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FATHER RESIDENCE AND ADOLESCENT PROBLEM BEHAVIOR: ARE YOUTH ALWAYS BETTER OFF IN TWO-PARENT FAMIIES?

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Abstract

This study uses data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to examine combinations of father residence and closeness which have received minimal examination but involve significant numbers of children. Our findings lead to a number of conclusions. First, adolescents who are close to their nonresident fathers report higher self-esteem, less delinquency, and fewer depressive symptoms than adolescents who live with a father with whom they are not close. Second, adolescents living with a father with whom they are not close have better grades, less violence and less substance use than those having a nonresident father who is not close. At the same time, however, not being close to a resident father is associated with lower self-esteem compared to having a nonresident father who is not close. Third, adolescents do best of all when they have close ties to resident fathers. A central conclusion of this study is that it is important to consider the quality of father-child relations among those who have a resident father when assessing the impact of nonresident fathers on their children.

Researchers and policy makers often target parent co-residence as the key to healthy families. But co-residence is not the only indicator that matters for child wellbeing, especially given the frequency of parental union formation and the heterogeneous structure of intact families. We suggest that adding father-child closeness to studies of residential status adds to our understanding of the link between these variables and adolescent problem behavior. Closeness is protective and beneficial to children and can be cultivated regardless to residential status. We regard it as a timely and important direction for family research.

Approximately 50% of all children live in a home without their biological father at some point during their youth (Bianchi, 1990; Bumpass, 1984). Research consistently suggests that compared to children living with two biological parents, those with nonresident fathers are at greater risk of poor performance in school, delinquency, substance abuse, depression, and low self-esteem among other factors (Amato, 2000; Antecol & Bedard, 2007). The loss of income associated with changing from a two-parent to a one-parent family explains a portion of the

differences in offspring well-being (McLanahan & Sandefur 1994; Thomson, Hanson, & McLanahan, 1994), as do family processes such as mothers' involvement in their children's lives (Hetherington, 1993). More recent research also suggests that the amount of father closeness accounts for differences in the well-being of children in one and two parent households (Carlson, 2006). That is, closeness of the father-child bond is associated with better outcomes for children (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999), and children are closer to their fathers, on average, in father resident families, which helps to account for some of the differences in child outcomes between one and two parent households.

But are children always better off in two parent families than they are in nonresident father families? We examine two situations not previously considered by prior research. First, not all children in two parent families are close to their fathers. Indeed, up to one-fifth (based on results from the current study) of adolescents in two biological parent families are not close to their fathers. It is not clear how these adolescents compare to offspring that don't live with their biological fathers. Do adolescents who are not close to their resident fathers do better (the same, or worse) than those with nonresident fathers? Second, some children are very close to their nonresident fathers (over two-fifths of the adolescents in nonresident father families in the current study). Do these offspring ever do as well as those who are close to resident fathers? It is the answers to these two questions that is the primary focus of this study. This study employs nationally representative data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), and focuses on several dimensions of problem behavior including offspring poor performance in school, delinquency, violence, substance abuse, depression, and low self-esteem.

The Importance of Offspring Closeness to Resident and Nonresident Fathers

Research indicates that the closeness of the father-child bond is a particularly salient dimension of the father-child relationship that is associated with better outcomes for children in both two biological parent families and nonresident father families (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). Emotionally close relationships are important for child well-being because fathers who have such bonds with their children can be more effective in monitoring, communicating with, and teaching children (Amato, 1998). The social capital (Coleman, 1988, 1990) that is inherent in the father-child relationship is more likely to be realized when relationships are close (King, Harris, & Heard, 2004). Furthermore, a close relationship is likely to facilitate the transfer of fathers' financial resources to children (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995; Nord & Zill, 1996).

Overall, nonresident fathers appear to be less likely than resident fathers to transmit the economic, parental, and community resources associated with healthy child development than resident fathers. Not living in the same household impedes fathers' ability to maintain affective bonds with their children and to monitor their children's everyday activities. In addition, nonresident fathers, compared to resident fathers, are more likely to engage in leisure activities such as going to the movies and less likely engage in authoritative parenting practices such as talking about problems or setting limits which promote well-being (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). Although these differences inform us about overall trends, they do not tell us about nonresident fathers who are closer to their children than resident fathers, or resident and nonresident fathers who are similarly close.

One goal of this study is to assess whether adolescents who are not close to their resident fathers do better, the same, or worse than adolescents with nonresident fathers with respect to exhibiting problem behavior. It should be noted that the answer to this question may further depend on whether the nonresident father-child bond is close or not.

On the one hand, even if adolescents are not close to their resident fathers, they may still benefit from the resources that their fathers may provide, resources that even nonresident fathers who are close to their children have difficulty providing. This possibility suggests that adolescents who are not close to their resident fathers will have less problem behavior compared with both adolescents who are close to their nonresident fathers and adolescents who are not close to their nonresident fathers.

On the other hand, the importance of a close father-child bond for child well-being may mean that residence is less consequential and that adolescents will benefit more from a close bond to a nonresident father than a weak bond to a resident father. This possibility suggests that adolescents who are close to their nonresident fathers will exhibit less problem behavior than adolescents who are not close to their resident fathers. It is also possible that adolescents who are not close to a nonresident father will exhibit less problem behavior than adolescents who are not close to their resident fathers if having to deal with an uncaring resident father on a daily basis creates more problems or stress than occasional encounters with a distant nonresident father.

A final possibility is that the disadvantages that result from a poor father-child relationship in two parent families are roughly equivalent in their consequences for child well-being as the disadvantages that result from having a nonresident father even if the bond to the nonresident father is close. This possibility suggests that adolescents who are not close to their resident biological fathers will exhibit similar levels of problem behavior as adolescents who are close to their nonresident fathers, and maybe even similar to adolescents who are not close to their nonresident fathers.

The second goal of this study is to assess whether adolescents who are close to their nonresident fathers ever do as well as those who are close to their resident fathers. There is evidence that following divorce a minority of adolescents maintain close ties with their father (Scott, Booth, King, & Johnson, 2007). In such cases it is possible that strong affection and frequent interaction may overcome the problems associated with father absence from the child's residence to the point that adolescents who have close relationships to nonresident fathers do not exhibit higher levels of problem behavior than adolescents with close relationships to resident fathers. In contrast, the double advantage of having a resident biological father and a close relationship with him may result in these adolescents doing best of all.

Other Comparisons of Father Residence and Closeness

Our primary research questions lead us to focus on three key comparisons between adolescents in one of four groups based on father residence (resident, not resident) and father closeness (close, not close): (1) nonresident father-close vs. resident father-not close, (2) nonresident father-not close vs. resident father-not close, and (3) nonresident father-close vs. resident father-close. Three other comparisons are possible: (1) resident father-close vs. resident father-not close, (2) nonresident father-close vs. nonresident father-not close, and (3) resident father-close vs. nonresident father-not close. These comparisons are of less interest to us because they have been explored in detail in other research (e.g., King, 2006; King & Sobolewski, 2006; Lamb, 1997). We test all group differences in our models, however, to replicate and confirm prior work. We expect to find that: (a) adolescents who are close to resident fathers will manifest fewer problems than adolescents who are not close to resident fathers, (b) adolescents who are close to nonresident fathers will manifest fewer problems than those not close to nonresident fathers, and (c) adolescents who are close to resident fathers will manifest fewer problems than those not close to nonresident fathers. All of these expectations (and prior findings) are consistent with a social capital framework that predicts better outcomes for children within

both two biological parent families and nonresident father families when the father-child relationship is close (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999: Marsiglio et al., 2000).

Additional Factors That May Influence Father Closeness-Offspring Problem Behavior Comparisons

Prior research indicates that we should control for offspring's age, gender, race/ethnicity, parents' education, household income, number of children in the household, and mother's closeness. Studies suggest that father involvement tends to decline with offspring's age. Adolescents gain autonomy, distance themselves from parents, and spend more time with peers (Furstenberg, 2000). Problem behaviors and lower levels of psychological well-being also tend to increase during late adolescence, suggesting that younger and older offspring may have different levels of well-being (Kann et al., 2000).

There are mixed findings on whether or not father involvement differs by offspring's gender. Research on two-parent families suggests that resident fathers are closer to sons than daughters (Harris & Morgan, 1991). Research findings for nonresident fathers are less clear. Some studies find no difference between sons and daughters (e.g., Cooksey & Craig, 1998) while others suggest that sons are favored (Manning & Smock, 1999; King, Harris & Heard, 2004). Also, studies consistently reveal that females are more likely to experience internalizing problems and males are more likely to exhibit externalizing problems, making gender an important variable to take into account when assessing outcomes such as depression and delinquency (Avison & McAlpine, 1992; Gore, Aseltine, & Colten, 1992).

Father involvement also varies across racial and ethnic groups (King, Harris, & Heard, 2004), as do levels of behavioral adjustment (McLeod & Owens, 2004) and academic achievement (Gamoran, 2001). However, inconsistent effects of race and ethnicity on father-child relationships are reported in the literature. For example, Hofferth (2003) shows that Black resident fathers may be less close to their children, but monitor them more than White or Hispanic fathers. Findings from Cooksey and Fondell (1996) suggest that Black fathers may spend less time with children compared to White fathers, but engage in more direct activities with their children. For nonresident father families, Black adolescents report being closer to their nonresident fathers than White adolescents (King, Harris & Heard, 2004) and some studies find that Black fathers have more contact with their nonresident children than White fathers (King, 1994; Seltzer, 1991), but others find no differences (Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). Less is known about Hispanic nonresident fathers, but there is some evidence that involvement is lowest for this group of nonresident fathers (King, 1994; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988).

Father's and mother's education is also an important control because it tends to be higher in two-parent than in single parent families (Amato & Booth, 1997), and is associated with greater father involvement (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996; King, Harris, & Heard, 2004). Parents' education has a consistent and close association with a number of child outcomes including grades (Amato & Booth, 1997). In addition, well-educated parents provide children with skills and information that help them cope with stressful circumstances (Ross & Huber, 1985) and increase their sense of control (Ross & Wu, 1995), both of which increase offspring well-being. As noted above, income accounts for a portion of the difference between father absence and problem behavior (McLanahan & Sandefur 1994; Thomson, Hanson, & McLanahan 1994), and will also be included as a control variable.

Marsiglio (1991) suggests that when the number of children exceeds two, father investments become diluted. Also, there is a line of research that suggests the number of siblings is not in itself a causal factor, but reflects environmental and genetic influences (Guo & VanWey,

1999). Because of its consistent link with a variety of dependent variables of interest, we include the number of children in the adolescent's household as a control variable in our analyses.

Mother closeness needs to be taken into account for three reasons. First, McLanahan & Sandefur (1994) find that differences in mother's involvement, supervision, and aspirations accounts for part of the difference between intact and father absent families with respect to offspring problem behavior. That is, mother closeness decreases the negative impact of residing in a single parent home on problem behavior. Second, mother closeness has also been shown to be instrumental in maintaining close pre-divorce father-offspring relationships long after the divorce (Scott, Booth, King, & Johnson, 2007). Third, studies suggest that mothers are more likely to perceive a deficit in parental warmth following divorce or separation compared to fathers and try to compensate for it in their role as the primary parent (Seltzer, 1994).

METHOD

Data

Data from adolescents residing with two biological parents and those in nonresident father homes from the first wave of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) are used to examine links between offspring closeness to nonresident and resident fathers and problem behavior. Add Health is a survey of high school and middle school students in the United States. The initial sample consists of respondents interviewed in 1994–1995 and obtained from a stratified random sample of all U.S. high schools. Approximately 90,000 students filled out in-school self-administered questionnaires. A sub-sample of about 20,000 adolescents consisting of a core sample from each cluster of schools plus selected over-samples was drawn from the school sample for an in-home portion of the survey. Face-to-face interviews were used to collect information from respondents and a parent or parent-figure (usually the resident mother) in the in-home stage of the survey.

Many subpopulations were over-sampled, including Blacks from well-educated families, Chinese, Cuban and Puerto Rican adolescents. When appropriate sample weights are used, these data are a nationally representative sample of adolescents in grades seven through twelve. See Bearman, Jones and Udry (1997) for a more detailed description of the data collection process.

To compare adolescents in nonresident and resident father families, we selected youth based on household composition. Using a combination of the household roster and mothers' reports of her current relationship status, we analyzed data from respondents ages 18 and under with valid sample weights that were living with either two biological parents or a biological mother (and had a living nonresident biological father). The biological mother only family subgroup includes mothers who were single, cohabiting or remarried. The final sample consisted of 9,686 resident father families and 4,724 nonresident father families.

Outcome variables

The six measures of well-being include two positive attributes (school grades and self-esteem) and four negative characteristics (delinquency, violence, substance use, and depression). All outcomes are based on adolescent reports from Wave 1. To facilitate comparisons between the outcome variables in the regression models, z-scores were created so that each variable has a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one.

The measure of *grades* is based on questions that ask adolescents to report their grades in English, math, social studies, and science for the most recent grading period. Responses are scored (1) = *D or lower*, (2) = *C*, (3) = *B*, and (4) = *A*. The mean of the four grades (α =.75) constitutes our measure of academic achievement. *Self-esteem* is a six-item (α =.85) scale that

includes items such as feelings of pride in one's accomplishments, feeling socially accepted, and having good qualities. Items on the self-esteem scale were scored where (1) = *disagree or strongly disagree* to (4) = *strongly agree* to reflect high self-esteem.

Delinquency consists of 10 items (α =.78) that tap the frequency of such behaviors as stealing, lying to parents about whereabouts, painting graffiti, damaging public property, taking a car without permission, and acting rowdy in public in the past 12 months. Response categories range from (0) = *never* to (2) = *three or more times*. The delinquency scale was logged to minimize skewness. *Violence* consists of eight items (α =.82) referring to fighting (0 = *never*, to 2 = *three or more times*) and using weapons (0 = *never*, to 2 = *more than once*) in the past 12 months.

Substance Use is a six-item scale (α =.85) that taps tobacco, alcohol (getting drunk, binge drinking and drinking daily), and marijuana use. For the three alcohol items, respondents reported frequency of use over the last 12 months (0 = *never;* 1 = *one or more times*), how many times they had five or more drinks in a row when they drank, and if they had been drunk more than once or twice in the past year. For tobacco and marijuana use, questions covered the last 30 days, and measured whether or not respondents smoked cigarettes more than once a week on average, smoked more than one cigarette at a time when they did smoke, and had ever smoked marijuana. A scale was created by taking the mean of the six items. Analyses using individual measures of tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use were also tested, and yielded the same results as the overall scale of substance use.

Depressive Symptoms is a seven-item scale (α =.83) that represents the mean of items such as feeling lonely, feeling sad, and being unable to shake off the blues. Response categories for depressive symptoms ranged from (0) = *never or rarely* to (2) = *a lot or most of the time.*

Independent variables

Father residence and closeness were combined to create four dummy variables as follows: Father closeness is assessed by the question; "How close do you feel to your biological father?" Response categories are (1) = *not at all,* (2) *very little,* (3) *somewhat,* (4) *quite a bit,* and (5) *extremely close*. Those reporting quite a bit and extremely close were designated as close. The remaining three categories were coded as not close. The four dummy variables are resident father-close, resident father-not close, nonresident father-close, and nonresident father-not close.

Considerable thought and consultation went into the decision to divide the closeness variable as we did. We think that face validity justifies that categorization. "Extremely close" is clearly in the close category. "Quite a bit" represents the feeling that the relationship is generally close with a rough spot or two. "Somewhat close" suggests systematic problems in the relationship as does "very little" and "not at all." Although there may be ways to subdivide the lowest three categories, the number of cases in those three responses was not sufficient to create a third category.

We use a measure of father-offspring relationship quality rather than involvement because research has shown that measures of activities (attending events, helping with school work) are less comparable for resident and nonresident fathers because fathers' non residence status precludes spontaneous activities or activities that are done on a daily basis (Furstenberg and Nord, 1985; Stewart, 2003). Furthermore, the father-offspring bond is a particularly salient dimension of parent-child relationships that is associated with better outcomes for children (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999).

Control variables

Mother-offspring closeness was obtained though a question worded the same way as the father's measure of closeness. Analyses were conducted using both the five category measure of mother-offspring closeness and a dichotomous variable that collapsed the five categories into low and high levels of closeness. Results did not differ for the two variables. The final models represent the results using the five category variable for mother-offspring closeness. *Parental education* is measured using adolescents' reports of how far their mother and father went in school (1) = *eighth grade or less* to (8) = *professional training beyond a four-year college or university. Household income* is an estimate of total household income and comes from the parent interview. The measure was logged to minimize skewness. The total *number of children under the age of 18* in the household is a continuous measure calculated using information on the age of each household member provided in the household roster. Offspring's *age* is a continuous variable that ranges from a minimum of 12 and to a maximum of 18. *Gender* is a dichotomous variable with females coded as 1, and males 0. We created four *race/ethnicity* dummy variables consisting of those who were non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, and Other. White was the omitted category in the analyses.

Missing data

Missing data were rare (5 percent of less) for most of the variables in the analysis. The one exception was for household income, which had less that 10 percent missing. The estimation maximization algorithm in SPSS 14.0 was used to impute missing values for all independent variables. This process produces more reliable estimates than mean substitution of list wise deletion when up to 50 percent of the cases are missing (Acock, 2005; Allison, 2001). Descriptive statistics for all variables used in the analyses are presented in Table 1.

Analytic Strategy

Ordinary least squares regression was used for all analyses. Initially, the father residence-closeness dummy variables were entered with resident father-close as the reference category, along with all control variables. To estimate differences between the four categories of residence-closeness categories, we substituted the reference categories in turn and re-ran the equations. The results of the analysis for each dimension of adolescent well-being are shown in Table 2. At the bottom of the columns is a summary of the differences between all of the residence-closeness categories that were statistically significant at $p < .05$. As a final step in the analyses, we tested models that included interaction terms between father-child closeness and fathers' residential status in place of the residence-closeness dummy variables, with controls. These models provide an alternative way of examining the relationships between father residence, father-offspring closeness, and adolescent well-being. The interaction models allow for a graphic presentation of these relationships, and have the benefit of examining closeness on the five point scale rather than as a dichotomy. Significant results from these analyses are presented in Figure 1.

Analyses were conducted using the overall sample weight to correct for the differential probabilities of sample selection resulting from factors such as the over sampling of minority groups. The survey data commands (SVY) in STATA (Stata Corp., 2005) were used to adjust the standard errors of the model estimates for the weighted, clustered, and stratified design of Add Health (Chantala & Tabor, 1999).

RESULTS

The differences between adolescents in the resident and nonresident father samples in terms of background characteristics are consistent with our expectations (Table 1). Those in the nonresident father sample report more problem behavior in every category. In addition, father-

offspring closeness is lower in nonresident father families. More than half (58%) of the adolescents in nonresident father families report not being close to their fathers, although a significant number of adolescents in two biological parent families (16%) also report not being close to their fathers. Those in the nonresident father sample were more likely to be female, have parents with lower levels of education and income, report slightly higher levels of mother closeness, have fewer siblings, and differ in their racial/ethnic composition.

How do offspring who are close to their nonresident fathers compare to those who are not close to their resident fathers?

Adolescents with close nonresident fathers (NC; see Table 2) have higher self-esteem, report less delinquency, and have fewer depressive symptoms than those with resident fathers with whom they are not close (RN). Thus, for three out of the six problem behaviors, offspring benefit from having a close relationship with their nonresident father compared to offspring residing with a distant resident father. There was no difference between the two groups with respect to school grades, being involved in violent activities, or substance use.

Are offspring who are not close to their nonresident fathers better or worse off than those residing with a father who is not close?

Living with a father with whom one is not close (RN) has several advantages over having a nonresident father who is not close (NN), namely that the former get better grades, are less violent and are less likely to be involved in substance use. Also, findings indicate that the disadvantage of living with a father with whom they are not close is that offspring have lower self-esteem.

Do offspring who are close to their nonresident fathers ever do as well as those who are close to resident fathers?

Offspring close to their nonresident fathers (NC) do not do as well as those close to resident fathers (RC). For none of the six problem behaviors were those close to nonresident father equal to or better than those close to resident fathers.

In summary, for several forms of problem behavior having a close relationship with a nonresident father is superior to having a poor relationship with a resident father. However, having a close relationship with a nonresident father is never equal to or better than having a close relationship with a resident father. Having continuous access to and interaction with a resident father with whom they are close trumps any other resident-closeness combination. However, a distant resident father has both advantages and disadvantages compared to having a nonresident father who is not close.

Other Comparisons of Father Residence and Closeness

Findings regarding the remaining comparisons are consistent with expectations and confirm prior work. It is evident from Table 2 that across all outcomes: (a) adolescents who are close to resident fathers have fewer problems than adolescents who are not close to resident fathers (RC vs. RN), (b) adolescents who are close to nonresident fathers have fewer problems than those not close to nonresident fathers (NC vs. NN), and (c) adolescents who are close to resident fathers have fewer problems than those not close to nonresident fathers (RC vs. NN).

Residence as a Moderating Variable

To obtain a graphic glimpse of the way in which residence moderated the links between father-offspring closeness and offspring well-being we created interaction terms (residence X closeness) and added them to the equation for each dependent variable. We used the five category version of the father-offspring closeness variable to create the interaction terms. The

interaction models include all control variables. All of the interaction models, except for the violence model, were statistically significant ($p <= .001$). The results are shown in Figure 1, and they are consistent with the main findings in Table 2. In addition, these results suggest that for grades, self-esteem, and delinquency, father closeness among nonresident father families reduces the association between father absence and problem behavior to some extent, but it is among resident father families where closeness has the strongest impact on reducing problem behaviors. For depression and substance use, offspring with resident fathers start off lower than nonresident fathers, but the slope for nonresident youth is steeper. For these two outcomes, nonresident father closeness appears to be especially powerful in reducing problem behavior.

Replication of the Analysis Using Longitudinal Data

Measuring independent and dependent variables at the same time increases the chances of undetected reverse causality. That is high self esteem, for example, may cause high father–child closeness. To check this possibility we reran the analysis using wave 1 measures of the independent variables and wave 2 as the source of dependent variables. Despite the fact that the sample was smaller and not as representative of the population (the seniors were not interviewed in wave 2), the results of the overtime analysis were nearly identical to what we found in our cross section analysis. This fact increases confidence that the direction of effects is in the way our findings suggest.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The link between father residence and offspring well-being has been studied extensively. There is near uniform agreement that offspring who grow up in two biological parent families have fewer behavioral problems (e.g., delinquency, violence, substance use, depressive symptoms), more self-esteem and better grades than children with absent fathers. Our results suggest that one reason children in two biological parent families do better on average is that a greater proportion of them enjoy close ties to their fathers. When this close tie is lacking, however, adolescents in two biological parent families often do not do as well as (or any better than) adolescents with nonresident fathers, especially in comparison to adolescents who are close to their nonresident fathers. Thus youth are not always better off in two parent families.

We find that adolescents who are close to their nonresident fathers report higher self-esteem, less delinquency, and fewer depressive symptoms than adolescents who live with a father with whom they are not close. It appears that adolescents benefit more from a close bond to a nonresident father than a weak bond to a resident father. Although not living in the same household makes it more difficult for nonresident fathers to transmit resources to their children, nonresident fathers who are able to maintain close ties to their children appear to be more effective in supporting their children's well-being than resident fathers with poor ties to their children. We also find that adolescents living with a father with whom they are not close have better grades, less violence and less substance use than those having a nonresident father who is not close. At the same time, however, not being close to a resident father is associated with lower self-esteem compared to having a nonresident father who is not close. We suspect that the benefits of having a not close resident father may be achieved through harsh methods of control that interferes with the development of self-esteem. Some might argue that higher grades, and lower violence and substance use may constitute more substantial benefits than the loss of self esteem. We would contend that the former are short term benefits accrued over a limited period of time during the child's development and that self esteem is a integral part of personality that carries benefits throughout the lifespan.

Although we find evidence that adolescents benefit from close ties to nonresident fathers, it is also clear from our findings that youth do best of all when they have close ties to resident fathers. Across all 6 outcomes, youth with a close nonresident father never did as well as those

who are close to their resident fathers. Adolescents close to resident fathers enjoy both high levels of social capital and are in families where that capital is more easily realized. It does not appear that strong affection alone can overcome the problems associated with father absence from the child's residence.

When we treat residence as a moderator of the link between father-offspring closeness and behavior problems, we find that the nature of the link differs by type of problem behavior. For grades, self-esteem, and delinquency it is clear that closeness among resident father families is a more powerful influence than closeness among nonresident father families. However, for depression and substance abuse, closeness among nonresident fathers had a stronger influence than closeness among resident fathers, although offspring with resident fathers had overall lower levels of depression and substance use. Other studies support the idea that more depressed individuals benefit more from positive events (e.g., marriage) than those who are less depressed (Frech & Williams, 2007). Perhaps closeness with a nonresident father may be such an event. Residence did not moderate the link between closeness and violence. Closeness to fathers reduces violence similarly in resident father families and nonresident father families.

The study would have benefited from a number of things. It would be desirable to be able to include pre-adolescent youth in the study to see if the same or other factors were at work. Brown's (2004) study suggests that the father absence-problem behavior link is stronger for 12–17 year olds than it is for those 6–11. The study would have benefited from longitudinal data so that we could monitor the impact of father absence from the time it began for offspring at different stages of cognitive, physical and social development, and even into adulthood. Longitudinal data would also allow consideration of reciprocal patterns of influence between fathers and adolescents. Although close father-child ties may reduce adolescent problem behavior, problematic behavior on the part of adolescents may also negatively influence the closeness of father-child ties (Hawkins, Amato, & King, 2007). It would be advantageous to include multiple dimensions of the father-child relationship rather than a single item to assess parent-child relationship quality. However, the father-offspring closeness item used here has been found to predict child outcomes in other studies (King, 2006; Manning and Lamb, 2003).

There is an extensive body of research indicating that growing up in a home without a biological father is associated with a wide range of behavior problems among offspring. We advanced this body of research by simultaneously taking into account the quality of father-child relationships for resident as well as nonresident fathers. What is clear is that a warm relationship with a nonresident father is sometimes superior to living with a distant resident father. What is also clear is that poor quality relationships with resident fathers are sometimes superior to having a poor relationship with a nonresident father, although there appear to be some costs. Finally, a close father in residence is nearly always superior to having a nonresident father. A central conclusion of this study is that it is important to incorporate the quality of father-child relations among those who have a resident father when assessing the impact of nonresident fathers on their children.

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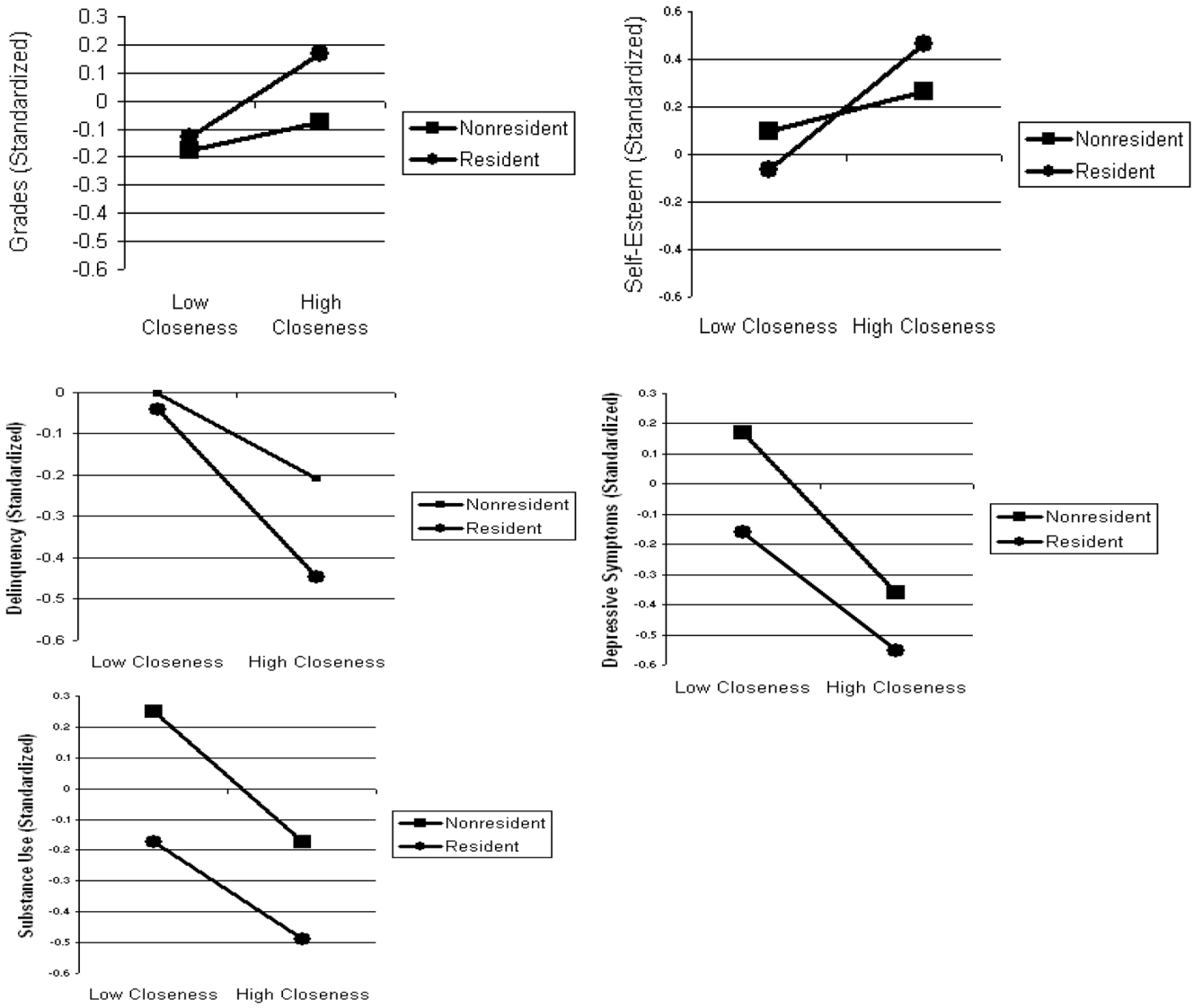

Figure 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for All Variables for Total Sample and by Father Residence Status (% or M).

	Total Sample	Resident Father	Nonresident Father	F^a
Grades	2.85	2.93	2.67	174.86***
Self-esteem	3.13	3.15	3.10	13.81***
Delinquency	.09	.09	.10	27.18***
Violence	.19	.17	.24	85.62***
Substance use	.19	.17	.23	44.59***
Depression	.35	.32	.42	58.61***
Father-offspring closeness	3.95	4.36	3.01	1441.59***
Father resident	68%	---	---	---
Father residence/closeness				1198.70***
Resident father-close	57%	84%	---	---
Resident father-not close	11%	16%	---	---
Nonresident father-close	12%	---	42%	---
Nonresident father-not close	19%	---	58%	---
Logged household income	1.54	1.61	1.40	260.43***
Mother-offspring closeness	4.56	4.54	4.58	4.17*
Mother's education	4.86	4.91	4.75	7.14**
Father's education	4.86	5.01	4.52	67.04***
Number of children	2.81	2.83	2.74	8.61**
Offspring's age	15.80	15.80	15.81	.01
Female	50%	48%	52%	9.24**
Race/ethnicity				46.83***
White	68%	72%	60%	
Black	14%	9%	25%	
Hispanic	11%	12%	11%	
Other	7%	8%	5%	

Note:All values are weighted. Unweighted N = 14410 for full sample. Unweighted N = 9686 for resident father sample. Unweighted N =4724 for nonresident father sample.

[a]Design-based F for differences between the resident father and nonresident father samples.

*p <.05.

**p <.01.

***p <.001.

Table 2

Regression results comparing levels of offspring well-being between groups of offspring based on father's residential status and father-offspring closeness (unstandardized OLS regression coefficients, weighted).

	Grades	Self-esteem	Delinquency
Resident father-close (RC)	---	---	---
Resident father-not close (RN)	−.21***a	−.38***a	.30***a
Nonresident father-close (NC)	−.19***a	−.11**b	.17***b
Nonresident father-not close (NN)	−.32***b	−.25***c	.28***a
Age	−.02	−.03***	.01
Female	.32***	−.23***	−.24***
Black[a]	−.25***	.26***	−.10**
Hispanic[a]	−.11*	−.06	.12**
Other[a]	.09	−.18***	.08
Father's education	.07***	.01	.01
Mother's education	.07***	.02*	.00
Household income	.14**	.03*	.07
Number of kids in household	−.00	−.01	−.01
Mother-offspring closeness	.07***	.33***	−.24***
Differences[b]	NN < NC = RN < RC	RN < NN < NC < RC	RN = NN > NC > RC
(*n*)	14005	14394	14330
	Violence	Substance use	Depressive symptoms
Resident father-close (RC)	---	---	---
Resident father-not close (RN)	.19***a	.27***a	.35***a
Nonresident father-close (NC)	.17***a	.28***a	.14***b
Nonresident father-not close (NN)	.28***b	.36***b	.35***a
Age	−.03***	.16***	.06***
Female	−.56***	−.12***	.27***
Black[a]	.28***	−.46***	.12**
Hispanic[a]	.15*	−.29***	.13**
Other[a]	.10*	−.25***	.20***
Father's education	−.04***	−.01	−.04***
Mother's education	−.03**	−.01	−.03**
Household income	−.12**	.08*	.04
Number of kids in household	.01	−.04***	.01
Mother-offspring closeness	−.09***	−.14***	−.20***
Differences[b]	NN > NC = RN > RC	NN > NC = RN > RC	RN = NN > NC > RC

	Grades	Self-esteem	Delinquency
(*n*)	14335	14410	14404

Note: For each residence-closeness group, coefficients within a column that do not share subscripts differ at p <.05.

[a] Reference category = White.

[b] Significant differences at p <.05 between groups on well-being are summarized. An equal sign represents no significant difference between groups.

* *p* <.05.

** *p* <.01.

*** *p* <.001.