Interhousehold Contributions of Nonresidential Fathers to Children

Parents living in separate residences comprise a major source of interfamilial exchange (Hill & Callister, 2007). In 2001, 22 percent of children had a non-residential biological father. It is generally believed that a positive relationship and exchanges with a nonresidential father are important to the future success of his children in school and in later family formation. However, little is known about the extent to which nonresidential fathers are involved in children's daily lives beyond their provision of child support. In this study, a structural equation model was used to evaluate the association between maternal and paternal characteristics and relationship and three aspects of father involvement: paternal accessibility (father-child contact), father-child interaction (relationship quality), and father's responsibility (financial support) (Pleck, 1997).

Theory suggests three types of influences on father involvement: his economic resources and ability to provide financial support, his relationship with the mother of his children and circumstances of their birth, and current circumstances such as whether she remarried, whether she is employed, and his geographic distance from the children (Pleck, 1997). Other factors that affect motivation and preferences, such as education, race, and child gender may also influence involvement.

Although previous studies have examined the association of economic circumstances with paternal financial contribution, few have been able to take into account his relationship with the mother of the children. Additionally, few have included all three types of involvement: access, interaction, and responsibility.

This study was conducted using data from 1992 to 2002 from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). The analysis was conducted on 827 twelve-year-old children of mothers who were respondents in the NLSY79 data. All of the children in the sample have a living non-residential biological father. Children were selected who answered questions about their relationship with their father and their parents' relationship with each other when they were age 12. The other variables were either identified during the year the child was age 12 or in the previous 12 years of the child's life.

In the structural equation model (see Figure 1), the background characteristics and contextual factors described above were hypothesized to affect each of four dependent observed variables or latent factors: biological parent relationship quality (latent), father-child contact (observed), father-child relationship quality (latent), and paternal financial support (observed).

All the independent variables were permitted to be correlated. Instead of developing a structural model among the dependent variables, the errors in the father-child relationship, mother-father relationship, and paternal financial support were permitted to be correlated. Contact was modeled as a mediator. The structural equation model was analyzed using maximum likelihood methods that estimate parameters in the presence of missing data. No data were dropped because of missing items.

We first estimated measurement models for mother-father relationship quality and for father-child relationship quality. A factor analysis of the mother-father relationship quality variables (get along and agree), using a cut-off eigenvalue of 1, extracted one factor with 80 percent of variance explained. Using the same cut-off criteria, a factor analysis of the father-child relationship quality variables (closeness, sharing, misses important events) extracted one factor with 82 percent of variance explained. The model fit for the entire measurement model including both factors was adequate according to Hu and Bentler's (1999) joint criteria (CFI=1.00, NNFI=.999, SRMR=.016).

Table 1 shows the standardized and unstandardized path coefficients from the model. As can be seen, mother's older age at first birth, mother employment, having a residential stepfather, and greater distance from the child were associated with less father-child contact. Higher family income was associated with greater contact. Biological parents' better relationship quality was positively predicted by mother's older age at first birth, African American race of the child, the presence of a residential step-father, and less distance of the father from the child. A higher family income, a greater proportion of years living with the father, the mother married to the father at birth, and greater father-child contact were associated with better father-child relationship quality. Fathers living farther away and a female child were associated with lower father-child relationship quality. Paternal financial support was significantly predicted only by contact with father and the biological parents' marital status at birth.

The results show that parental relationship quality is linked to paternal involvement with his child but not to paternal financial support. Amount of contact is linked to father-child relationship quality and to financial support but not to parent relationship quality.

Figure 1. Diagram of SEM Model

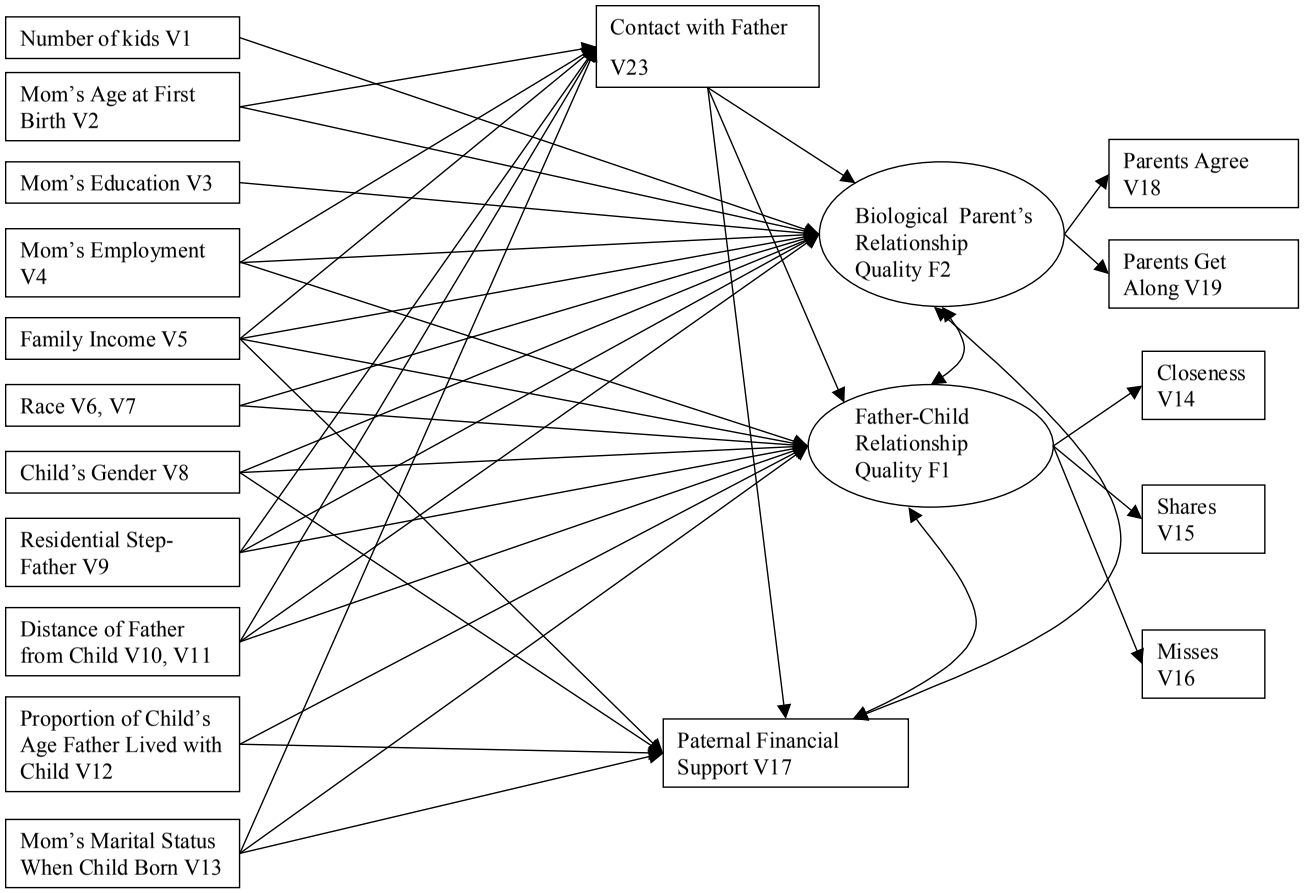

Table 1. Standardized and Unstandardized Regression Coefficients

					Father Involvement											
	Parent Relationship Quality				Father-Child Contact				Father-Child Relationship Quality				Paternal Financial Support			
Variable Description	**Beta**		**B**	**SE**	**Beta**		**B**	**SE**	**Beta**		**B**	**SE**	**Beta**		**B**	**SE**
Number of kids	-0.015		-0.012	0.037												
Age of mother at birth	0.164	*	0.040	0.013	-0.333	*	-0.110	0.015								
Mother's education	0.070		0.032	0.024												
Mother's employment status	-0.042		-0.089	0.120	-0.123	*	0.358	0.133	0.011		0.034	0.145				
Family Income	0.081		0.087	0.070	0.121	*	0.176	0.077	0.153	*	0.231	0.081	0.013		0.007	0.028
Child's Race- Black	0.128	*	0.266	0.112					0.081		0.238	0.147				
Child's Race- Hispanic	0.021		0.073	0.178					0.012		0.059	0.218				
Child Female	-0.099		-0.179	0.093					-0.109	*	-0.279	0.114	-0.042		-0.042	0.046
Residential Stepfather	0.124	*	0.232	0.111	-0.245	*	0.622	0.121	-0.001		-0.004	0.134				
Distance from child- moderate	0.008		0.015	0.109	-0.099	*	0.255	0.122	-0.013		-0.034	0.134				
Distance from child- far	-0.199	*	-0.407	0.121	-0.177	*	0.491	0.134	-0.321	*	-0.926	0.150				
Proportion of years with father									0.198	*	0.818	0.182	-0.041		0.006	0.074
Mother's marital status at birth					-0.041		0.100	0.110	0.119	*	0.305	0.115	0.2	*	0.199	0.048
Father-Child Contact	0.075		0.055	0.041					0.111	*	0.116	0.048	0.163	*	0.066	0.019
			R^2=	0.118			R^2=	0.195			R^2=	0.235			R^2=	0.062

Correlations between errors in		Model Fit:	
Parent Relationship Quality, Father-Child Relationship Quality	0.508*	CFI:	0.96
Father-Child Relationship Quality, Paternal Financial Support	0.030	RMSEA:	0.052
Parent Relationship Quality, Paternal Financial Support	-0.032	CI RMSEA:	.041-.063

References

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