

**Paternal Engagement and Responsibility in Low-Income Families:
Longitudinal Links with Adolescent Well-Being**

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Recent years have seen an increase in research on the role of fathers, with particular attention to the contexts and processes through which fathers influence children's development. As adolescents face central developmental challenges and transitions, exacerbated by structural deficits for teens in low-income urban communities, parents can play a pivotal supporting and protecting role. Yet little is known about the role of fathers, particularly nonresidential fathers, in low-income families. Psychological models of parenting (e.g., Lamb) attend to the importance of parents' accessibility and responsibility, as well as the quality of parents' engagement. In particular, attachment theory proposes that consistent and trusting father-adolescent relationships will foster growth and well-being, whereas inconsistent caregiving and alienated father-adolescent relationships will predict poor socioemotional functioning. In relation to economic discrimination and historical trends, in addition to cultural norms and practices concerning gender roles, research has also suggested that fathers' roles and influence may differ for boys and girls and in various racial and ethnic groups.

Data are derived from two waves of survey data from *Welfare, Children and Families: A Three-City Study*, a multimethod, longitudinal study of the well-being of low-income urban children and families in the wake of welfare reform. The sample includes a stratified, random sample of 850 adolescents, predominantly African American and Latino. Adolescents reported on their biological fathers' accessibility and parent-child attachment (IPPA). Mothers reported on fathers' financial contributions and responsibility for caretaking. Both mothers and teens

reported on a variety of child well-being measures including psychological functioning (BSI), behavior problems (CBCL, delinquency), and school success, and adolescents' cognitive achievement was directly assessed (Woodcock-Johnson). A large number of family characteristics and processes were measured with standardized instruments.

Analyses will include longitudinal lagged regressions to model the effect of fathers' accessibility, responsibility, and engagement on adolescents' trajectories. Models will include adolescent functioning at the first wave as well as a host of child, maternal, and household characteristics, controlling for both measured and unmeasured, time-invariant characteristics that may be correlated both with father involvement and adolescent well-being, thus helping to partial out the independent relationship between father involvement and adolescent trajectories. The second level of analyses will consider child gender and race/ethnicity as moderators of the relationship between father involvement and adolescent well-being.

Initial analyses indicate that fathers' presence and responsibility appear more strongly related to adolescent well-being than does accessibility, predicting decreases in behavior problems and increases in cognitive achievement over time. The most consistent pattern, however, indicates that adolescents' perceptions of a trusting and communicative attachment relationship with their father predicts improved psychological and behavioral well-being and increases in achievement over time. Interestingly, these findings are stronger for girls than boys, perhaps reflecting the greater importance of emotional relationships for adolescent girls. In addition, positive attachment relationships with fathers appear more beneficial for psychological functioning among Latino adolescents, whereas for African Americans, effects are most pronounced regarding decreasing levels of behavior problems. Results will be discussed in light of the cultural norms and expectations concerning fathers' roles in families.