



# The Effects of Father Involvement: An Updated Research Summary of the Evidence

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## Introduction

In the year 2002, we compiled the first summary of the research that examined the impact of father involvement on children's developmental outcomes, the co-parenting relationship, and development of fathers themselves. In 2007, we updated this review by examining approximately 150 new research studies in these areas. Although this does not include all of the research on fathering conducted during this period, it does provide an update of key published works on father involvement. In general, the research results reported in 2002 have been strengthened by additional research that we have examined in this period. One of the challenges of looking at the effects of father involvement is to disentangle father involvement from the effects of social class and family structure. We also include here new and emerging findings that provide deepening insight into the complex phenomenon of fathering.

This document presents an updated overview of the key trends in the father involvement literature. While we are unable to provide methodological detail in such a succinct summary, we endeavoured to compile as accurately as possible, reliable research results that support these trends. It is clear from the research that father involvement has enormous implications for men on their own path of adult development, for their wives and partners in the coparenting relationship and, most importantly, for their children in terms of social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development.

In presenting the research evidence, we have used author citations in the text. If the bibliography is not included here, it can be accessed at [www.cfii.ca](http://www.cfii.ca) or [www.fira.uoguelph.ca](http://www.fira.uoguelph.ca). Furthermore, given the developments in the measurement of the father involvement construct itself, we have included a section at the end of this document on the different ways that father involvement has been measured in the research literature.

## Cognitive Development

Infants of highly involved fathers, as measured by amount of interaction, including higher levels of play and caregiving activities, are more cognitively competent at 6 months and score higher on the Bayley Scales of Infant Development (Pedersen, Rubinstein, & Yarrow, 1979; Pedersen, Anderson, & Kain, 1980). By one year they continue to have higher cognitive functioning (Nugent, 1991), are better problem solvers as toddlers (Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984), and have higher IQ's by age three (Yogman, Kindlan, & Earls, 1995). When compared with mothers, fathers' talk with toddlers is characterized by more wh- (e.g. "what", "where" etc.) questions, which requires children to assume more

communicative responsibility in the interaction. This encouraged toddlers to talk more, use more diverse vocabulary, and produce longer utterances when interacting with their fathers (Rowe, Cocker, & Pan, 2004).

School aged children of involved fathers are also better academic achievers. They are more likely to get A's (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997; Nord & West, 2001), have better quantitative and verbal skills (Bing, 1963; Goldstein, 1982; Radin, 1982), have higher grade point averages, get better achievement test scores, receive superior grades, perform a year above their expected age level on academic tests, obtain higher scores on reading achievement, or learn more and perform better in school (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Blanchard & Biller, 1971; Cooksey & Fondell, 1996; Feldman & Wentzel, 1990; Gadsen & Ray, 2003; Goldstein, 1982; Gottfried, Gottfried, & Bathurst, 1988; Howard, Lefever, Borkowski, & Whitman, 2006; McBride et al., 2005; McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, & 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 1997; Shinn, 1978; Snarey 1993; Wentzel & Feldman, 1993). Children of involved fathers are also more likely to live in cognitively stimulating homes (William, 1997). A father's academic support was positively related to adolescent boys' academic motivation to try hard in school, feel their grades were important, and to place a high value on education (Alfaro, Umana-Taylor, & Bamaca, 2006). Father contact was also associated with better socioemotional and academic functioning in school related areas for children with single or married adolescent mothers (Howard et al., 2006).

Children of involved fathers are more likely to demonstrate more cognitive competence on standardized intellectual assessments (Lamb 1987; Radin 1994) and have higher IQ's (Gottfried et al., 1988; Honzik, 1967; Radin 1972; Shinn, 1978).

Children of involved fathers are more likely to enjoy school (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997), have positive attitudes toward school (Flouri, Buchanan, & Bream, 2002; Flouri, 2005), participate in extracurricular activities, and graduate. They are also less likely to fail a grade, have poor attendance, be suspended or expelled, or have behaviour problems at school, (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Brown & Rife, 1991; Mosley & Thompson, 1995; National Center for Education Statistics, 1997; Nord & West, 2001; William, 1997). In addition, Zimmerman, Slaem, and Notaro (2000) found that positive paternal engagement in 10th grade predicted fewer problem behaviors in 11th grade.

Children of involved fathers are more likely to have higher levels of economic and educational achievement, career success, occupational competency, better educational outcomes, higher educational expectations, higher educational attainment, and psychological well being (Amato, 1994; Barber & Thomas, 1986; Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992a; Bell, 1969; Flouri, 2005; Furstenberg & Harris, 1993; Harris, Furstenberg, & Marmer, 1998; Lozoff, 1974; National Center for Education Statistics, 1997; Snarey, 1993). More recently, Flouri and Buchanan (2004) found that father and mother involvement at age 7 independently

predicted educational attainment by age 20 for both sons and daughters indicating that early father involvement can be another protective factor in counteracting risk conditions that might lead to later low attainment levels.

## Emotional Development and Well-Being



Infants whose fathers are involved in their care are more likely to be securely attached to them, (Cox, Owen, Henderson, & Margand, 1992), be better able to handle strange situations, be more resilient in the face of stressful situations (Kotelchuck, 1976; Parke & Swain, 1975), be more curious and eager to explore the environment, relate more maturely to strangers, react more competently to complex and novel stimuli, and be more trusting in branching out in their explorations (Biller, 1993; Parke & Swain, 1975; Pruett, 1997).

Father involvement is positively correlated with children's overall life satisfaction and their experience of less depression (Dubowitz et al., 2001; Field, Lang, Yando, & Bendell, 1995; Formoso, Gonzales, Barrera, & Dumka, 2007; Furstenberg & Harris, 1993; Zimmerman, Salem, & Maton, 1995), less emotional distress (Harris et al., 1998), less expressions of negative emotionality such as fear and guilt (Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1990), less conduct problems (Formoso et al., 2007), less psychological distress (Flouri, 2005), greater sense of social competence (Dubowitz et al., 2001), higher levels of self-reported happiness (Flouri, 2005), fewer anxiety symptoms, and lower neuroticism (Jorm, Dear, Rogers, & Christensen, 2003). In adoptive families, young adults' ratings of paternal nurturance and involvement were strongly and positively correlated with their reports of current psychosocial functioning (Schwartz & Finley, 2006). Likewise, paternal acceptance is significantly and positively related to youths' self-reported psychological adjustment (Veneziano, 2000).

Children of involved fathers are more likely to demonstrate a greater tolerance for stress and frustration (Mischel, Shoda, & Peake, 1988), have superior problem solving and adaptive skills (Biller, 1993), be more playful, resourceful, skilful, and attentive when presented with a problem (Mischel et al., 1988), and are better able to manage their emotions and impulses in an appropriate manner. Father involvement contributes significantly and independently to adolescent happiness (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003a). Harper and Fine (2006) found a positive relationship between paternal warmth and child well-being for non-residential father families. A close, non-conflictual stepfather-stepchild relationship improves adolescent well-being (Yuan & Hamilton, 2006) and close relationships with both stepfathers and non-resident fathers is associated with better adolescent outcomes in regards to grades, self-efficacy, internalizing and externalizing behaviours, and acting out in school (King, 2006).

Children of involved fathers are more likely to demonstrate a greater internal locus of control (Biller, 1993; Hoffman, 1971; Lamb, 1987; Mosley & Thompson, 1995; Radin, 1994; Ross & Broh, 2000; Williams & Radin, 1999), have a greater ability to take initiative, use self-direction and control (Amato, 1989; Pruett, 1987), and display less impulsivity (Mischel, 1961). Daughters of involved fathers

are more willing to try new things, keep busier, and are happier (Mosely & Thompson, 1995). High father involvement was also associated with increased children's feelings of paternal acceptance, a factor that plays a role in the development of self-concept and esteem (Culp, Schadle, Robinson, & Culp, 2000). Consequently, children of involved fathers had higher self-esteem (Deutsch, Servis, & Payne, 2001; Ross & Broh, 2000).

Young adults who had nurturing and available fathers while growing up are more likely to score high on measures of self acceptance and personal and social adjustment (Fish & Biller, 1973), see themselves as dependable, trusting, practical, and friendly (Biller, 1993), be more likely to succeed in their work, and be mentally healthy (Heath & Heath, 1991). The variable that is most consistently associated with positive life outcomes for children is the quality of the father child relationship (Amato, 1998; Furstenberg & Harris, 1993; Lamb, 1997). Children are better off when their relationship with their father is secure, supportive, reciprocal, sensitive, close, nurturing, and warm (Biller, 1993; Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984; Lamb, 1986, 1997; Radin, 1981).

"Overall, father love appears to be as heavily implicated as mother love in offspring's' psychological well-being and health, as well as in an array of psychological and behavioural problems." (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001)



## Social Development

Father involvement is positively correlated with children's overall social competence, social initiative, social maturity, and capacity for relatedness with others (Amato, 1987; Forehand & Nousiainen, 1993; Gottfried et al., 1988; Krampe & Fairweather, 1993; Mischel et al., 1988; Parke, 1996; Snarey, 1993; Stolz, Barber, & Olsen, 2005). This impact begins early in child development. For example, Kato, Ishii-Kuntz, Makino, and Tsuchiya (2002) found a direct influence of men's participation in childcare for children's pro social development among three year olds (Kato et al., 2002).

Children of involved fathers are more likely to have positive peer relations and be popular and well liked. Their peer relations are typified by less negativity, less aggression, less conflict, more reciprocity, more generosity, and more positive friendship qualities (Hooven, Gottman, & Katz, 1995; Lieberman, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 1999; Lindsey, Moffett, Clawson, & Mize, 1994; Macdonald & Parke, 1984; Rutherford & Mussen, 1968; Youngblade and Belsky, 1992). Adolescents who are securely attached to their fathers report less conflict in their interactions with peers (Ducharme, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 2002). Furthermore, fathers' levels of direct involvement are positively related to adolescents' friendship and peer experiences (Updegraff, McHale, Crouter, Kupanoff, 2001). Conversely, negative paternal affect such as high levels of hostility, had significant direct and indirect effects on adolescent negative social behaviour, which in turn predicted decreased peer acceptance (Paley, Conger, & Harold, 2000).

Children of involved fathers are more likely to have prosocial sibling interactions (Volling & Belsky, 1992), show fewer negative emotional reactions during play with peers, experience less tension in their interactions with other children, and solve conflicts by themselves rather than seeking the teacher's assistance (Suess, Grossman, & Sroufe, 1992).

Children who have involved fathers are more likely to grow up to be tolerant and understanding, (McClelland, Constantian, Regalado, & Stone, 1978), be well socialized and successful adults (Block & van der Lippe, 1973), have supportive social networks consisting of long-term close friendships (Franz, McClelland & Weinberger, 1991), and adjust well to college both personally and socially (Reuter & Biller, 1973). In addition, children who felt close to their involved fathers are also more likely to have long term, successful marriages (Franz et al., 1991; Lozoff, 1974), be satisfied with their romantic partners in midlife (Moller & Stattin, 2001), have more successful intimate relationships (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002b), and be less likely to divorce (Risch, Jodl, & Eccles, 2004). Likewise, young adults whose fathers were more sensitive in their early play interactions had more secure, healthy partnership representations of their current romantic relationship (Grossmann, Grossmann, Winter, & Zimmerman, 2002).

The strongest predictor of empathic concern in children and adults is high levels of paternal involvement while a child (Bernadette-Shapiro, Ehrensaft, & Shapiro, 1996; Koestner, Franz, & Weinberber, 1990; Lamb, 1987; Radin, 1994; Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957).

Father warmth and nurturance significantly predicts children's moral maturity, is associated with more pro-social and positive moral behaviour in boys and girls (Mosely & Thompson, 1995), and is positively correlated with higher scores on measures of internal moral judgment, moral values, and conformity to rules (Hoffman 1971; Speicher-Dublin, 1982).

## Physical Health

Fathers can indirectly influence the physical health and well-being of their children through facilitating optimal health outcomes for mothers. When fathers are emotionally supportive of their spouses, wives are more likely to enjoy a greater sense of well being, good post partum mental health (Gjerdingen, Froberg, & Fontaine, 1991), have a relatively problem free pregnancy, delivery process, and nursing experience (Biller, 1993), and maintain or adopt healthy pregnancy behaviours (Teitler, 2001). Single mothers are twice as likely as married mothers to experience a bout of depression and experience higher levels of stress (Cairney, Boyle, Offord, & Racine, 2003) suggesting that fathers have a positive impact on mother's health and children's well-being.

Infant mortality rates are 1.8 times higher for infants of unmarried mothers than for married mothers (Matthews, Curtin, MacDorman, 2000) in part because unmarried mothers are less likely to obtain prenatal care, more likely to have a low birth weight baby (Padilla & Recihman, 2001; US Department of Health and Human Services, 1995), and more likely to report cigarette use during their

pregnancy (McLanahan, 2003). Fathers can help increase the physical health of their children in various indirect ways. For example, 75% of women whose partners attended a breastfeeding promotion class initiated breastfeeding (Wolfberg et al., 2004). In addition, fathers who provide monetary support to non-married mothers during the pregnancy decrease the likelihood of a low birth weight baby (Padilla & Reichman, 2001).

When compared to children living with both biological parents, toddlers living in stepfamilies and single-parent families are more likely to suffer a burn, have a bad fall, or be scarred from an accident (O'Connor, Davies, Dunn, & Golding, 2000). In addition, children who live apart from their fathers are more likely to be diagnosed with asthma and experience an asthma-related emergency even after taking into account demographic and socioeconomic conditions. Unmarried, cohabiting parents and unmarried parents living apart are 1.76 and 2.61 times respectively more likely to have their child diagnosed with asthma. Marital disruption after birth is associated with a 6 fold increase in the likelihood a child will require an emergency room visit and 5 fold increase of an asthma related emergency (Harknett, 2005). Diabetic youth from single-mother headed households had poorer health even when statistically controlling for race, child's age, and family socioeconomic status (Thompson, Auslander, & White, 2001).

Obese children are more likely to live in father absent homes than are nonobese children (Struass & Knight, 1999). The obesity of the father is associated with a four-fold increase in the risk of obesity of sons and daughters at age 18 (Burke, Beilin, & Dunbar, 2001). In addition, a father's BMI (Body Mass Index) predicts sons' and daughters' BMI independent of offspring's alcohol intake, smoking, physical fitness, and father's education (Burke, Beilin, & Dunbar, 2001). The fathers, (not the mothers) total and percentage body fat was the best predictor of changes in daughter's total and percentage body fat (Figueroa-Colon, Arani, Goran, & Weinsier, 2000) as well as the father's diet and enjoyment of physical activity. As his BMI rose, so did his daughters (Davison & Birch, 2001). More active toddlers were more likely to have a father with a lower BMI than less active children (Finn, Johannsen & Specker, 2002). This finding echoes other research that found that fathers' inactivity was a strong predictor of children's inactivity (Troost, Kerr, Ward, & Pate, 2001; Fogelholm, Nuutinen, Pasanen, Myohanen, & Saatela, 1999).

Overall, children who live without their fathers are more likely to experience health related problems (Horn & Sylvester, 2002).

## Decrease in Negative Child Development Outcomes



Father involvement protects children from engaging in delinquent behaviour (Harris et al., 1998), and is associated with less substance abuse among adolescents (Coombs & Landsverk, 1988), less delinquency (Zimmerman et al., 1995), less drug use, truancy, and stealing (Barnes, 1984), and less drinking (Harris et al., 1998). For example, father involvement when the youth was in 10th grade was associated with less problem behavior (drug use, delinquency, violent behavior) the next year, especially if the father provided school support (Zimmerman et al., 2000).

The relationship between peer drug use and adolescent marijuana use is attenuated by both closeness to father and the perception that parents would catch them for major rule violations (Dorius, Bahr, Hoffmann, & Harmon, 2004). Having a close, positive father child relationship predicts a reduced risk of engagement in multiple, first time risky behaviours. In addition, when fathers have a positive relationship with their children, the negative effect of having a father with an authoritarian or permissive parenting style on increased risk of engaging in delinquent activity and substance use is reduced Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, & Carrano, 2006).

Father involvement (as measured by frequency of contact and relationship quality) is also associated with a lower frequency of externalizing and internalizing symptoms such as acting out, disruptive behaviour, antisocial behaviour, depression, sadness and lying (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002a; King & Sobolewski, 2006; Mosley & Thompson, 1995). More recently, Flouri and Buchanan (2003b) found that father involvement (as measured by spending time together and relationship quality) at age 7 protected against psychological maladjustments in adolescents from non-intact families, and father involvement at age 16 protected against adult psychological distress among adult daughters in women. In addition, children's good relationships with their stepfathers are associated with significantly lower risk of internalizing or externalizing problems (White & Gilbreth, 2001). Good relationships with both step and non custodial father are also associated with better child outcomes (White & Gilbreth 2001).

A father's positive involvement (as measured by the amount and type of contact) is related to children having fewer behavioural problems (Amato & Rivera, 1999; Howard et al., 2006). For example, children who feel close to, and do things frequently with their fathers display less antisocial behavior and are less depressed and withdrawn (Peterson & Zill, 1986). Father involvement is also negatively associated with children's behavior problems, conduct disorder, and hyperactivity (Flouri, 2005). In addition, Flouri, (2005) found that father involvement was not only negatively associated with bullying behavior, but that it provided a buffering effect for children in that it protected them from extreme victimization. Likewise, Aldous and Mulligan (2002) found that a father's greater involvement in his "difficult to raise preschooler's life" was related to the child having fewer reported behaviour problems as a grade schooler. Their research further indicates that this benefit from early paternal attention was also evidenced for nonproblematic young sons, but not daughters. Some research extends the benefits of father involvement for children in relationship to problem behaviours to fathers and mothers. For



example, Pffifner, McBurnett, and Rathouz (2001) found that families with residential fathers reported fewer antisocial symptoms for fathers, mothers, and children. In addition, Kosterman, Haggerty, Spoth, and Redmond (2004) found that prosocial experiences with fathers may play a key role in dissuading daughters from antisocial behaviour. Several risk factors to children's mental health problems in middle school that were associated with lower father involvement included having high stress reactivity (Boyce et al., 2006).

Adolescents who strongly identified with their fathers were 80% less likely to have been in jail and 75% less likely to become unwed parents (Furstenberg & Harris, 1993). Living in any type of married household also reduces the risk of early sexual activity and pregnancy (Moore & Chase-Lansdale, 2001). In addition, father involvement at age 7 was negatively related to socio-economic disadvantage at age 33; children were less likely to have experienced homelessness, received state benefits, or live in subsidised housing (Flouri, 2005).



## Effects of Father Absence on Child Development Outcomes

Children who live without their fathers, are, on average, more likely to have problems in school performance (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Horn & Sylvester, 2002; Kelly, 2000). For example, they are more likely to have lower scores on achievement tests (McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994; Painter & Levine, 2000; Pong & Ju, 2000; Snarey, 1993; US Department of Health and Human Services, 1995), lower scores on intellectual ability and intelligence tests (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; Luster & McAdoo, 1994), have lower grade point averages, (McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994), be academic underachievers working below grade level (Blanchard & Biller, 1971), have lower academic performance (Kelly, 2000), have trouble solving complex mathematical and puzzle tasks, (Biller, 1981), or spend an average of 3.5 hours less per week studying (Zick & Allen, 1996).

Children who live without their fathers, are, on average, more likely to experience behavior problems at school (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Horn & Sylvester, 2002) such as having difficulty paying attention, disobedience, (Mott, Kowaleski-Jones, & Mehaghan, 1997), being expelled, suspended (Dawson, 1991), or have poor school attendance. They are more likely to drop out of school (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Painter & Levine, 2000), twice as likely to repeat a grade (Nord & West, 2001), less likely to graduate from highschool, more likely to complete fewer years of schooling, less likely to enroll in college (Krein & Beller, 1988; McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994; Painter & Levine, 2000), and more likely to be out of school and work or have poor labour attachments in their mid 20's (McLanahan & Sandefeur, 1994).

Boys who live without their fathers consistently score lower on a variety of moral indexes - such as measures of internal moral judgement, guilt following transgressions, acceptance of blame, moral values and rule conformity (Hoffman, 1971). Girls who live without their fathers are more likely to cheat, lie, and not feel sorry after misbehaving (Parke, 1996; Mott et al., 1997). Both boys

and girls are less likely to be able to delay gratification, have poor impulse control over anger and sexual gratification, and have a weaker sense of right and wrong (Hetherington & Martin, 1979).

Children in father absent homes are more likely to have problems in emotional and psychosocial adjustment and exhibit a variety of internalizing and externalizing behaviours (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Horn & Sylvester, 2002; Kelly, 2000; Painter & Levine, 2000). Not living with both biological parents quadruples the risk of having an affective disorder (Cuffe, McKeown, Addy, & Garrison, 2005). Family structure affects conduct disorders and childhood aggression directly but the magnitude of the effect declines when tested with family processes and individual characteristics (Brannigan, Gemmell, Pevalin, & Wade, 2002). However, the heightened antisocial behavior in children associated with absent biological fathers was not mitigated by presence of stepfathers and was not accounted for by lower SES (Pfiffner, McBurnett, & Rathouz, 2001).



In father absent homes, boys, on average, are more likely to be more unhappy, sad, depressed, dependent, and hyperactive. Girls who grow up in father absent homes are, on average, are more likely to become overly dependent (Mott et al., 1997) and have internalizing problems such as anxiety and depression (Kandel, Rosenbaum, & Chen, 1994). For example, African American daughters perceptions of anger and alienation from fathers was related to greater emotional and behavioural problems for adolescents (Coley, 2003). In addition, a combination of low father contact and high levels of either anger or trust in the daughter-father relationship was related to particularly deleterious psychosocial outcomes for adolescent girls (Coley, 2003). Both boys and girls are more likely to develop disruptive or anxiety disorders (Kasen, Cohen, Brook, & Hartmark, 1996), have conduct problems (Kandel et al., 1994), suffer from psychological disorders, or commit suicide (Brent, Perper, Moritz, & Liotus, 1995). Adolescents whose mothers divorced and remained single, those born outside marriage and their mother remained unmarried had the greatest behavioural problems when compared with their counterparts with married biological parents (Carlson, 2006). However, father involvement partially mediates the effects of family structure on adolescent behavioural outcomes in that it reduced both the size and the significance of nearly all the statistically significant family structure effects on adolescent behaviour suggesting that father involvement is a critical factor in predicting adolescent behavioural outcomes (Carlson, 2006).

Children who live without their fathers are, on average, more likely to choose deviant peers, have trouble getting along with other children, be at higher risk for peer problems (Mott et al., 1997), and be more aggressive (Horn & Sylvester, 2002).

Children who live without their fathers are, on average, are at greater risk of being physically abused, of being harmed by physical neglect, or of suffering from emotional neglect (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996).

Adolescents in single-mother or single-father families are significantly more delinquent than their counterparts residing with two biological, married parents, although these differences are reduced once various family processes such as supervision, monitoring, involvement and closeness are accounted for (Demuth & Brown, 2004). Nonetheless, children who live without their fathers are more likely to engage in criminal behavior (Horn & Sylvester, 2002), or commit a school crime - possessing, using, or distributing alcohol or drugs, possessing a weapon, or assaulting a teacher, administrator, or another student (Jenkins, 1995), are at higher risk of status, property, and personal delinquencies (Anderson, 2002; Bush, Mullis, & Mullis, 2000), or score higher on delinquency and aggression tests (Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, Diaz, & Miller, 2000). In addition, Mackey and Immerman (2004) found that father absence, rather than poverty, was the stronger predictor of young men's violent behavior. Adolescents in father absent homes face elevated incarceration risks (Harper & McLanahan, 2004). Absence of paternal influence was a particularly important risk factor for daughters' criminality although mothers and fathers appeared to play a similar role in controlling their sons' antisocial behavior (Kemppainen, Jokelainen, Isohanni, Jaervelin, & Raesaenen 2002).

Children who live with a single parent or in stepfamilies are more likely to use and abuse illegal drugs, alcohol, or tobacco compared to children who live with both biological or adoptive parents (Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, Capps, & Zaff, 2006; Johnson, Haffmann, & Gerstein, 1996; Kelly, 2000; Painter & Levine, 2000) and report higher rates of drinking and smoking (Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, Diaz, & Miller, 2000). Mandara and Murray (2006) found that father absent boys were much more likely than father present boys or either group of girls to use drugs. Father closeness was negatively correlated with the number of a child's friends who smoke, drink, and smoke marijuana. Father closeness was also correlated with a child's use of alcohol, cigarettes, and hard drugs and was connected to family structure with intact families ranking higher on father closeness than single-parent families (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2004).

Adolescents who live without their father are more likely to engage in greater and earlier sexual activity, are more likely to become pregnant as a teenager (Ellis et al., 2003; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Miller & Moore, 1990; Metzler, Noell, Biglan, & Ary, 1994; US Department of Health and Human Services, 1988), or have a child outside of marriage (Painter & Levine, 2000). This elevated risk was not explained by familial, ecological, or personal disadvantages associated with father absence and there was stronger and more consistent evidence of the effects of father absence on early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy than on other behavioural or mental health problems or academic achievement (Ellis et al., 2003). More specifically, women whose parents separated between birth and six years old experienced twice the risk of early menstruation, more than four times the risk of early sexual intercourse, and two and a half times higher risk of early pregnancy when compared to women in intact families (Quinlan, 2003). Other research indicates similar trends. Teens without fathers were twice as likely to be involved in early sexual activity and seven times more likely to get pregnant as an adolescent (Ellis et al., 2003).

Likewise, early fatherhood, both during the teen years and early twenties, is much more likely to occur if young men did not grow up living with their own

fathers. Young fathers were also less likely to be living with their children if their own fathers had not lived in residence with them throughout childhood (Furstenberg & Weiss, 2001). Overall, research indicates that being raised by a single mother raises the risk of teen pregnancy, marrying with less than a high school degree, and forming a marriage where both partners have less than a high school degree (Teachman, 2004).

Children who live without their fathers are, on average, more likely to be poor (Horn & Sylvester, 2002) with the US Bureau of the Census (2003) reporting that children in father absent homes are five times more likely to be poor.



Overall, father absence has deleterious effects on a wide range of child development outcomes including health, social and emotional, and cognitive outcomes (Wertheimer, Croan, Moore, & Hair, 2003).

## **Benefits of Father Involvement for Fathers**

Men who are involved fathers feel more self confident and effective as parents, (DeLuccie, 1996; Russell, 1982), find parenthood more satisfying (Owen, Chase-Lansdale & Lamb, 1982), feel more intrinsically important to their child (Lamb, 1987) and feel encouraged to be even more involved (DeLuccie, 1996).

Spending time taking care of children provides fathers with opportunities to display affection and to nurture their children (Almeida & Galambos, 1991; Coltrane, 1996; Lamb, 1997). Involved fathers are more likely to see their interactions with their children positively (DeLuccie, 1996), be more attentive to their children's development (Lamb, 1987), better understand, and be more accepting of their children (Almeida & Galambos, 1991; Russell, 1982), and enjoy closer, richer father-child relationships, (Gronseth, 1975; Lamb, 1987; Lamb, Pleck, & Levine, 1987; Owen et al., 1982; Snarey, 1993). When fathers spend more time with their children they are more likely to engage in supportive interactions, regardless of negative mood (Almeida, Wethington, & McDonald, 2001).

Fathers who are involved in their children's lives are more likely to exhibit greater psychosocial maturity (Pleck, 1997; Snarey, 1993), be more satisfied with their lives (Eggebean & Knoester, 2001), feel less psychological distress (Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992b; Gove & Mongione, 1983; Ozer, Barnett, Brennan, & Sperling, 1998), and be more able to understand themselves, empathically understand others, and integrate their feelings in an ongoing way (Heath, 1994).

Involved fathers report fewer accidental and premature deaths, less than average contact with the law, less substance abuse, fewer hospital admissions, and a greater sense of well being overall (Pleck, 1997). Involved fathers are more likely to participate in the community (Heath, 1978, 1994; Heath & Heath, 1991; Eggebean & Knoester, 2001; Townsend 2002; Wilcox, 2002), do more socializing (Eggebean & Knoester, 2001), serve in civic or community leaderships positions (Snarey, 1993), and attend church more often (Chaves, 1991; Eggebean &

Knoester, 2001; Ploch & Hastings, 1998; Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, & Waite, 1995). Fatherhood encourages men to increase intergenerational and extended family interactions and participate in service-oriented activities and hours in paid labour (Knoester & Eggebean, 2006). In addition, Lerman and Sorensen (2000) found a positive relationship between increased involvement of fathers and additional hours of work and increased earnings.

Some evidence suggests that involved fathering is correlated with marital stability (Cowan & Cowan, 1992) and is associated with marital satisfaction in midlife (Heath & Heath, 1991; Snarey, 1993). Involved fathers are more likely to feel happily married ten or twenty years after the birth of their first child (Snarey, 1993), and be more connected to their family (Eggebean & Knoester, 2001).

Overall, men who are involved fathers during early adulthood usually turn out to be good spouses, workers, and citizens at midlife (Snarey, 1993; Townsend, 2002). Despite some of the documented short term costs of father involvement for men such as stress, increased work- family conflict, and decreased self esteem, these costs do not appear to reduce overall satisfaction with parenthood (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Long term, high involvement has a modest, positive impact on occupational mobility, work success, career success and the father's societal generativity (Hawkins, Christiansen, Sargent, & Hill, 1993; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004; Snarey 1993).

In fact, men's emotional involvement with their children has been found to act as a buffer against work related stresses (Barnett et al., 1992b).



## **Co-Parental Relationship**

The quality of the co-parental relationship has both direct implications for how involved fathers are, and indirect implications for child development outcomes.

As a result, marriage becomes an important context within which to promote and sustain father involvement. This next section explores three dimensions of the co-parental relationship: 1) the importance of marriage for father involvement, 2) the mother's role in father involvement, and 3) how the quality of the co-parental relationship indirectly affects child development outcomes.

## The Importance of Spousal Relations for Father Involvement

There is a positive correlation between marital quality and the following: levels of father involvement in child care responsibilities (Bouchard & Lee, 2000; Harris & Morgan, 1991; McBride & Mills, 1993), the quality of the father-child relationship (Belsky & Volling, 1987; Cox, Owen, Lewis, & Henderson, 1989; Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998; Feldman, Nash, & Aschenbrenner, 1983; Levy-Schiff & Israelaschivili, 1988), the father's satisfaction in his own paternal role, and his competence as a parent (Bouchard & Lee, 2000).



These correlations indicate that the marital relationship is an important context for the quality of men's experiences as a father (Bouchard & Lee, 2000). Men are more likely to understand their role of being a father and a husband as a "package deal" - one contingent upon the other (Townsend, 2002). Therefore, if marital conflict is high, fathers have a much more difficult time being involved with their children, which weakens the father-child relationship (Coiro & Emery, 1998; Doherty et al., 1998).

For example, interparental conflict was negatively related to quality fathering for single earner Mexican American families (Formoso et al., 2007). Conversely, a strong parenting alliance was positively related to quality fathering. Thus, strengthening the interparental relationship can support quality fathering (Formoso et al., 2007).

The importance of the marital context considered, recent research indicates that for biological fathers regardless of their fathering status (residential, nonresidential, residential boyfriend, non-resident boyfriends, or non-resident friend), the fathers who had at least a romantic relationship with the mother were more involved with their children across types of involvement than those in no relationship, marital or otherwise (Cabrera et al., 2004).

Some research indicates that increased father involvement can have positive consequences for the marriage. For example, Snarey (1993) found that fathers who were involved in their children's lives were significantly more likely to enjoy a stable marriage at midlife. (Father involvement accounted for 25% of the variance in the father's midlife marital success.) Other researchers have found a similar relationship between competent fathering behaviours and increased marital satisfaction and marital stability in later life (Belsky, 1984; Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Feldman, et al., 1983; Heath & Heath, 1991). Thus, overall, there is more evidence that paternal involvement has positive consequences for marriage than negative consequences (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004).

## Mother's Role in Father Involvement

When mothers are supportive of their spouse's parenting (view them as competent parents, provide encouragement, expect and believe parenting is a joint venture), men are more likely to be involved with, and responsible for their children (Biller, 1993; Coverman, 1985; Cowan & Cowan, 1987; DeLuccie, 1995, 1996; Doherty et al., 1998; McBride & Rane, 1998; Pasley, Futris & Skinner, 2002; Simons, Whitbek, Conger, & Melby, 1990), feel recognized as a parental figure (Jordan, 1990), place a greater importance on their father role identity (Pasley et al., 2002), and feel more satisfaction, pleasure, competence, and comfort in their paternal role (Biller, 1993; Bouchard & Lee, 2000; Coffman, Levitt, & Brown 1994; Cowan & Cowan, 1987; DeLuccie, 1996).



Thus, fathers' perceived investments in their parental roles and actual levels of paternal involvement are moderated by mothers' beliefs about the role of the father (McBride et al., 2005). Research indicates that fathers who perceive their wives as evaluating them positively as fathers were more likely to report higher levels of involvement in child-related activities and place greater importance on the father role identity which was, in turn, associated with higher levels of involvement (Pasely et al., 2002). More recently research indicates that a mother's positive relationship with both the father and his family was found to predict a greater likelihood of initiated and sustained high father involvement. Conversely, a decreasing pattern of father involvement was significantly associated with increased maternal parenting stress over time (Kalil, Ziol-Guest, Coley, 2005).

Mothers can serve as gatekeepers (Allen & Hawkins, 1999) to the father-child relationship. Many women are ambivalent about greater father involvement for a variety of reasons including concerns about their husband's competence as a caregiver, feared loss of control over a domain in which they exercised significant power, and an unwillingness to change their standards for housework and childcare. The father's level of involvement in the child's life is therefore, partly determined by the extent to which mothers permit participation (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; DeLuccie, 1995; Dickie & Carnahan, 1980; Seery & Crowley, 2000). For example, Fagan and Barnett (2003) found that maternal gatekeeping was significantly, and negatively associated with the amount of father involvement. In addition, father competence was indirectly and directly linked to the amounts of maternal gatekeeping and father involvement with children with gatekeeping mediating the relationship between father competence and involvement.

## The Co-Parental Relationship has Indirect Effects on Child Development Outcomes

The co-parental relationship indirectly affects the parent-child relationship. For example, when fathers are supportive and encouraging, mothers are more competent parents. Mothers in families in which father involvement is high may have a more positive outlook regarding their child's behavior than do mothers in families in which father involvement is low (Culp et al., 2000). When fathers are supportive and encouraging, mothers are more patient, flexible, emotionally responsive, sensitive, and available to their infants and young children (Belsky, 1981; Cowan & Cowan, 1987; Feiring & Lewis, 1978; Parke & Anderson, 1987; Snarey, 1993). This tends to enhance the quality of the mother-child relationship and thus facilitates positive developmental outcomes for their children (Lamb 1997), such as being popular with peers (Boyum & Parke, 1995), increased self-control and academic competence (Brody et al., 1994), and positive relationships with peers and intimate partners (Amato, 1998). High levels of supportive co-parenting were also associated with fewer externalizing behavior problems in preschoolers (Schoppe, Manglesdorf, & Frosch, 2001).



The effect of a supportive co-parental relationship seems to work for fathers as well. Therefore, support from wives can improve the quality of the father's parenting (Amato, 1998; Conger & Elder, 1994), which in turn has positive child development outcomes. Recent research found that co-operative coparenting predicts more frequent father-child contact, which in turn predicts higher relationship quality and more responsive fathering (Sobolewski & King, 2005). In addition, frequent conversations between husbands and wives were found to be a significant indirect factor affecting children's sociability (Kato et al., 2002).

When the co-parental relationship is not supportive, children suffer. For example, husbands who show little warmth or are abusive towards their wives, have wives who are more likely to feel emotionally drained, irritable, and distracted. This increases the likelihood that they will employ noneffective parenting strategies (such as harsher and less consistent discipline) when interacting with their children and respond to them in an impatient, nonnurturing manner (Amato, 1998).

Less happy marriages and marital arguments when children were young were associated with children's behavior problems when they were older (Aldous & Mulligan, 2002). Harper and Fine (2006) found similar results when they found a negative relationship between inter-parent conflict and child well being (Harper & Fine, 2006). And Lundy (2002) reported that marital dissatisfaction adversely affected paternal synchrony which negatively impacted the security of the infant-father attachment.

Research consistently documents a negative association between marital discord and children development outcomes such as academic success, behavioural conduct, emotional adjustment, self esteem, and social competence (Amato,



1998; Cummings & O'Reilly, 1997; Davies & Cummings, 1994; Emery, 1988; Grych & Fincham, 1990; Kandel, 1990). Happily married parents interact more positively with their infant (Levy-Schiff, 1994), preschool child (Lindahl, Clements, & Markman, 1997), and school age child (Simons, Beaman, Conger, & Chao, 1993).

A positive co-parental relationship models many important relationship skills that children can use in their own relationships such as: providing emotional support, resolving conflict effectively, showing respect, and positive, open communication patterns (Amato, 1998)

## **Non-Residential Fathers**

### **Payment of Child Support**

The amount of child support paid by non-resident fathers is positively and significantly associated with children's well being, leading scholars to argue that a dollar of child support has a larger benefit to children than does a dollar of family income (Aughinbaugh, 2001). For example, the amount of child support received increased the educational attainment and cognitive test scores of children and adolescents more than income from any other source (Argys, Peters, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998; Beller & Chung, 1988; Knox, 1996).

The amount of child support paid impacts a wide variety of child development outcomes, such as improved cognitive test scores, higher reading, verbal, and math ability (Argys et al., 1998; King, 1994), better educational achievement, success, and competence - including higher grades and attained education level (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Graham, Beller, & Hernandez, 1994; King, 1994; Knox & Bane, 1994; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; McLanahan, Seltzer, Hanson, & Thompson, 1994), higher levels of social and emotional adjustment, fewer behavioural problems, better ratings on the personal maturity scale, preschooler's school readiness, and increased probability that youths will graduate from highschool and go onto college (Green & Moore, 2000; Menning, 2002). In fact, Graham, Beller, and Hernandez (1994) found that child support helps children overcome about two thirds of the disadvantage in years of school completed and reduces highschool drop out rates as well as the percentage of students who fall behind their age cohorts in high school. In addition, child support payments improve children's access to educational resources, increase the amount of stimulation in the home and improve children's health and nutrition (Graham et al., 1994; Knox & Bane, 1994).

Overall, strong evidence exists for the positive role of non-resident fathers' payment of child support for children's outcomes (Graham & Beller, 2002) as these economic contributions improve children's standards of living, health, educational attainment, and general well-being (Seltzer, 1994). Interestingly, some research has been able to document a circular effect of child support in that measures of child achievement in reading and math can have, in turn, positive impacts on the receipt and amount of child support, suggesting that noncustodial parents appear to consider how well their former partners care for their children when they make child support decisions (Aughinbaugh, 2001).

Payment of child support is negatively and significantly related to reports of children's behavioural problems (Furstenberg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987; McLanahan et al., 1994) and children's externalizing problems (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). It is, however, positively associated with positive behavioural adjustment and adaptation after divorce (King, 1994; Lamb, Sternberg, & Thompson, 1997).

The positive correlation between payment of child support and desirable child development outcomes continues to exist after controlling for influences of maternal income, interparental conflict, and frequency of contact (Amato, 1998). In some cases, research has found that the frequency of contact, or time spent doing activities with non-residential fathers has no significant effects on child development outcomes unless it is also combined with financial support (Menning, 2002). Other research indicates that greater contact with the father in the form of child visitation tends to be associated with more child support being paid (Seltzer, 1991). Thus, overall, monetary and material contributions from the father, especially contributions provided informally, are positively associated with more positive child well-being outcomes (Dunn, 2004; Dunn, Cheng, O'Connor, & Bridges, 2004; Greene & Moore, 2000).

## Relationship with Mother and Child

Research consistently indicates that the most crucial mediating variable for child development outcomes for children with non-residential fathers is the quality (not quantity) of the father's relationship with the mother and the child (Amato, 1998; Kelly, 2000; Marsiglio et al., 2000). Other variables, such as the father's frequency of contact with their child and their child's feelings about their fathers have proven to be inconsistent predictors of child development outcomes or adjustment (Amato, 1998; Marsiglio et al., 2000). The quality of the child father relationship is related to the quality of the mother-non-resident father relations and the mother child relationship (Dunn et al., 2004). Thus, positive child-non-resident father relationships are correlated with 1) contact between child and father (amount and regularity), 2) the quality of the motherchild relationship, and 3) the frequency of contact between the mother and her former partner (Dunn et al., 2004).

Divorced fathers who visit their children often were more likely to have a supportive relationship with their former spouses (Whiteside & Becker, 2000). In addition, fathers' perceptions of parenting support received from the former spouse contribute to fathers' levels of coparental interaction after divorce (Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2000). Likewise, mother's attitudes have been found to strongly determine the effectiveness of post-divorce father involvement (Kelly, 2000).

Cooperative co-parenting between parents who live apart predicts more frequent father-child contact, which in turn predicts higher relationship quality, more responsive fathering, and stronger ties between non-resident fathers and

their children (Sobolewski & King, 2005). Non-resident father involvement is related positively to mother's involvement and negatively to interparental conflict (Flouri, 2006) which is negatively related to child well being (Harper & Fine, 2006)

Following divorce, children consistently do better in many domains of child development when they are able to maintain meaningful relationships with both parents unless the levels of interparental conflict remain unusually high (Amato, 1993; Emery, 1982; Guildubaldi & Perry, 1985; Heath & MacKinnon, 1988; Hess & Camara, 1979; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1982, 1985; Kurdek, 1986; Lamb, 1997; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).



Positive child developmental outcomes for children are associated with the quality of the non-residential father's parenting and how they interact with the child. For example, non-residential fathers who engage in authoritative parenting (setting and enforcing rules, monitoring, supervising, helping with homework, provide advice and emotional support, providing consistent discipline, praising children's accomplishments) are less likely to have adolescents who experience symptoms of depression or various externalizing problems (Barber, 1994; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Simons, Whitbek, Beaman, & Conger, 1994). Likewise, higher non-resident father involvement predicts decreases in adolescent delinquency, particularly for youth with initial engagement in delinquent activities (Coley & Medieros, 2007), lower probabilities of school failure among adolescents (Menning, 2006), fewer externalizing and internalizing problems for adolescents, less acting out at school among adolescents (King & Sobolewski, 2006; Whiteside & Becker, 2000), lower probabilities of school failure among adolescents (Menning, 2006), less emotional distress (Stewart, 2003), and overall better academic outcomes (Kelly, 2000).

These positive results and higher levels of child well-being are often qualified by not only the condition of non resident father involvement, but increases in that involvement over time, presence of paternal warmth, authoritative parenting, high relationship quality, feelings of closeness, frequent visitation, and responsive fathering (Dunn et al., 2004; Harper & Fine, 2006; Menning, 2006). However, other research has found that non resident father involvement and frequency of contact did not improve the regression models predicting children's total difficulties or pro-social behavior although frequency of contact was negatively associated with child's emotional symptoms (Flouri, 2006). Likewise, Stewart (2003) found that participating in leisure activities with non-resident fathers did not influence children's well being. Extrinsic support (going out to dinner, buying things, and seeing movies together) and frequency of contact do not consistently contribute in a positive way to child development (Marsiglio et al., 2000; Young, Miller, Norton, & Hill, 1995) because they do not facilitate authoritative parenting. These results, therefore, provide mixed evidence about

the degree to which children benefit from nonresident father involvement (Stewart, 2003).

Overall, non-residential fathers have the potential to contribute to their child's development by 1) paying child support, 2) developing a collaborative and cooperative relationship with the child's mother, and 3) investing in an authoritative parental role. This leads Whiteside and Becker (2000) to state that the quality of the parental alliance and the parents' warmth, sensitivity, good adjustment, and discipline style make the difference between a welladjusted child post-divorce and one who is angry, scared, or limited in cognitive and social skills.

## **Fathers & Work**

### **Importance of the Provider Role**

Economic support of the family is an indirect, but important way, fathers can contribute to their child's development. Christiansen & Palkovitz (2001) argue that economic provision for child and family needs is the foundation on which many fathers build their involvement in family life and that it is integrated and connected with many other forms of father involvement. Specifically, fathers who do not provide economically for their families are more likely to disengage from involvement in many other aspects of their children's lives than fathers who do provide economically (Christensen & Palkovitz, 2001).

Snarey (1993) found that when compared with men who are not fathers, fathers exhibit a greater attachment to the labour force and career out of a sense of responsibility to provide for their children. Other research indicates a similar trend. Fatherhood encourages men to be more serious about their work productivity but not to "over commit" to their jobs and careers (Coltrane, 1995; Eggebean & Knoester, 2001; Gutmann, 1994)

### **Effects of Family Income on Child Development Outcomes**

**Note: The effects of income on child development outcomes are mostly due to the father's income since fathers continue to contribute, on average more than 50% of the family income. In married, two parent families father contribute on average about two thirds of the family income (Amato & Booth, 1997).**

Research consistently documents that poverty has many detrimental effects on child development outcomes, putting them at greater risk of poor nutrition and health problems (Klerman, 1991), low school grades, dropping out of school (Levin, 1986), emotional and behavioural problems such as depression, low self-esteem, conduct disorders, and conflict with peers (Brooks-Gunn, Britto, & Brady, 1999; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Klerman, 1991; Marsiglio et al., 2000; Mayer, 1997; McLoyd, 1989; McLoyd & Wilson, 1991). In Mexican-American families, fathers' income was negatively associated with depressive symptoms in mothers and adolescent children in highly acculturated families (Crouter, Davis, Updegraff, Delgado, & Fortner, 2006).

In contrast, fathers earnings are positively associated with the educational attainment (Hill & Duncan, 1987; Kaplan, Lancaster, & Anderson, 1998; Yeung, Duncan & Hill, 2000), psychological well being, (Amato, 1998), and earned income (Behrman & Taubman, 1985) of young adult sons and daughters even

when mother's earnings are controlled. Paternal education is positively associated with children's grade point averages (Alwin & Thornton, 1984; DiMaggio, 1982) cognitive and achievement test scores (Alwin & Thornton, 1984; Amato, 1987, Blau & Grossberg, 1992; Mercy & Steelman, 1982; Parcel & Menaghan, 1994; Steelman & Dolby, 1983) school attendance (Brown & Rife, 1991), and occupational status and earnings (Amato, 1998; Jencks, Crouse, & Mueser 1983; Kerkhoff, Cambell & Trott, 1982; Kiker & Condon, 1981; Sewell, Hauser, & Wolf, 1980).

Overall, men who are involved fathers during early adulthood usually turn out to be good spouses, workers, and citizens at midlife (Snarey, 1993).

## **Impact of Father Involvement on Work**

Despite some of the documented short term costs of father involvement for men such as stress, increased work-family conflict, and decreased self esteem, long term, high involvement has a modest, positive impact on occupational mobility, work success, and societal generativity (Snarey, 1993; Hawkins, Christiansen, Sargent, & Hill, 1993).

Men's emotional involvement with their children was found to act as a buffer against work related stresses (Barnett et al., 1992b) and Lerman and Soreneson (2000) found a positive relationship between increased involvement of fathers and their subsequent hours of work and earning. In addition, Westermeyer's research (1998) found that career success did not come at the expense of marriages or community service.

Research indicates that men who occupy many roles such as husbands, employees, and fathers reported higher well-being and lower distress (Barnett, 1997), and are more mentally healthy (Westermeyer, 1998)

## **Balancing Work and Family**

### **Barriers and Pathways**

#### **Pathways**

Several forms of work organizational supports have been identified as necessary to facilitate an optimal work/family balance for fathers. They include: family responsibility leave, supportive supervisors and co-workers, work time flexibility, work-place flexibility (Lee & Duxbury, 1998), and flexible implementation of corporate policies at the local level (Palkovitz, Christensen, & Dunn, 1998).

Flex-time and pro-family corporate practices are associated with more father involvement (Pleck, 1997).

#### **Barriers**

Workplace barriers such as longer work hours are ranked by fathers as the most important reason for low levels of paternal involvement and source of stress in balancing work and family life (Haas, 1992; Milkie & Peltola, 1999; Yankelovich, 1974).

Men are more likely to work more hours, and less likely to take advantage of flexible work arrangements or parental leave (Robinson & Godbey, 1997).

Fathers who work long hours are more likely to feel overloaded, be less accepting of their adolescent children, and be less effective in perspective taking. The combination of long working hours and role overload predicted this relationship quality (Crouter, Bumpas, Head, & McHale, 2001). In addition, parents working non-standard schedules reported worse family functioning, more depressive symptoms, and less effective parenting. Their children were also more likely to have social and emotional difficulties and these relationships were partially mediated through family relationships and parent well-being (Strazdins, Clements, Korda, Broom, & D'Souza, 2006). Likewise, the mismatch between employed parents' work schedules and their children's school schedules creates parental after school stress, which is related to the psychological well being of the parent. (Barnett & Gareis, 2006).

Although innovative discussions exist on the limitations of past father involvement definitions, constructs, and measures, this discussion will highlight briefly some of the main ways father involvement has been measured, with an emphasis on the ways father involvement has been measured in the majority of the research cited in this document.

## **Measures of Father Involvement**

The most dominant measures of father involvement include the use of time diaries, correlational studies that demonstrate the salience of father presence by studying families without fathers, and variations of Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine's (1985) constructs of engagement, accessibility, and responsibility.

A content analysis of the research cited in this document reveals that father involvement was typically measured in one, or a combination, of the following three ways.

### **Father Involvement Measured as Time Spent Together**

This includes frequency of contact, amount of time spent together (doing things such as shared meals, shared leisure time, or time spent reading together), and the perceived accessibility and availability of the father. This can also include the amount of time fathers spend performing routine physical child care such as bathing, preparing meals, and clothing in addition to the amount of time father's spend playing with their child, and how effective, mutual and reciprocal the play is.

## Father Involvement Measured as the Quality of the Father-Child Relationship

A father is defined as an involved father if his relationship with his child can be described as being sensitive, warm, close, friendly, supportive, intimate, nurturing, affectionate, encouraging, comforting, and accepting. In addition, fathers are classified as being involved if their child has developed a strong, secure attachment to them. In this regard, Pleck (1997) has argued that it is more appropriate to refer to the benefits of “positive father involvement” (p. 67) than “father involvement” per se.



## Father Involvement Measured as Investment in Paternal Role

Measures assess the level of investment in child rearing, including the father’s ability to be an authoritative parent (exercises appropriate control and limits while allowing autonomy; takes responsibility for limit setting and discipline; monitors child’s activities), the degree to which he is facilitative and attentive to his child’s needs, and the amount of support he provides his children with school related activities.

## Multidimensional Versus Unidimensional Conceptualizations

Throughout this document, we have made reference to the relationship between father involvement and various outcomes. Implicit in this approach is that “father involvement” is a unidimensional construct. Direct engagement, as articulated by Lamb et al. (1987) has tended to dominate assessments of father involvement. Considerable work has been carried out to elaborate the complicated nature of father involvement leading to arguments about the importance of considering father involvement as a “multidimensional” construct (Schoppe-Sullivan, McBride & Ringo Ho, 2004). Palkovitz (1997) broadened the conceptualization with reference to 15 categories of paternal involvement that included: Communication (listening, talking, showing love); Teaching (role modeling, encouraging activities and interests); Monitoring (friends, homework); Cognitive processes (worrying, planning, praying); Errands; Caregiving, (feeding, bathing); Shared interests (reading together); Availability; Planning (activities, birthdays); Shared activities (shopping, playing together); Providing (food, clothing); Affection; Protection; and Supporting emotionality (encouraging the child). Furthermore, as Parke (2000) has argued, the nature of father involvement changes over time as a function of children being at various stages of development and fathers themselves undergoing various developmental challenges over time. Whereas the focus has often been on how fathers make the transition to fathering, Palkovitz and Palm (2005) argue that there are many transitions over the life course within the fathering experience that have an impact on child and family outcomes. Furthermore, given the diversity of the fathering experience in relation to ethnicity (Parke, 2000), culture (Hewlett, 2000) and a host of other factors including sexual orientation, family structure and social class, it is important to look at variability both within and between these groups.

## Measuring Father Involvement and its Impact:

## Challenges and Qualifications



Efforts to construct a pragmatic yet valid and reliable measure of father involvement have had to face the challenge of balancing the need to capture the complex dimensions of father involvement with the practical issue of having a format that is not so long and cumbersome as to be prohibitive for participants (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004). This measurement challenge continues to be a work in progress with noteworthy efforts including: a nine factor model that assesses direct and indirect effects, as well as behavioral, cognitive, affective, moral and ethical aspects of involvement (Hawkins, Bradford, Palkovitz, Christiansen, Day & Call, 2002); and a six factor model that includes responsibility, love/physical affection, talking with the child, household activities, child activities and cognitive monitoring (Schoppe- Sullivan et al., 2004). Nevertheless, significant measurement challenges lie ahead in the effort to capture the multidimensional nature of father involvement (Day & Lamb, 2004).

In light of some of these complexities, qualitative approaches that examine the construction of the fathering experience have used grounded theory methodology approaches (Daly, 2002; Matta & Knudson-Martin, 2006); indepth interviewing (Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000; Marsiglio, 2004); and narrative approaches (Dollahite, 2004; Pleck & Stueve, 2004).

### Father involvement in the context of other influences

A father's activities, thoughts and engagements with a child occur within a complex environment of other influences. The quality and nature of the interactions that children have with teachers, neighbours, peers, extended family, siblings and other parents can all shape the developmental outcomes of the child. From a broader perspective, wars, family access to resources, and other cultural and economic conditions can play powerful roles in shaping children's well-being (Hewlett, 2000). Accordingly, it is important that when looking at the "evidence" provided in this document that we be mindful of the wide range of influences on child development. Palkovitz (2002) provides the following caution:

*"Because development is multiply determined, it is somewhat hazardous to get too specific regarding relationships between patterns of paternal involvement and child development outcomes. In focusing on child outcomes we often ignore the fact that patterns of father involvement are only one factor in a large and diverse array of possible contributors to developmental outcomes. The existing database does not allow us to conclusively partial out the effects of of father involvement on child outcome variables."*

### Measurement issues

From a methodological point of view, there are other limitations in how measurements are made when assessing the relationship between father involvement and child outcomes. One significant limitation is that most researchers rely on a single data source which raises the problem of the same informant who provided the data about paternal involvement also providing information about child outcomes. Another measurement limitation in the



fathering literature is that most studies are correlational and often cross sectional. This makes inferring the direction of causality problematic, and impossible to account for selection effects or pre-existing conditions inherent in the child that may be impacting child development outcomes (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004).

## **Sampling issues and representativeness**

Another limitation of the father involvement literature is that most of the research is based on US population samples, of which African American samples represent a significant proportion of the father absence literature. The adverse child developmental outcomes reportedly due to father absence may, in part reflect the disadvantaged, disenfranchised, and de-privileged experience of systemic and institutionalized racism rather than the impact of father absence. For example, Harper and McLanahan (2004) found that a sizeable portion of the risk that appeared to be due to father absence could actually be attributed to other factors such as teen motherhood, low parent education, racial inequalities, and poverty.

## **Social class issues**

Other scholars have also challenged the impact of father involvement after controlling for SES. Kesner and McKenry (2001) argue that after controlling for SES, there would be no differences between children from single and two parent homes on measures of social skills and conflict management, which would suggest that single parent family structure is not by itself a risk factor for children's social development (Kesner & McKenry, 2001). Likewise, Battle (2002) found that in the presence of socioeconomic status, family configuration was not statistically significant in predicting educational achievement. In the case of educational achievement, other scholars found that father presence had no effect on post secondary educational attainment after controlling for high school curriculum placement and high school grades (List & Wolfle, 2000). In addition, research indicates that a father's child rearing practices have a smaller effect on children than poverty or race (Mosely & Thompson, 1995; Pleck, 1997). In a similar vein, Averett, Gennetian, and Peters (1997) found that levels of father care were less influential on cognitive development than the child care centers their children were placed in.

## **The importance of the parenting relationship for understanding father involvement**

When assessing the impact of father involvement on child outcomes, researchers often neglect to control for the quality of the mother child relationship which could account for a portion of the observable effects. For example, Amato (1994) observed that the extent of mothers' child care and the quality of the marriage may have accounted for the supposed positive effect of father's child care.

In a review of the empirical research that examines the relationship between father love (acceptance-rejection) and child outcomes, Rohner & Veneziano (2001) identify six different categories of empirical studies that illustrate the complex systemic dynamics of father involvement, mother involvement and child development outcomes. Three of these categories of literature indicate that father love and involvement makes a unique and significant contribution to child development outcomes after statistically controlling for the mothers' influence; while the other categories of study come to the conclusion that father love operates independently of mother love and involvement; that father involvement moderates the influence of mother involvement; and that mother and father involvement have different outcomes related to sons and daughters. Several conclusions can be drawn from this: there is strong evidence to support the conclusion that certain types of father involvement independently contribute to children's developmental outcomes (there is also evidence that certain kinds of mother involvement contributes to unique outcomes); at the same time, depending on the nature of the parenting relationship, there are interactive effects that involve contributions from both mothers and fathers; and finally, there are a number of different outcomes for sons and daughters that warrant further research and analysis. The conclusion for Rohner & Veneziano (2001) is that we may be better off studying father involvement from a triadic (mother –father –child) or systemic perspective rather than focusing on the dyadic relationship (father–child).

## **Direct and indirect effect**

Although much of the focus in this document and in the literature is on the direct effects of father involvement on child development outcomes, it is apparent that fathers are an important source of indirect effects on children's developmental outcomes. Specifically, when fathers function as a source of practical and emotional support for mothers, they enhance the quality of the mother-child relationship thereby facilitating healthy developmental outcomes for children (Lamb, 2000). In addition, fathers indirectly influence their children through their own accumulation of social capital, access to privilege, income, and social networks.

## **Assessing the impact of father presence and father absence**

The salutary effects of being raised by two married biological parents depends on the quality of care parents can provide (Jaffee, Moffitt, Caspi, & Taylor, 2003). For example, Jaffee et al. (2003) found that when fathers engaged in high levels of antisocial behavior, the more time they lived with their children, the more conduct problems their children had, indicating that more father involvement is not always optimal in all cases. It is also important to understand the reasons for low or high levels of paternal involvement. For example, a father may be highly

involved in his child's life because he is unemployed, but would rather be able to lower his levels of father involvement in order to better provide for his child financially. In addition, it is important to move discussions beyond explorations of family structure or father absence, as recent research suggests that family context, family process, patterns of interaction, and the quality of various relationships tend to have more explanatory power (Davis & Friel, 2001). Recent research suggests that the impact of father absence flows through the following paths: 1) no co-parent, 2) economic loss / disadvantage, 3) social isolation and disapproval 4) perceived/actual abandonment relating to psychological distress, 5) conflict between parents (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). These may be the mechanisms (not the presence or absence of a father) that create deleterious effects on children. In addition, no agreement that psychological and social well-being are needs obtained by a parent of a specific gender. Previous research maintains that a child's needs can be met with or without father involvement (Walker & McGraw, 2000). All things considered, further research is needed to more clearly understand the mechanisms by which father involvement influences child development outcomes.

## Employment conditions and father involvement

There are a number of employment factors that influence the degree to which fathers are involved with their children. Lamb (2000) reports that in two parent families where mothers are employed, fathers are more involved with their children when compared with families with non-employed mothers. When mothers earn more money than fathers, then the fathers are more likely to spend more time in the care of their children (Casper & O'Connell, 1998). When parents work non-standard work schedules, fathers are also more likely to be involved in the provision of care to children (Presser, 1995). Conversely, fathers who have higher incomes are more likely to spend less time with their children than low income fathers but the time that they do spend is more positive (Levy-Schiff & Israelaschivili, 1988). When fathers are required to take on fathering responsibilities due to unemployment, there is a tendency that they parent more harshly and children may suffer as a result (Russell, 1983 cited in Cabrera et al., 2000).

### Summary

Overall, several limitations exist with how the construct of father involvement is conceptualized and measured and the ways its impact has been understood and assessed that present a variety of challenges and qualifications to the research findings. Clearly it is important to consider measurement, sampling, and social class issues, to be attentive to direct and indirect effects, to consider the multidimensionality of father involvement within the context of other influences and relationships, to explore the impact of structural parameters on involvement such as employment conditions, and to find better ways of understanding father presence than by exploring its opposite - father absence. Further research and theory can continue to build the father involvement literature by being attentive to these limitations.

## Bibliography

In presenting the research evidence, we have used author citations in the text. If the bibliography is not included here, it can be accessed at [www.cfii.ca](http://www.cfii.ca) or [www.fira.uoguelph.ca](http://www.fira.uoguelph.ca)

Thank you.



### **The Father Involvement Initiative – Ontario Network**

(**FII-ON**) is a broad-based coalition of organizations and individuals who have come together to discuss, learn about and encourage the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. The members of the network share the belief that the active involvement of caring, committed and responsible fathers promotes healthy development in children. The **FII-ON** participants also believe that father involvement promotes the development of resiliency, which is a child's ability to remain healthy and adaptive in the face of adversity.

Thus, within a population health approach, the **FII-ON** seeks to create partnership among various stakeholders (fathers, mothers, service providers, policy and decision-makers, employers and the business sector, labour organizations, professional associations, community-based coalitions, government and academic institutions, and the media) in pursuit of its ultimate goal: to be a catalyst in society's acknowledgement of and action upon our collective responsibility to involve fathers in development of healthy and resilient children.