches offer to their members regardless of family status may also be valuable to unmarried couples and can have an influence on children’s well-being.

Objectives

Examine the importance of religiosity and father-mother relationship status as it relates to children’s well-being.

Hypothesis 1: Children’s well-being is associated with religious attendance as it relates to the various types of father-mother relationship status.

Hypothesis 2: Children’s well-being is associated with various types of father-mother relationship status.

Methods

SAMPLE
The data for this study included 1,870 African American fathers, mothers, and their children participating in the 5-year follow-up data collection wave of the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study (hereafter “Fragile Families”).

MEASURES
Mother-father relationship status was constructed using one question: (a) “What is your relationship with (MOTHER) now? The response categories included 1 = married, 2 = romantically involved, 3 = separated/divorced, 4 = just friends, 5 = not in any relationships).

Child’s behavior. The primary outcome in this study was mothers’ report of children’s behavior problems as measured by the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) (Achenbach, 1991). This scale was designed to measure children’s behavior problems.

Parental engagement with child. Parental engagement was measured using a scale developed by Mathematica Policy Research (2002). The items were designed to measure the number and frequency of care giving, social, cognitive, and physical activities parents participated in with their children.

Religiosity. Religiosity was measured using a single item (e.g., “How often do you attend religious services?”).

Other variables. These variables include age, income, work hours per week, total number of children and education.

DATA ANALYSIS
The data analysis for this study consisted of two stages. Stage 1 consisted of one-way ANOVA analyses. The first one-way ANOVA analysis compared the reported religiosity of fathers based on the father-mother relationship status. The second one-way ANOVA analysis compared the mother’s report of child’s outcome based on the father-mother relationship status. Stage 2 will involve a multiple regression analysis.

Results

ANOVA
There was a significant effect of the father-mother relationship status on religiosity at the p < .05 level for the five conditions [F (4, 1164) = 11.47, p = .000]. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for those married (M = 4.16, SD = 1.54) was significantly different than those who were romantically involved (M = 3.33, SD = 1.56) and with those not in any relationship (M = 3.76, SD = 1.65). Further, the Tukey test indicated that the mean score for those not in any relationship was significantly different than those who are romantically involved.

As for child well-being, there was a significant effect of the father-mother relationship status on religiosity at the p < .05 level [F (4, 991) = 4.05, p = .003]. The Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for those married (M = 6.02, SD = 1.54) was significantly different than those who were romantically involved (M = 3.33, SD = 1.56) and with those not in any relationship (M = 3.76, SD = 1.65). Further, the Tukey test indicated that the mean score for those not in any relationship was significantly different than those who are romantically involved.