

**FRAGILE FAMILIES, FATHER  
INVOLVEMENT, AND PUBLIC  
POLICY**

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# FRAGILE FAMILIES, FATHER INVOLVEMENT AND PUBLIC POLICY

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## INTRODUCTION

Nonmarital childbearing has increased dramatically during the past forty years, with one third of births now occurring outside of marriage. While this trend has received considerable attention from both researchers and policymakers as it relates to women and children, the role of unmarried fathers has been largely overlooked beyond their provision (or lack of provision) of financial support. Only recently—as new data have become available—have researchers begun to explore the nature of relationships between unmarried parents and the role of unmarried fathers in the lives of their children. This new research has yielded some surprising findings that deconstruct myths about ‘absent fathers’ and point to ways that policymakers might strengthen fathers’ involvement with their children. In this chapter, we describe trends in nonmarital childbearing since the mid-1900s. We define the concept of *fragile families* and describe relationships in these families. Then, we explain how father involvement is important for children. Finally, we discuss how public policies—welfare, child support, and fatherhood programs—affect father involvement in fragile families.

## TRENDS IN NONMARITAL CHILDBEARING

The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed a sharp rise in nonmarital childbearing in the United States. In 1940, only four percent of all births occurred outside of marriage, while by 1999, fully one third were to unmarried parents (Ventura & Bachrach, 2000). The proportion of all births that occur outside marriage (sometimes called the nonmarital birth ratio) is affected by three proximate factors: the proportion of women in the population that are unmarried, birth rates among unmarried women, and birth rates among married women. We briefly describe trends in each of these areas, noting important group differences where they exist.

Since only unmarried women can give birth outside marriage, delays in marriage increase the risk of a nonmarital birth. Between 1964 and 1990, the median age at marriage rose from 21.4 in 1964 to 26.7 for women, and from 23.6 and 28.7 for men (Clarke, 1995). The proportion of unmarried women ages 30 to 34 rose from 13.8 percent in 1950 to 31.3 percent in 1998 (Ventura et al., 2000).

Even with no other secular demographic changes, we would have expected nonmarital births to rise because of the greater pool of unmarried women in the population.<sup>1</sup> Yet, other changes did occur which drove the nonmarital birth ratio even higher. Along with delays in marriage, the rate at which unmarried women were giving birth increased after mid-century. Recent estimates show that live births per 1,000 unmarried women ages 15-44 rose from 7.1 in 1940 to 43.9 in 1999, a more than six-fold increase (Ventura et al., 2000). The rate of increase, which was generally steady from 1940 to 1990, has leveled off since that time.

Finally, as fertility among unmarried women was rising, fertility among married women was declining, further exaggerating the growth in the proportion of all births that occur outside of marriage. Birth rates among married women ages 15-44 dropped sharply between 1960 and 1976 (from 156.6 to 91.6 live births per 1,000 married women). Since the mid 1970s, they have declined only slightly, to 87.3 births per 1,000 in 1999 (Ventura et al., 2000).

While nonmarital childbearing has risen throughout the population, the magnitude of the rise and the current prevalence varies significantly by socio-demographic status. Data that differentiate Hispanics from non-Hispanic whites are only available for the past two decades, but these data highlight important differences by race and ethnicity. In 1980, 9 percent of births among non-Hispanic white women occurred outside marriage, compared to 56 percent among black women and 24 percent among Hispanic women. By 1999, the comparable figures were 22

percent among non-Hispanic whites, 69 percent among blacks and 42 percent among Hispanics (Ventura et al., 2000). Thus, while black women had a higher overall rate of nonmarital childbearing at mid-century, the rate of increase between 1980 and 1999 was notably greater for whites (144 percent) and Hispanics (75 percent) than for blacks (23 percent).

Teen childbearing has also been a cause for concern among policymakers because of the greater economic disadvantage among and welfare use by teenage mothers. Nonmarital birth rates for teenagers (ages 15 to 19) rose steadily between 1940 and 1994 but have declined since that time; unmarried birth rates have fallen among teens of all races since 1994, but they have dropped the most for black teenagers (Ventura et al., 2000). Overall, teen births as a proportion of all unmarried births have declined from 50 percent in 1970 to 29 percent in 1999, primarily due to rising birth rates among women ages 20 and older and increasing numbers of these women (Ventura et al., 2000). Still, births to teens are much more likely to occur outside of marriage (79 percent) than births to older women; only 48 percent of births to women in their early twenties occur outside marriage (Ventura et al., 2000). Moreover, births to unmarried teens account for about half of all *first* nonmarital births (Moore, 1995). Thus, teen childbearing remains an important aspect of nonmarital childbearing and family formation among unmarried parents.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The rising divorce rate has also increase the proportion of women at risk of a nonmarital birth. Indeed, about one third of births outside marriage in 1980-85 occurred to formerly-married women (Bumpass & McLanahan, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that teen birth data reflect mothers' fertility and do not provide information about fathers' fertility patterns. While accurate estimates of male fertility are difficult to obtain, we do know that approximately 85 percent of children born to teen mothers are fathered by men in their teens or early 20s (contrary to earlier reports of large age differences between teen mothers and their partners) (Elo, Berkowitz, & Furstenberg, 1999). These young fathers (and mothers) may face additional challenges compared to their older counterparts that require particular types of policy or program interventions.

## FRAGILE FAMILIES

While ‘traditional’ family formation in the U.S. has typically followed a linear course—first dating, then marriage, and then childbearing, the rise in nonmarital childbearing (along with concomitant changes in union formation) has yielded a range of complex and diverse family arrangements. Today, it is not uncommon for intercourse, conception and/or cohabitation to occur outside marriage. The vast majority of unmarried women are sexually active: 77 percent of women ages 20 to 29 in 1995 reported engaging in sex during the previous year (Ventura et al., 2000). Also, most pregnancies among unmarried women are unintended, and most are not voluntarily terminated: 78 percent of pregnancies among never-married women in 1994 were unintended (Henshaw, 1998), and four of every 10 pregnancies among unmarried women in 1995 ended in abortion (Ventura et al., 2000). Further, while in the 1950s and 1960s, 52 to 60 percent of first births conceived before marriage were ‘legitimized’ by marriage prior to the birth, this was the case for only 23 percent of premaritally-conceived first births in the period from 1990 to 1994 (Bachu, 1999). These facts about sexual activity and pregnancy resolution portend that the nonmarital birth rate is not likely to attenuate at any time in the near future.

Beyond major changes in the norms and practices related to sexuality and fertility, fundamental shifts have also been noted in union formation and marital behavior over the past 40 years. Marriage has become less central to the life course both because individuals are marrying later (or choosing not to marry at all) and divorcing more often. Unmarried cohabitation has arisen as a precursor to—or possible substitute for—legal marriage such that today over 50 percent of marriages are preceded by cohabitation, and nearly half of all women have cohabited at some point by their late 30s (Bumpass & Lu, 1999; Smock, 2000). Further, many cohabiting households include children, and nearly 40 percent of nonmarital births occur to cohabiting

couples. Indeed, much of the recent increase in nonmarital childbearing can be attributed to births to cohabiting couples (Bumpass et al., 1999; Smock, 2000).

The changes in family patterns described above imply that many ‘single’ mothers are not rearing their children alone and suggest the emergence of a new family type—the *fragile family*, composed of unmarried parents who are raising their child together. Some of these parents are cohabiting while other are living apart but maintaining frequent contact (Mincy & Pouncy, 1997; Sorenson, Mincy & Halpern, 2000). We denote these relationships as *families* to highlight the fact that the parents are raising their child(ren) together, and we call them *fragile* because of their high risk of poverty and union instability.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the recent rise in—and high prevalence of—nonmarital childbearing, surprisingly little is known about fragile families, especially about the fathers in these families. Typically, researchers and policymakers have focused solely on single mothers and their children, in part because of a concern over children’s welfare and in part because data on fathers were not readily available. Furthermore, the information that exists about nonresident fathers typically comes either from studies that combine unwed fathers with divorced or separated fathers, or from research based on small and/or unrepresentative samples (McLanahan et al., 1998).

This situation is about to change with the launching of a new survey of *Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing*.<sup>4</sup> This new study, which is being conducted by a team of researchers at Princeton and Columbia Universities, is following a birth cohort of approximately 3,700

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<sup>3</sup> While we do not apply a strict economic criterion to the definition of *fragile families*, the vast majority of unmarried parents and their children are not economically advantaged (only three percent report household income of \$75,000 or above), so the term broadly applies to this demographic group.

<sup>4</sup> The *Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study* is funded by the California HealthCare Foundation, the Commonwealth Fund, the Ford Foundation, the Foundation for Child Development, the Fund for New Jersey, the William T. Grant Foundation, the Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Kronkosky Charitable Foundation, the A.L. Mailman Family Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), the National Science Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard

nonmarital births in 20 large cities throughout the U.S.<sup>5</sup> The new study is representative of nonmarital births in cities with populations of 200,000 and over and will provide a wealth of information on unwed mothers and fathers and the relationships between them.<sup>6</sup> In the Fragile Families Study, mothers are interviewed in person at the hospital within 48 hours of having given birth, and fathers are interviewed in person either in the hospital or shortly thereafter. Follow-up interviews are planned for when the children are 12, 30 and 48 months old. The survey focuses on four major questions:

- What are the characteristics and capabilities of unmarried parents, especially fathers?
- What is the nature of the relationships between unmarried parents, and what factors push them together or pull them apart?
- What are the consequences for children over time?
- How do public policies and labor market conditions affect parents' relationships and children's wellbeing?

While it is too soon to know very much about the consequences for children born into fragile families or how policies affect parents' relationships over time, data from the baseline interviews highlight several key findings about the capabilities and relationships of unmarried parents at the time of their child's birth. Some of this information is reported in Figure 1 and in Tables 1 through 3.

(Figure 1 about here)

Figure 1 depicts relationships between unmarried parents by (mother's) race/ethnicity around the time that their child is born. Most unmarried fathers are closely connected to the

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Foundation, the Public Policy Institute of California, the St. David's Foundation, the St. Vincent Hospital and Health Services, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (ACF and ASPE).

<sup>5</sup> The twenty cities are: Oakland, CA; San Jose, CA; Jacksonville, FL; Chicago, IL; Indianapolis, IN; Boston, MA; Baltimore, MD; Detroit, MI; Newark, NJ; New York City, NY; Toledo, OH; Philadelphia, PA; Pittsburgh, PA; Nashville, TN; Austin, TX; Corpus Christi, TX; San Antonio, TX; Norfolk, VA; Richmond, VA; and Milwaukee, WI. For detailed information on the design of the Fragile Families Study, see Reichman et al., 2000.

mother of their child at the time of birth. Overall, eighty-two percent of mothers report being romantically involved with the baby's father; 48 percent of couples are cohabiting, and another 34 percent are romantically involved but living separately (which we refer to as a 'visiting' relationship).<sup>7</sup> About eight percent of mothers report that they are 'just friends' with the fathers, and only 10 percent report that have very little contact with the father.<sup>8</sup>

While the proportions of couples in any romantic relationship are similar across different racial and ethnic groups, there is variation in the type of relationship. Non-Hispanic white and Hispanic parents are more likely to be co-residing (about 60 percent) than non-Hispanic black parents (39 percent), whereas black parents are more likely to be in a 'visiting' relationship (43 percent) than either whites (19 percent) or Hispanics (25 percent).

Most unmarried parents have positive expectations about marriage to the baby's father in the future. As shown in Table 1, about 55 percent of unmarried mothers think their chances of marriage to the father are "pretty good" or "almost certain," while 72 percent of unmarried fathers take this position with respect to the mothers. We would expect fathers in the Fragile Families sample to be somewhat more positive than mothers, since the 76 percent of fathers who participated in the study represent a select group that is likely more committed to their children than the average unwed father.

(Table 1 about here)

Assessments of marriage probabilities are higher among parents that are cohabiting, as compared to parents that are romantically involved but living apart ('visiting') and couples that are not romantically involved. The fact that 26 percent of fathers who are no longer romantically

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<sup>6</sup> A comparison group of approximately 1,200 married parents from all 20 cities is also being followed.

<sup>7</sup> We use mothers' reports about parents' relationship and father involvement, as their reports provide information about *all* unmarried fathers; only 76 percent of fathers were interviewed.

<sup>8</sup> The proportions in various relationship types are remarkably similar across age groups, except that teenage mothers (less than age 20) are less likely to be cohabiting (40 percent) than older mothers (about half of whom are cohabiting).

involved with their child's mother say that their chances of marriage are "pretty good" or "almost certain" (compared to only two percent of all mothers in this relationship type) underscores the fact that the fathers interviewed in the Fragile Families Study are more attached to their families (or desire attachment) than the fathers not interviewed.

Although somewhat less positive about marriage than married couples, most unmarried couples agree with the statement, "it is better for children if their parents are married." Positive views of marriage are slightly more common among cohabiting couples than among non-cohabiting couples, but the difference is small. Even the majority of couples that are no longer romantically involved report that they believe children would be better off if their parents were married.

Table 1 also reports information on unmarried parents' trust of the opposite sex. Overall, the numbers suggest that distrust is more than twice as high among unmarried parents, as compared with married parents. Yet, a relatively small fraction of parents in both groups are likely to agree with the statement "women (men) cannot be trusted to be faithful." For parents in all relationship types, mothers are less trusting than fathers in the area of sexual fidelity.

Finally, Table 1 reports information on several aspects of the quality of parents' relationships in fragile families and on the incidence of physical violence. Most parents in fragile families report very positive relationships with their partners shortly after their child's birth. Cohabiting parents are very similar to married parents in terms of emotional support (represented by mothers' reports about fathers' affection and encouragement), and they are only slightly higher in terms of fathers' negative behaviors such as violence or insults/criticism. Couples that are not romantically involved at the time of the child's birth (approximately 20 percent of the sample) report much higher levels of abuse and notably lower levels of supportiveness in the relationship.

Most unwed fathers are highly involved with their families during the pregnancy and at the time of the child's birth. Table 2 reports information on fathers' recent contributions and future intentions toward the child. According to mothers' reports, over 80 percent of unwed fathers contributed financial support during the pregnancy, and three-quarters visited the mother and baby in the hospital. Seventy-eight percent of mothers say the baby will take the father's last name, and 85 percent say that the father will sign the birth certificate. Finally, over 90 percent of the mothers *want* the father to help raise the child.

(Table 2 about here)

Although new unwed parents clearly have 'high hopes' for their relationship at the time of the child's birth, the Fragile Families data clearly show that the capabilities of these new parents are quite low. According to Table 3, 41 percent of unmarried mothers have less than a high school degree and 36 percent of unmarried fathers have not finished high school. Less than a quarter of new unwed parents have any college education, and only three percent obtained a bachelor's degree. The contrast with married parents is striking: married mothers and fathers are much less likely to have dropped out of high school and much more likely to have attended college; more than a third of married mothers—and 31 percent of fathers—have a bachelor's degree.

(Table 3 about here)

The picture for employment is less bleak, although again unmarried parents are not as well off as married parents. Whereas 91 percent of married fathers were working when their child was born, 75 percent of unmarried fathers were employed. Over 40 percent of all unmarried mothers had received welfare assistance during the past year, with roughly similar proportions receiving welfare among mothers that were cohabiting, visiting, and no longer romantically involved with the father. Because 39 percent of mothers are having their first child

(and thus are less likely to be on welfare at the time of the birth), the proportion of mothers who received welfare in the year prior to the birth may underestimate the true level of need among this population. A more accurate estimate of the proportion of mothers who are likely to be eligible for welfare is 74 percent, which is the proportion of births that were covered by Medicaid (figure not shown in table).

**[NOTE: WE ARE STILL CHECKING THESE NUMBERS]** Table 3 also reports predicted hourly wage rates and predicted annual earnings for new parents in the Fragile Families Study.<sup>9</sup> Married mothers are predicted to earn just over \$14.00/hour and married fathers about \$17.50/hour. By contrast, unmarried mothers—regardless of relationship type—earn about \$8.50 and unmarried fathers about \$11.00/hour. If we multiply the fathers’ wage rates by 2000 hours (full-time work) and mothers’ wage rates by 1000 hours (half-time work), we can obtain an estimate of the annual earnings of these couples. These figures highlight the fact that unmarried couples are very different from married couples in terms of their human capital and earnings capacity, a difference that would not change if these couples were to legally marry. If fathers worked full-time and mothers worked half-time, the average unmarried couple would have income just under \$30,000, which is about 60 percent of that of the average married couple (\$49,000). Many unmarried couples face precarious economic circumstances and are likely to be affected by welfare and child support policies over time.

In sum, while the birth of a child may represent a ‘magic moment’ of high attachment and expectations among unmarried parents, these couples face an uncertain future. Specifically for children, studies show that children born outside of marriage are less likely to have contact with their fathers than their counterparts born within marriage; also, involvement by nonresident fathers (both divorced and never-married) typically diminishes over time (Lerman & Sorenson,

2000; Seltzer, 1991). Both of these findings suggest that there is cause for concern about the prospect that fathers in fragile families will remain highly involved in their children's lives in the long term.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF FATHER'S INVOLVEMENT

A multitude of sociological studies have shown that children who live apart from their biological fathers do not fare as well on a range of outcomes as children who grow up with both biological parents (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Children in single-parent families are often deprived of two types of resources from their fathers—economic (money) and relational (time) (McLanahan, 2000). The economic consequences can be most easily quantified: single parent families with children have a significantly higher poverty rate (39 percent in 1998) than two-parent families with children (8 percent in 1998) (Committee on Ways and Means[CWM], 2000), and living in extreme poverty has adverse effects on child development and wellbeing (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Yet, children in single-parent families are also disadvantaged because they lack the parental attention and emotional support that a father can provide. Nonresident fathers see their children less often than resident fathers, and lack of interaction decreases the likelihood that a father and child will develop a close relationship (Seltzer, 1991; Shapiro & Lambert, 1999). While most of this research is based on divorced fathers, we can assume that for unwed fathers the pattern would be the same if/when the parents' relationship ends.

The academic literature has consistently documented that fathers' involvement—at least economic involvement—can obviate some of the disadvantage of living in a single-parent family and positively affect child wellbeing. The provision of child support is associated with improved

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<sup>9</sup> This figures are based on the characteristics of parents who actually had some earnings in the previous year;

child outcomes, particularly in the domains of cognitive/academic and behavioral outcomes (Graham, Beller & Hernandez; Greene & Moore, 1996; 1994; King, 1994b; Knox & Bane, 1994; McLanahan et al., 1994). Child support is particularly beneficial for children when the relationship between mothers and fathers is amicable (Argys & Peters, 1996). Also, paying child support is correlated with direct involvement, so requiring fathers to pay child support may increase their interaction with their children as well (Seltzer, 1991, 2000).<sup>10</sup>

While the benefits of fathers' economic contributions are clearly demonstrated by research, the benefits of fathers' relational involvement with their children are less well documented. In fact, studies of the frequency of contact between nonresidential fathers and their children do *not* demonstrate that greater father-child interaction has beneficial effects for children and adolescents (Crockett, Eggebeen, & Hawkins, 1993; Furstenberg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987; Hawkins & Eggebeen, 1991; Kandel, 1990; King, 1994a, 1994b; Simons, Whitbeck, Beaman, & Conger, 1994). This lack of effects of father-child contact exists regardless of the child's race, gender, mother's education, or marital status at birth (King, 1994b). It is important to note, however, that most of these studies are based on samples of divorced fathers rather than on samples of fragile families.

Several researchers have suggested that the *quality* of the father-child relationship may be more important than the quantity (Amato, 1998; Crockett et al., 1993; King, 1994b; Simons et al., 1994), and recent sociological research supports this argument (Amato & Rivera, 1999; Harris, Furstenberg, & Marmer, 1998; Harris & Marmer, 1996; Parke, forthcoming; Zimmerman, Salem, & Maton, 1995). These findings are consistent with psychological research that has documented clear, beneficial effects of fathering for children (e.g. Lamb, 1997), and we

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therefore, they may somewhat overstate the averages for the entire sample (i.e. including those who did not work).

would expect that future research with improved measures of the quality of father involvement will corroborate these results.<sup>11</sup> Again, these findings suggest that father involvement in fragile families, particularly when the relationship with the child’s mother remains positive, is likely to have beneficial effects for children.

Many sociologists and psychologists have examined the nature of fathers’ involvement with their children and what may be important antecedents of greater involvement. While several well-known typologies of the predictors of father involvement have been developed (see Belsky, 1984, 1990; Lamb, Pleck, Charnov & Levine, 1987; Pleck, Lamb, & Levine, 1986), we focus here on two key factors that public policy may be able to influence—father’s capacity as economic provider, and the quality of the relationship between the father and mother.

### *The Father as Economic Provider*

While cultural understandings of fathering have broadened beyond the provision of economic resources in recent decades, breadwinning remains a central element of the father role in most segments of society (Lamb, 1997). Thus, all else being equal, we would expect fathers’ employment status and earnings capacity to affect their contributions to children (Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000).<sup>12</sup> There are two primary ways that fathers’ capability as an economic provider may affect his involvement. First, fathers who have higher income can simply afford to provide more economic resources to their children. Research shows that earnings capacity is strongly

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<sup>10</sup> While some of the association between current child support and contact is explained by the frequency of fathers’ visitation in an earlier time period and other family characteristics, Seltzer (2000) finds “modest support for claims that stricter child support enforcement will increase fathers’ contact with children.”

<sup>11</sup> Some research suggests that both the quantity and quality of father involvement are important for children, although the necessary ‘thresholds’ of each are unclear (see Palkovitz, this volume).

<sup>12</sup> Although Lerman & Sorenson (2000) find that higher earnings among unmarried fathers are associated with greater involvement one year later, they note that the causal relationship between fathers earnings/employment and involvement could go in either direction. Because from a policy perspective, it is may be more feasible to influence fathers’ human capital and earnings potential than to directly affect the quantity or quality of fathers’ involvement with their children, we focus on the effects of socioeconomic status on involvement.

related to the amount of child support paid by nonresident fathers (Garfinkel, McLanahan, & Hanson, 1998).

A second (and less obvious) way that fathers' economic capabilities affect involvement is that fathers with greater earnings capacity are more likely to perceive themselves—and to be perceived by others—as having 'rights' to their child. Fathers who cannot meet the expectations of the breadwinner role may disengage from their families out of a sense of shame or inadequacy (Liebow, 1967). Alternatively, fathers who are unemployed or otherwise unable to provide resources to the child may be 'pushed out' of the family—or not be given access to the child—by mothers (Edin & Lein, 1997; Marsiglio et al., 2000). Thus, the father's lack of economic stability may preclude his being able to stay engaged in his child's life, with the mother (or grandmother) serving as 'gatekeeper' to the child.

Studies confirm that fathers of higher socioeconomic status (as measured by education and employment status) are more likely to live with their children and/or more likely to exhibit positive parenting behaviors than fathers of lower status (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998; Cooksey & Craig, 1998; Landale & Oropesa, 2001; Woodworth, Belsky, & Crnic, 1996), although the evidence is not entirely consistent (Pleck, 1997; Garfinkel et al., 1998). Edin's ethnographic work confirms the importance of fathers' economic stability for mothers acceptance of them as partners. She notes that many mothers maintain a "pay and stay" rule such that men who are unemployed or not contributing to household expenses are neither welcome as cohabitators nor viewed as desirable marriage partners (Edin, 2000). Recent research from the Fragile Families Study also shows that unmarried fathers are more likely to be involved around the time of their child's birth if they are employed (Carlson & McLanahan, 2001). Mincy and Dupree (2000) also find that among unmarried parents who have just had a child, the father's

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being employed positively affects both the mother's intentions and her actual behavior with respect to family formation.

### *The Father as Provider of Emotional Support*

Bronfenbrenner argues that healthy child development depends on the presence of a primary caregiver who is committed to the welfare of the child plus another adult who provides support to the primary caregiver (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Since the biological father is the most likely candidate for providing support to the mother (usually the primary caregiver), the nature of the father-mother relationship serves as a useful indicator of whether the mother has the support she needs.

Two (related) aspects of parents' relationship that are likely to be important for parenting are: whether the parents live together, and the quality of their relationship (regardless of co-residence). To some extent, unmarried parents' relationships can be viewed on a 'continuum,' with cohabiting parents having the 'best' relationships, followed by couples who are romantically involved but living separately, couples who are friends, and finally couples who are not in any kind of relationship. In some instances, relationship quality may be higher among visiting couples than among cohabiting couples, but on average, we would expect it to be higher among cohabitators.

In addition to supporting the mothers' parenting, there are at least three reasons why the mother-father relationship should affect father involvement. First, when fathers live with their children (and the mother, since most children still live with their mothers), they automatically share time and money with the child. Second, living with the child increases a father's information about—and empathy toward—the child which, in turn, may increase his altruism toward the child. Men's ties to their children are often mediated by their connection to the child's

mother, with the sexual union (and the accompanying ‘pillow talk’ by which mothers convey information to fathers about the child) playing an important role in fostering the father-child bond (Heimer & Staffen, 1998). This mechanism is relevant even if parents do not cohabit and/or no longer have any romantic connection between them; having an amicable (non-romantic) relationship with the child’s mother is likely to encourage higher levels of fathers’ involvement because fathers who can effectively communicate with the child’s mother will have greater access to information about—and ultimately a greater understanding of—the child.

Third, when fathers live apart from their child, they cannot be sure that the money they contribute is actually being used to benefit the child and, thus, they are likely to contribute fewer resources (Weiss & Willis, 1985). For men who live apart from their child, the problem of monitoring is also related to the quality of the parents’ relationship. If the father trusts the mother and believes that she has the interest of the child at heart, he is likely to contribute more money to the child, even if he is no longer romantically involved with the mother.

Previous research supports the notion that fathers are more likely to be involved with their children if the relationship with the child’s mother, particularly within marriage, is positive and supportive (Belsky, Youngblade, & Rovine, 1991; Gottman, 1998). For unmarried parents, a conflicted relationship between the parents discourages positive father involvement, while an amicable relationship supports healthy father-child interaction (Coley et al., 1998; Danziger & Radin, 1990; Seltzer, 1991). Early results from the Fragile Families Study confirm the importance of the mother-father relationship for father involvement. Fathers who are cohabiting with the child’s mother are much more likely to have been involved during the pregnancy and around the time of the birth (such as by giving money, providing help with chores or transportation, and visiting the mother in the hospital); further, regardless of the couples’

relationship ‘status,’ having a high level of commitment and trust between them is also associated with greater involvement (Carlson et al., 2001).

## PUBLIC POLICY AND FATHER INVOLVEMENT

Assuming that fathers’ participation in children’s lives offers important benefits, public policy should encourage—or at a minimum, not undermine—father involvement. Unfortunately, many of the policies that were designed to help children in low-income families actually discourage fathers from being involved with their children.<sup>13</sup> The problem is due in part to the fact that most of the programs that are in place today were designed for children who had ‘lost’ their father either because of death, divorce or abandonment. Because the parents’ romantic relationship was by definition dissolved in such cases, policymakers were not concerned that the programs they designed might undermine the relationship between the mother and father. On the contrary, the Fragile Families data tell us that many single mothers today are still in a romantic relationship with the father of their child, at least at the time of the child’s birth; this means that policymakers need to reassess the logic behind many of the programs intended to help low-income families. In this section of the paper, we discuss three types of policies affecting father involvement – welfare policy, child support policy, and fatherhood initiatives – and discuss ways to make these policies more ‘family friendly.’<sup>14</sup>

### **Welfare Programs**

The fact that the U.S. relies primarily on means-tested programs to assist low-income families (as compared to most European nations, which utilize mostly universal programs)

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<sup>13</sup> See Cabrera & Evans (2000) for a discussion of issues surrounding welfare reform and father involvement.

<sup>14</sup> See Sigle-Rushton and Garfinkel (in this volume) for a discussion of the economic literature on how welfare and child support are linked to father involvement.

penalizes families that include two parents. The ‘penalty’ occurs because income and asset eligibility tests are not adjusted for family size but are based on total family (or household) income. By this rule, two-parent families are less likely to qualify for benefits than single-parent families simply because there are two parents (at least potentially) contributing income. The major welfare program in the U.S. for aiding single mothers and their children is Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) (formerly Aid to Families with Dependent Children, AFDC). In both of these programs, benefits are reduced by one dollar for each additional dollar of family income. So even if a two-parent family were able to qualify for assistance, the family’s benefit level would be reduced by the amount of income a cohabiting partner (or spouse) contributed. Thus, while single individuals in the general population who choose to cohabit or marry benefit from the economies of scale that come with co-residence, families that receive welfare reap no such benefit. Consequently, there is little economic incentive to have the father around, and there may be a serious disincentive to live with him (and pool household resources).

Another problem with the original AFDC program was that its rules did not allow states to provide assistance to children in two-parent homes unless the second parent was incapacitated. In 1961, Congress amended the law so that families with an unemployed father could qualify for AFDC in what became known as the AFDC—Unemployed Parent (UP) program. Yet, the rules for AFDC-UP have always been more stringent than the rules for single-parent families, requiring previous attachment to the labor force and previous eligibility for unemployment insurance. These rules exclude many low-income parents. With the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996, states were given the option to eliminate the work rules for two-parent families, and as of this writing, 33 states have taken advantage of this option while 17 have maintained the more stringent requirements (State Policy Documentation Project 2001). The work eligibility rules provide additional hurdles

for two-parent families compared to single-parent families. Finally, under the old AFDC program, mothers cohabiting with a man who was *not* the child's father could qualify for the basic AFDC program, while mothers living with the child's father were required to enroll in the AFDC-UP program with its more stringent eligibility requirements (Moffitt, Reville & Winkler, 1995). This distinction between biological and stepfathers provides an additional disincentive for unmarried mothers to maintain a relationship with the biological father.

### *Empirical Evidence on the Effects of Welfare on Father involvement*

There is a long history of concern in the U.S. that cash welfare benefits (now TANF) increase single parenthood, either by encouraging nonmarital births and/or by discouraging marriage. Economic theory (Becker, 1991) tells us that individuals take account of economic incentives in determining whether to marry and/or have children. Thus, providing transfer income to single mothers should increase mothers' ability to bear and rear children alone and reduce their need for marriage. A vast academic literature has investigated this topic, and several 'generations' of findings have yielded somewhat different conclusions about the effects of welfare on family formation. Early research on the Seattle and Denver Income Maintenance Experiments (SIME/DIME) suggested that increases in guaranteed income were associated with greater marital dissolution (Hannan et al., 1977, 1978), but this conclusion was later disputed when the same data were re-analyzed using a different sample and more sophisticated analytic techniques (Cain & Wissoker, 1990). During the 1970s and 1980s, researchers concluded that welfare has no effects on marriage and fertility (Bane & Jargowsky, 1988). More recently, a new consensus has emerged which holds that welfare benefits have small but significant positive effects on nonmarital childbearing (Moffitt, 1998). While the 'marriage penalty' may vary, depending on the combination of parents' earnings, welfare income, and other program benefits

(Primus & Beeson, 2000), most researchers agree with Robert Moffitt when he states that "...the conventional perception of the U.S. welfare system as largely favoring single-parent families over two-parent families and childless couples and individuals is essentially correct" (Moffitt, 1998).

### *What Can Be Done?*

While not everyone would want public policy to explicitly favor legal marriage over other family statuses, most people agree that policy should not discourage marriage and family formation, and that supporting parents who live together is appropriate. Eliminating all categorical distinctions for two-parent families has been suggested as an important first step in 'leveling the playing field' for two-parent families (Garfinkel, 2001; Primus et al., 2000). Also, raising the income test for eligibility for TANF for families with two adults in the household would counteract the bias toward single-parent families inherent in means-tested programs. Finally, it seems reasonable to not discriminate against the biological father as compared to other men with whom the mother may cohabit.

The recent evaluation of the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) provides evidence that easing the rules for two-parent families increases family formation and stability. The MFIP demonstration eliminated the work-history eligibility rules for two-parent families and increased benefits available to two-parent families; these features of the program are credited with significantly reducing divorce among two-parent married families who participated in the program (Knox et al. 2000). At the same time, greater incentives for employment and flexibility in benefits for single-parent families, as well as the changes in rules for two-parent families, increased marriage rates (Knox et al. 2000). These findings support the idea that individuals will respond to financial incentives surrounding marriage and that greater income (through a

combination of earnings and welfare assistance) positively affects entry into and stability within marriage.

Other researchers argue that the best way to encourage marriage and/or cohabitation among unwed parents is to provide supports outside welfare, by which they mean assistance that is less income-tested and more universal (Bernstein & Garfinkel, 1996). Examples of such programs include earnings subsidies, childcare subsidies, and health care subsidies. While the 1996 welfare reform legislation garnered most of the attention of welfare analysts and advocates during the 1990s, the last decade also brought a virtual revolution in the levels of assistance provided *outside* of traditional welfare. Between 1984 and 1999, federal spending on low-income families not on welfare rose more than eight-fold, from \$6 billion to an estimated \$52 billion (Ellwood, 1999). The biggest component of this growth was in the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which now provides a refundable tax credit up to 40 percent of earnings to low-wage workers with children. Although the EITC may discourage marriage in some instances, it is much more ‘marriage friendly’ than welfare, particularly for low-income couples. Indeed, if a mother earns less than \$8,000 per year and her partner earns \$12,000 a year, the couple stands to gain \$3,500 a year if they marry or cohabit.<sup>15</sup>

### **Child Support Enforcement**

Another program that has had a dramatic effect on fragile families is the child support enforcement system. The federal child support enforcement (CSE) program was started in 1975 to ensure that nonresident fathers provided financial support to their children. Federal matching funds were provided to states for establishing paternity, establishing child support awards, and

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<sup>15</sup> The amount of the credit is based on the custodial parent’s income if parents live apart and on parents’ joint income if they are married. For cohabiting couples with a child in common, the benefit is based on the earnings of the parent with the higher earnings (Primus et al., 2000).

collecting child support payments. As initially structured, collections were used to offset welfare expenditures in the AFDC program, and child support paid by fathers of mothers on welfare was to be applied to recover welfare costs (and sometimes to recoup Medicaid payments for the medical costs related to the child's birth); this practice continues today. In 1980, the program was broadened to serve all children eligible for support regardless of income or welfare status, but historically and at the present time, the majority of cases in the federal child support enforcement system involve parents and children connected to the welfare system. From its inception, the child support enforcement system was charged solely with enforcing fathers' financial support of their children, while other aspects of fathers' involvement, including visitation and custody, were (and remain) governed by state laws.

Legislative reforms in the last two decades, most recently PRWORA, have increased the overall effectiveness of the CSE system. Rates of paternity establishment, child support orders in place, and amount of collections have all risen, closing the estimated \$34 billion estimated gap (in 1990) between the amount of child support owed and the amount actually paid (Sorenson, 1995). Yet, although policy has appropriately increased collections from fathers who failed to pay child support (the so-called 'deadbeat dads'), new research suggests that stronger enforcement may be driving a significant sub-group of fathers away from their children (Garfinkel, et al., 1998; Sorenson, 1995; Sorenson & Turner, 1996). For these fathers—typically the fathers of children on welfare—the child support enforcement system is not meeting their needs and may in fact be undermining their involvement with their children. As noted earlier, fathers may disengage from their children if they are not adequately fulfilling the 'provider' role, and child support enforcement may be creating disincentives for fathers to provide for their children.

As noted above, child support payments by fathers of children on welfare are used to reimburse the welfare expenditures of the mother and child. Mothers on welfare must assign their rights to the receipt of child support to the government, and any child support paid by the father goes to repay welfare expenditures and not to increase family income. Historically, states were required to ‘pass through’ the first \$50 per month to mothers, which at least improved the family’s wellbeing slightly. However, this requirement was eliminated with the 1996 welfare reform, and as of December 1998, 30 states and the District of Columbia had entirely eliminated any child support pass-through. This policy (of reimbursing state welfare costs) provides significant disincentives for fathers to pay their obligations, since their children are not economically better off from their payments (Garfinkel, Meyer & McLanahan, 1998). Therefore, in such circumstances the father may avoid paying altogether.

Strong child support enforcement may also reduce fathers’ in-kind contributions to their children. Qualitative research suggests that unmarried parents generally prefer informal support arrangements (Waller & Plotnick, 2001) because the money goes to the child rather than to the state. Moreover, unmarried fathers who are living with their child are already providing support insofar as they are sharing their incomes with their children. The child support enforcement system was developed to meet the needs of children whose fathers were not living with the mother. Yet, the situation for fragile families is vastly different since nearly half of these fathers are co-residing with the mother and child, at least at the time of the child’s birth. For unmarried parents whose relationship has ended, it is reasonable to establish and collect child support obligation from fathers (who are typically the noncustodial parents). For parents whose relationship is more fluid, a formal child support agreement (whereby the father’s contributions go directly to the state) is likely to discourage fathers’ *informal* involvement and may drive the father away. Resources are finite, and low-income fathers can often not afford both to buy

clothes or toys for the child at the same time that they are paying a substantial fraction of their income in child support payments. If the father is forced to pay formally, his in-kind contributions—that are more directly seen by both the child and the mother to benefit the child—will likely diminish. Consequently, the child support enforcement system may be decreasing the total support provided to children because money that would otherwise be used by fathers to improve their children’s wellbeing is being paid instead to the state.<sup>16</sup>

A second way that the current child support enforcement system may discourage fathers’ involvement is that child support orders are often not appropriately linked to fathers’ economic status. Because many states have minimum orders (based on the assumption that the father is working full-time regardless of his actual employment status), low-income fathers may be forced to pay a much higher proportion of their income in child support than middle-income fathers (Sorenson, 1999). This policy affects fathers in fragile families more than it affects other families because the former have lower wages and are much more likely to not work year-round. Finally, child support orders are not routinely adjusted for changes in the father’s income. This can lead fathers to accumulate large debts that, according to the 1986 Bradley amendment, cannot be forgiven or adjusted. Further, failure to pay child support is often treated as a criminal act, so fathers delinquent in child support may be put in jail or prison, which further diminishes their long-term earnings potential (Western, 2000).

### *Empirical Evidence on the Effects of Child Support on Father Involvement*

Economic theory is ambiguous about whether stronger child support enforcement will encourage or discourage father involvement. On the one hand, child support reduces the costs of nonmarital childbearing to women (assuming women actually receive some of the money paid

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<sup>16</sup> Obviously, if a father is living with the child and not paying child support, his income would have to be counted

by fathers). On the other hand, it increases the costs to men. The net effect is an empirical question. The research on this topic indicates that the negative effects of stronger enforcement on men appear to dominate, with strong child support enforcement leading to lower levels of both nonmarital childbearing (Case, 1998; Garfinkel et al. 2000) and divorce (Nixon, 1997). Thus, it appears that the effects of public and private transfers may go in opposite directions, with welfare benefits slightly discouraging the formation of families, and strong child support enforcement, on balance, encouraging families to form or stay together (or couples not to have a child outside of marriage in the first place).

The effects of child support enforcement may be more complicated for low-income families who are receiving—or potentially eligible for—welfare. While child support is increasingly effective, children born outside of marriage are less likely to have a child support established than children born within marriage. In part, this may be due to the fact that (as noted above) unmarried parents prefer informal support arrangements and up until recently the government has largely ignored low-income fathers (Waller et al. 2001). If unmarried parents have an informal agreement between themselves such that he contributes money ‘under the table’ or makes in-kind contributions, any welfare received by the mother is in addition to any support received by the father. Since economic stability is generally associated with marriage and family formation (a so-called ‘income effect’), in this case the additional income from welfare may *encourage* family formation because parents are better able to pool their resources (Mincy & Dupree, 2000).

Qualitative studies of low-income couples show that strict enforcement also increases tension between unmarried parents—the mother may perceive that the father is not doing enough to help her and her child(ren) (not realizing that child support is used to reimburse welfare costs),

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in determining the TANF benefit.

while the father may perceive that the mother is ‘going after him’ (not realizing that she is required to cooperate in establishing paternity as a criterion for receiving welfare). The findings in the qualitative literature are supported by studies that show that stronger child support enforcement is associated with high conflict among low-income couples (Seltzer, McLanahan, & Hanson, 1998).

### *What Can Be Done?*

One solution would be to not require child support orders for fathers who are cohabiting with the mother and child (Garfinkel, 2001). Of course, the income of these fathers would have to be counted in the calculation of the welfare benefit, although hopefully with a higher disregard than is currently allowed (see above). This would provide an incentive for fathers to live with the mother and child.

Another proposal would be to change the rules for the child support enforcement program so that a significant proportion of child support payments (in particular) are disregarded for the purposes of TANF eligibility determination and benefit calculation. This would ensure that private support is received by the mother *in addition to* any public transfers for which she and child would otherwise be eligible. A related suggestion—but distinct from TANF benefit rules *per se*—would be to pass through the full amount of child support paid to the mother, regardless of the family’s welfare status. Thus, fathers’ payments would directly benefit the custodial-parent family instead of being used to offset state welfare spending. Both these changes—changing TANF eligibility/benefits rules and de-linking child support and TANF cost recovery—would promote father involvement (by increasing his incentives to pay) and would thus improve the economic wellbeing of mothers and children.

A third policy reform would be to ensure that the child support rules are responsive to the circumstances of low-income fathers. This means setting orders as a percent of income, ensuring that orders are regularly updated when the father's income changes, and developing ways to help fathers overcome the burden of child support debts.

Finally, because child support orders should be linked to fathers' income *and* should reasonably reflect the actual costs of raising a child, particular supports could be instituted for the children of very low-income fathers. Child support incentive payments—in the form of government contributions to match actual child support payments by very low-income fathers—could augment the meager support that children would otherwise receive in such situations (Primus & Daugirdas, 2000). Also, a publicly-funded minimum assured benefit could be made available to children in limited circumstances when paternity has been established and the custodial parent is fully cooperating with the child enforcement system, yet no child support is being collected (Garfinkel, 1992, 2001; Primus et al., 2000). The incentive payments and assured benefit would ensure that *all* children receive some support, even if their father cannot pay a sufficient amount or is not able to pay at all.

## **Fatherhood Programs**

Most people agree that father involvement is generally positive and that we should be doing more to encourage fathers' involvement with their children.<sup>17</sup> Thus, beyond TANF program rules and child support policies, there is an opportunity for public policy and programs

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<sup>17</sup> One caveat to this concerns the possibility that some fathers may be dangerous or violent, and encouraging their involvement may threaten mothers and/or children. While violence is obviously a very serious problem for those who experience it, data from the Fragile Families Study indicate that only a small minority of unmarried fathers are physically violent toward the mothers (4.8 percent) or have problems due to drug or alcohol use (6.4 percent). Further, about three-quarters of mothers who report that the father is either physically violent or has a substance problem also report that they want the father involved in the child's life (authors' tabulations).

to provide incentives and supports for fathers to be involved with their children, either by improving their earnings capacity or by increasing their skills for—or investment in—parenting.

While the primary mission of the child support enforcement system has been collecting money from nonresidential parents, several demonstration projects linked to child support enforcement were undertaken in the 1980s and 1990s. These programs were explicitly designed to improve fathers' labor market outcomes and/or to strengthen fathers' connections to their children. The primary demonstration in this area was the Parents' Fair Share (PFS) program, which was designed to increase low-income noncustodial parents' earnings and ability to pay child support. The program, which was administered in seven sites around the country, drew its clientele primarily from fathers who were divorced, unemployed, had fallen behind in their child support payments, and were disconnected from their children. Most of the men who participated in the program were ordered to do so in lieu of going to jail; therefore, their enrollment likely reflects their desire to avoid incarceration more than any intrinsic motivation to improve their labor market prospects and family relationships.

Evaluation of the program highlighted the difficulty and complexity of improving labor market outcomes for low-income men and the fact that child support and welfare programs are not equipped to adequately meet the needs of poor fathers (Johnson, Levine, & Doolittle, 1999). Although the PFS program did not increase earnings and employment for participants overall, it was able to increase earnings for men with greater barriers to employment such as low education and limited previous work experience (Martinez & Miller, 2000). Also, the program increased the proportion of fathers who provided any formal child support and slightly increased the average support amount paid by some fathers (Knox & Redcross, 2000). PFS did not, on average, increase the frequency of noncustodial fathers' visits with their children, although some

positive effects were noted in sites with particularly low initial levels of father-child contact (Knox & Redcross, 2000).

More recently, numerous small-scale programs have been developed to serve divorced fathers as well as fathers in fragile families; these programs diverge in their emphases but often intend to improve both fathers' parenting skills and their employment capabilities, and to increase their connection to their children (see Mincy and Pouncy in this volume for an overview of fatherhood programs). In March of 2000, the Department of Health and Human Services approved ten new state demonstration projects to "improve the opportunities of young, unmarried fathers to support their children both financially and emotionally" (Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). These demonstration programs which developed out of the Partners for Fragile Families (PFF) programs, sponsored by the Ford Foundation in the 1990s, focus exclusively on low-income fathers and families. Their stated objective is to encourage 'team parenting' among unwed parents and increase the earnings capacity of low-skilled fathers. These HHS-sponsored demonstrations represent the first national effort to develop programs to better meet the needs of fathers in fragile families.

Based on the early findings from the Fragile Families Study, the new generation of fatherhood programs are likely to make a difference *if* they are targeted on the right men and *if* they are timed correctly. Practitioners who run employment programs for disadvantaged men say that motivation is important in determining whether these men can sustain their participation in these program long enough to reap their benefits. The Fragile Families data suggest that new fathers are likely to be highly motivated and to take advantage of the services that fatherhood programs may provide. Thus, fatherhood programs should start early—at the hospital if possible—and should target men who are still involved with their children and their child's mother. The disappointing results from the Parents' Fair Share program may have been due in

large part to the fact that the intervention occurred too late. The program drew its clientele from men who had *already* fallen behind in their child support obligations, who were no longer involved with the mother, and who had limited contact with their child. Starting at the time of a new birth may provide greater momentum for strengthening fathers' own capabilities and their family attachments, given the optimism unmarried couples have about their future at that time.

Beyond starting early, programs should treat fathers both as individuals (recognizing their personal strengths, limitations and needs) and as part of families (recognizing their familial commitments, responsibilities and supports). Further, programs should be equipped to address multiple needs faced by both mothers and fathers; in particular, programs should assist parents with expanding their labor market skills and capabilities, developing parenting and relationship skills, and overcoming substance abuse or mental health problems. Finally, programs should provide education to both parents about the nature of programs rules and the financial implications of their choices with respect to living arrangements and marital status.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we have described the emergence of a new family form—the *fragile family*—defined as unmarried parents who are raising their child together. Fragile families are the fastest growing family form in the United States today, and they account for about 80 percent of all nonmarital births. Although at birth, unmarried parents have ‘high hopes’ for marriage and/or continued father involvement, the resources of these parents (in terms of human capital and employment stability) are relatively low. Thus, if these families are to meet their goal of raising their child together, they will likely need both public and private support. Insofar as most individuals believe that children would be better off if they were being raised by both biological parents and insofar as most parents in fragile families want to marry, a restructuring of social

policy to strengthen fragile families would appear to have wide bi-partisan support. Indeed, as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a growing move to fund programs that address exactly these aims. But the new fatherhood initiatives do not exist in a vacuum, and their success will depend in large part on how they interact with welfare policy (TANF) as well as child support enforcement policies. Thus, to be successful, all three policies and programs must work together which, at present, is not the case. In this paper, we have discussed some of the recommendations that have been proposed to make welfare and child support policies more ‘family friendly’ so that they would enhance rather than undermine the efforts of fatherhood initiatives. Drawing on the insights from the Fragile Families Study, we also highlight the fact that the birth of a new child represents a ‘magic moment’ in the lives of poor parents which increases motivation and enhances the possibility for real change.

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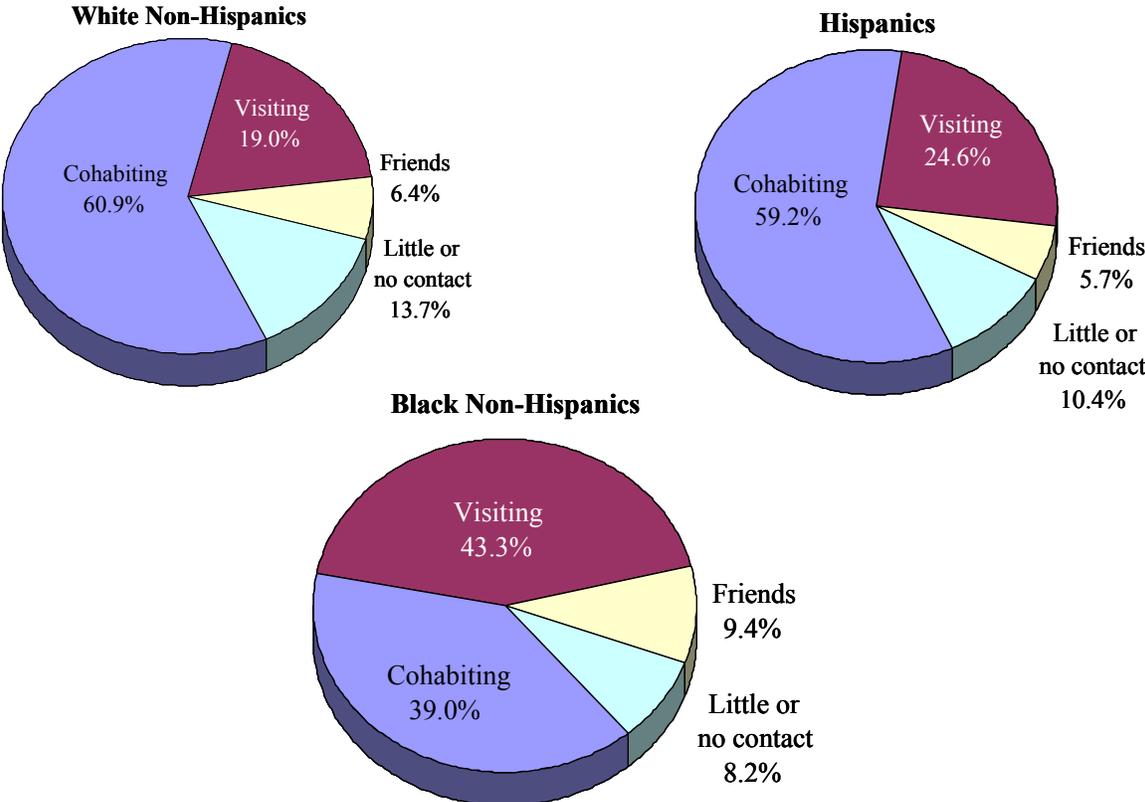
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# Figure 1. Relationship Status by Race/Ethnicity



**Table 1: Parents' Attitudes Towards Marriage and Relationship Quality**

|  | Married | Unmarried |            |          |       |
|--|---------|-----------|------------|----------|-------|
|  |         | Total     | Cohabiting | Visiting | Other |
| <b>Attitudes Towards Marriage</b>                                |         |           |            |          |       |
| <i>Chances of marriage</i>                                       |         |           |            |          |       |
| Mother - pretty good or almost certain                           | NA      | 55.4      | 78.4       | 49.1     | 2.3   |
| Father - pretty good or almost certain                           | NA      | 71.8      | 84.0       | 63.1     | 25.5  |
| <i>Marriage attitudes - marriage is better for children</i>      |         |           |            |          |       |
| Mother agrees or strongly agrees                                 | 84.7    | 66.3      | 69.7       | 63.9     | 61.3  |
| Father agrees or strongly agrees                                 | 90.9    | 78.4      | 79.2       | 77.3     | 77.0  |
| <i>Gender Attitudes</i>  |         |           |            |          |       |
| Men cannot be trusted to be faithful                             | 10.7    | 24.8      | 19.7       | 26.6     | 35.3  |
| Women cannot be trusted to be faithful                           | 5.6     | 13.7      | 12.0       | 15.7     | 17.4  |
| <b>Relationship Quality</b>                                      |         |           |            |          |       |
| <i>Potentially exploitative relationships (mothers' reports)</i> |         |           |            |          |       |
| Father is sometimes/often violent                                | 2.0     | 4.8       | 3.1        | 3.7      | 11.8  |
| Father often insults or criticizes                               | 1.8     | 4.3       | 2.6        | 3.4      | 11.0  |
| <i>Father's Supportiveness of Mother (mothers' reports)</i>      |         |           |            |          |       |
| Father often expresses affection or love                         | 85.6    | 72.2      | 82.9       | 71.3     | 42.9  |
| Father often encourages mother                                   | 80.9    | 67.6      | 79.3       | 68.0     | 32.8  |
| <i>Sample size (n)</i>   | 1,188   | 3,704     | 1,782      | 1,271    | 651   |

**Table 2. Unmarried Fathers' Relationship with Child (mothers' reports)**

|  | Total | Cohabiting | Visiting | Other |
|--|-------|------------|----------|-------|
| Father contributed money during pregnancy  | 81.6  | 95.7       | 84.3     | 35.7  |
| Father visited mother and baby in hospital | 75.9  | 93.9       | 72.1     | 33.1  |
| Baby will have father's last name          | 78.4  | 92.7       | 78.3     | 39.0  |
| Father name will be on birth certificate   | 85.2  | 96.2       | 87.3     | 50.6  |
| Father plans to help raise child           | 91.2  | 99.7       | 96.0     | 55.9  |
| Mother wants father involved               | 93.4  | 99.9       | 97.2     | 66.5  |
| <i>Sample size (n)</i>                     | 3,704 | 1,782      | 1,271    | 651   |

**Table 3. Unmarried Parents' Capabilities**

|                                | Married  | Unmarried |            |          |          |
|--------------------------------|----------|-----------|------------|----------|----------|
|                                |          | Total     | Cohabiting | Visiting | Other    |
| <i>Mothers' education</i>      |          |           |            |          |          |
| Less than high school          | 16.6     | 40.5      | 39.9       | 40.8     | 42.1     |
| High school or the equivalent  | 20.0     | 33.5      | 33.5       | 34.2     | 32.0     |
| Some college                   | 28.9     | 22.9      | 23.3       | 22.1     | 22.7     |
| Bachelor's degree or higher    | 34.6     | 3.1       | 3.3        | 2.8      | 3.2      |
| <i>Fathers' education</i>      |          |           |            |          |          |
| Less than high school          | 16.7     | 35.7      | 36.6       | 35.0     | 34.4     |
| High school or the equivalent  | 24.3     | 41.1      | 38.8       | 44.8     | 40.5     |
| Some college                   | 27.8     | 19.5      | 20.6       | 18.0     | 19.2     |
| Bachelor's degree or higher    | 31.2     | 3.7       | 4.0        | 2.2      | 5.9      |
| <i>Parents' Employment</i>     |          |           |            |          |          |
| Father worked in last week     | 90.9     | 74.9      | 80.4       | 68.7     | 69.2     |
| Father worked in last year     | 98.2     | 95.1      | 96.5       | 94.0     | 91.9     |
| Mother worked in last year     | 75.0     | 77.2      | 78.3       | 74.4     | 79.4     |
| Mother received welfare        | 11.7     | 43.6      | 39.9       | 47.6     | 45.8     |
| <i>Earnings</i>                |          |           |            |          |          |
| Mothers' predicted hourly wage | \$14.21  | \$8.47    | \$8.55     | \$8.43   | \$8.35   |
| Fathers' predicted hourly wage | \$17.56  | \$10.69   | \$10.79    | \$10.44  | \$11.01  |
| Predicted couple earnings      | \$49,334 | \$29,860  | \$30,132   | \$29,311 | \$30,374 |
| <i>Sample size (n)</i>         | 1,188    | 3,704     | 1,782      | 1,271    | 651      |