

In-Hospital Acknowledgement of Paternity:
*A Portrait of Father Involvement and Support
in the First Three Years after a Nonmarital Birth*

August 2013

In-Hospital Acknowledgment of Paternity (AOP)

A Portrait of Father Involvement and Support in the First Three Years after a Nonmarital Birth

Deliverables C & D: Interim Report

Original submission date: August 30, 2013

Final submission date: September 25, 2013

Submitted by:

Cynthia Osborne, Ph.D.

Director, Child and Family Research Partnership

Authors

Cynthia Osborne, Ph.D.

Director, Child and Family Research Partnership
Associate Professor, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs
The University of Texas at Austin

Daniel Dillon, MPAff

Research Associate, Child and Family Research Partnership
The University of Texas at Austin

Freya Gaertner, MA

Research Associate, Child and Family Research Partnership
The University of Texas at Austin

Rebecca Breeden, MPAff

Research Associate, Child and Family Research Partnership
The University of Texas at Austin

Robert Brill, MA, MPAff

Research Associate, Child and Family Research Partnership
The University of Texas at Austin

Brittany Wright, MS

Graduate Research Assistant, Child and Family Research Partnership
The University of Texas at Austin

Eric Zimmerman

Graduate Research Assistant, Child and Family Research Partnership
The University of Texas at Austin

Research Support

Carlos Herrera, MA

Graduate Research Assistant, Child and Family Research Partnership
The University of Texas at Austin

Xueshu Chen

Graduate Research Assistant, Child and Family Research Partnership
The University of Texas at Austin

Preferred Citation:

Osborne, Cynthia et al. (2013). In-Hospital Acknowledgment of Paternity (AOP): A Portrait of Father Involvement and Support in the First Three Years after a Nonmarital Birth. Child and Family Research Partnership.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Description	Page
List of Tables	9
List of Figures	10
List of Appendices	14
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	15
Purpose and Introduction	15
Background and Findings	15
Who Signs the AOP	16
Why Parents Sign the AOP	16
The Role of Father Involvement and Support	16
The Mother and Father Relationship	17
The Father and Child Relationship	17
Child Support	18
Child Outcomes	19
Policy Considerations	20
Organization of the Report	20
CHAPTER 1: Introduction	23
Purpose and Objectives	23
Paternity Establishment Study (PES)	23
Checking in with AOP Signers (CAS)	24
Study Demographic Characteristics	24
Background and Motivation	25
Family Structure Changes and Child Wellbeing	26
The Father's Role in Child Development and Wellbeing	27
The Value of Paternal Involvement	27
The Value of Paternal Financial Support	28
Paternity Establishment	28
CHAPTER 2: Establishing Paternity	29
Background and Motivation	29

Benefits of Establishing Paternity	30
History of Paternity Establishment	30
Chapter Outline	31
Characteristics of AOP-Signing Fathers.....	32
Rate of AOP Signing	32
Demographic Characteristics	32
Race/Ethnicity	32
Education Level	35
Additional Demographic Characteristics.....	35
Parental Relationship.....	36
Romantic Relationship Status	36
Characteristics Associated with Establishing Paternity	38
Previous Children	38
Domestic Violence	42
Incarceration	43
Why Parents Sign the AOP	43
Motivations for Establishing Paternity	44
Motivations for Not Establishing Paternity	46
Importance of Establishing Paternity	47
Learning about Paternity Establishment	48
Parents' Experience with the Birth Registrar.....	51
Knowledge of AOP	54
Conclusion.....	57
CHAPTER 3: Parental Relationship.....	59
Background and Motivation	59
Parental Relationships During Pregnancy and Shortly After Birth	61
Parents' Relationship Status Shortly After Birth.....	62
Parents' Expectations Shortly After Birth	62
Expectations for Marriage in the Future.....	62
Desire for Paternal Involvement in the Future	64
Relationship During Pregnancy.....	65
Relationship Duration Prior to Pregnancy	65

Pregnancy Planning.....	66
Relationship Instability.....	67
Father Prenatal Involvement	67
Support from Extended Family	69
Group Differences by Parental Relationship During Pregnancy.....	70
Characteristics Associated with Short-Term Relationships	70
Characteristics Associated with Relationship Instability During Pregnancy	71
Characteristics Associated with Various Parental Relationships During Pregnancy	73
AOP Signing.....	74
Child Support Orders/ Expectations	75
Multipartner Fertility	76
Domestic Violence	77
Parental Relationships Three Years After an AOP is Signed	78
Relationship Status Changes Over Time	78
Marriage.....	80
Breakup.....	81
Reasons for Breakup	82
Desire for Father Involvement Changes Over Time.....	83
Coparenting Relationship at Three Years	84
Communication in the Coparenting Relationship.....	85
Trust and Shared Responsibility in the Coparenting Relationship.....	87
Group Differences by Parental Relationship Three Years After an AOP is Signed	89
Characteristics Associated with Various Types of Parental Relationships.....	89
Characteristics Associated with High- and Low-Quality Coparenting Relationships.....	91
Characteristics Associated with Desire for Father Involvement.....	93
Characteristics Associated with Various Parental Relationships Three Years After an AOP is Signed.....	95
Multipartner Fertility	96
History of Incarceration	97
Employment Instability	98
Substance Abuse	99

Domestic Violence	100
Child Support Orders/ Expectations	101
Relative Importance of Factors Associated with No Romantic Relationship	102
Conclusion.....	103
CHAPTER 4: Father Involvement.....	105
Background and Motivation	105
Not All Fathers are Equally Involved.....	105
Operationalizing Father Involvement.....	108
Father Involvement Three Months After Birth.....	110
Father Intentions at Three Months	110
Father Accessibility at Three Months	111
Accessibility Indicators.....	111
Father Engagement at Three Months.....	112
Engagement Indicators	112
Father Responsibility at Three Months	114
Responsibility Indicators	114
Overview of Father Involvement at Three Months	115
Group Differences by Father Involvement at Three Months	117
Characteristics Associated with Father Involvement at Three Months	120
AOP Signing.....	121
Parental Relationships	122
Maternal Gatekeeping.....	124
Child Support Orders/Expectations	125
Multipartner Fertility	126
Incarceration.....	127
Employment Status.....	128
Education	129
Domestic Violence	130
Father Involvement Three Years After Birth.....	131
Father Involvement Over Time	132
Father Accessibility at Three Years	133
Father Responsibility at Three Years	136

Group Differences by Father Involvement at Three Years	137
Characteristics Associated with Father Involvement at Three Years	139
Characteristics Associated with Father Accessibility Over Time	139
Multipartner Fertility	140
Education	141
Employment Status.....	142
Domestic Violence	143
Child Support Order/Expectations.....	144
Relative Importance of Factors Associated with Father Involvement	145
Conclusion.....	147
CHAPTER 5: Financial Support	149
Background and Motivation	149
Chapter Outline.....	151
Support Arrangements	151
Overview of How Texas Fathers Provide Support	153
Planning and Importance of Financial Support	155
Families Relying on Informal Arrangements.....	156
Types of Informal Support Fathers Provide.....	157
Three Months After a Nonmarital Birth.....	157
Three Years After an AOP is Signed	159
Mothers' Expectations for Financial Support	160
Mothers' Expectations for Opening a Child Support Case.....	161
Shared Responsibility.....	162
Group Differences by Informal Support Provided	162
Families Relying on Formal Child Support Arrangements	166
Entrance Into the Child Support System.....	167
Entrance Into the Child Support System by Relationship Type	167
Reasons Child Support Order was Established	168
Group Differences by Entrance Into the Child Support System	169
Characteristics Associated With Father Support	171
Child Support Compliance	172

Group Differences by Compliance	173
Characteristics Associated with Compliance	175
Conclusion.....	176
CHAPTER 6: Outcomes and Policy Implications.....	179
Background and Motivation	179
Father Involvement, Support, and Child Outcomes	179
Paternal Involvement and Positive Child Outcomes	180
Factors Associated with Father Involvement and Child Wellbeing	180
Paternal Support and Positive Child Outcomes.....	182
Father Typologies.....	184
Informal Support.....	184
Formal Child Support	185
No Support.....	187
Involvement and Cohabitation	187
Group Differences by Father Typology.....	188
Support and Involvement by AOP Signing.....	192
Policy Discussion	194
Policy Considerations.....	203
Conclusion.....	204
Appendix.....	205
ENDNOTES.....	211

LIST OF TABLES

Description	Page
Table 1: Fathers' Demographic Characteristics by AOP Signing at 3 Months	33
Table 2: Group Differences by AOP Signing at 3 Months	39
Table 3: Group Differences by Duration of Parental Relationship Prior to Pregnancy	71
Table 4: Group Differences by Relationship Stability During Pregnancy.....	72
Table 5: Group Differences by Parental Relationship at 3 Years, AOP Signers	90
Table 6: Group Differences by Quality of Coparenting Relationship at 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	92
Table 7: Group Differences by Mother's Desire for Father Involvement at 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	94
Table 8: Father Engagement at 3 Months	113
Table 9: Father Responsibility at 3 Months	114
Table 10: Group Differences by Father Involvement at 3 Months.....	118
Table 11: Father Responsibility Measures at 3 Years	136
Table 12: Group Differences by Father Involvement at 3 Years.....	138
Table 13: Group Differences by Informal Support Type at 3 Years, AOP Signers	163
Table 14: Group Differences by Support Type at 3 Years, AOP Signers	169
Table 15: Group Differences by Child Support Compliance at 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	174
Table 16: Group Differences by Father Typology at 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	189
Table 17: Policy Considerations for AOP Signing and Child Support Enforcement	203
Table 18: Response Consistency on Father Involvement at 3 Months	210

LIST OF FIGURES

Description	Page
Figure 1: Births to Unmarried Parents, 1980-2011.....	26
Figure 2: AOP Signing by Race/Ethnicity at 3 Months	34
Figure 3: Cohabitation Status and Romantic Relationship Status by AOP Signing at 3 Months.....	36
Figure 4: AOP Signing by Cohabitation and Relationship Status at 3 Months	37
Figure 5: AOP Signing by Incidence of Previous Children at 3 Months	40
Figure 6: AOP Signing by Previous Paternity Establishment at 3 Months	41
Figure 7: AOP Signing by Domestic Violence at 3 Months	42
Figure 8: Mothers' and Fathers' Motivations for Establishing Paternity	45
Figure 9: Mothers' Motivations for Not Establishing Paternity.....	46
Figure 10: Mother and Father Reports of Paternity Establishment Importance	47
Figure 11: Where Parents Received Paternity Establishment Information During Pregnancy	49
Figure 12: Where Parents Prefer to Receive Information about Paternity Establishment.....	50
Figure 13: Percentage of Parents Who Spoke with a Birth Registrar about the AOP	51
Figure 14: Percentage of Mothers Who Disagree That the Birth Registrar Was Helpful by AOP Signing.....	53
Figure 15: Percentage of Parents Who Knew Prior to Child's Birth that Father Had to Establish Paternity to Be Legal Father	54
Figure 16: Parents' Knowledge of Whether Undocumented Fathers Can Establish Paternity	55
Figure 17: Parents' Knowledge of Whether Paternity Establishment Is Necessary for a Child Support Order.....	56
Figure 18: Parents' Relationship at 3 Months	62
Figure 19: Parents' Chances of Marrying Each Other in the Near Future	63
Figure 20: How Involved Mother Would Like Father to Be in Raising Child at 3 Months	64
Figure 21: Relationship Duration Prior to Pregnancy	65
Figure 22: Percentage of Parents Trying to Have a Baby When Mother Became Pregnant	66
Figure 23: Father Involvement During Pregnancy	68
Figure 24: Percentage of Mothers Receiving Support from Father's Family During Pregnancy	69

Figure 25: Length of Relationship Prior to Pregnancy and Stability of Relationship During Pregnancy by AOP Signing at 3 Months	74
Figure 26: Length of Relationship Prior to Pregnancy and Stability of Relationship During Pregnancy by Child Support Order/Expectation at 3 Months.....	75
Figure 27: Length of Relationship Prior to Pregnancy and Stability of Relationship During Pregnancy by Father's Multipartner Fertility at 3 Months.....	76
Figure 28: Length of Relationship Prior to Pregnancy and Stability of Relationship During Pregnancy by Domestic Violence at 3 Months.....	77
Figure 29: Relationship and Cohabitation Status at Birth and at 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	79
Figure 30: Age of Child When Parents Married, AOP Signers Married by 3 Years.....	80
Figure 31: Age of Child When Parents Broke Up, AOP Signers Broken Up by 3 Years.....	81
Figure 32: Reasons Couples Broke Up at 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	82
Figure 33: Percentage of Mothers Indicating Each Type of Father Involvement is "Very Important" at 3 Months and at 3 Years, AOP Signers	83
Figure 34: Frequency of Parental Interaction at 3 Years by Cohabitation Status, AOP Signers.....	85
Figure 35: Frequency of Parental Conflict at 3 Years, AOP Signers	86
Figure 36: Trust in the Coparenting Relationship at 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	87
Figure 37: How Often Father Looks after Child When Mother Needs to Do Things at 3 Months and 3 Years, AOP Signers	88
Figure 38: Parental Relationship Outcomes by Father's Multipartner Fertility at 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	96
Figure 39: Parental Relationship Outcomes by Father's History of Incarceration at 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	97
Figure 40: Parental Relationship Outcomes by Father's Employment Instability at 3 Years, AOP Signers	98
Figure 41: Parental Relationship Outcomes by Substance Abuse at 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	99
Figure 42: Parental Relationship Outcomes by Domestic Violence at 3 Years, AOP Signers	100
Figure 43: Parental Relationship Outcomes by Child Support Order/Expectations at 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	101
Figure 44: How Various Characteristics Affect the Odds of Having No Relationship at 3 Years.....	102
Figure 45: Components of Father Involvement. Adapted from Lamb et al. (1987).....	109
Figure 46: Father Intentions for Involvement at 3 Months.....	110
Figure 47: Frequency of Father Contact in the Last 30 days	111

Figure 48: Father Involvement Indicators at 3 Months	116
Figure 49: Father Involvement by AOP Signing at 3 Months.....	121
Figure 50: Father Involvement by Parent's Romantic Relationship at 3 Months.....	122
Figure 51: Father Involvement by Maternal Gatekeeping at 3 Months.....	124
Figure 52: Father Involvement by Child Support Expectations at 3 Months.....	125
Figure 53: Father Involvement by Paternal Multipartner Fertility at 3 Months	126
Figure 54: Father Involvement by Employment Status at 3 Months.....	128
Figure 55: Father Involvement by Education at 3 Months	129
Figure 56: Father Involvement by Domestic Violence at 3 Months	130
Figure 57: Change in Father Involvement at 3 Years	132
Figure 58: Father Accessibility at 3 Months and 3 Years, Nonresident AOP Signers	133
Figure 59: Overnight Father Accessibility at 3 Years, Nonresident AOP Signers.....	134
Figure 60: Mothers' Request for Father Accessibility at 3 Months and 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	135
Figure 61: Father Responsibility at 3 Months and 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	137
Figure 62: Father Accessibility by Father Multipartner Fertility at 3 Months and 3 Years, Nonresident AOP Signers.....	140
Figure 63: Father Accessibility by Education at 3 Months and 3 Years, Nonresident AOP Signers.....	141
Figure 64: Father Accessibility by Unemployment at 3 Months and 3 Years, Nonresident AOP Signers.....	142
Figure 65: Father Accessibility by Domestic Violence at 3 Months and 3 Years, Nonresident AOP Signers.....	143
Figure 66: Father Accessibility by Child Support Order/Expectations at 3 Months and 3 Years, Nonresident AOP Signers	144
Figure 67: How Various Characteristics Affect the Odds of Low Accessibility at 3 Years, Nonresident AOP Signers.....	146
Figure 68: Relationship Type at 3 Months and 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	152
Figure 69: Support Arrangements by Relationship Type at 3 Months	153
Figure 70: Support Arrangements by Relationship Type at 3 Years, AOP Signers	154
Figure 71: Having/Following a Plan for Financial Support by Relationship Type at 3 Months.....	155
Figure 72: Types of Informal Support Provided by Relationship Type at 3 Months.....	158

Figure 73: Types of Informal Support Provided by Relationship Type at 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	160
Figure 74: Plans to Open a Child Support Case and Shared Responsibility by Relationship Type at 3 Months.....	161
Figure 75: Entrance into the Child Support System, by Relationship Type at 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	167
Figure 76: Reasons Mothers Opened a Child Support Case at 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	168
Figure 77: Risk Factors by Child Support Order at 3 Years, AOP Signers.....	171
Figure 78: Reasons Father Does Not Pay Child Support at 3 Years – Mothers’ Reports, AOP Signers.....	172
Figure 79: Compliance with Child Support Order by Risk Factor at 3 Years, AOP Signers	175
Figure 80: Father Typologies at 3 years, AOP Signers	186
Figure 81: Paternal Support and Involvement by AOP Signing at 3 Months.....	192
Figure 82: Model of Father Involvement and Support	195

LIST OF APPENDICES

<u>Description</u>	<u>Page</u>
Appendix A: PES Study Information.....	205
Appendix B: CAS Study Information	206
Appendix C: CAS and PES Study Demographics.....	207
Appendix D: Glossary of Terms.....	209
Appendix E: Response Consistency Among Matched Parents	210

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose and Introduction

The Texas Office of the Attorney General, Child Support Division (OAG) contracted with the Texas Child and Family Research Partnership (CFRP) to provide recommendations regarding ways to expand paternity education, increase or sustain federal performance of paternity measures, and reduce the incidence of rescissions of paternity establishments. Ultimately, these recommendations should lead to higher and more accurate levels of paternity establishment among unmarried fathers, fewer paternity disestablishments, and improved compliance with child support obligations.

The purpose of this report is to examine the intersection of in-hospital Acknowledgment of paternity (AOP), formal child support, informal support, parental relationships, and father involvement. Analyses presented throughout this report are primarily descriptive in nature and aim to give a broad understanding of the characteristics associated with each topic. Future reports by CFRP will build on these findings with the use of multivariate analyses and additional survey waves in an effort to tease out relative effect sizes and causality in the data.

To address the research aims related to this report, CFRP conducted two separate studies: The Paternity Establishment Study (PES) and Checking in with AOP Signers (CAS) Study. Information from the PES and CAS studies are used extensively throughout this report. Detailed information on these studies is available in Chapter One and Appendix A through Appendix C.

Background and Findings

The percentage of nonmarital births in the United States doubled between 1980 and 2011. Currently in Texas, 42 percent of recent births are to unmarried mothers. This dramatic rise in the number of nonmarital births is of growing concern because of the precarious economic status of single parents (most often mothers) and children. Moreover, there are a host of negative social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes associated with children who live in poor single-parent families, especially when those families lack involved and supportive fathers.

One strategy to promote a father's financial and emotional investment in his child—while also formalizing the legal rights and responsibilities of fatherhood—is to encourage the establishment of paternity. Paternity establishment is the legal determination of fatherhood. It serves as a tool to promote responsibility, encourage father involvement, and provide legal access to a cadre of attendant benefits and rights. Furthermore, research shows that fathers who voluntarily sign an Acknowledgment of Paternity (AOP) form in the hospital are more likely to be involved and supportive, which can lead to improved child outcomes.

Given the benefits associated with establishing paternity, it is important to understand who establishes paternity and why. To help answer these questions, CFRP conducted two surveys to gather information on the parental characteristics and prenatal factors associated with AOP signers and non-signers. The two surveys were conducted among separate populations of mothers and fathers in Texas approximately 3 months after the birth of their child (PES) and 3 years after the birth of their child (CAS). The following section provides an overview of CFRP's major findings, a summary of policy recommendations, and a short synopsis of the report by chapter.

WHO SIGNS THE AOP

Overall, roughly three-quarters of unmarried fathers in Texas voluntarily sign an AOP form in the hospital when their child is born. The demographic characteristics of fathers who sign the AOP are not significantly different from the characteristics of fathers who do not, with the exception of racial background. A significantly greater proportion of African American fathers decline to sign the AOP, as compared to their White and Latino counterparts. Looking more closely at specific risk factors associated with non-signers, we find that non-signers are more likely to have been incarcerated at their child's birth, exhibit abusive behavior towards the mother and/or child, and have children with multiple partners. In addition, when compared to AOP signers, non-signers are less likely to be romantically involved with the mother, live with the mother and child, or have established paternity with previous children.

WHY PARENTS SIGN THE AOP

Most parents are driven by legal and personal reasons to establish paternity, including to ensure that the child has a legal father. In the majority of cases in which paternity is not established, the father did not visit the hospital at the time of the child's birth. The father's lack of attendance at the hospital may reflect his higher level of risk factors or the poor relationship quality of the parents and indicate that establishing paternity through a court process may be more ideal for these parents.

When examining parents' experiences with the birth registrar – the person responsible for filing a birth certificate and providing information on paternity – CFRP found that most parents learn about paternity establishment in the hospital. However, mothers associated with non-signing fathers are less likely than AOP-signing mothers to report having met with the birth registrar at the hospital. Furthermore, non-signing mothers who met with a birth registrar are less likely than mothers associated with signing fathers to indicate that the birth registrar was helpful.

THE ROLE OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT

Prior research on nonmarital childrearing reveals that a parent's romantic relationship, positive coparenting, and parental cohabitation are all positively associated with increased paternal involvement and support. Prior research also provides insight into how paternal risk factors such as domestic violence, incarceration, multipartner fertility, and substance abuse can

decrease an unmarried father's likelihood of being involved with his children.^{1,2} Drawing on survey data from unmarried Texas parents, CFRP builds on these findings in several ways: 1) examining the intersection and associations between the parental relationship, father involvement, paternal support, and AOP signing, 2) investigating how each of these topics is informed by a web of personal, interpersonal, and environmental factors, and 3) approximating how the parental relationship, father involvement, and paternal support are likely to change over time.

THE MOTHER AND FATHER RELATIONSHIP

Although most parents in our samples describe relative stability and optimism surrounding their relationship at the child's birth, many unmarried couples also hinted at signs of relationship fragility even before the child was born. Indeed, many parental relationships dissolve in the years following a nonmarital birth. Three-quarters of AOP-signing couples are cohabiting when their child is born, but by the time the child has reached the age of three, the percentage of cohabiting couples declines to less than 60 percent. Moreover, a mother's desire for the father to be involved in the child's life also reportedly decreases over time. The most commonly reported reasons for a relationship ending are infidelity, financial reasons, domestic violence, and drugs or alcohol.

Closer inspection of AOP-signing parents with 3-year-olds reveals that three of the most prominent characteristics associated with low-quality parental relationships are domestic violence, substance abuse, and multipartner fertility. CFRP data also show child support orders or expectations of establishing an order are more common when parental relationships are weak. More than half of parents in a low-quality coparenting relationship have a child support order or are considering establishing one compared to just 11 percent of those in good coparenting relationships, indicating that child support is a valued resource for parents who no longer have a healthy relationship. Moreover, paternal multipartner fertility was reported in nearly 40 percent of low-quality coparenting relationships compared to 25 percent in high-quality coparenting relationships.

THE FATHER AND CHILD RELATIONSHIP

Three months after a nonmarital birth, most Texas fathers are involved with their child. Roughly 7 out of 10 see their children regularly, participate in shared activities, and help out with basic childrearing duties. These fathers want to play a role in the lives of their children, and for the most part they are following through. Very soon after birth, however, another 3 in 10 fathers have very little involvement in the lives of their children. These fathers are disproportionately found in non-romantic relationships with the mother. They are more likely to have children with other partners or be with mothers who have children by multiple fathers. In addition, they are disproportionately unemployed, abusive, and entangled with the criminal justice system. These fathers overwhelmingly declined to establish paternity, and the mothers associated with these fathers are much more likely to be already considering child support.

In cases where the father signed an AOP, the vast majority of mothers report that the father's participation with his child has remained stable or even flourished over the first several years of the child's life. The underlying data, however, depict a somewhat less genial narrative. Three years after a nonmarital birth, the proportion of AOP-signing fathers who remain accessible and responsible to their children has fallen noticeably in relation to a similar group of fathers examined shortly after birth. The result is a nontrivial decline in the involvement of many unmarried fathers over time.

Statistical analyses reveal that these uninvolved fathers are significantly more likely to be in non-romantic relationships with the mother, have problems maintaining steady employment, and have children with other partners—risk factors that are similarly associated with poor quality parental relationships. In addition, AOP-signing fathers who did not finish high school or who have a history of domestic violence also have statistically higher odds of being uninvolved in their children's lives.

CHILD SUPPORT

For many mothers, the financial support provided by a child's father can mean the difference between making ends meet and living below the poverty line. For those families who are not lifted out of poverty by formal child support payments, the assistance can still help close the "poverty gap" that these families face.³ In addition to the economic benefits, child support payments are associated with greater academic achievement and fewer externalizing problems in children.^{4,5,6} Previous research also shows that fathers who voluntarily establish paternity are more likely to pay child support (despite being less likely to have a child support order), to pay more over the long term, and to increase their payments over time.⁷

Drawing on survey data from Texas parents, CFRP finds that financial support arrangements vary widely by parental relationship and often change over time. Formal support arrangements (i.e. child support orders) are most common among parents with no romantic relationship, whereas the vast majority of parents who are cohabiting or dating rely on informal support arrangements. Three months after a nonmarital birth, 77 percent of parents rely exclusively on informal support arrangements, whereas three years after an AOP is signed, 69 percent of parents rely exclusively on informal arrangements.

Parents who do not sign an AOP are most likely to have neither informal nor formal support arrangements—three months after a nonmarital birth, 48 percent of non-signing fathers provide no financial support at all. Three years after an AOP is signed, 1 in 10 Texas fathers provides no financial support. A number of risk factors, including multipartner fertility, domestic violence, incarceration, substance abuse, and employment instability are associated with a father's failure to provide financial support.

Many of the same risk factors associated with a failure to provide financial support informally are also associated with entrance into the child support system. Overall, multipartner fertility,

incarceration, domestic violence, and substance abuse are more prevalent among fathers in the child support system than fathers not in the child support system. Once a family is in the formal child support system, these same risk factors are associated with non-compliance with child support orders. Non-compliant fathers are also much more likely to be in non-cohabiting, non-romantic relationships and to be uninvolved with their children.

CHILD OUTCOMES

Research shows that high-quality father involvement and support are associated with a number of positive child outcomes, including decreased delinquency and behavioral problems, improved cognitive development, increased educational attainment, and better psychological wellbeing.⁸ Children with involved fathers, on average, perform better in school, have higher self-esteem, and exhibit greater empathy, emotional security, curiosity, and pro-social behavior.⁹

Moreover, for low-income families, a father's financial support can significantly reduce material hardship and parental stress, improvements which may have collateral benefits on positive parenting and parental investments in children.¹⁰ Formal financial support provided through the child support system is also associated with positive child outcomes, including improved emotional wellbeing and academic achievement.¹¹ Although the effect of paternal financial support on child outcomes varies by type (informal, formal, or both), amount, and whether the father is resident or nonresident, research has established a clear link between support and a wide range of positive cognitive and emotional outcomes for children.

Three years after an AOP is signed, the vast majority of Texas fathers are still involved, living with the mother, and providing informal support to their children. For many of these children, the emotional and financial investments of their fathers are likely to yield a host of positive outcomes. Still, three years after a nonmarital birth a sizable fraction of Texas fathers have begun to withdraw from the lives of their children both emotionally and financially.

By the time their child has reached the age of three, nearly 1 out of 7 AOP-signing fathers is in the formal child support system and no longer living with the mother or otherwise involved in the life of the child. Moreover, less than half of these fathers are meeting their formal child support obligations. Another 8 percent of fathers are providing no financial support, not living with their child's mother, and are not involved with their child. The findings suggest that a significant proportion of 3-year-old Texas children are failing to receive adequate levels of involvement and support from their fathers, and as a consequence, will likely suffer from the host of negative outcomes that accompany paternal withdrawal.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

A father's failure to sign the in-hospital AOP serves as a red flag for a range of potential risk factors that may wield significant influence on future child outcomes. Increasing the rate of voluntary paternity establishment, therefore, may improve child outcomes for this at-risk population. However, efforts to increase voluntary paternity establishment should be mindful of the prevalence of domestic violence, substance abuse, multipartner fertility, and other threats to positive outcomes for these families.

Failing to take these factors into consideration is likely to significantly affect the success of policies intended to increase voluntary in-hospital paternity establishment. Moreover, increasing the rate of paternity establishment among fathers with antisocial behaviors such as domestic violence is cause for concern given the potential for increased harm to the mother and child. Under these circumstances, court-ordered paternity establishment may offer an avenue for restricting a father's visitation access through legal parameters that afford better protection to the mother and child.

Programs currently in place to improve family and child welfare, including coparenting instruction and employment initiatives, might provide an example for future programs to assist single-parent families receiving both formal and informal support. In addition, many mothers reported inadequate information regarding paternity establishment, and others did not receive any relevant information until after the child's birth, though they would have liked to receive it during pregnancy. Improving the timing and channels for this information may empower parents to make decisions about paternity establishment before, rather than after, arriving at the hospital. Future surveys and ongoing analyses by CFRP will build on the findings of this report, especially with regard to the process of AOP signing and the ways in which paternity establishment can be improved throughout the state of Texas.

Organization of the Report

Chapter One provides general background information on the prevalence of nonmarital births, the influence of fathers on child outcomes, and how these topics relate to paternity establishment in Texas. It also provides a detailed description of the two separate surveys conducted by CFRP, including methodology and basic demographic information. Additional information on these surveys and the demographic characteristics of respondents can be found in Appendix A through Appendix C.

Chapter Two focuses on paternity establishment and the associated benefits of establishing paternity. It discusses the characteristics of parents who voluntarily establish paternity through signing the Acknowledgment of Paternity (AOP) form in the hospital, those who do not, and the reasons for these decisions. Particular attention is given to distinct motivations for establishing paternity among mothers and fathers. The primary goal of this chapter is to better understand

the motivations of those who do and do not voluntarily establish paternity in Texas and to gain insight into how knowledge of the AOP influences paternity establishment.

Chapter Three examines the parental relationship over time, through the lens of paternity establishment and relevant risk factors. The data provide snapshots of relationships among unmarried Texas parents during pregnancy, shortly after birth, and three years after a nonmarital birth. This chapter charts the course of unmarried parental relationships over this time period, explores how relationships differ by AOP signing, and investigates the risk factors that threaten to derail many of these relationships along the way.

Chapter Four begins by surveying the relevant literature on father involvement, including a discussion of how involvement varies by fathers' characteristics and how it is likely to change over time. The chapter draws on data collected by CFRP to examine the ways in which Texas fathers are involved three months after a nonmarital birth and how that involvement differs by various characteristics of the mother and father. The chapter also examines the involvement of AOP-signing fathers three years after a nonmarital birth and analyzes the relative impacts of various paternal risk factors in an effort to understand which characteristics have the most influence on a father's odds of being uninvolved.

Chapter Five examines the ways in which fathers who are not in the child support system support their children, with a specific focus on risks to mothers and fathers successfully navigating an informal support agreement. The chapter also discusses the fathers who have a formal child support order in place and examines related issues of compliance. Additionally, the chapter discusses maternal expectations of support and how they are correlated with the type of support mothers actually receive.

Chapter Six begins with a review of the literature linking paternal involvement and support to improved outcomes for children. The literature review is followed by a presentation of overarching father typologies, which broadly classify AOP-signing fathers with 3-year-olds into distinct categories based on their level of involvement and the means by which they provide financial support. The father typologies are then analyzed for the prevalence of risk factors to understand how various characteristics may threaten the viability of a father's emotional and financial contributions. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the relevant considerations for public policy, with particular emphasis on the policy levers most likely to influence paternal involvement, AOP signing, and child support.

This page intentionally left blank.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Objectives

The Texas Office of the Attorney General, Child Support Division (OAG) contracted with the Texas Child and Family Research Partnership (CFRP) to provide recommendations regarding ways to expand paternity education, increase or sustain federal performance of paternity measures, and reduce the incidence of rescissions of paternity establishment. Ultimately, these recommendations should lead to higher and more accurate levels of paternity establishment among unmarried fathers, fewer paternity disestablishments, and improved compliance with child support obligations.

To inform recommendations to the OAG, CFRP developed a research program to determine the prenatal and parental factors that affect in-hospital paternity establishment, ascertain when unmarried parents are most receptive to messages about paternity establishment, examine the association between in-hospital paternity establishment and subsequent child support compliance or use of informal support, and determine whether a father's understanding of the paternity establishment process affects his future involvement with his child and compliance with child support.

The purpose of this report is to examine the association of in-hospital Acknowledgment of Paternity (AOP), formal child support, and the provision of informal support among fathers who do not enter the child support system. In addition, this report investigates how each of these factors interacts with the parental relationship and a father's involvement with his child. To address these research questions, CFRP conducted two separate studies: The Paternity Establishment Study (PES), and Checking in with AOP Signers (CAS) study. This report relies extensively on data collected from these two studies to provide a descriptive analysis of the factors associated with AOP signing, financial support, and father involvement among unmarried parents in Texas.

PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT STUDY (PES)

The Paternity Establishment Study (PES) was developed to inform the research aims noted above, as well as to provide additional information on the parental characteristics and prenatal factors associated with AOP signers and non-signers. CFRP conducted this survey among mothers and fathers from the nine child support regions within Texas approximately three months after the birth of their child. Examples of topics covered in the survey include demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of parents, relationship dynamics, father involvement, multipartner fertility, parental care, experiences regarding AOP, and intent to obtain a child support order.

The PES survey was administered online and by phone during a two-month period beginning in April 2013. It was offered in both English and Spanish to a final sample of 807 Texas mothers

and 294 Texas fathers. For analysis, CFRP reduced this to an analytic sample containing only parents who had complete data for key outcome variables. The dataset used for analysis in this report contains data from 700 mothers and 294 fathers.

The sampling methodology used in PES oversampled unmarried parents who did not sign the AOP in an effort to improve the reliability of estimates calculated for this subgroup. Though sample sizes (*N*) presented throughout this report are based on this unadjusted sample, all data—including distributions, significance testing, and other analyses—have been weighted to reflect the true proportions of relative subgroups in the population. This technique permits the overall survey results to be representative of all unmarried births in Texas. Additional information on this study can be found in Appendix A.

CHECKING IN WITH AOP SIGNERS (CAS)

The Checking in with AOP Signers (CAS) Study was also developed to inform the research aims outlined above, with a specific focus on understanding why some parents who establish paternity choose to enter the child support system whereas others do not. CFRP conducted this survey among AOP-signing parents approximately three years after their child was born. Parents who did not sign the AOP were not included in this sample. Examples of topics covered in this survey include demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of parents, relationship dynamics, father involvement, external stressors, social support, experience with AOP administration, child support, and receipt of informal support.

The CAS survey was administered online and by phone during a three-month period beginning in January 2013. It was offered in both English and Spanish to a final sample of 597 Texas mothers and 84 Texas fathers. For analysis, CFRP reduced this final sample to an analytic sample containing only parents who had complete data for key outcome variables. The CAS dataset used for analysis in this report contains data from 529 mothers and 84 fathers.

The sampling methodology used in CAS oversampled unmarried parents in the formal child support system in an effort to improve the reliability of estimates calculated for this subgroup. Though sample sizes (*N*) presented throughout this report are based on this unadjusted sample, all data—including distributions, significance testing, and other analyses—have been weighted to reflect the true proportions of relative subgroups in the population. This technique permits the overall survey results to be representative of all unmarried births in Texas in which an AOP was signed. Additional information on this study can be found in Appendix B.

STUDY DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The PES sample population is representative of all unmarried Texas births taking place during the early part of 2013. The CAS sample population is representative of all unmarried Texas births taking place during the summer of 2009 in which the father signed an in-hospital AOP. The weighted demographic characteristics of mothers and fathers in each survey are presented in Appendix C.

Across both studies, more than half of unmarried births are to Hispanic mothers and fathers. White parents make up roughly a quarter of both samples, and African American parents make up less than a fifth of both samples. More than 8 out of 10 parents in both samples are U.S. citizens.

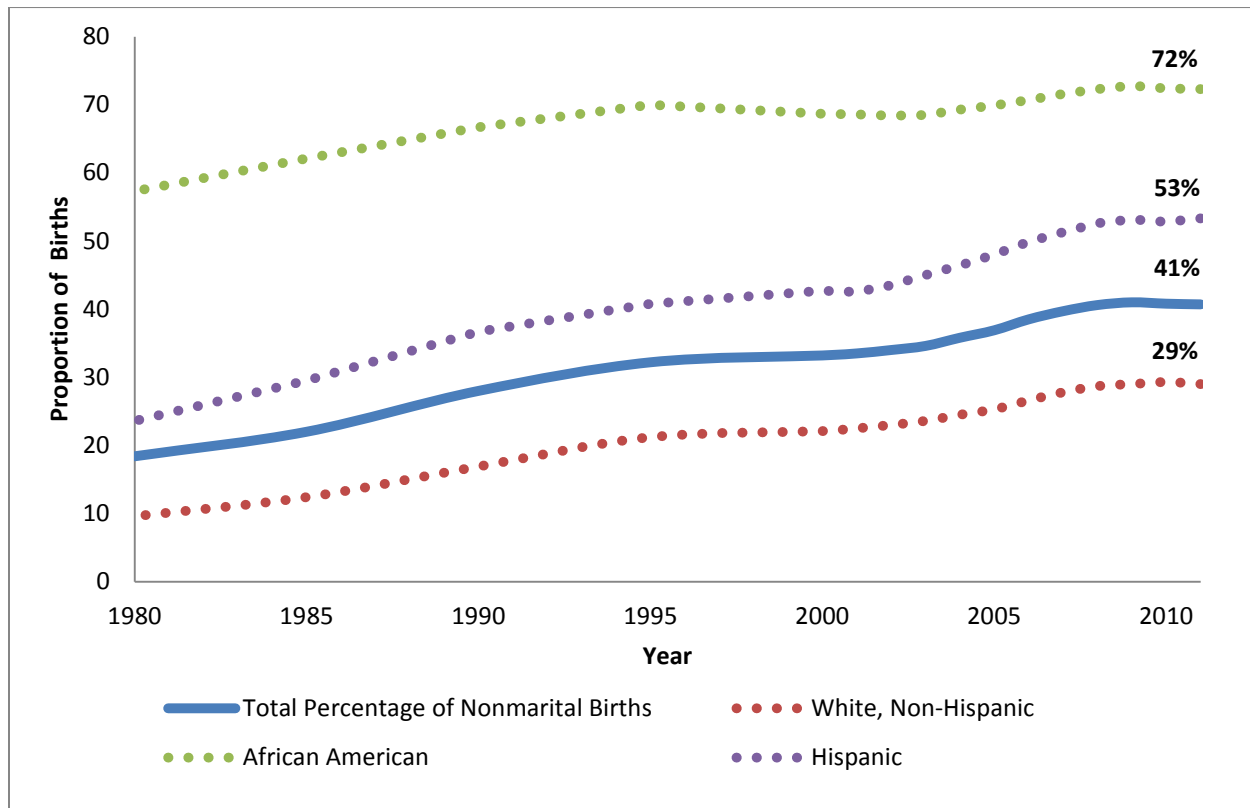
Sixty-one percent of parents in the PES Study were living together and romantically involved three months after their children were born. In the CAS Study, approximately 58 percent of parents were living together and romantically involved after three years. Across both surveys, roughly 3 out of 10 mothers and fathers have children with other partners.

Within the PES and CAS samples, roughly 1 in 5 parents have less than a high school diploma. Both surveys also point to high levels of employment instability; approximately 1 in 6 fathers in the PES Study are unemployed, and 1 in 4 fathers in the CAS sample are either unemployed or have trouble keeping a job. Drug and alcohol problems are present in more than 1 out of 10 fathers in the CAS Study, and a third of CAS fathers have been incarcerated. Nearly 2 out of 10 fathers in both surveys have a history of domestic violence or threatening behavior. For more information on the characteristics of each study population, refer to Appendix C.

Background and Motivation

The structure and stability of the typical family in the United States has changed dramatically over the past several decades, shaped in large part by an increase in the number of children born to unmarried mothers. According to national data, the percentage of births to unmarried women rose from 18 percent in 1980 to 41 percent in 2011 [Figure 1].¹² In Texas, 42 percent of recent births were to unmarried women.¹³ Having children in a cohabiting relationship has also become more common, accounting for more than half of all births to unmarried mothers in the United States in recent years.¹⁴ These demographic changes are of growing concern due to the negative social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes associated with children living in single-parent families.^{15,16}

In addition, research suggests these demographic shifts may play a role in perpetuating long-term economic, racial, and gender inequalities.¹⁷ Indeed, the incidence of unmarried parenting falls disproportionately across racial and socioeconomic groups, compounding the existing challenges present among populations already subject to societal disadvantage. In 2011, 29 percent of White mothers, 53 percent of Hispanic mothers, and 72 percent of African American mothers gave birth to children outside of marriage.¹⁸ In Texas, the demographic breakdown is similar; 27 percent of White, 50 percent of Hispanic, and 67 percent of African American births were to unmarried mothers in 2011.¹⁹

Figure 1: Births to Unmarried Parents, 1980-2011

Source: Child Trends. July 2013. *Births to Unmarried Women: Indicators on Children and Youth*. Retrieved from http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/75_Births_to_Unmarried_Women.pdf

Moreover, women who are younger, less-educated, and lower-income have a significantly higher percentage of nonmarital births than other women.²⁰ According to national data gathered from recent births to unmarried women ages 15 to 50, 18 percent have less than a high school degree and 15 percent are in poverty;²¹ data from the same survey indicate that in Texas, nearly 23 percent have less than a high school degree and more than 17 percent are in poverty.²² These demographic shifts and the associated changes to the normative family structure in the United States have had a corresponding impact on the health and wellbeing of children living in single-mother households.

FAMILY STRUCTURE CHANGES AND CHILD WELLBEING

Research shows that children living in single-mother households are more likely, on average, to suffer from behavioral issues, perform poorly on standardized tests, and drop out of high school than children with two married parents.^{23,24} When compared to similar adults who were raised by both biological parents, adults raised by single parents are also more likely to be unemployed, endure economic hardship, have a nonmarital birth, and suffer symptoms of depression.^{25,26}

For children living in families with two cohabiting biological parents who are unmarried, several related negative outcomes have also been observed for younger children, especially in terms of lower school engagement and increased behavioral and emotional problems.²⁷ Though these negative outcomes are likely due to characteristics of parents who choose cohabitation for childbearing rather than causation, many of the negative outcomes will carry over into adulthood, significantly diminishing a child's future wellbeing and economic potential.

THE FATHER'S ROLE IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING

The rise in the number of children born to unmarried parents has placed a greater focus on how fathers—both resident and nonresident—contribute to positive outcomes in their children. In general, fathers influence the wellbeing of their children through two avenues – involvement and support. Father involvement might include activities such as shared play or leisure, caretaking, providing moral guidance, or helping with homework. Paternal support refers to the financial responsibilities of parenthood, which may include informal financial support, informal in-kind support, or formal child support.

The Value of Paternal Involvement

Resident and nonresident fathers contribute to the wellbeing of their children through various types of involvement, including spending time together, engaging in shared activities, providing discipline, and connecting children to other members of the family or community.²⁸ A growing body of research shows that positively involved fathers contribute to academic success, reduce levels of delinquency, and promote healthy social and emotional wellbeing for their offspring.²⁹

Moreover, the positive effects of paternal involvement are considerably larger when the father has established a positive relationship with the child's biological mother.^{30,31} In one recent study on the link between parents and child cognitive outcomes, 5-year-old children with a supportive mother and father scored 16 points higher on a standardized math test and nine points higher on a standardized language test when compared to children without supportive parents.³² Although the benefits of father involvement may vary depending on many factors, a majority of studies confirm the relationship between positive paternal involvement and favorable developmental outcomes across nearly all measures of child wellbeing.³³

There are, however, several circumstances in which high paternal involvement may not be beneficial to a child. Increased interaction from fathers who do not engage in positive parenting behaviors or have a history of abusive behavior may do more to adversely affect mother and child wellbeing than to cultivate it.³⁴ Other fathers may simply become absent from the act of parenting altogether, thereby depriving their children of the myriad benefits associated with positive fatherhood. Under these circumstances, a father's economic support may become even more important to the development and wellbeing of his child.

The Value of Paternal Financial Support

Unmarried fathers can support their children through various means, including informal cash support, informal in-kind support (e.g. diapers, clothes, food), and formal cash support through the child support system. Due to the analytic difficulty in isolating the benefits that accompany informal support alone, most research to date has focused on quantifying the benefits associated with formal child support or total support. Child support payments have been linked to a number of positive child outcomes, including improved academic success, fewer behavioral problems, and reduced rates of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.³⁵ According to recent estimates, the provision of formal child support also helps lift roughly one million people out of poverty each year.³⁶

For many children, the escape from poverty facilitated by formal child support carries implications that extend beyond the particular benefits of child support receipt. Indeed, these children are less likely to experience the myriad disadvantages of growing up in poverty, where health, behavior, academic achievement, and school completion all suffer the negative impacts wrought by income insecurity and economic hardship.³⁷ The risk of repeating a grade or dropping out of school is twice as high for poor children as it is for children who are not poor.³⁸ Moreover, poor children have been shown to score lower on a range of developmental tests across multiple ages; they are at greater risk for physical abuse, neglect, cardiovascular disease, Type II diabetes, and depressed wages over their own lifetimes.³⁹

That a father can attenuate these effects through the provision of financial support speaks to the importance of a father's economic contributions. Moreover, because many mothers work less and earn less than fathers, a father's economic support may act as one of the key drivers of positive child outcomes.

Paternity Establishment

One strategy to promote a father's financial and emotional investment in his child—while also formalizing the legal rights and responsibilities of fatherhood—is to encourage the establishment of paternity. Oftentimes, the act of establishing paternity is one of the first steps a father can take towards affirming his connection to his child. Moreover, paternity establishment—especially when it is done in the hospital—has been linked to future father involvement and a greater likelihood of support.⁴⁰ Given the symbolic, financial, and legal ramifications of paternity establishment, Chapter 2 takes a closer look at the types of Texas fathers who choose to establish paternity and why.

CHAPTER 2: ESTABLISHING PATERNITY

Background and Motivation

One of the first steps an unmarried father can take to demonstrate his commitment as a parent is to establish paternity. Paternity establishment is the legal determination of fatherhood for a child born to unmarried parents. When a father formalizes his connection to the child through this process, he creates a bond that is both symbolic and legal in nature. There are three ways a father can establish paternity — through presumption (parents must be married), voluntary Acknowledgment, or a court order. Voluntary paternity establishment, which is usually done in the hospital at the time of birth, has been linked to a number of positive outcomes for the father, mother, and child.⁴¹ In light of these benefits, researchers have begun to examine factors associated with voluntary paternity establishment in an effort to better understand why some fathers may be more inclined to establish paternity than others.

Voluntarily establishing paternity in the hospital can be done before or after the birth of the child and does not necessarily require “evidence of paternity” (e.g., DNA testing). In most cases, voluntary paternity establishment happens when both parents sign an AOP form. This form legally certifies that the mother and father acknowledge that the father is a parent of the child.

Signing the AOP in the hospital is ideal for several reasons. First, AOP signing in the hospital is especially convenient for the parents because it is likely that both parents will be present to sign the form. There is also an AOP-certified entity at the hospital (birth registrar) to discuss the AOP process and file the appropriate paperwork. Perhaps most important, however, the likelihood that a father will establish paternity decreases significantly over time.⁴²

With these considerations, researchers note that signing an Acknowledgment of Paternity in the hospital shortly after birth may be an especially opportune time for many fathers to establish paternity.⁴³ In some cases, signing the AOP during pregnancy may be even more ideal—particularly when parents are given information and an opportunity to sign before arriving at the hospital for the birth; in other situations—especially where antisocial behaviors are present—establishing paternity through the courts where additional legal parameters can be defined may be preferable.

Following an overview of the numerous benefits associated with establishing paternity, we provide a brief review of the history behind paternity establishment policy in the United States. The remainder of this chapter then turns to an analysis of survey data collected by CFRP with two primary goals: 1) To examine the characteristics of fathers who legally and voluntarily establish paternity through signing the *Acknowledgment of Paternity* (AOP) form in the hospital, and 2) To better understand why parents elect or decline to establish paternity.

BENEFITS OF ESTABLISHING PATERNITY

State and federal efforts to increase the rate of paternity establishment have largely been driven by the sweep of benefits, both legal and symbolic, associated with establishing paternity. One tangible and immediate benefit to signing the AOP is the right of fathers to include their name on the child's birth certificate. Paternity establishment also ensures that children born outside of marriage are eligible for a wide range of benefits through their fathers, including health insurance, life insurance, social security, veteran's benefits, and inheritance. For children born to unmarried parents, an additional benefit of paternity establishment is the ability to access their paternal genetic history and determine if they may be at risk for any inherited health defects. Finally, establishing paternity is a necessary precondition for formal child support or visitation orders to be established.

In addition to the many legal benefits, establishing paternity symbolizes a direct connection between a father and child. Formalizing this connection lays the groundwork for future father involvement, which has been linked to numerous positive child outcomes (a topic discussed more fully in Chapter 6 of this report). Nonresident fathers who voluntarily acknowledge paternity in the hospital are more likely to comply with child support orders and pay child support than those fathers who do not.^{44,45} Fathers who sign the AOP in the hospital are also more likely than fathers who establish paternity outside the hospital, or not at all, to be involved in their child's life through frequent contact and overnight visits.⁴⁶

Compared to fathers with court-ordered paternity establishment, those who voluntarily establish paternity are both less likely to have a child support order *and* more likely to comply with the child support orders they do have.^{47,48} One partial explanation for these trends may lie in the tendency of fathers who sign the AOP to have a better relationship with the mother — whether they are romantically involved, living together, or just more inclined to get along and jointly support their child without a formal obligation.

Importantly, the positive outcomes associated with signing an AOP in the hospital may not be *caused* by signing the document per se, but rather a reflection of the characteristics of parents who choose to voluntarily establish paternity at their child's birth as compared to the characteristics of parents who delay signing or are ordered to establish paternity through a court process. Therefore, it is important to understand the characteristics of voluntary signers and non-signers to identify which characteristics are associated with higher rates of signing and positive child and family wellbeing.

HISTORY OF PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT

Lawmakers have long recognized the benefits of paternity establishment; in fact, since the enactment of Title IV-D of the Social Security Act in 1975, federal legislation has provided much of the impetus for change in paternity establishment policies in hopes of increasing paternity rates. Congress enacted the Family Support Act in 1988 to revise and strengthen existing child support policies. The primary components of this act included setting incentives for states to

establish paternity, requiring states to use genetic testing in cases of contested paternity, encouraging states to use civil processes for establishing paternity, and allowing for paternity to be established at any point before a child's 18th birthday.

In 1993, Congress enacted the Omnibus Reconciliation Act, which required states to create a simplified, administrative process for parents to voluntarily establish paternity in the hospital at the time of their child's birth. Texas uses the in-hospital AOP process to satisfy this federal requirement. The voluntary paternity acknowledgment process was also enhanced by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996. Through PRWORA, Congress increased the paternity establishment standard for states from 75 percent to 90 percent of all births to unmarried mothers. In addition, Congress required unmarried parents to sign a voluntary acknowledgement, called the *Acknowledgement of Paternity* (AOP) form in Texas, to allow the father's name to be identified on the child's birth certificate.⁴⁹

These policies have led to national and state increases in paternity establishment rates. In Texas, the rate of *voluntary* paternity establishment was 71 percent and the rate of overall paternity establishment was 94.7 percent in 2010, according to the Texas OAG.⁵⁰ The rate of voluntary paternity establishment increased slightly to 74 percent in 2012.⁵¹ Given Texas' high paternity establishment rates, the state consistently exceeds the federal paternity establishment performance goals.⁵² Importantly, although rates of paternity establishment have increased, there has been a dearth of research in Texas and nationally on why this has occurred and what can be done to ensure that increases in paternity establishment happen effectively.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The following section of this chapter addresses the question of *who* establishes paternity in Texas by signing the in-hospital AOP form. As discussed throughout the section, previous studies have identified various factors that may influence a father's likelihood of establishing paternity. Drawing on survey data from the mothers' Paternity Establishment Study (PES), we build on past research by examining how Texas fathers who sign the AOP differ from those who do not across three broad dimensions.

First, we examine the extent to which AOP signing varies as a function of paternal demographic characteristics, such as race and education. In the second section, we explore how the parents' romantic relationship and cohabitation status are associated with signing the AOP. Finally, in the third part of this section, we evaluate the impact of various factors associated with signing the AOP, including: multipartner fertility (MPF), having a previous child together, previous paternity establishment decisions, the presence of domestic violence, and whether or not the father was incarcerated at the time of the child's birth. The primary goal of these analyses is to describe those who do and do not voluntarily establish paternity in Texas.

The final part of this chapter addresses the question of *why* parents establish paternity in the hospital, with a focus on describing parents' experiences learning about the AOP. Previous research has largely ignored the parents' perspective on paternity establishment; our analyses begin to fill this gap in the literature by describing parents' own perceptions of the AOP.

Results in this final section also rely on data from the Paternity Establishment Study (PES), but include both fathers' and mothers' reports. We assess the motivations behind establishing paternity, from whom parents learn about paternity establishment, and how parents perceive the experience of learning about the AOP in the hospital. The primary goal of these analyses is to better understand the motivations of those who do and do not voluntarily establish paternity in Texas, as well as to gain insight into how parents' knowledge of the AOP influences their propensity to sign.

Characteristics of AOP-Signing Fathers

The positive outcomes associated with voluntary AOP signing have led researchers to seek a better understanding of the types of fathers who are most (or least) likely to establish paternity in the hospital. Knowledge of these factors may help policymakers better target resources intended to increase the rate of paternity establishment towards those fathers who are least inclined to sign the AOP and to better identify the types of risks associated with non-signing parents. The following analyses contrast the characteristics of Texas parents who sign the in-hospital AOP form and those who do not along three broad dimensions: father demographic characteristics, the mother-father relationship, and paternal risk factors.

RATE OF AOP SIGNING

Overall rates of in-hospital paternity establishment from survey data collected by CFRP closely mirror rates recorded by the OAG. Results from the PES Study, conducted when the child was approximately three months old, indicate that 77 percent of unmarried Texas parents sign the AOP in the hospital. The rate of voluntary paternity establishment recorded by the Texas Office of the Attorney General was 74 percent in 2012.⁵³

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Race/Ethnicity

Previous research has only recognized a handful of demographic differences between fathers who sign an AOP and those who do not. One difference that has been noted by several studies is the link between paternity establishment and a father's racial/ethnic background; Hispanic and African American fathers are often less likely to establish paternity than White fathers.^{54,55}

To determine whether these patterns exist among Texas fathers, CFRP examined the distribution of Hispanic, African American, White, and mixed or other race fathers among signing and non-signing groups [Table 1]. Among fathers who signed the AOP, 59 percent are Hispanic, 23 percent are White, 15 percent are African American, and 3 percent are of another

race. Consistent with prior research, we find that African American fathers in Texas are disproportionately represented among the non-signing group. Hispanic fathers, however, seem to buck the trends noted by past researchers; in Texas, Hispanic fathers are significantly more prevalent among the signing group than the non-signing group.

Table 1: Fathers' Demographic Characteristics by AOP Signing at 3 Months

Group Differences by AOP Signing at 3 Months (Percent)			
	AOP Signers	Non-Signers	Sig.
<i>N (Unweighted)</i>	545	155	
<i>Weighted Proportion</i>	77%	23%	
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>			
Hispanic/Latino	59%	47%	***
African American	15%	30%	***
White, Non-Hispanic	23%	20%	
Multiracial or Other Race	3%	4%	
<i>Education Level</i>			
Less than High School	24%	25%	
High School Graduate	36%	39%	
Some College	26%	18%	**
Associate Degree	5%	3%	
Bachelor's Degree	5%	5%	
Don't Know	4%	11%	***
<i>Age</i>			
<21	12%	13%	
21-24	30%	25%	
25-29	25%	23%	
30+	33%	39%	
<i>Military Status</i>			
Currently in the Military or a Veteran	7%	7%	
<i>Citizenship Status</i>			
A Citizen of the United States	80%	80%	
A Lawful Permanent Resident	5%	4%	
Currently Authorized to Work in the United States	3%	3%	
None of the Above	12%	13%	

Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

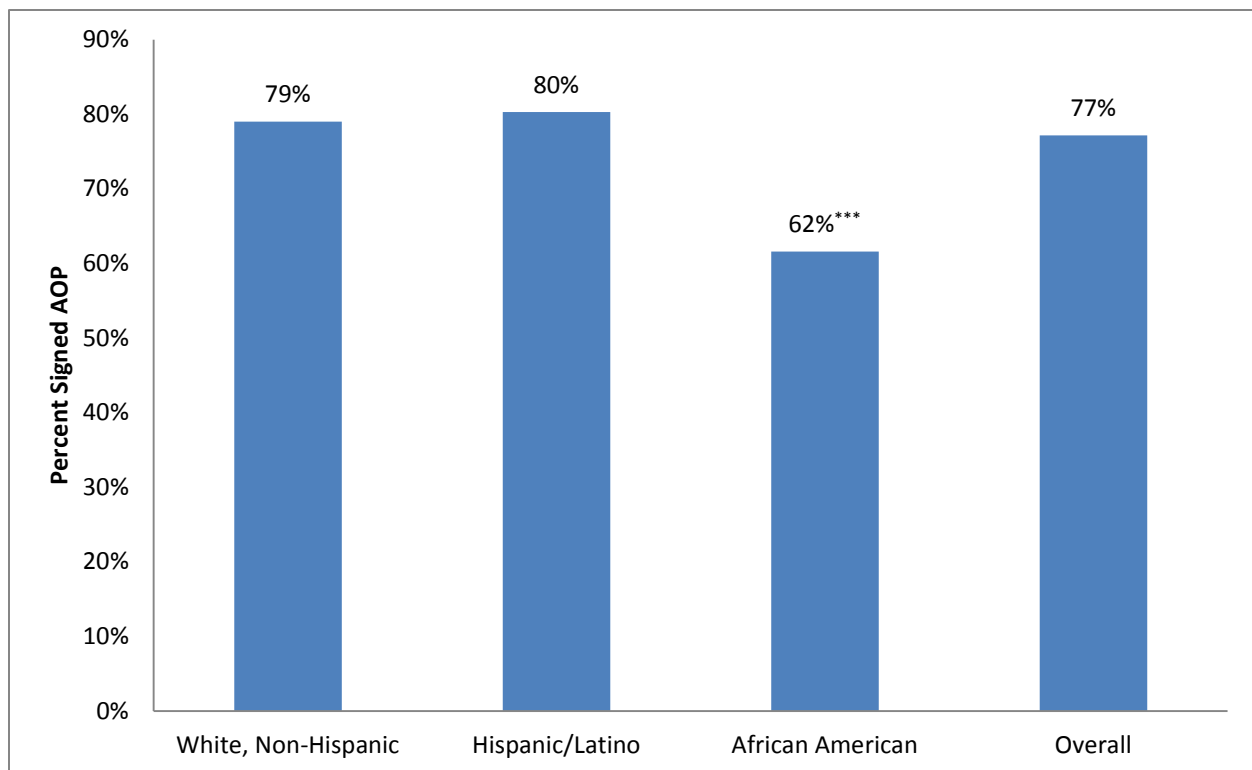
Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Ns in this table do not align with weighted proportions due to population weighting.

Given the racial differences between AOP signers and non-signers, especially with regard to the number of African American and Hispanic fathers, CFRP also examined *paternity establishment rates* between Hispanic, African American, White, and multiracial or other race fathers. Analyzing the data in this way allows us to calculate the percentage of fathers within a certain race or ethnic category who signed the AOP.

As shown in Figure 2, our findings support the notion that African Americans are less likely than fathers who are not African American to sign an AOP. Over one-half of African American fathers signed the AOP compared to over three-quarters of Hispanic and White fathers. Again, our results seem to contradict the conclusions of prior research; in Texas, Hispanic fathers are no less likely to sign the AOP than White fathers. In fact, the percentage of Hispanic fathers who signed the AOP was nearly identical to the percentage of White fathers who signed. Multiracial or other race fathers were not significantly different from Hispanic, White, or African American fathers in their likelihood of signing the AOP.

Figure 2: AOP Signing by Race/Ethnicity at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Education Level

Previous research demonstrates that fathers with more education (typically a high school degree or higher) are more likely to establish paternity than those who have less than a high school degree.^{56,57,58} To evaluate whether this pattern holds for unmarried fathers in Texas, CFRP grouped fathers into six categories based on education level: less than high school, high school graduate (or equivalent), some college, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, and "do not know". Unlike previous studies, our findings do not support the notion that AOP signers are more educated than non-signers in Texas [Table 1]. Across both groups, approximately 1 in 4 fathers have less than a high school education. A greater proportion of AOP signers attended some college than non-signers, but both groups contained an equal proportion of college graduates.

When asked about the education level of the father of their child, some mothers did not know. In cases in which the mother indicated that she did not know the father's education level, the associated father was significantly less likely to sign the AOP. Eleven percent of fathers who did not sign the AOP were associated with mothers who could not identify their education level; in contrast, only 4 percent of fathers who signed the AOP were associated with a mother who was not aware of their education level.^a

This pattern is evident when examining paternity establishment rates across education categories as well. In fact, the only group that had a significantly lower establishment rate was those fathers whose education level was unknown. Only half of the fathers whose education level was unknown established paternity compared to more than three-fourths of fathers whose education level was known (not shown). The tendency of fathers with "unknown" education to fall into the non-signing group may have more to do with the limited parental relationship than with the father's education, per se; indeed, the response option "do not know" may simply be acting as a proxy for a weak or cursory connection between mother and father.

Additional Demographic Characteristics

CFRP also assessed a handful of additional demographic variables, including the father's age, citizenship status, and veteran status to determine whether these factors varied as a function of AOP signing. As shown in Table 1, signers and non-signers did not differ significantly from one another on the majority of these characteristics. Overall, the data suggest that signers and non-signers are similar in age, citizenship status, and veteran status.

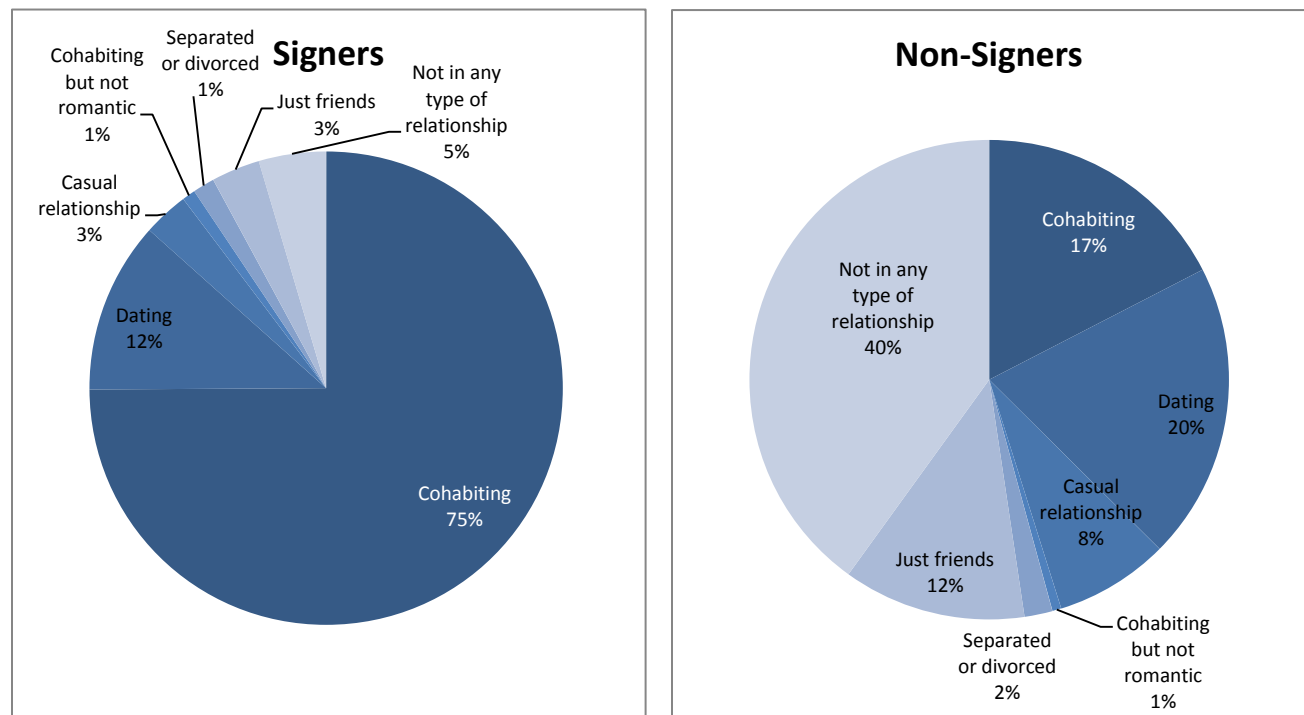
^a It is possible that the absence of a significant difference between the low and high education groups is attributable to a lack of data for these fathers with "unknown" education. If these fathers were included in their correct education category, it is possible that significant differences may emerge.

PARENTAL RELATIONSHIP

Romantic Relationship Status

Previous research shows that the stronger the parental relationship, the more likely it is for parents to establish paternity at the child's birth.^{59,60} Fathers are more likely to establish paternity if they are romantically involved with the mother, or even just friendly with the mother, than if the parents are on bad terms. Cohabitation with the mother and child further increases the likelihood that a father will establish paternity. Data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth reveal that cohabiting parents are 3.8 times as likely as non-cohabiting parents to establish paternity at all; moreover, these parents are 9 times more likely to establish paternity in the hospital than elsewhere.⁶¹

Figure 3: Cohabitation Status and Romantic Relationship Status by AOP Signing at 3 Months



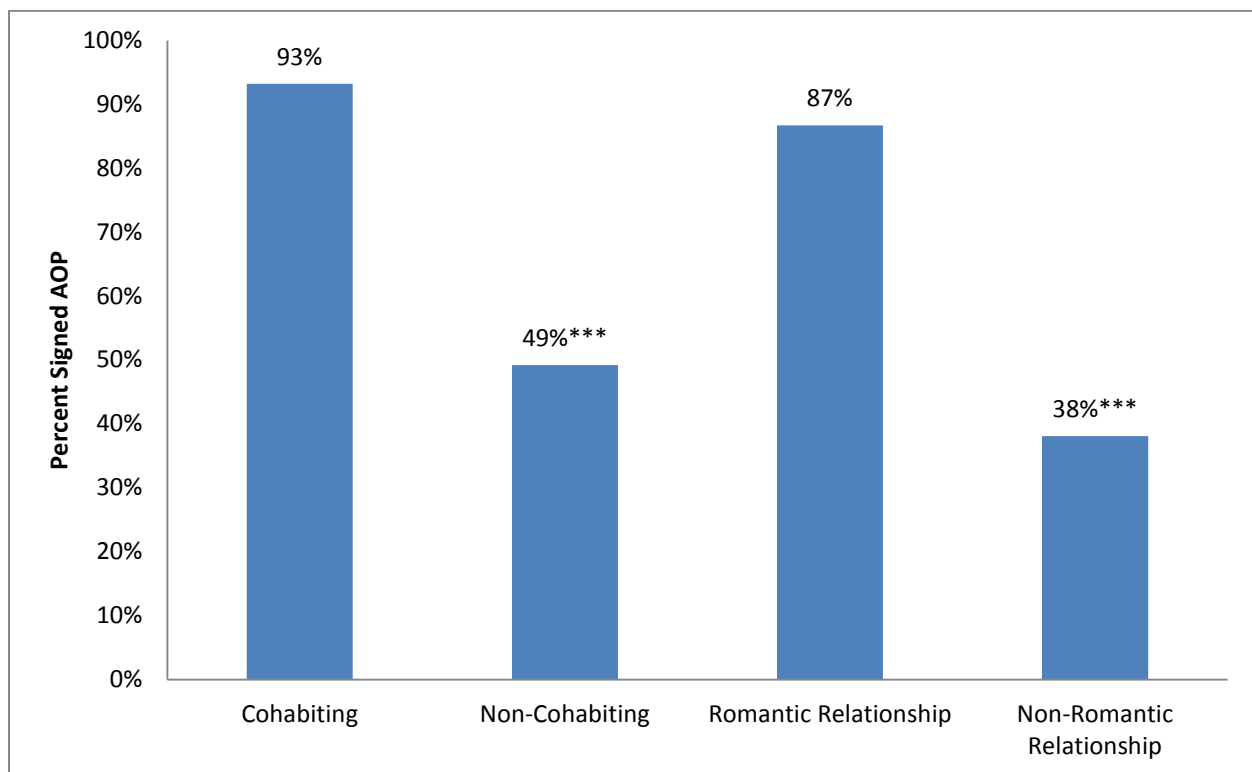
Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: "Cohabiting" refers to couples who are living together and romantic. "Dating" refers to couples who are romantic but not cohabiting.

Survey data collected by CFRP support the narrative that fathers who sign the AOP are more likely to have a better relationship with the mother than those who do not sign. As shown in Figure 3, 40 percent of non-signing fathers are not in any type of relationship with the mother. By contrast, only 5 percent of signers have no relationship with the mother at the time of the child's birth. When considering parents' cohabitation status, fathers who signed the AOP are significantly more likely to be living with the mom and child at the time of the child's birth. Indeed, three-fourths of AOP signers are cohabiting with the mother, compared to just 17 percent of fathers who did not sign the AOP [Figure 3].

CFRP also investigated whether cohabitation and romantic involvement are associated with rates of paternity establishment. As seen in Figure 4, nearly all fathers who are cohabiting with the mother sign the AOP, compared to less than half of the fathers who are not cohabiting with the mother. Similarly, whether the parents are romantically involved appears to heavily influence their likelihood of signing the AOP. More than 9 in 10 fathers who are romantically involved with the mother signed the AOP, compared to only 4 in 10 fathers who are not in a romantic relationship with the mother. Taken together, the data suggest that the parental relationship plays a large role in paternity establishment decisions. When parents are romantically involved and/or cohabiting, they are significantly more likely to sign the AOP than if they are not living as a family at the time of the child's birth.

Figure 4: AOP Signing by Cohabitation and Relationship Status at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted.

Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Cohabiting and Romantic Relationship are not mutually exclusive categories.

CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH ESTABLISHING PATERNITY

In addition to examining the demographic and relationship variables associated with AOP signing, researchers have also examined numerous risk factors that may negatively influence the likelihood of voluntarily establishing paternity. In the following section we consider five of these potential risks and how they relate to AOP signing: 1) multipartner fertility (having prior children with another partner), 2) higher parity births (having prior children with the same mother), 3) previous paternity establishment decisions, 4) domestic violence, and 5) incarceration at the time of the birth. For specific definitions of these terms and how they are operationalized using CFRP survey data, please refer to Appendix D: Glossary of Terms.

Previous Children

One risk to paternity establishment is whether the father has any previous children. Research suggests that fathers who have prior children with another partner (i.e., multipartner fertility (MPF)) are less likely to establish paternity with their current newborns.⁶² Past literature also links higher parity births with the same mother to a lower likelihood of establishing paternity in the hospital when compared to first-born children (e.g., the parents' first born child is more likely to have paternity established than their subsequent children).⁶³ For fathers who have prior children, previous paternity establishment decisions also influence their likelihood of signing the AOP. If men do not establish paternity with earlier children, research suggests they are less likely to establish paternity with their new child.⁶⁴

Survey data collected by CFRP support previous findings regarding multipartner fertility and paternity establishment. As seen in Table 2, nearly half of non-signers have previous children with another partner (MPF), compared to fewer than 3 in 10 AOP signers. Moreover, whether or not fathers established paternity with these previous children appears indicative of their propensity to establish paternity with their current child. When compared to AOP signers, Texas fathers who did not sign the AOP are almost 3 times as likely *not* to have established paternity with previous children from other relationships.

In addition to examining prior children with another partner, CFRP also examined whether the mother and father had previous children together (i.e., whether the current child was a higher parity birth). Among both signers and non-signers, the majority of fathers did not have previous children with the mother. Parents who did have previous children together, however, were not equally distributed among groups. As shown in Table 2, AOP signers were more likely to have prior children with the mother (30%) than non-signers (21%). Of the fathers who had previous children with the mother, AOP signers were significantly more likely to have established paternity with their previous children (84%) than non-signers (56%).

Table 2: Group Differences by AOP Signing at 3 Months

Group Differences by AOP Signing (Percent)			
	AOP Signers	Non-Signers	Sig.
<i>N (Unweighted)</i>	545	155	
<i>Weighted Proportion</i>	77%	23%	
<i>Multipartner Fertility</i>			
MPF Father	29%	48%	***
Father Did Not Sign AOP with Previous Children	14%	22%	
<i>Higher Parity Births</i>			
Father Has Previous Children with Mother	30%	21%	*
Father Did Not Sign AOP with Previous Children	16%	44%	**
<i>Father Characteristics</i>			
Domestic Violence	13%	40%	***
Incarcerated at Birth	<1%	8%	***

Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

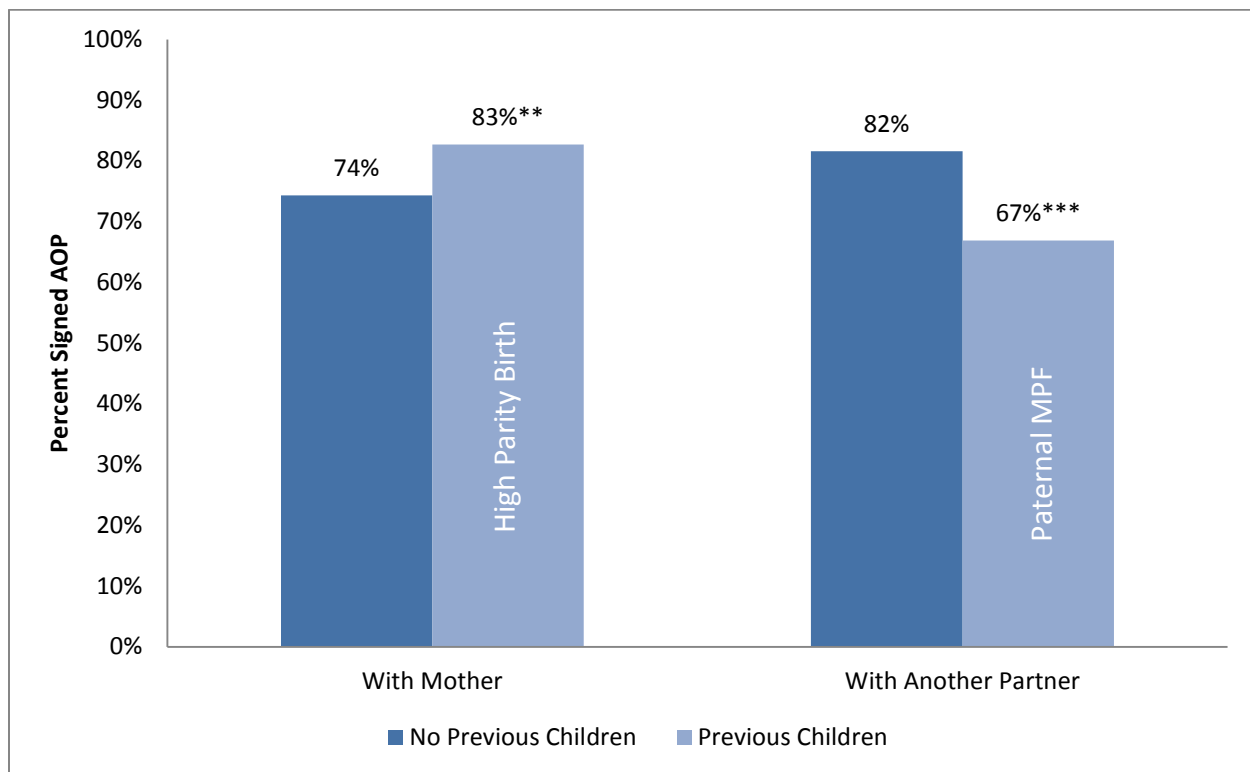
Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Ns in this table do not align with weighted proportions due to population weighting.

Definitions for terms in this table can be found in Appendix D: Glossary of Terms

As illustrated in Figure 5 below, the general patterns noted above are also reflected in paternity establishment rates among Texas fathers with previous children and those without. Compared to fathers who do not have previous children with another partner, fathers with multipartner fertility (MPF) were significantly less likely to sign the AOP. Among fathers who have previous children with the same mother however, the reverse is true. Fathers who have previous children with the same mother are significantly more likely to sign the AOP than fathers who do not have previous children with the same mother. Taken together, the results seem to indicate a higher degree of commitment among fathers who have previous children with the same mother. These fathers are significantly more inclined to affirm their connection to their newest child whereas fathers with a history of multipartner fertility are decidedly less so.

Figure 5: AOP Signing by Incidence of Previous Children at 3 Months

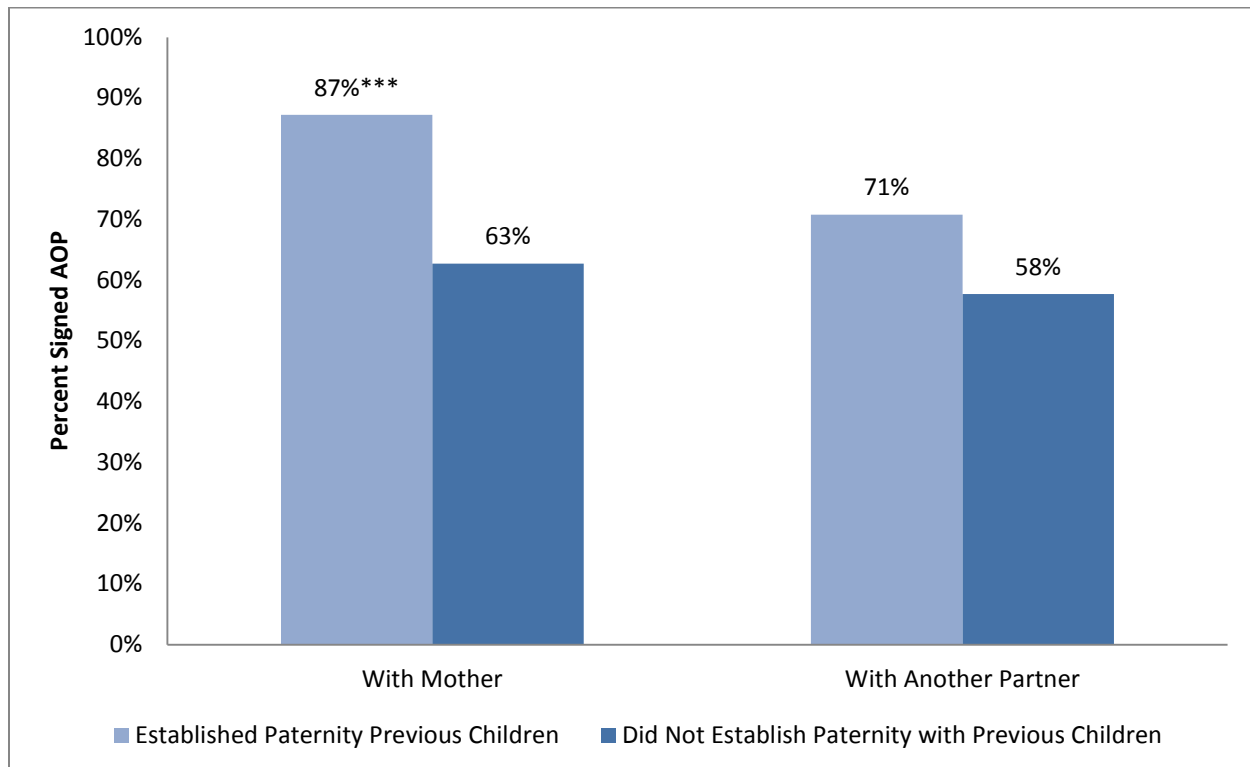


Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Consistent with analyses above, we also find that a father's previous paternity establishment decisions are indicative of his propensity to sign the AOP with his newest child. Figure 6 reveals that Texas fathers who did not sign the AOP with previous children are significantly less likely to sign the AOP than fathers who *did* establish paternity with previous children. Still, it is worth noting that at least half of fathers who did not establish paternity with prior children elected to establish paternity with their newest child.

Figure 6: AOP Signing by Previous Paternity Establishment at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

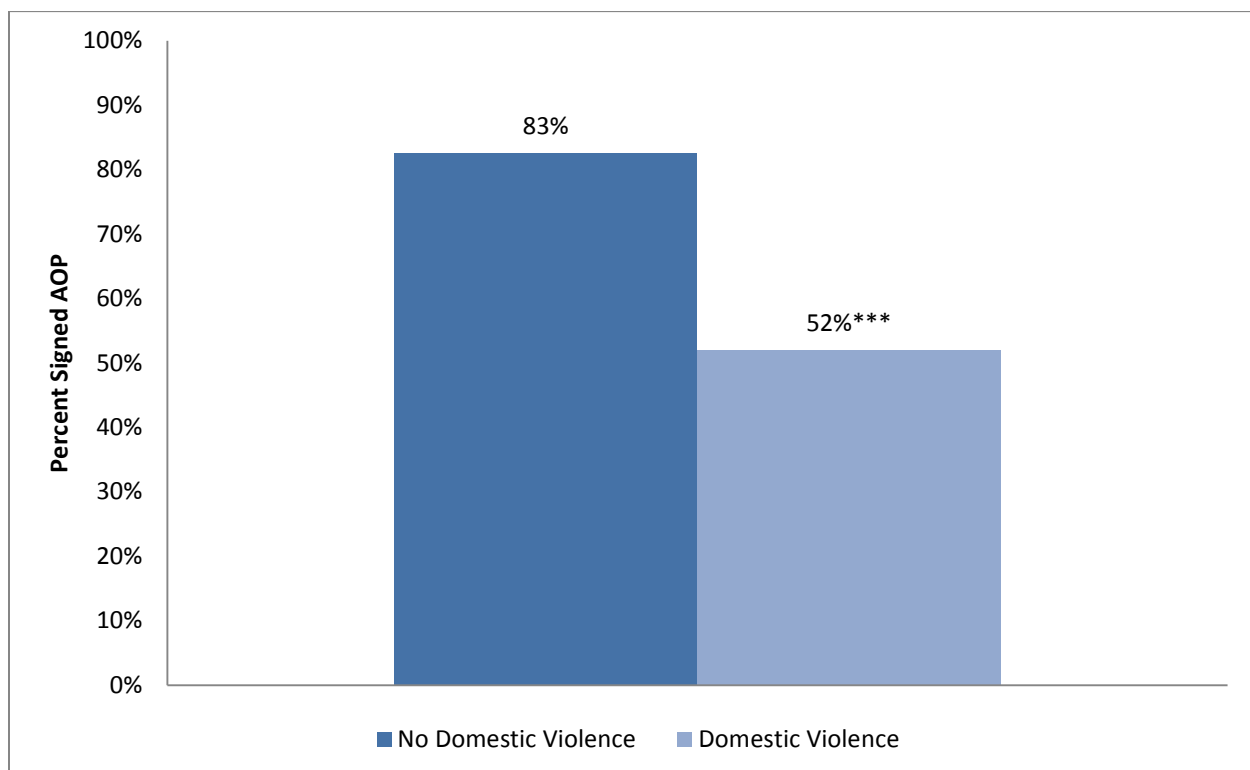
Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Domestic Violence

A review of the literature reveals little existing research on the link between domestic violence and AOP signing. Previous research finds physical violence to be negatively associated with father involvement in the household, however.⁶⁵ Researchers have noted that in cases in which physical abuse towards the mother or child is present, the mother is more likely to leave the relationship and/or limit access between father and child.⁶⁶ Given the link between domestic violence and a couples' relationship, we would expect the presence of domestic violence to be negatively associated with a couples' likelihood of establishing paternity.

Table 2 in the discussion above illustrates the prevalence of domestic violence among AOP signers and non-signers. Approximately 1 in 10 AOP signers were physically or emotionally abusive towards the mother or child compared to nearly 4 in 10 non-signers. This profound skew in the prevalence of domestic violence is echoed in the rate of paternity establishment among abusive and non-abusive fathers. Figure 7 shows that among non-abusive fathers, more than 8 in 10 signed the AOP. By contrast, only half of fathers with a history of domestic violence signed the AOP in the hospital.

Figure 7: AOP Signing by Domestic Violence at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Though it is unclear whether abusive fathers are less likely to sign the AOP because of their own aversion to paternity establishment or because the mother has chosen to distance herself and her child from the father, increasing in-hospital paternity establishment among parents in this group is cause for concern. From a policy standpoint, the preferred method of paternity establishment when domestic violence is present is through the court process where safer legal structures can be defined for a father's visitation and access to the child. A number of other considerations are also relevant to paternity establishment when violence is present, including the immediate safety of mother and child, the use of legal paternity by the abuser as a means of power and control, and the connection between paternity establishment and child support. These factors will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Incarceration

Incarceration can also influence a father's ability to connect with and provide for his child.^{67,68} With regards to paternity establishment, incarceration can be a substantial physical barrier to in-hospital AOP signing given fathers' inability to be present at the birth; still, it is not required for the father to be present at the birth to establish paternity. Incarcerated fathers may contact the Access to Court Supervisor at their facility for assistance with an AOP.⁶⁹ Survey data collected by CFRP reveals that non-signers are significantly more likely to have been incarcerated at the time of the child's birth than signers [Table 2]. Nearly 1 in 10 non-signing fathers were in prison or jail when their child was born, compared to less than 1 percent of fathers who signed the AOP.

Why Parents Sign the AOP

In 1997, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services published guidelines outlining how to best communicate with parents about paternity establishment.⁷⁰ These recommendations included providing multiple outreach opportunities, developing thoughtful outreach materials, having knowledgeable staff at the hospital to facilitate and answer questions, and incorporating paternity education into prenatal classes or other venues accessible to parents prior to the birth of their child. Though many of these recommendations remain salient today, little research has been done in the intervening period to identify the most promising channels for connecting with parents on the topic of paternity establishment. Moreover, the prevailing perspectives on this topic remain most heavily informed by the viewpoints of AOP administrators and healthcare professionals.^{71,72}

At present, little is known about the perspectives of birth parents with regard to when and from whom they would prefer to receive information about paternity establishment. Furthermore, we know very little about parents' motivations for establishing paternity and whether or not unmarried parents have a working understanding of the AOP prior to signing. Appreciating parental perspectives is crucial to ascertaining when parents are most receptive to messages about paternity establishment and parental responsibility.

In the following section, we address numerous aspects of the parents' experience with paternity establishment. First, we examine *why* parents are more or less likely to establish paternity. To date, no research has examined the motivating factors behind why parents choose to establish or not establish paternity in the hospital. Therefore, it is unknown whether parents are most often motivated by personal, social, financial, or legal reasons when making decisions about signing the AOP.

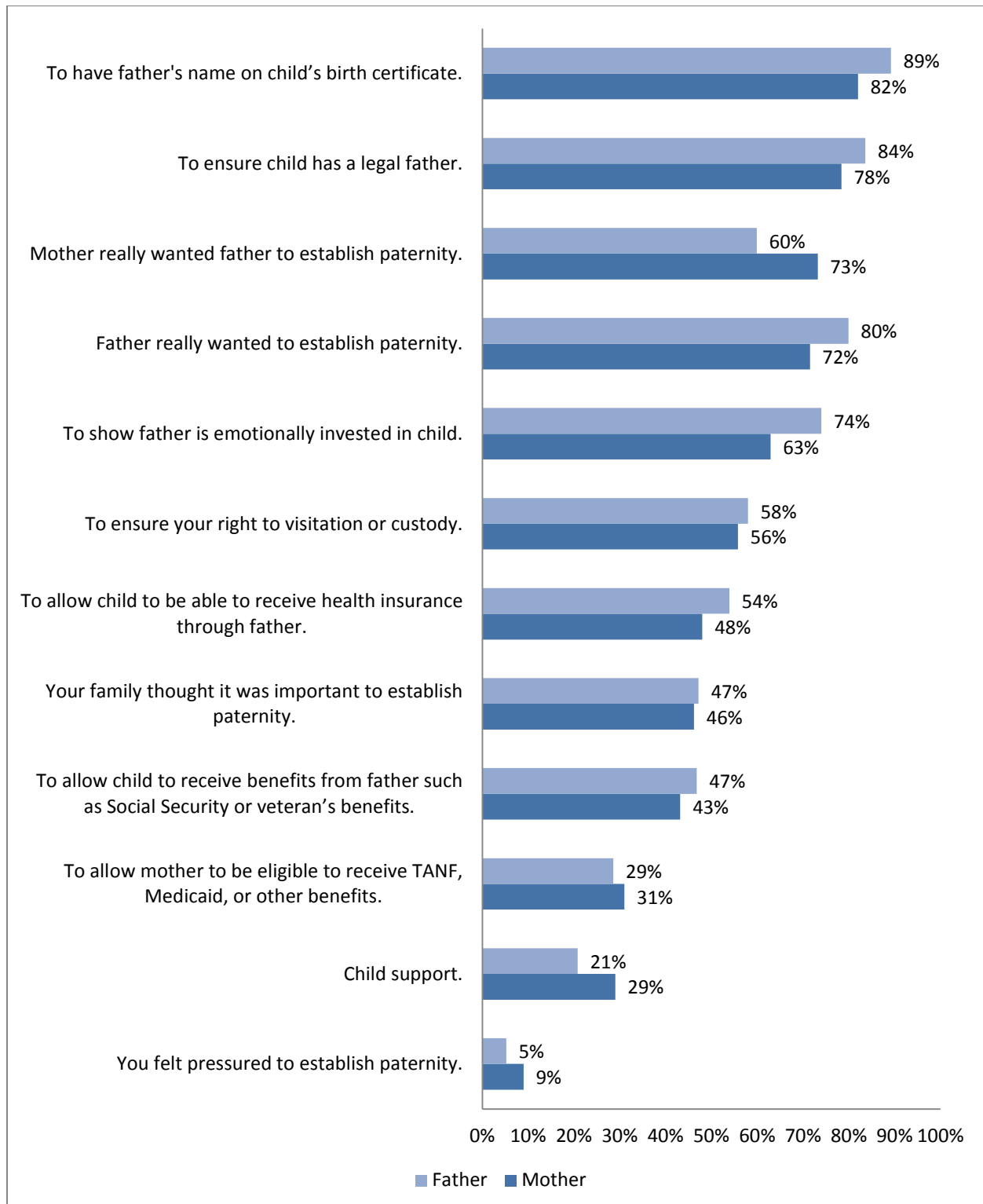
Additionally, there is little existing information on where parents learn about establishing paternity during pregnancy. Most unmarried parents learn about paternity establishment at the hospital shortly before or after the birth of the child with the help of a birth registrar. There are other opportunities for parents to learn about paternity establishment, however. One goal of this section is to better understand to what degree parents are learning about paternity establishment through these additional channels. We also ask parents when and from whom they would like to learn about paternity establishment. Indeed, learning about paternity establishment during pregnancy may give parents more time to make an informed decision with regards to signing the AOP.

Finally, little is known about the in-hospital meetings between parents and birth registrars and whether or not parents find the meetings helpful or informative. Parents' experience with the birth registrar in the hospital could influence the degree to which parents understand the importance of establishing paternity and may influence their decision to sign the AOP. In addition to soliciting parents' views on their experience with the birth registrar, CFRP also tested parents' knowledge about the AOP.

Understanding the reasoning behind parental paternity decisions could have important policy implications for increasing rates of in-hospital AOP signing. The primary goal of these analyses is to better understand how parents view the AOP process. We begin this section with an examination of parents' motivations for establishing paternity.

MOTIVATIONS FOR ESTABLISHING PATERNITY

Three months after a nonmarital birth, Texas mothers and fathers were given a list of reasons why parents may establish paternity and asked to select all of the reasons that motivated them. Mothers and fathers are similar in their motivations for establishing paternity. As Figure 8 shows, having the father's name on the birth certificate is the most commonly cited reason for establishing paternity among both parents, followed by ensuring the child has a legal father, and "really wanting" to establish paternity. Mothers and fathers are less likely to cite receiving government benefits or being able to establish child support orders as motivating factors for establishing paternity, though these reasons are still cited by 20 to 30 percent of mothers and fathers.

Figure 8: Mothers' and Fathers' Motivations for Establishing Paternity

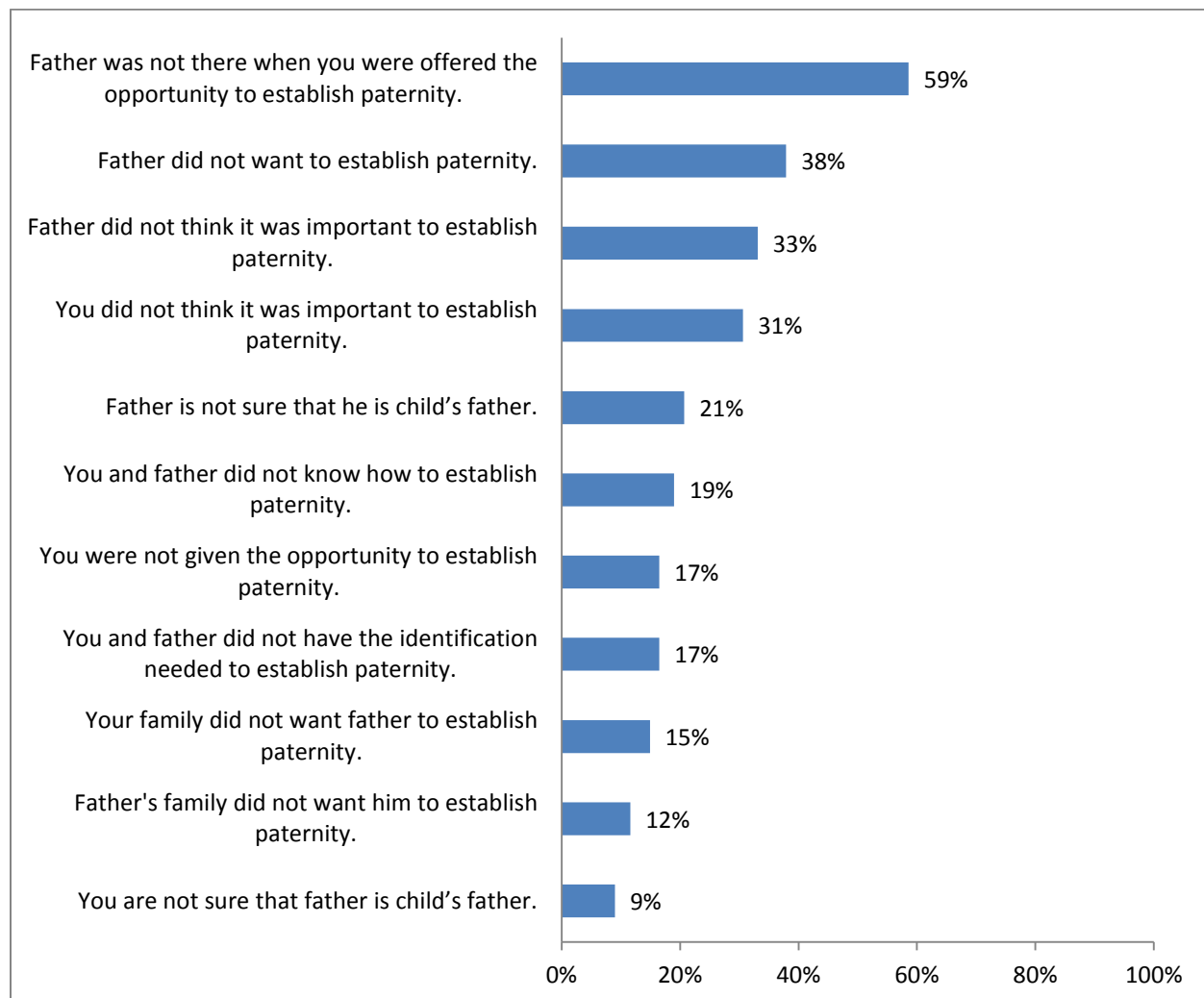
Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted / PES Fathers at 3 months

Note: Percentages add to over 100% due to respondents' ability to select more than one reason.

MOTIVATIONS FOR NOT ESTABLISHING PATERNITY

Mothers and fathers who did not sign the AOP were also given a list of reasons why people may *not* establish paternity in the hospital and asked to select all of the reasons that applied to them. Because nearly all fathers who completed the PES Study established paternity, we rely solely on mothers' responses in the following analysis. As illustrated in Figure 9, nearly 60 percent of mothers stated that they did not establish paternity because the father was not present at the time she was offered the opportunity to establish paternity. Importantly, the father may have not been present because of a poor relationship with the mother and/or an unwillingness to sign. In approximately 2 out of 5 cases, the father did not want to establish paternity. Another commonly cited reason for not establishing paternity is that parents did not think it was important; roughly one-third of mothers and fathers express this view.

Figure 9: Mothers' Motivations for Not Establishing Paternity



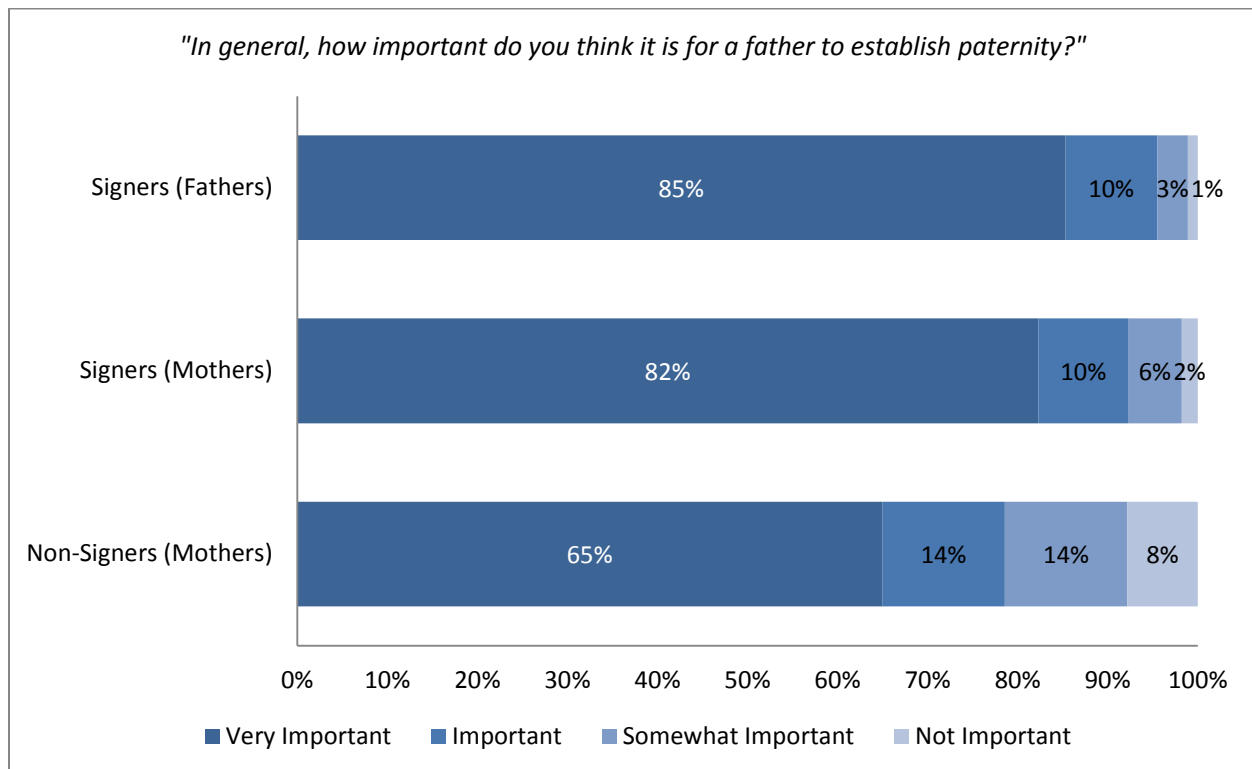
Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: Percentages add to over 100% due to respondents' ability to select more than one reason.

IMPORTANCE OF ESTABLISHING PATERNITY

All parents were asked to give their perspective on the importance of establishing paternity. Figure 10 reveals that among mothers and fathers who signed the AOP, more than 4 in 5 believe establishing paternity is “very important”. By contrast, mothers who are linked to non-signing fathers are significantly less likely to think that establishing paternity is very important (65%); nearly 1 in 10 mothers who did not establish paternity express that it is not important.

Figure 10: Mother and Father Reports of Paternity Establishment Importance



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted / PES Fathers at 3 months

LEARNING ABOUT PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT

CFRP also examined how mothers and fathers learned about paternity establishment. Given the considerable influence it may have on paternity establishment decisions, understanding how parents receive information about the AOP may provide valuable insight into policy efforts aimed at raising the rates of paternity establishment. Figure 11 lists the various people and places in which parents may learn about paternity establishment.

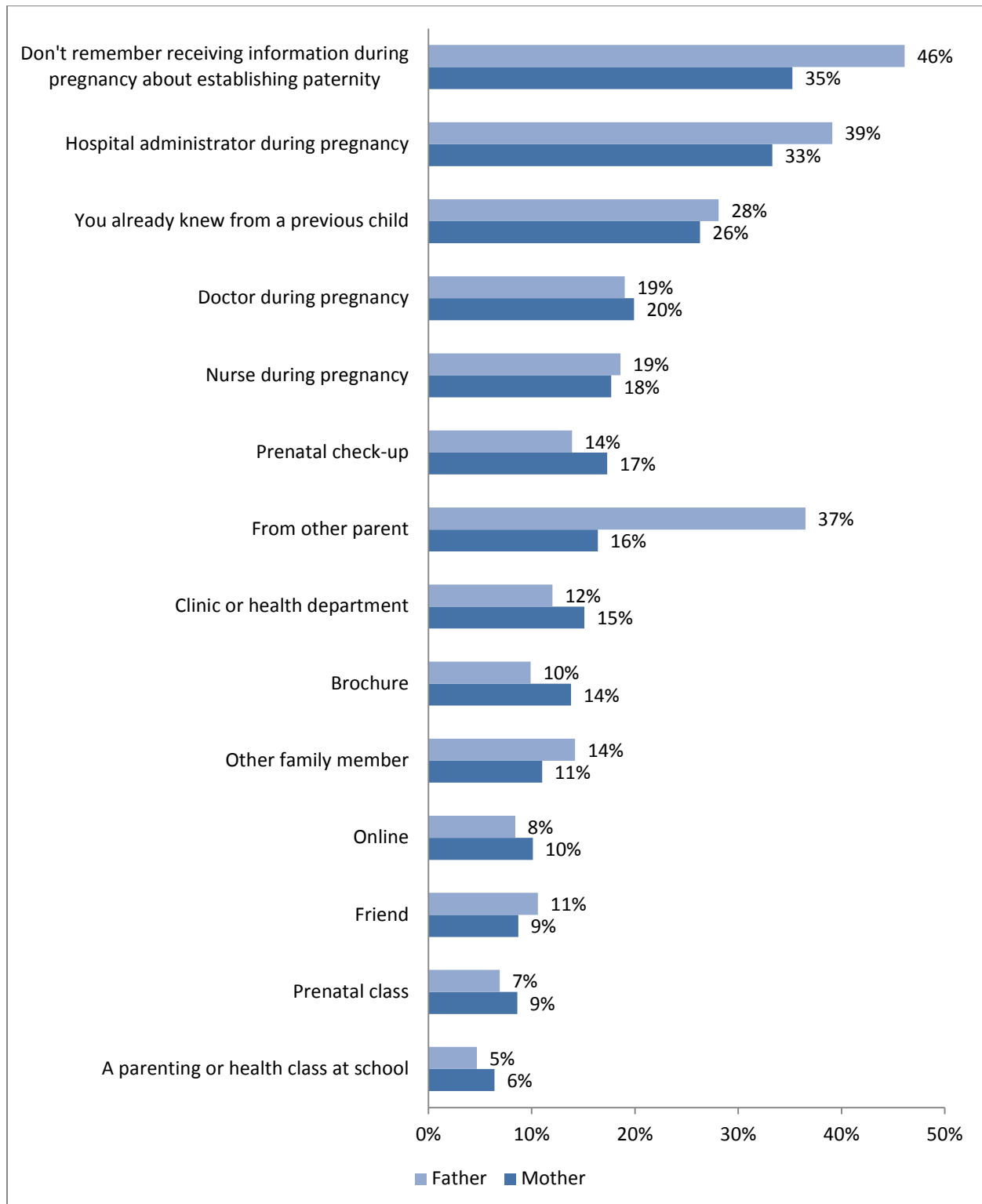
The results show that individuals primarily learn about paternity establishment through medical personnel rather than through friends and family. Hospital administrators, knowledge from a previous birth, and doctors are among the most common ways in which mothers and fathers become familiar with the paternity establishment process.

Prenatal and parenting classes are among the least commonly cited channels for learning about paternity establishment, though it is unclear whether the information is not being provided in these forums or if parents are simply not attending.

Fathers are almost as likely to hear about paternity establishment from the mother as they are from a hospital administrator, implying that policies aimed at conveying paternity establishment information to the mother may increase the odds that fathers receive this information as well.

Importantly however, more than a third of all mothers and nearly half of fathers reported that they did not receive *any* information about paternity establishment during pregnancy. In fact, many parents learn about paternity establishment for the *first* time shortly before or after the birth of their child.

Figure 11: Where Parents Received Paternity Establishment Information During Pregnancy

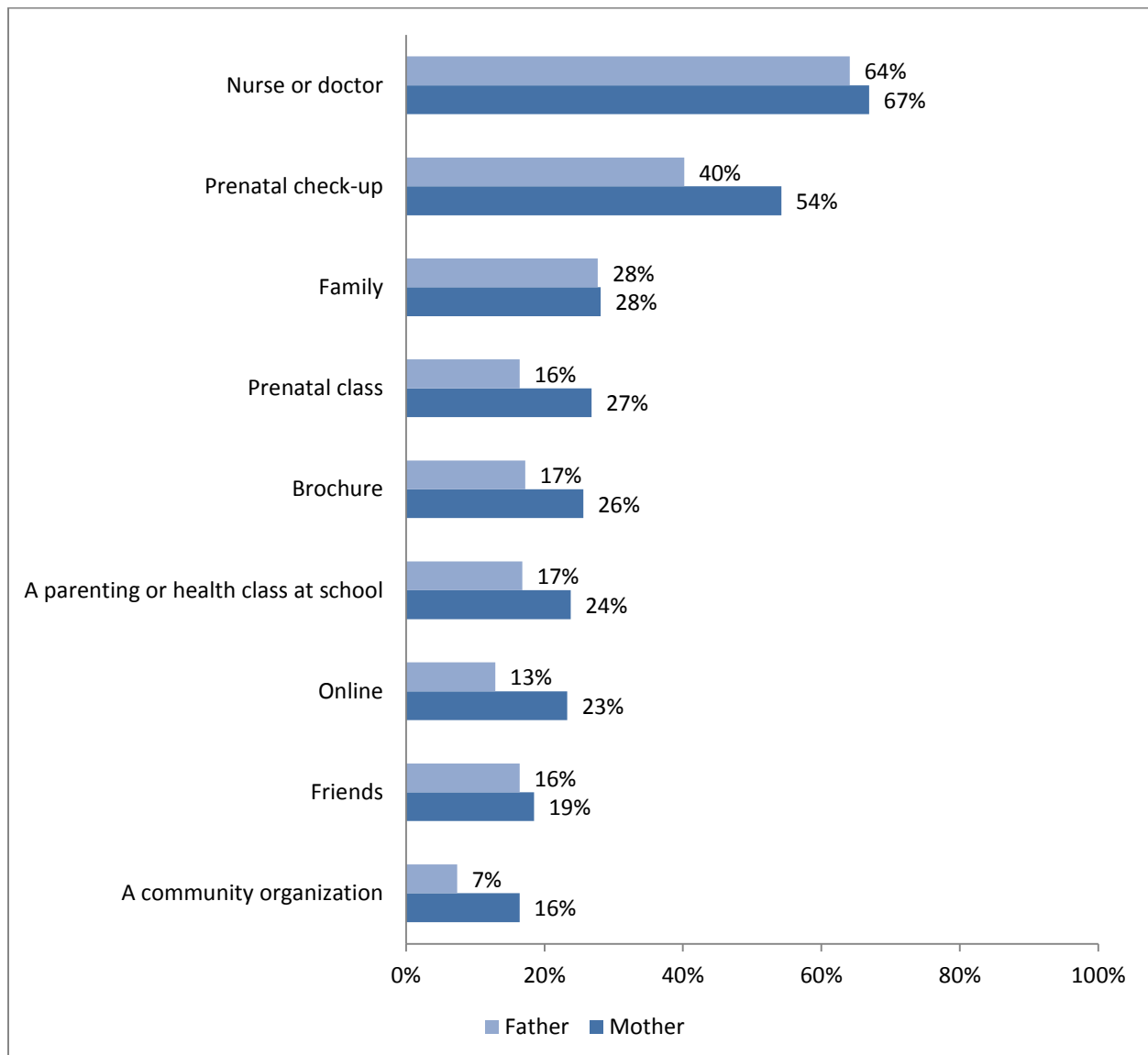


Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted / PES Fathers at 3 months

Note: Percentages add to over 100% due to respondents' ability to select more than one reason.

Though roughly 2 in 10 mothers and fathers report having learned about paternity establishment from their doctor or nurse [Figure 11], two-thirds of parents indicate that doctors or nurses are their preferred source for learning about paternity establishment [Figure 12]. Behind doctors and nurses, parents are most likely to cite prenatal appointments as a preferred source of paternity establishment information. Overall, mothers are more likely than fathers to express a preference for learning about paternity establishment through multiple sources.

Figure 12: Where Parents Prefer to Receive Information about Paternity Establishment



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted / PES Fathers at 3 months

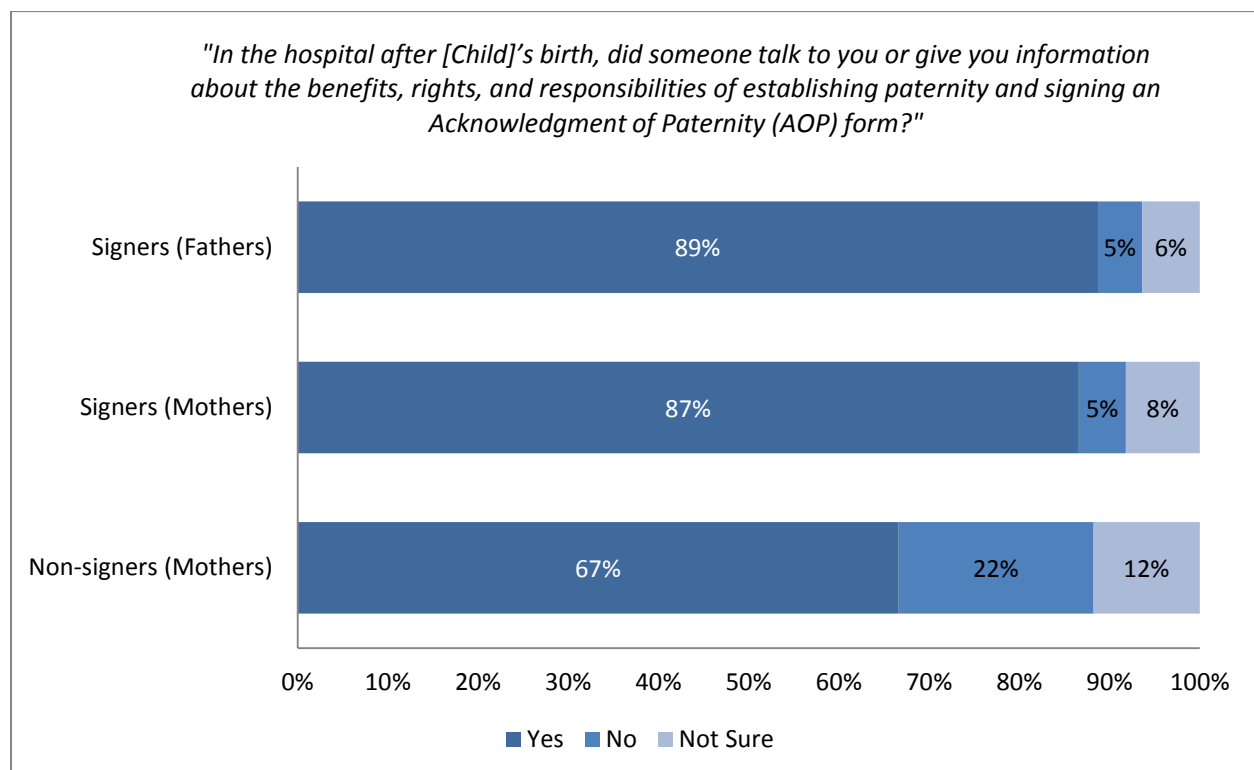
Note: Percentages add to over 100% due to respondents' ability to select more than one reason.

When CFRP asked mothers when they would have liked to have learned about paternity establishment, 68 percent of mothers indicate that they would prefer to learn about paternity establishment before or during their pregnancy (not shown). Still, a sizable fraction of mothers—roughly 1 in 3—stated that they did not need to know about paternity establishment before the birth of their child. Interestingly, both signers and non-signers are equally likely to express this view.

PARENTS' EXPERIENCE WITH THE BIRTH REGISTRAR

The majority of parents who establish paternity do so in the hospital with the assistance of a birth registrar. Given that parents' experience with the birth registrar may influence their likelihood of establishing paternity, it is important to examine whether AOP signers and non-signers report different experiences with their respective birth registrars. As mentioned previously, most of the fathers who completed the PES Study also signed the AOP, making it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from the surveys about fathers who did *not* sign the AOP. The following analyses examine fathers' self-reported experiences with the birth registrar, but only mothers' reports are used to compare the birth registrar experiences of AOP signers and non-signers.

Figure 13: Percentage of Parents Who Spoke with a Birth Registrar about the AOP



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted / PES Fathers at 3 months

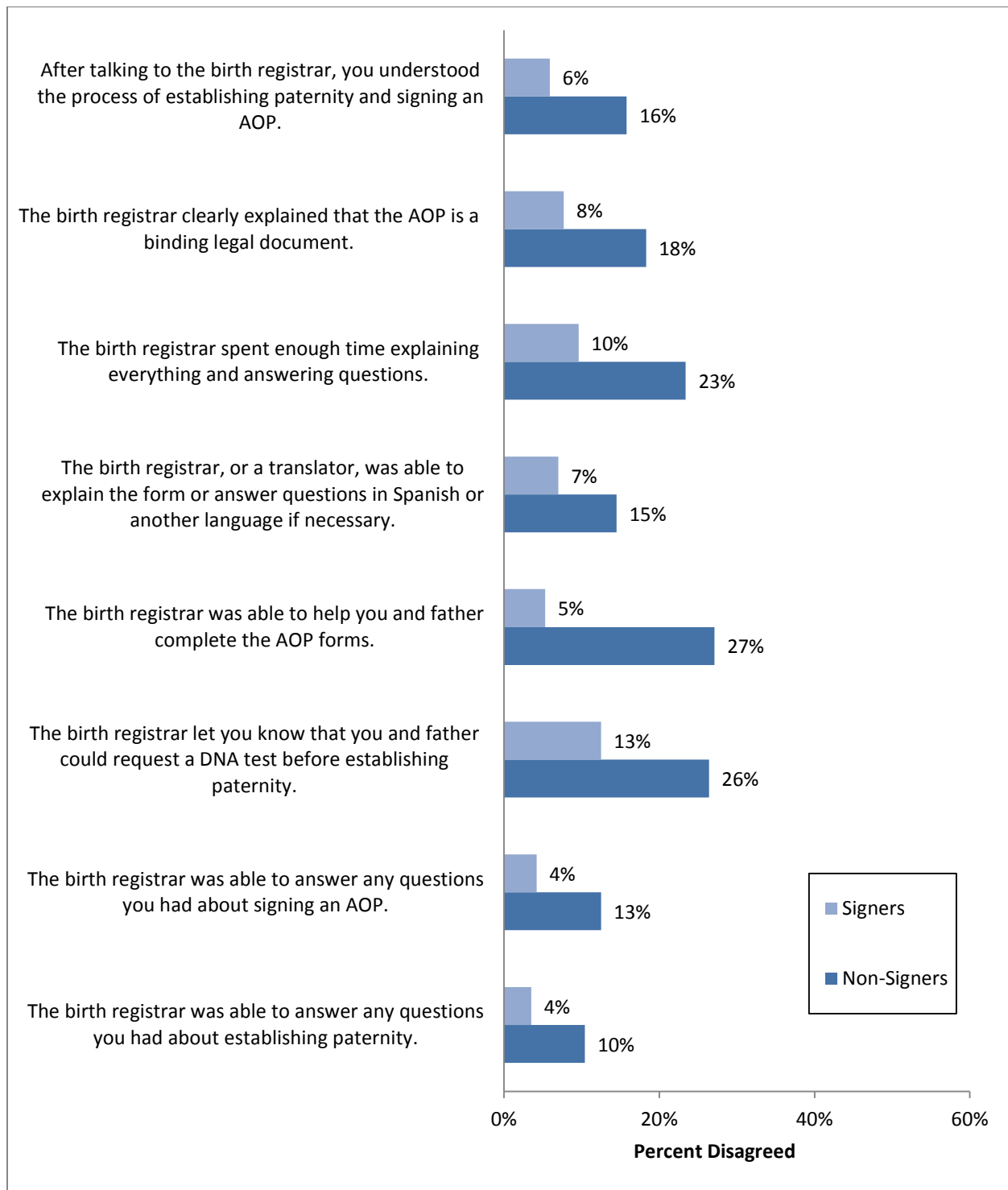
Figure 13 shows the vast majority of AOP-signing fathers (89%) report receiving information about the benefits, rights, and responsibilities of establishing paternity while in the hospital. The proportion of mothers who report receiving information from the birth registrar, however, varies widely according to whether or not they signed the AOP. Mothers associated with fathers who signed the AOP are significantly more likely to report speaking with a birth registrar (87%) than mothers associated with fathers who did not sign (67%).

Three months after a nonmarital birth, Texas mothers and fathers were also asked to signal their level of agreement with statements regarding the knowledge and helpfulness of the birth registrar on topics related to paternity establishment and the AOP. In addition to examining mothers' and fathers' responses, CFRP compared the birth registrar experience of mothers who signed the AOP and those who did not. These analyses help to unpack the extent to which signers and non-signers differ in their perceptions of the birth registrar's helpfulness.

Overall, AOP-signing mothers and fathers report similar experiences with the birth registrar, with 8 in 10 mothers and fathers strongly agreeing that the birth registrar was helpful across multiple survey items. Mothers associated with non-signing fathers, however, are considerably less likely to strongly agree that the birth registrar was helpful than mothers associated with AOP signers.

As seen in Figure 14, non-signers are also much more likely than signers to indicate that the birth registrar was not helpful across each survey item. AOP signers and non-signers are most likely to differ on questions related to whether or not the birth registrar was able to help complete the AOP forms, and whether or not the birth registrar informed them of their ability to request a DNA test prior to establishing paternity. Non-signing mothers are also significantly more likely than signers to believe that the birth registrar did not spend enough time answering the parents' questions.

Figure 14: Percentage of Mothers Who Disagree That the Birth Registrar Was Helpful by AOP Signing



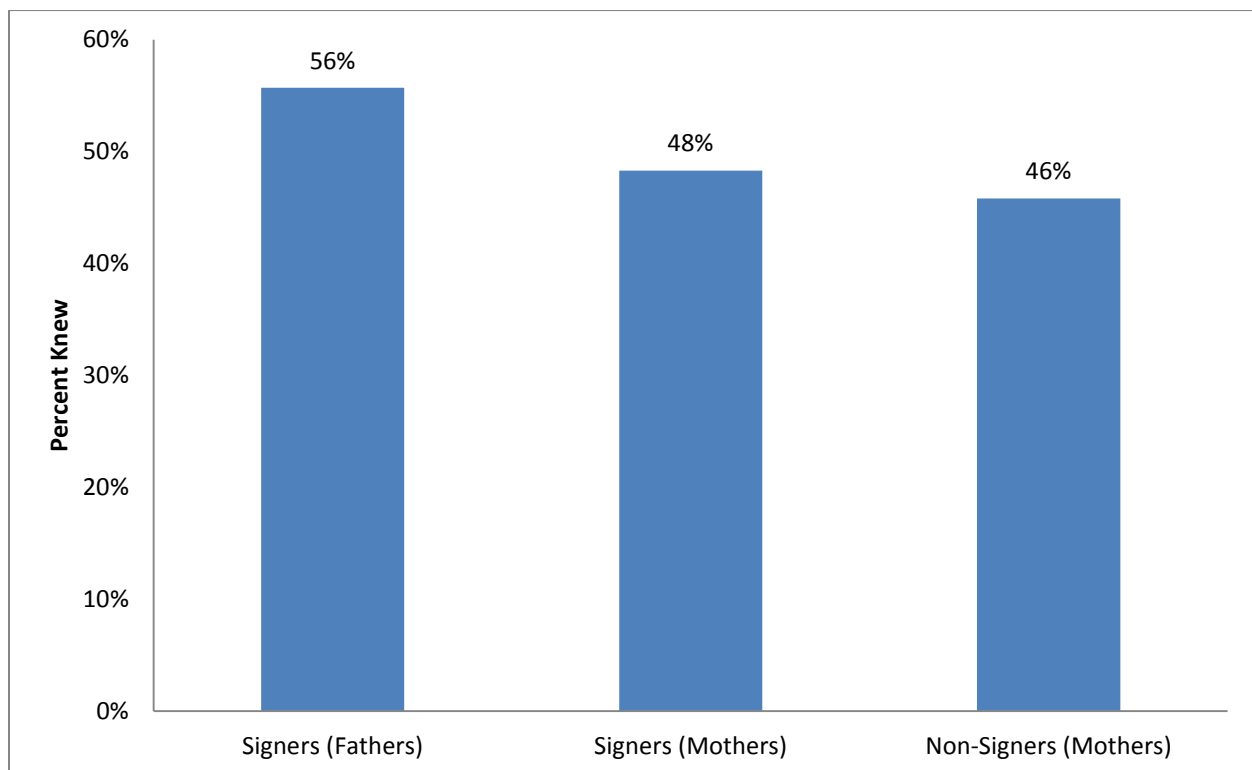
Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

KNOWLEDGE OF AOP

In addition to asking parents about their experiences with the birth registrar and the paternity establishment process, CFRP also sought to determine parents' level of knowledge of the AOP and its implications. Three months after the birth of their child, Texas mothers and fathers were asked three questions intended to gauge their knowledge of the AOP process and establishing paternity. The extent to which parents are aware of the AOP and its implications may help inform whether policies aimed at increasing education around paternity establishment are well-targeted.

First, unmarried parents were asked whether they knew prior to the birth that establishing paternity was necessary for the father to be considered a legal parent of the child. As Figure 15 shows, only half of all mothers and fathers know prior to birth that paternity establishment is necessary for the father to be considered the legal father of the child. Interestingly, there is little difference between AOP signers and non-signers when it comes to prior knowledge about the implications of paternity establishment on legal fatherhood.

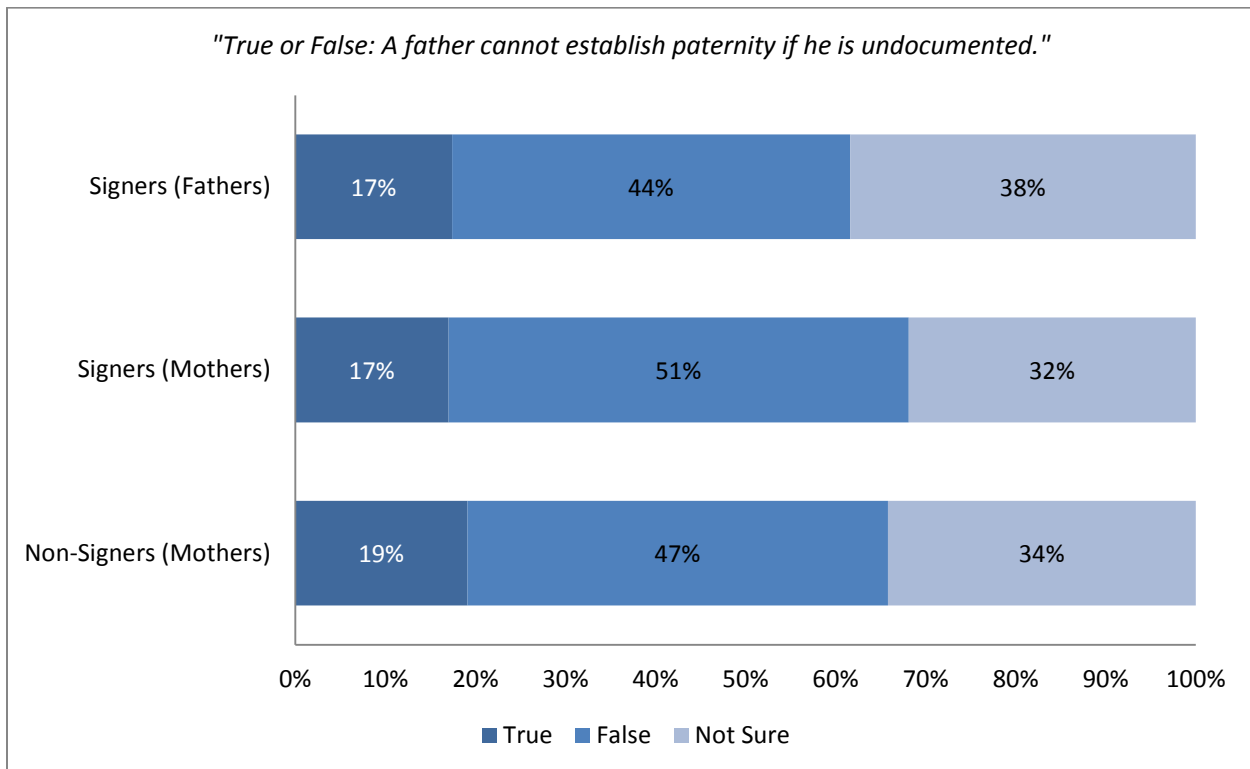
Figure 15: Percentage of Parents Who Knew Prior to Child's Birth that Father Had to Establish Paternity to Be Legal Father



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted / PES Fathers at 3 months

Next, unmarried parents were asked whether the following statement was true or false: *A father cannot establish paternity if he is undocumented.* Figure 16 reveals that parents are mixed in their responses. Approximately 1 in 3 mothers and fathers do not know how documentation influences a father's ability to establish paternity, roughly half of all parents correctly state that undocumented fathers can establish paternity in the U.S., and nearly 1 in 5 incorrectly believe that undocumented fathers cannot establish paternity. Better information regarding the relationship between paternity establishment and documentation status may improve AOP-signing rates given that roughly 1 in 10 Texas fathers is undocumented.

Figure 16: Parents' Knowledge of Whether Undocumented Fathers Can Establish Paternity

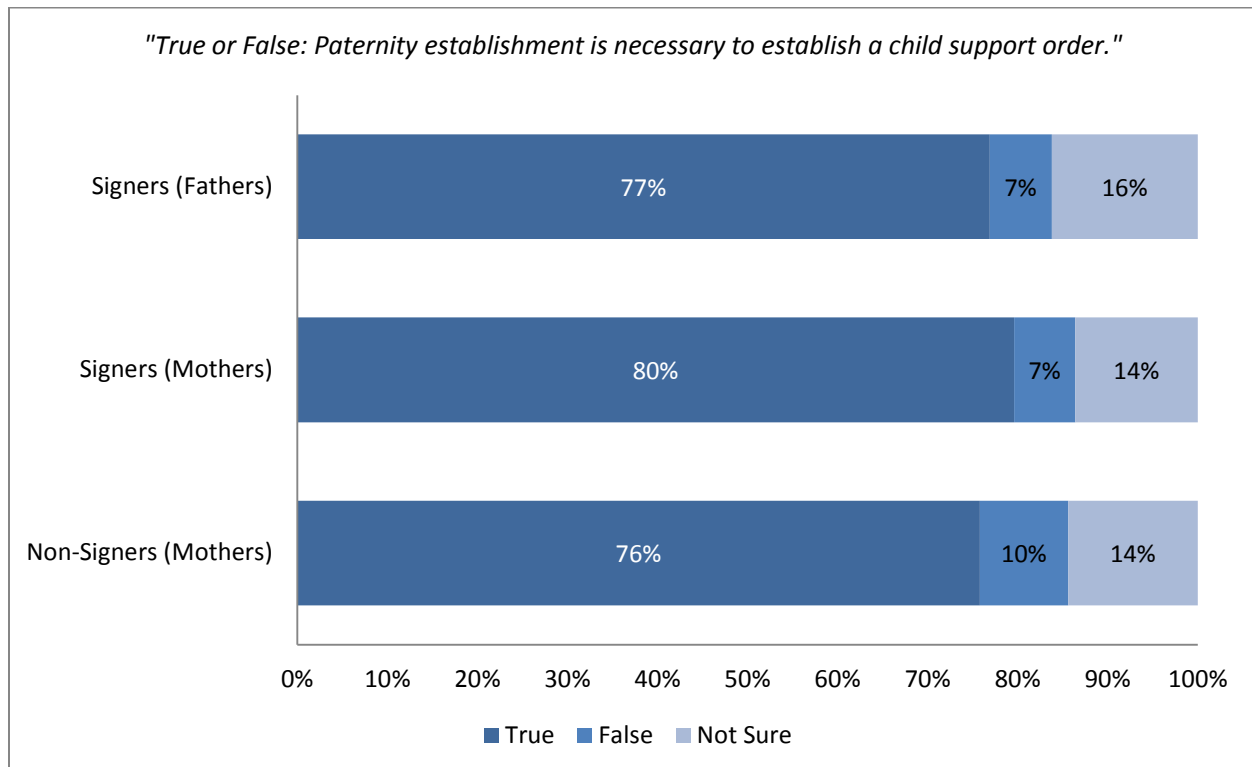


Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted / PES Fathers at 3 months

Note: Respondents selecting "False" provided the correct answer: A father can establish paternity if he is undocumented.

Finally, parents were asked whether paternity establishment is necessary to obtain a child support order. The majority of parents know that paternity establishment is necessary to establish a child support order, with roughly 4 out of 5 parents stating this is true. Of the remaining respondents, parents are more likely to say they did not know whether paternity establishment is necessary than to think the statement is false [Figure 17].

Figure 17: Parents' Knowledge of Whether Paternity Establishment Is Necessary for a Child Support Order



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted / PES Fathers at 3 months

Note: Respondents selecting "True" provided the correct answer: Paternity Establishment is necessary to establish a child support order.

Taken together, parents' knowledge of the AOP and its implications appears somewhat skewed. Parents are most aware that paternity establishment is necessary for a child support order, but decidedly less knowledgeable about how paternity establishment is related to legal fatherhood and a father's documentation status. Increased education surrounding the positive aspects of paternity establishment may increase parents' inclination to sign the in-hospital AOP. On the other hand, the data reveal that parents' level of knowledge about the AOP is not significantly different between signers and non-signers, implying that whether or not parents correctly grasp the details of AOP signing may not affect their decision to sign.

Conclusion

Paternity establishment is one of the first opportunities for an unmarried father to affirm his commitment to his child. Moreover, prior research shows that establishing legal fatherhood through the AOP is linked to higher levels of subsequent paternal involvement and a host of positive outcomes for children.^{73,74} Given the numerous benefits of paternity establishment, the first part of this chapter set out to understand the differences between fathers who choose to sign the AOP and those who do not.

Roughly 7 in 10 Texas fathers sign the in-hospital AOP. These fathers are not significantly different from fathers who decline to sign the AOP across most demographic domains, with the exception of racial background. African American fathers are significantly less likely to sign the AOP than other fathers. Apart from race/ethnicity, signers and non-signers are similarly distributed with regards to education, age, citizenship, and veteran status.

In contrast to the thin connection between paternity establishment and most demographic characteristics, the relationship status between the mother and father emerged as especially telling of a father's propensity to sign the AOP. Fathers who are romantically involved and/or living with the mother are significantly more likely to sign the AOP than fathers without these ties. In fact, nearly all of fathers who are cohabiting with the mother signed the AOP compared to only one-third of non-cohabiting fathers. Efforts to increase voluntary paternity establishment across Texas may benefit from programs aimed at promoting paternity establishment among parents who are not living together, especially where increased outreach and targeting to this group is possible.

Fathers who decline to sign the AOP are also distinguished by a higher incidence of several destabilizing risk factors. These fathers are more likely to be incarcerated at the child's birth, exhibit abusive behavior toward mother or child, and have children with multiple partners. When compared to AOP signers, fathers who did not sign the AOP are also less likely to have established paternity with their previous children.

On the whole, non-signing fathers are far more likely to bear the characteristics that, over time, increasingly threaten to undermine the parental relationship, the father-child connection, and a father's economic support of his child. From a policy perspective, increasing in-hospital paternity establishment among fathers in this group—especially those with antisocial behaviors such as domestic violence—may not be ideal given the potential for increased harm to the child. Under these circumstances, court-ordered paternity establishment may offer an avenue for circumscribing a father's visitation access through legal parameters that afford better protection to the mother and child.

The second half of this chapter sought to better understand the parents' experience with paternity establishment. Most parents are driven by legal and personal reasons to establish paternity, including ensuring that the child has a legal father. Interestingly, in the majority of the cases in which paternity was *not* established it was not necessarily that one of the parents did not want the father to establish paternity or that they did not think it was important; rather it was that the father "missed" the opportunity to establish paternity in the hospital by being absent from the birth. Whether a father's nonattendance at the birth is due to a contentious parental relationship or external barriers to attendance such as incarceration or an inflexible work schedule will be explored in future analyses.

Moreover, many parents do not learn about paternity establishment until they are at the hospital for the delivery, one of the more tumultuous occasions to fully digest the implications of legal fatherhood. Because many parents are not informed about paternity establishment during pregnancy, the task of helping parents to understand the AOP falls with greater importance to the role of the birth registrar.

Not all unmarried parents, however, report having met with a birth registrar; non-signing mothers are significantly less likely than signing mothers to indicate that they discussed the AOP with a birth registrar. Moreover, non-signing mothers who *did* report meeting with a birth registrar are significantly less likely to indicate that the registrar was helpful than their signing counterparts. Importantly however, signing and non-signing parents did not differ significantly in their prior knowledge of the AOP suggesting that the failure to sign may have little to do with lack of information.

One recurrent theme echoed throughout the literature and reiterated in survey data presented across this chapter is the profound impact of the mother-father relationship on AOP signing. The importance of the parental relationship carries implications not only for paternity establishment but also for future father involvement.^{75,76,77} The next chapters turn to examining the relationships of unmarried Texas parents with greater depth and nuance. Chapter 3 charts the course of the parental relationship over time, from the sunny optimism of the prenatal period to the state of shared parenthood more than three years after birth. The significance of these relationships for future father involvement and support are also discussed.

CHAPTER 3: PARENTAL RELATIONSHIP

Background and Motivation

Examining the role of fathers in the lives of their children requires assessing the mother-father relationship. Both inside and outside of marriage, the father-child relationship is particularly sensitive to the condition of the parental relationship.⁷⁸ A father's involvement with his child is often influenced by his involvement with the child's mother, and the quality of this parental relationship affects the father-child relationship.⁷⁹

The mother-father relationship impacts the father-child relationship from the outset. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this report, signing an Acknowledgment of Paternity (AOP) form is the first legal act of fatherhood for unmarried fathers, symbolizing a direct connection between father and child. Establishment of paternity also allows children born outside of marriage to access a range of benefits through their fathers, including various forms of insurance and public assistance programs. In addition to these benefits, voluntary establishment of paternity has been linked to numerous positive child outcomes arising from increased paternal involvement and support.

Consistent with prior research, survey data presented in the previous chapter evince the importance of the mother-father relationship in connection to paternity establishment; paternity is significantly more likely to be established at the time of a nonmarital birth if the parental relationship is strong.⁸⁰ Data collected by CFRP also echo the findings of previous research on the intersection of cohabitation and paternity establishment;⁸¹ Texas parents are nearly twice as likely to voluntarily establish paternity in the hospital if the mother and father live together.

An extensive body of literature points to the importance of the parental relationship in shaping outcomes associated with AOP signing, father involvement, and economic support. The extent to which parents get along and whether or not they cohabit has considerable impact not only on AOP signing, but also on how fathers support their children emotionally and financially.

More specifically, romantic relationships, quality coparenting relationships, and cohabitation are all positively associated with increased paternal involvement and support. In one study, researchers found that nonresident fathers with high involvement at one and three years after a nonmarital birth were more likely to have been in a consistent romantic relationship with the mother, whereas fathers with low involvement were disproportionately inclined to have been consistently non-romantic.⁸²

Research also shows that positive coparenting predicts future involvement among nonresident fathers.⁸³ Though romantic relationships and a high-quality coparenting relationship tend to increase paternal involvement among nonresident fathers, cohabitation has perhaps the greatest influence on the extent and nature of paternal involvement.⁸⁴ On average, fathers who live with their children are considerably more involved than those who do not.⁸⁵

Data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing^b Study provide insight into how the parental relationship, and by implication the father-child relationship, may change over time. Though most parents are romantically involved and optimistic about their relationship at the time of a nonmarital birth, fewer than half are still romantic five years later and only a small minority have married.⁸⁶ Just as divorced fathers may disengage with their children when marriage ends,⁸⁷ unmarried fathers are even more likely to disengage when their romantic relationship with the child's mother ends.⁸⁸

Prior research also provides insight into how risk factors such as domestic violence, incarceration, multipartner fertility, and substance abuse can decrease an unmarried father's likelihood of being involved with his children by destabilizing the mother-father relationship.^{89,90} Studies show mothers may select out of relationships in which these risk factors are present,⁹¹ and father involvement may be especially sensitive to the effects of risk factors when a mother and father do not get along.⁹²

The current study provides an opportunity to chart the course of the parental relationship over time for two cohorts of Texas parents who had children outside of marriage. This chapter provides three snapshots of the parental relationship among unmarried Texas parents—during pregnancy, shortly after birth, and three years after a nonmarital birth.^c Additional sections of the chapter then examine each snapshot through the lens of paternity establishment, child support, and the prevalence of paternal risk factors.

Though CFRP data reveal that most couples have high hopes for their future together with the onset of parenthood, early indications of fragility are present in many of these unmarried relationships—especially with regard to the high prevalence of short-term relationships and break-ups during pregnancy. Fathers who have not signed an AOP, mothers with expectations of

^b The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study followed a cohort of nearly 5,000 children born in large U.S. cities between 1998 and 2000 (roughly three-quarters of whom were born to unmarried parents). The study refers to unmarried parents and their children as “fragile families” to underscore that they are families and that they are at greater risk of breaking up and living in poverty than more traditional families. The core FF Study was designed to primarily address four questions of interest to researchers and policy makers: (1) What are the conditions and capabilities of unmarried parents, especially fathers?; (2) What is the nature of the relationships between unmarried parents?; (3) How do children born into these families fare?; and (4) How do policies and environmental conditions affect families and children? [Source: Princeton University and Columbia University. About the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. The Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. Columbia Population Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/about.asp>] Due to a number of parallels between the Fragile Families Study and our own, we make frequent mention of the data and findings from Fragile Families in an effort to lend context and highlight comparisons with one of the major academic precedents to our research.

^c PES respondents provide a snapshot of relationships three months after a nonmarital birth and CAS respondents provide a snapshot of relationships three years after a nonmarital birth. CAS respondents also provide retrospective reports of their relationships at the time of the child's birth. Information about relationships during pregnancy is based on PES survey respondents' retrospective reports. Where PES and CAS data are presented together, the data are not longitudinal, as PES and CAS surveys were administered to separate cohorts of parents.

opening a child support case, and families in which risk factors such as domestic violence and multipartner fertility are present are all associated with these short-term, turbulent relationships.

A snapshot of the parental relationship three years after an AOP is signed shows that many relationships have dissolved. Moreover, fewer mothers express a desire for paternal involvement and a sizable percentage of coparenting relationships have weakened by the time a child is three years old.

CFRP's analyses show many of the factors associated with relationship instability during pregnancy are also associated with poorer relationship outcomes three years later. In particular, relationships in which risk factors are present, including domestic violence, multipartner fertility, unemployment, incarceration, and substance abuse are all linked to poorer outcomes for nonmarital parental relationships. Mothers in these relationships are also more likely to have opened a child support case, or expects to in the near future.

Parental Relationships During Pregnancy and Shortly After Birth

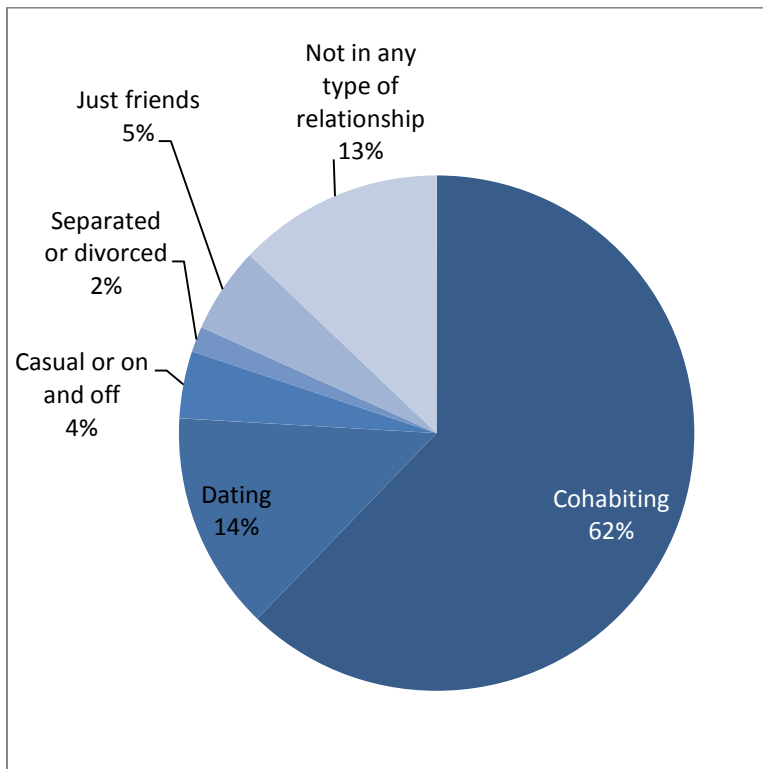
This section provides an overview of the parental relationship during pregnancy and three months after a nonmarital birth. We begin with a discussion of the relationship status and high expectations of marriage held by many parents shortly after their child is born—three months after a nonmarital birth, more than 7 in 10 Texas parents are romantically involved and the majority expect to marry.

Closer inspection, however, reveals fissures in many of these relationships long before the child is even born. Sizable fractions of unmarried parents have been dating for less than six months when they become pregnant. Most were not trying to have a baby when they became pregnant, and break-ups during pregnancy are common. Overall, unmarried mothers do not receive much support from their children's fathers during pregnancy, and most receive only limited support from extended family. Despite the bumpy road many travel throughout the course of their pregnancy however, most unmarried parents arrive at a vista of extreme optimism when their children are born.

PARENTS' RELATIONSHIP STATUS SHORTLY AFTER BIRTH

The majority of unmarried Texas parents are committed to each other when their child is born. Three months after a nonmarital birth, 62 percent of Texas parents are cohabiting and another 14 percent are romantically involved, but not living together (referred to as “dating” in this report). Only 13 percent of unmarried Texas parents are not in any type of relationship at all. A small fraction—2 percent—report being separated or divorced, however these families were likely in common law marriages, which are encouraged to establish paternity [Figure 18].

Figure 18: Parents' Relationship at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: Less than one percent of parents at 3 months are cohabiting but not romantically involved. Separated or Divorced may refer to separation from common law arrangements

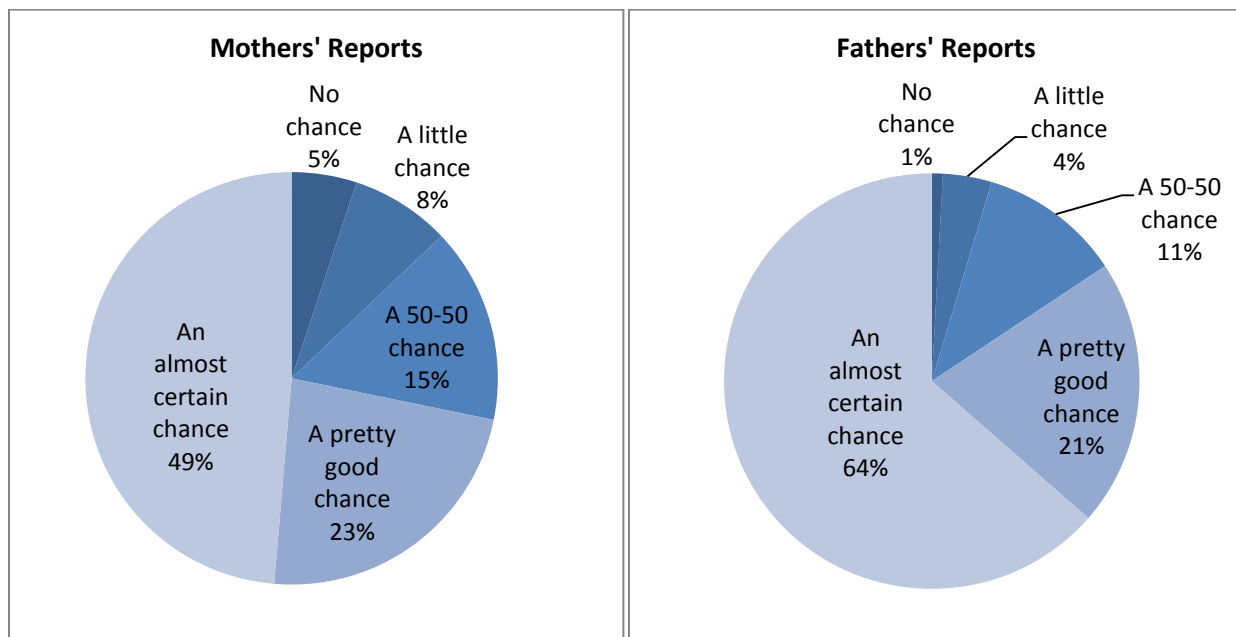
PARENTS' EXPECTATIONS SHORTLY AFTER BIRTH

Expectations for Marriage in the Future

In their book *Promises I Can Keep*, an analysis of interviews with over 150 unmarried mothers, Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas describe the parental optimism following the birth of a child as a “magic moment.” Parents in even the most tumultuous relationships often show resolve to stay together right after their child is born.⁹³ This phenomenon is also well-documented by the Fragile Families Study, in which just hours after a child’s birth, two-thirds of unmarried mothers rated the chances of marrying the child’s father at better than 50/50.⁹⁴

Unmarried parents in Texas may be even more optimistic.^d As shown in Figure 19, three months after a nonmarital birth nearly three-quarters of mothers feel there is a better than 50/50 chance of marrying the child's father in the future. Approximately half feel marriage is almost certain, and only 5 percent report no chance of marrying the child's father. Unmarried fathers are optimistic about their chances for marriage as well—fully 85 percent of surveyed fathers^e rate their chances of marrying the child's mother at better than 50/50. The majority of Texas fathers in the sample (64%) rate the chances of marriage as almost certain, whereas only 1 percent reports no chance of marrying the child's mother in the near future [Figure 19].

Figure 19: Parents' Chances of Marrying Each Other in the Near Future



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted / PES Fathers at 3 months, unweighted

Note: Percentages may add to more than 100% due to rounding

^d Relative to the nationwide Fragile Families Study referenced above, PES and CAS Study participants are more likely to be Hispanic/Latino. In addition, all Fragile Families Study participants gave birth at urban-area hospitals whereas roughly 44 percent of PES and CAS Study participants gave birth at non-urban hospitals (population < 200,000). The discrepancy is a purposeful deviation from the Fragile Families Study taken to obtain a statewide representative sample. In Texas, 73 percent of hospitals are located in urban areas and 27 percent are located in rural areas (non-Core Based Statistical Areas).¹

^e PES Fathers survey data are unweighted with respect to AOP signing. As a consequence, statistics generated from this sample are not representative of all unmarried fathers in Texas. PES Fathers participants are predominately cohabiting AOP signers and may therefore be more optimistic than other unmarried fathers.

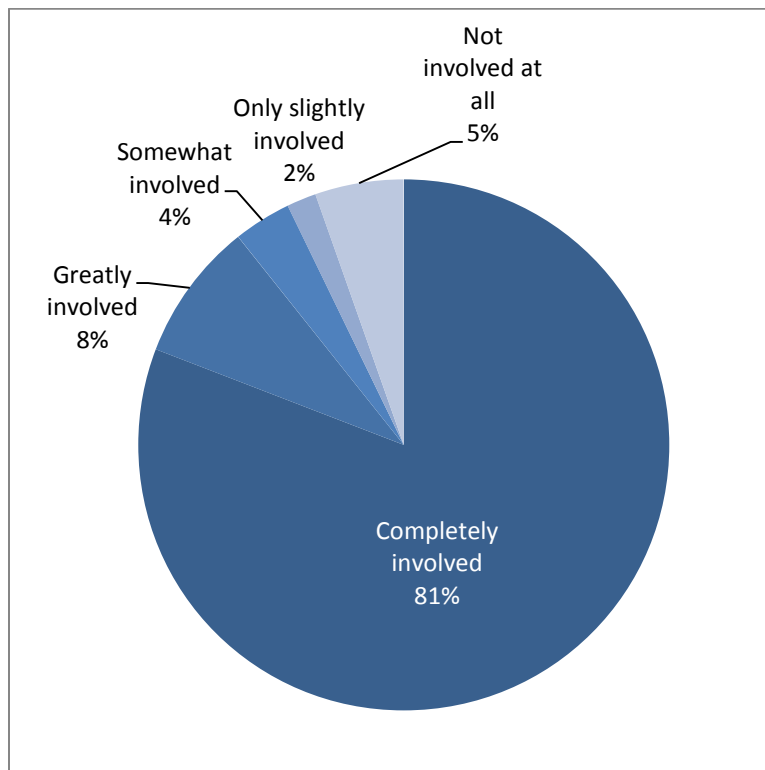
¹ Texas Hospital Association (2013). Caring for Texans: An In-Depth Look at Texas Hospitals and the People They Serve. Fast Facts on Texas Hospitals. Retrieved from:

<http://www.tha.org/HealthCareProviders/Advocacy/Hospital%20Facts.pdf>

Desire for Paternal Involvement in the Future

Soon after a child is born, parents not only have high expectations for their own relationship, but most would also like the father to have a substantial role in the life of the child. As shown in Figure 20 below, a large majority of unmarried Texas mothers desire ongoing paternal involvement and support. Three months after an unmarried birth, 8 out of 10 mothers would like the child’s father to be completely involved in raising the child in the coming years. More than 8 in 10 mothers also indicate that it is “very important” the father is available to help raise the child and regularly spends time with the child (not shown). Overall however, mothers are slightly less concerned that the father provide financial support and have a say in decisions regarding the child. Roughly 7 out of 10 mothers rate each of these topics as very important.

Figure 20: How Involved Mother Would Like Father to Be in Raising Child at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

As much as mothers desire sustained involvement from their children’s fathers, fathers in our study desire it even more. In fact, nearly all surveyed fathers (97%) say it is very important that they are available to help raise their children (not shown). Almost as many (94 – 95%) say it is very important to regularly spend time with the child, provide financial support for the child, and have a say in decisions regarding the child. Importantly, the fathers who responded to the PES survey are likely more sanguine about their involvement than the typical unmarried father who did not respond to the survey.

RELATIONSHIP DURING PREGNANCY

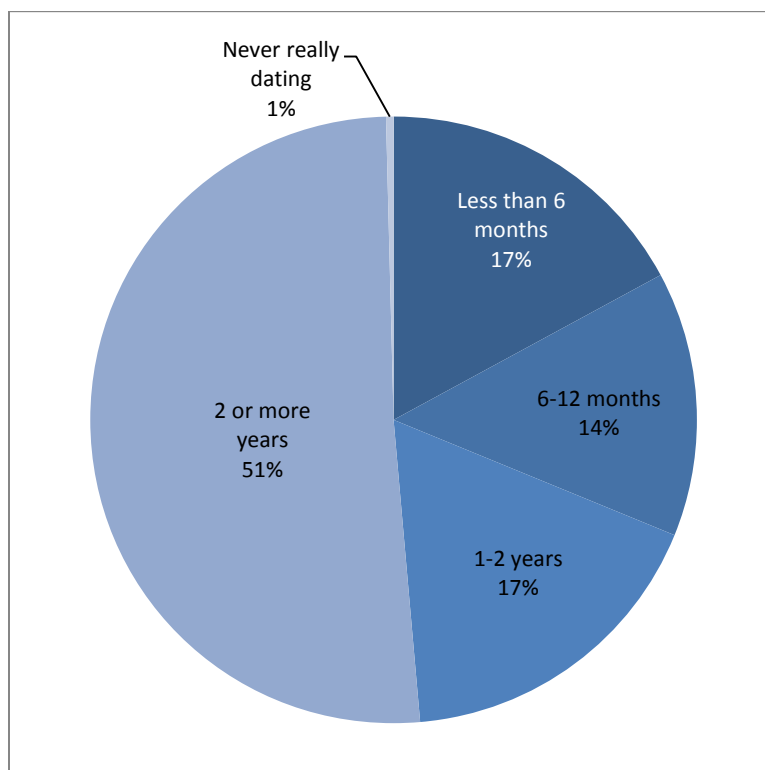
Relationship Duration Prior to Pregnancy

Though more than 7 in 10 unmarried Texas parents are romantically involved and optimistic about the future of their relationship shortly after their child is born, indications of relationship fragility are often present during pregnancy. One such indication is the brevity of unmarried parental relationships.

Research shows the duration of the parental relationship prior to birth is significantly shorter for cohabiting parents than for married parents.⁹⁵ In their book *Doing the Best I Can*, which documents in-depth interviews with over 100 unmarried fathers, Kathryn Edin and Timothy Nelson conclude, “In sum, a common feature of our fathers’ narratives about the nature of the relationship before pregnancy is the brevity and modest cohesion of the tie.”⁹⁶

Survey data collected by CFRP echo this theme; nearly half of unmarried Texas parents have been dating for less than two years when they become pregnant. Moreover, nearly 1 in 5 unmarried Texas mothers has been dating her child’s father for less than six months, or is not really dating him at all, when she becomes pregnant [Figure 21].

Figure 21: Relationship Duration Prior to Pregnancy



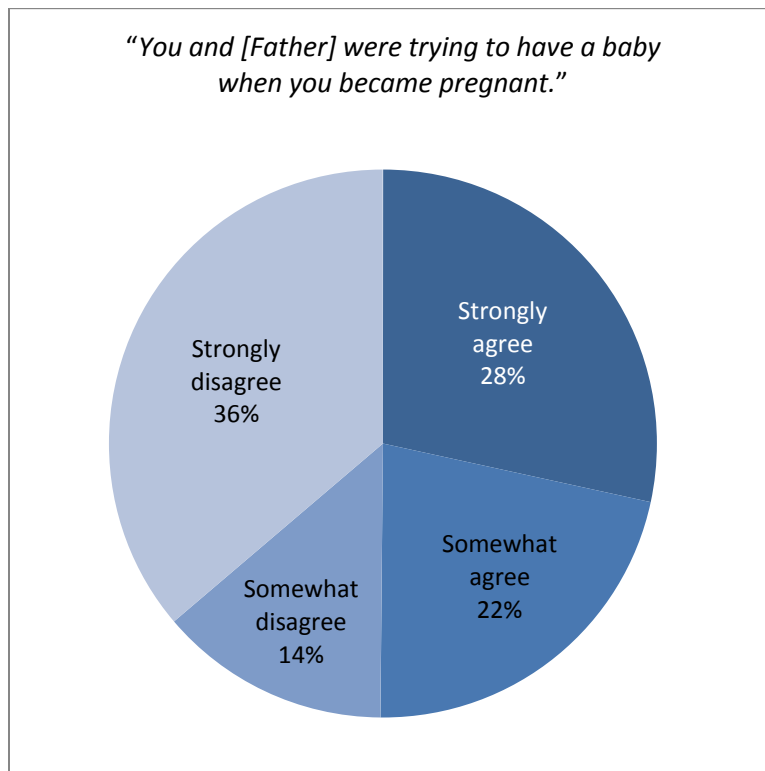
Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Pregnancy Planning

Another indication of relationship volatility among unmarried parents is the low percentage of pregnancies that are actively planned. As shown in Figure 22, fewer than 1 in 3 mothers strongly agree with the statement, “You and the father were trying to have a baby when you became pregnant.” In fact, half of mothers disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. Though most are not trying to have a baby, only 2 in 10 mothers report using birth control regularly at the time they become pregnant (not shown).

This phenomenon is also documented in qualitative interview data from the study entitled *Time, Love, and Cash in Couples with Children*. In-depth interviews with 50 unmarried couples reveal many are ambivalent about pregnancy. A couple may want a child, but feel unsure about whether conditions are right. In many of these cases, couples decide to “leave open the possibility.”⁹⁷ In their book *Doing the Best I Can*, Kathryn Edin and Timothy Nelson reiterate this idea, noting that for many unmarried couples, condoms are often viewed as means of disease prevention rather than birth control. Summarizing the sentiments from hundreds of interviews with young unmarried men, the authors write, “if both partners have ‘tested clean’ from STDs, men who continue to use condoms might as well be calling their female partner a ‘cheater’...”⁹⁸

Figure 22: Percentage of Parents Trying to Have a Baby When Mother Became Pregnant



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Relationship Instability

Given the somewhat impromptu nature of the conception, many couples enter into the prenatal period on shaky ground. Survey data collected by CFRP reveal that relationship instability during pregnancy is common. Approximately 1 in 4 unmarried mothers say their relationships declined after finding out they were pregnant, and nearly one-third broke up with the father at some point during pregnancy (not shown).

These findings mirror the themes evinced in qualitative data gathered by other researchers. Some of the young mothers interviewed for the book *Promises I Can Keep* describe a period of turmoil during the pregnancy stemming from financial stress or from the father's desire to continue a lifestyle not conducive to parenthood.⁹⁹ Distrust about sexual infidelity may also be a source of contention. For the couples profiled in *Time, Love, and Cash in Couples with Children*, fear of a partner being unfaithful is a "pervasive theme."¹⁰⁰

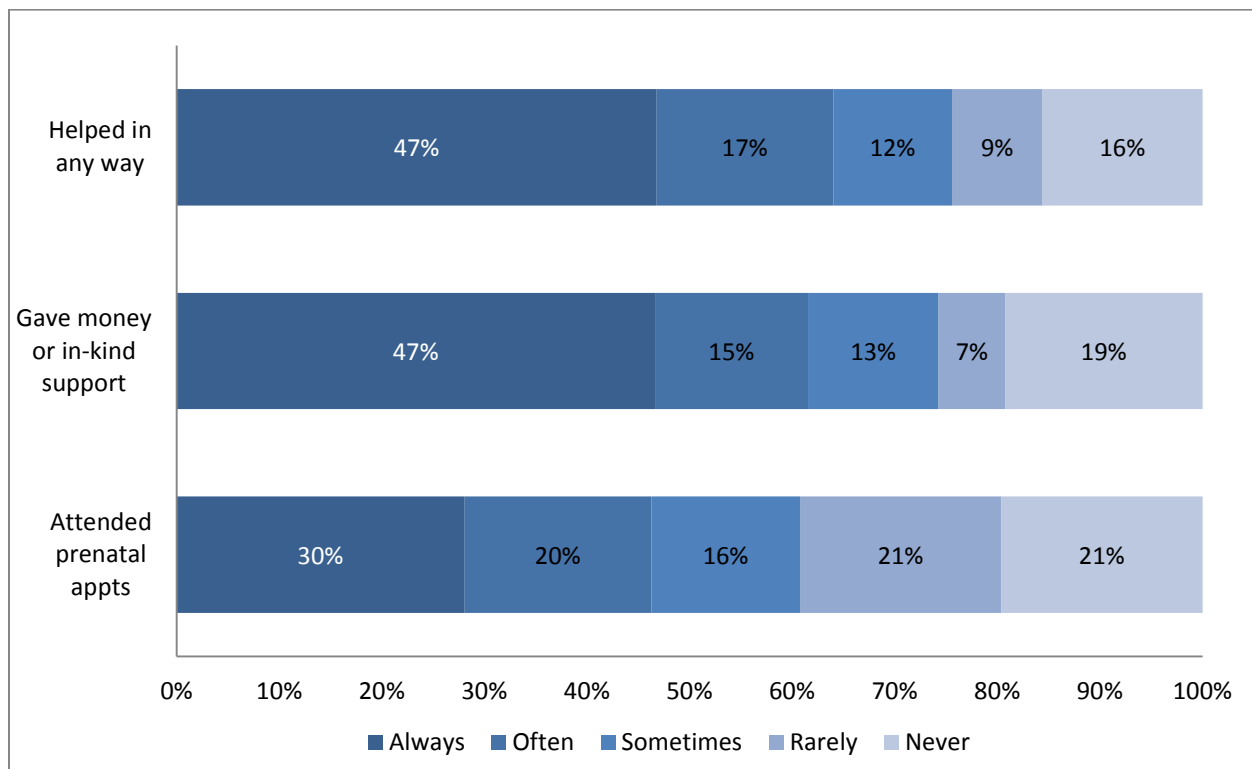
These fears are reflected in the responses of mothers surveyed by CFRP. A sizable fraction of unmarried Texas mothers (17%) report the father questioned whether the child was his during pregnancy. An additional 3 percent say they do not know if the father questioned whether the child was his. Taken together, the data suggest a general mistrust and lack of cohesion in roughly 1 out of 5 unmarried parental relationships.

Father Prenatal Involvement

Research suggests a father's prenatal involvement and support of the mother at the time of birth is an indicator of future involvement with both mother and child. Paternal involvement in pregnancy is significantly and positively associated with levels of fathers' engagement years later.¹⁰¹ Researchers have also found that participation at the time of a child's birth is a predictor of nonresident fathers' involvement.¹⁰²

Overall, the results show that unmarried mothers do not receive much support from fathers during pregnancy. Fewer than half of unmarried Texas mothers report always receiving help, money, or in-kind support from their children’s fathers when they needed it [Figure 23]. Approximately 1 in 4 rarely or never received help, money, or in-kind support during pregnancy. In addition, 4 in 10 fathers rarely or never attended prenatal appointments and one-third were not present at the 20-week ultrasound (not shown). A father’s lack of attendance at these appointments is important to note given that they are generally considered opportune moments for accessing fathers with information regarding the establishment of paternity.

Figure 23: Father Involvement During Pregnancy



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

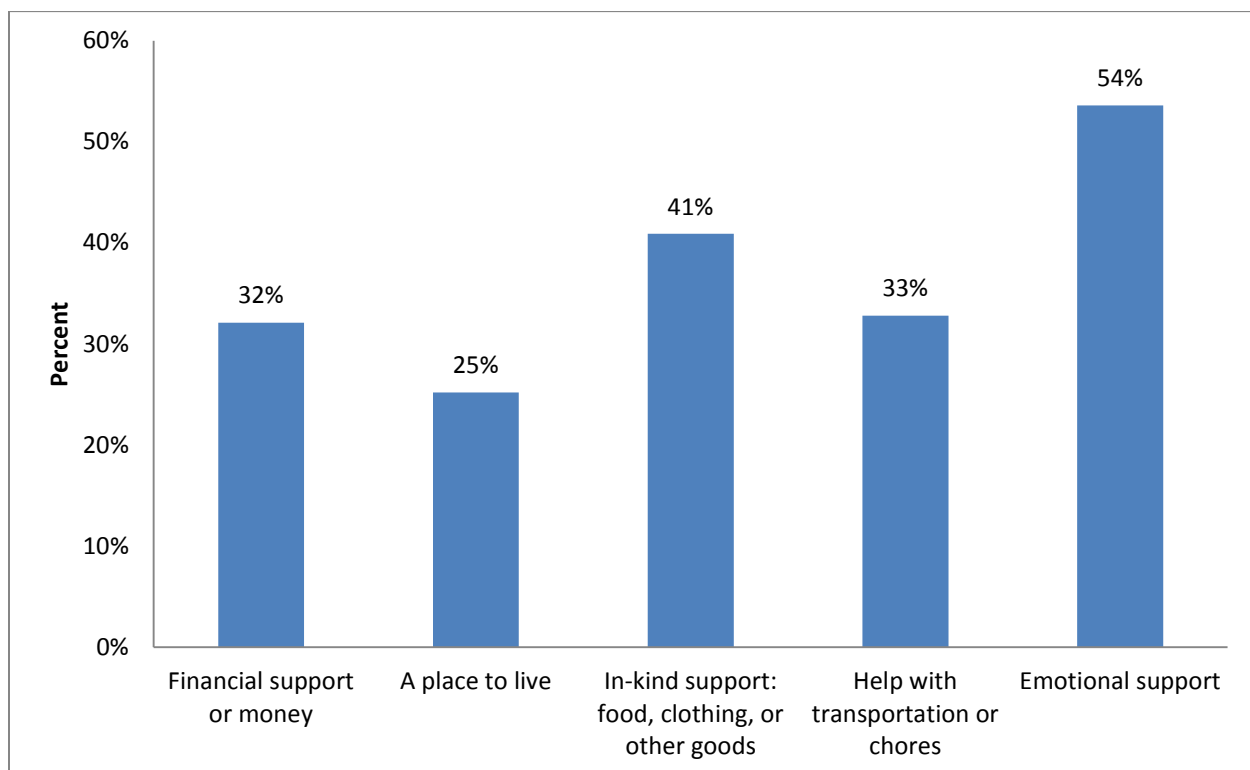
Though the majority of fathers are present when the child is born, a substantial minority (20%) are not. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the father’s absence at the birth is the most prominent reason for failing to establish paternity in the hospital. The most common reasons for a father’s absence at the birth, as reported by mothers, are as follows: the father did not want to be there (31%), the mother did not want the father to be there (26%), the father was out of town for personal reasons (13%), and the father was incarcerated (10%). An additional 19 percent of mothers do not know why the father was not present at the birth (not shown).

Support from Extended Family

Family systems theory supports the notion that an unmarried father will be more involved and supportive if his own family of origin is supportive.¹⁰³ Indeed, research shows a higher quality relationship between a mother and the family of her child's father's is associated with higher levels of father involvement.¹⁰⁴

Though most unmarried Texas mothers do not receive financial, housing, or in-kind support from the father's family during pregnancy, just over half receive emotional support. As shown in Figure 24, less than one-third of mothers report receiving financial support from the father's family during pregnancy and even fewer were provided a place to live. One-third received help with transportation or chores, and a larger proportion—4 in 10—received in-kind support such as food, clothing, or other goods. The generally low levels of material support from fathers' families during pregnancy may be because many mothers do not need—or do not want to say they need—the help of the father's family. Future analyses may be able to tease out the underlying drivers of a father's familial support through an examination of familial support in the context of maternal need.

Figure 24: Percentage of Mothers Receiving Support from Father's Family During Pregnancy



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

One way an unmarried father's family may signal a lack of support is by questioning the true paternity of the child during pregnancy. Ten percent of unmarried Texas mothers report the father's family questioned the child's paternity during this time period. Another 14 percent of mothers do not know if the father's family ever questioned the child's paternity (not shown).

Group Differences by Parental Relationship During Pregnancy

As described in the previous section of this chapter, many unmarried parental relationships show signs of fragility as early as during the pregnancy. In this section, we group Texas parents into separate categories based on the length and stability of their relationships. The following analyses then explore the characteristics and paternal risk factors associated with the most fragile unmarried relationships in an effort to identify their common features.

Characteristics Associated with Short-Term Relationships

To identify the relationship and risk factors associated with short-term parental relationships, CFRP divided unmarried Texas parents into two groups – those who had been dating for less than six months when they became pregnant, and those who had been dating for six months or more. Overall, 18 percent of unmarried mothers were dating the child's father for less than six months, or not really dating him at all, when they became pregnant.

As shown in Table 3 below, fathers who do not sign the AOP and mothers who are considering a child support order are significantly more prevalent among couples who were dating for less than six months when they became pregnant. Four in ten of the fathers in the short-term relationship group did not sign an AOP, whereas less than half as many in the longer-term relationship group failed to sign an AOP. Mothers in shorter-term relationships are also more likely to be considering opening a formal child support order when the child is born, an indication that the parents may not be able to rely upon an informal arrangement to provide for the child.

Domestic violence, prevalent among unmarried parents in Texas overall, is significantly more prevalent among those whose relationship was short prior to the pregnancy—nearly 1 in 3 mothers in this group reports experiencing domestic violence [Table 3]. Domestic violence and its deleterious effects on these relationships is further discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Table 3: Group Differences by Duration of Parental Relationship Prior to Pregnancy

Group Differences by Duration of Parental Relationship Prior to Pregnancy (Percent)			
	Dating 6 Months or More	Dating Less than 6 Months	Sig.
<i>N (Unweighted)</i>	579	121	
<i>Weighted Proportion</i>	82%	18%	
<i>Parental Factors</i>			
AOP Non-Signers	20%	41%	***
Child Support Order/Expectations	23%	36%	***
<i>Multipartner Fertility</i>			
MPF Father	32%	40%	
MPF Mother	29%	35%	
<i>Threats to the Relationship</i>			
Incarcerated at Birth	2%	3%	
Unemployed	15%	21%	
Less than High School	24%	18%	
Domestic Violence	17%	29%	***
<i>Father's Race/Ethnicity</i>			
Hispanic/Latino	57%	53%	
African American	19%	18%	
White, Non-Hispanic	21%	25%	

Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Ns in this table do not align with weighted proportions due to population weighting.

Definitions for terms in this table can be found in Appendix D: Glossary of Terms

Characteristics Associated with Relationship Instability During Pregnancy

CFRP conducted a similar analysis to identify factors associated with relationship instability during pregnancy. In this section, unmarried Texas parents are divided into “stable relationship” and “unstable relationship” groups based on whether they reported breaking up during pregnancy. Overall, 69 percent of parents are in relationships that were stable during the pregnancy. Of those who broke up during pregnancy, nearly half were back together by the time their child was three months old.

Many of the characteristics discussed thus far are also associated with relationship instability during pregnancy [Table 4]. Fathers who did not sign an AOP and mothers considering child support are significantly more common in the unstable relationship group. Those in unstable relationships are also more likely to have children with other partners. Nearly half of fathers in tumultuous relationships have children with other partners, whereas the same is true for fewer

than 1 in 3 fathers in stable relationships. Unemployment, which is prevalent in both groups, is significantly more prevalent among those in unstable relationships.

Perhaps the most striking difference between those in stable and unstable relationships, however, is the prevalence of domestic violence. A father's abusive behavior is clearly linked to relationship turbulence for many unmarried parents, with 44 percent—almost half—of mothers in unstable relationships reporting domestic violence. Still concerning, but less common, 8 percent of mothers in stable relationships report violence from their partner.

Race is also significantly associated with the cohesion of the parental relationship during pregnancy. Fathers in stable relationships are disproportionately Hispanic/Latino whereas those in unstable relationships are disproportionately African American.

Table 4: Group Differences by Relationship Stability During Pregnancy

Group Differences by Relationship Stability During Pregnancy (Percent)			
	Relationship Stable	Relationship Unstable	Sig.
<i>N (Unweighted)</i>	487	213	
<i>Weighted Proportion</i>	69%	31%	
<i>Parental Factors</i>			
AOP Non-Signers	11%	51%	***
Child Support Order/Expectations	13%	54%	***
<i>Multipartner Fertility</i>			
MPF Father	28%	47%	**
MPF Mother	27%	35%	***
<i>Threats to the Relationship</i>			
Incarcerated at Birth	2%	3%	
Unemployed	14%	22%	**
Less than High School	23%	22%	
Domestic Violence	8%	44%	***
<i>Father's Race/Ethnicity</i>			
Hispanic/Latino	61%	45%	***
African American	14%	27%	***
White, Non-Hispanic	21%	23%	

Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Ns in this table do not align with weighted proportions due to population weighting.

Definitions for terms in this table can be found in Appendix D: Glossary of Terms

Characteristics Associated with Various Parental Relationships During Pregnancy

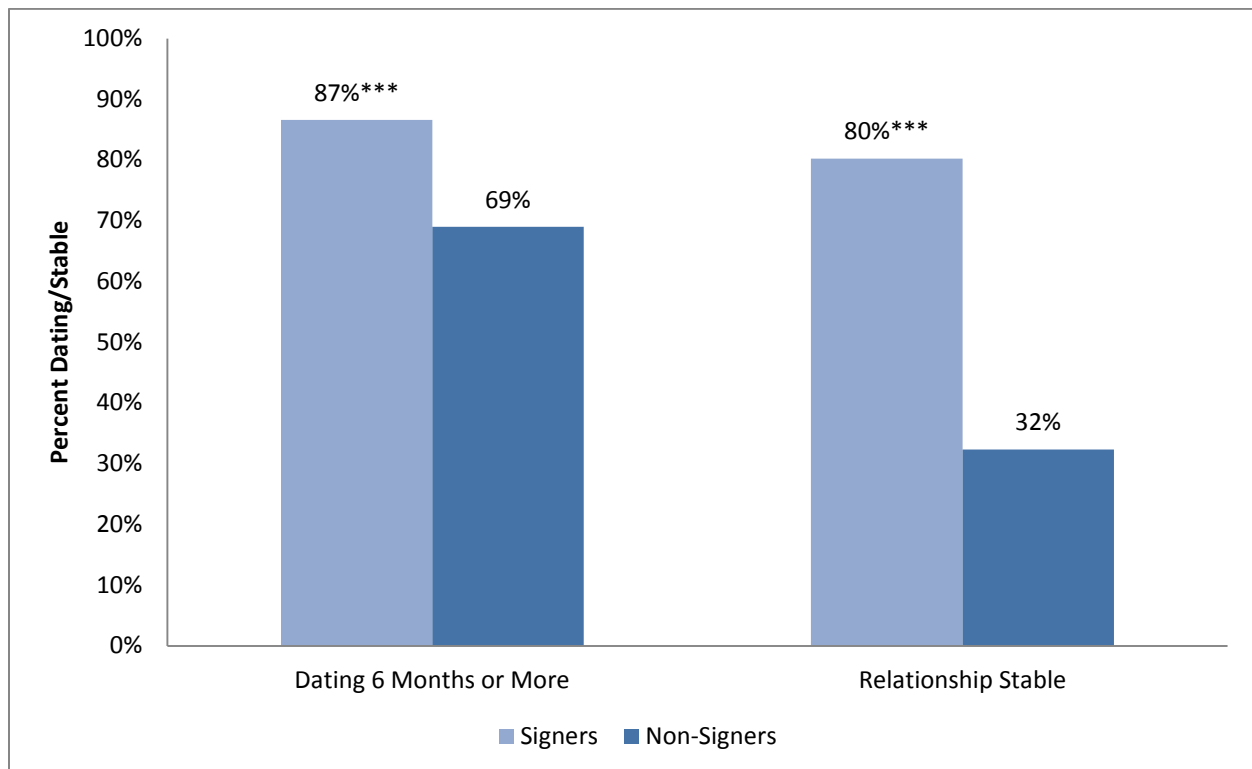
As described in the Background and Motivation section of this chapter, data from the Fragile Families Study make clear that many parental relationships dissolve in the years after a nonmarital birth. CFRP data show many unmarried Texas parents, though romantically involved when their child is born, actually bear a somewhat checkered history prior to the birth.

In this section, we examine how AOP signers and non-signers differ in the length and stability of their relationships to illustrate the positive association between paternity establishment and longer, more stable unions. Similarly, this section gives additional consideration to the intersection between the parental relationship and expectations of a child support order, demonstrating how mothers considering a formal child support order shortly after birth are less likely to have been in longer, more stable relationships prior to the child's birth. Finally, this section takes a closer look at two of the more prominent threats to the stability of the parental relationship – multipartner fertility and domestic violence.

AOP Signing

As shown in Figure 25 below, failure to sign an AOP when the child is born is associated with shorter and less stable relationships prior to the child's birth. Nearly one-third of unmarried parents who did not sign an AOP had been together for less than six months prior to becoming pregnant. By contrast, only 11% of AOP signers were in such short-term relationships prior to pregnancy. Moreover, 80 percent of Texas fathers who signed an AOP are in relationships that remain stable during pregnancy, whereas only 32 percent of non-signing fathers experience the same prenatal stability. Importantly, the parents who do not sign an AOP are in the least healthy relationships; mothers in these relationships are also likely to be the first to need formal child support to ensure the father provides for the child, and they will need to use the court process to establish paternity.

Figure 25: Length of Relationship Prior to Pregnancy and Stability of Relationship During Pregnancy by AOP Signing at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

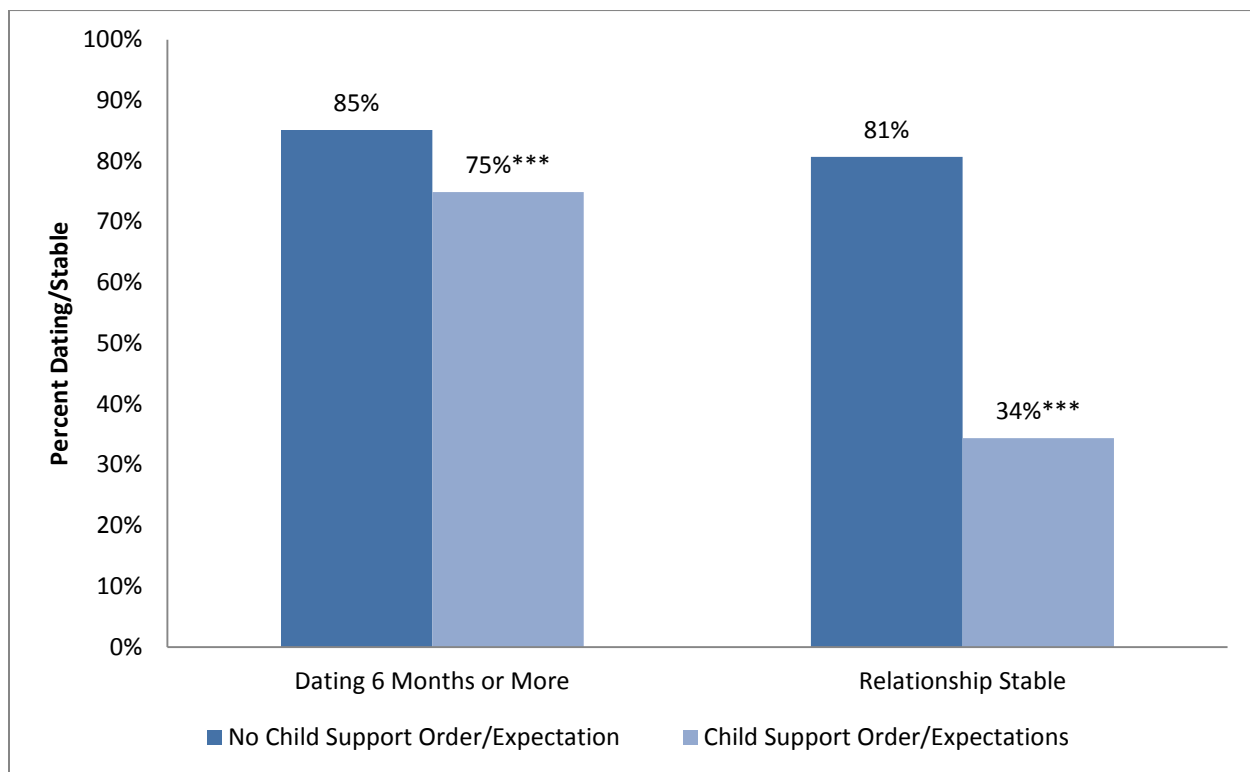
Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Child Support Orders/ Expectations

Relationship length also has a modest correlation with a mother's decision to open a child support case. Among Texas mothers who have opened a child support case or expect to open a child support case three months after a nonmarital birth, longer-term relationships are significantly less common. Eighty-five percent of mothers who have no plans to open a child support case were dating the child's father for more than six months when they became pregnant, compared to 75 percent of mothers who do have a child support order or expect to open one.

Relationship stability is also significantly less common among those with a child support order or plan. More than 8 in 10 mothers with no expectations of opening a child support case are in relationships that were stable during pregnancy, whereas only one-third of mothers considering child support were in similarly stable relationships [Figure 26]. In fact, Texas mothers considering child support at three months are twice as likely to have been in unstable relationships as they are to have been in stable relationships during pregnancy.

Figure 26: Length of Relationship Prior to Pregnancy and Stability of Relationship During Pregnancy by Child Support Order/Expectation at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

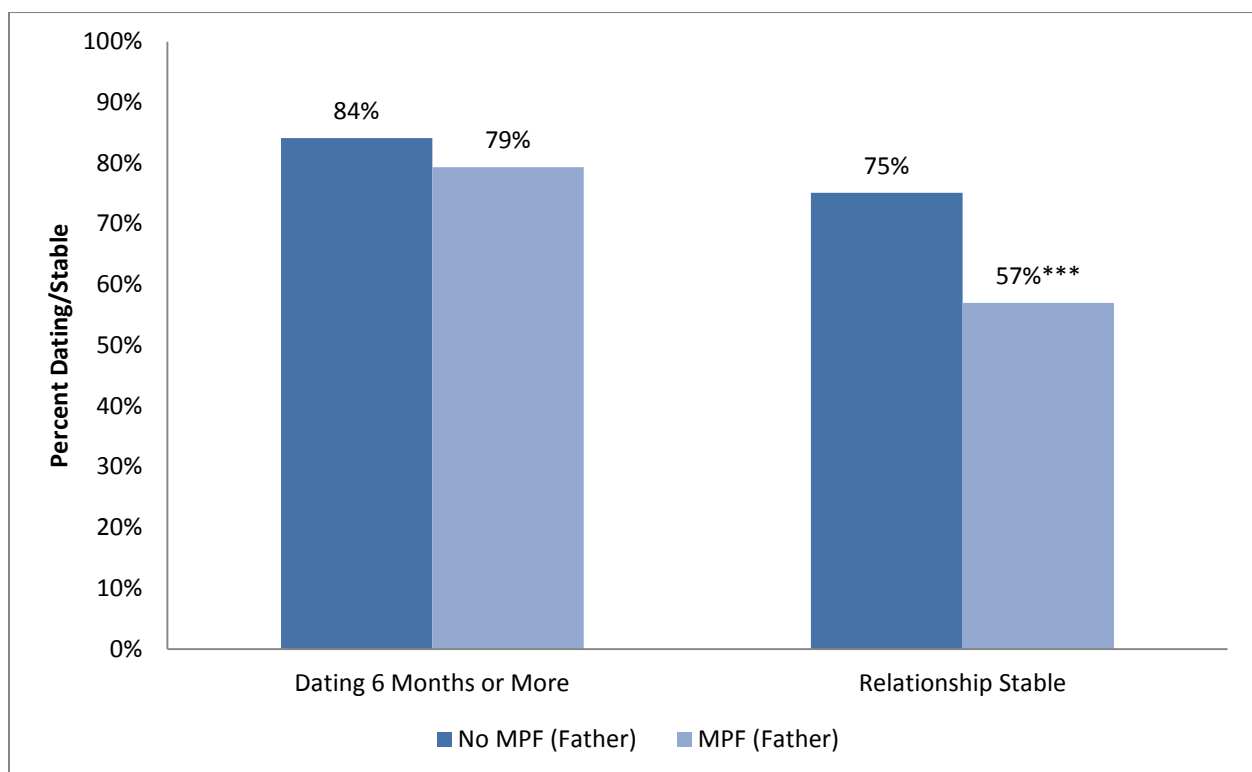
Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Multipartner Fertility

Prior research demonstrates that a father's responsibility to children outside of the household may undermine his investment in his current role as partner.¹⁰⁵ For many couples, having children by previous partners also strains their ability to cooperate effectively.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the fears of sexual infidelity described earlier in this chapter may be exacerbated by the existence of coparenting relationships with previous partners.

Among unmarried parents with newborns in Texas, roughly 1 in 3 parents have previous children by another partner (not shown). Figure 27 shows that fathers with and without multipartner fertility are similar in their likelihood of dating the mother for six months or more prior to pregnancy. Relationship stability during pregnancy, however, is significantly less common among fathers who have previous children with another partner—fewer than 6 in 10 fathers who have a child with another partner managed to navigate the current pregnancy without breaking up at least once.

Figure 27: Length of Relationship Prior to Pregnancy and Stability of Relationship During Pregnancy by Father's Multipartner Fertility at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

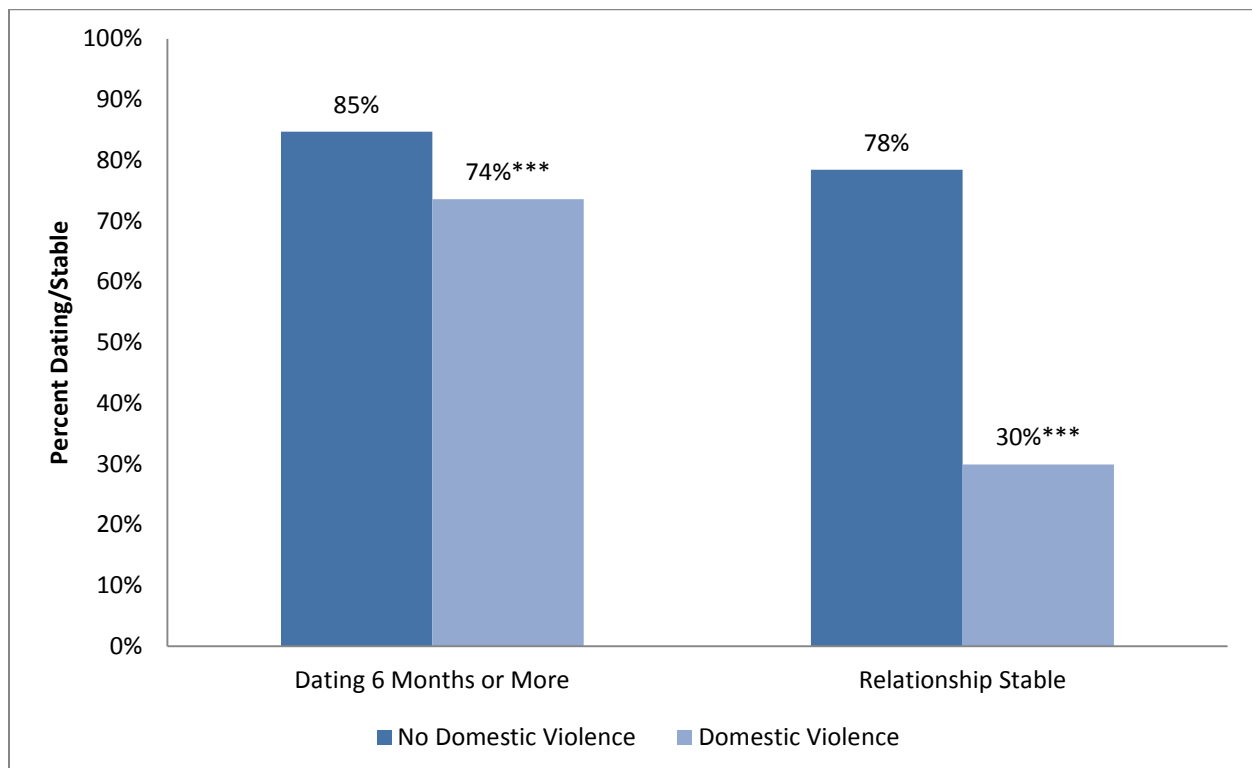
Domestic Violence

Alarming high rates of domestic violence are reported by mothers three months after a nonmarital birth. Overall, nearly 1 in 10 Texas mothers have been physically hurt in an argument with the child's father since becoming pregnant. Moreover, nearly 1 in 5 feels that the child's father has put her or the child at risk of physical or emotional harm.

As described in the previous section of this chapter, domestic violence is more prevalent among those dating for only a short time prior to pregnancy, as well as among those with less stable relationships during pregnancy. The destabilizing effect of domestic violence on the relationships of unmarried couples is perhaps even more evident in the following analysis.

As illustrated by Figure 28 below, mothers who report experiencing domestic violence are significantly less likely to be dating their child's father for more than six months when they become pregnant. Relationships that involve domestic violence are also significantly less likely to have been stable during pregnancy. More than three-quarters of relationships without domestic violence were stable during pregnancy, compared to just 3 out of 10 relationships with a history of abuse [Figure 28].

Figure 28: Length of Relationship Prior to Pregnancy and Stability of Relationship During Pregnancy by Domestic Violence at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Parental Relationships Three Years After an AOP is Signed

This section examines the parental relationship of AOP signers in Texas approximately three and a half years after a nonmarital birth. For many, their relationship and expectations for paternal involvement have eroded over time. Considerable numbers of parents who were cohabiting or dating at the time of their child's birth break up in the years following, and mothers' desire for father involvement with the child may wane alongside the dissolution of the romantic relationship. This section also explores the arc of the coparenting relationship, which appears weak or even non-existent for a sizable fraction of parents three years after a nonmarital birth.

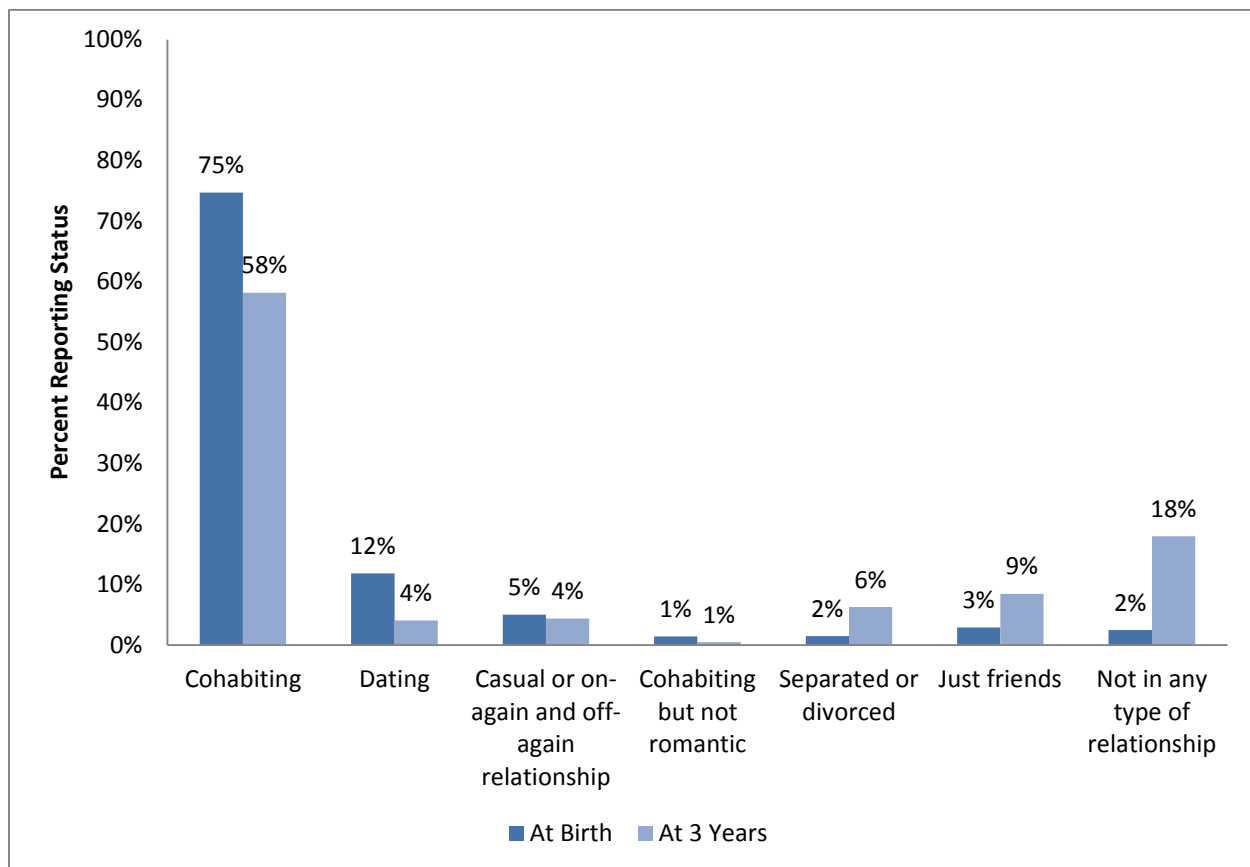
RELATIONSHIP STATUS CHANGES OVER TIME

As described in the Background and Motivation section of this chapter, fathers who live with their children are, on average, more involved and more likely to provide informal financial support than those who do not.^{107,108} Cohabiting relationships, however, are typically shorter in duration and more likely to dissolve than marriages.¹⁰⁹ One study involving data from the Fragile Families Study found that children born to cohabiting parents are at five times greater risk of parental separation than children born to married parents.¹¹⁰

Survey data collected by CFRP reinforce the idea that cohabiting relationships are subject to dissolution over time. In the three years after a nonmarital birth, the percentage of AOP-signing parents who live together declines considerably. Though three-quarters of AOP-signing couples are cohabiting when their child is born, the proportion of cohabiting couples slips to just 59 percent by the time the child reaches the age of three [Figure 29].

Figure 29 below also illustrates a decline in the percentage of AOP-signing parents who are dating. Whereas 12 percent of parents are dating when their child is born, just 4 percent are still dating when their child is three years old. This contrasts sharply with the percentage of couples who are separated or divorced, just friends, or not in any type of relationship, which collectively increase from less than 10 percent of AOP-signing parents of newborns to one-third of AOP-signing parents of 3-year-olds.

Figure 29: Relationship and Cohabitation Status at Birth and at 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

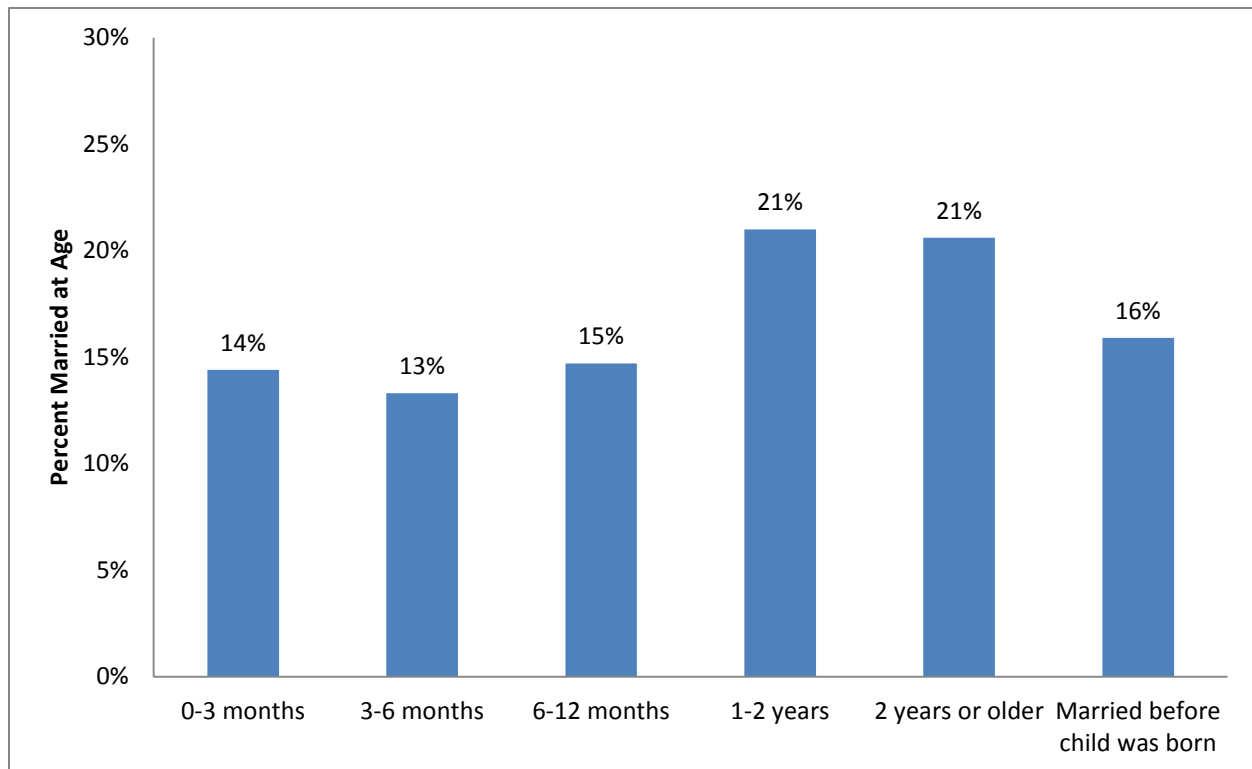
Note: Cohabiting couples includes couples who have married. At 3 years, 47 percent of those who cohabit report being married. High marriage rates may be partially due to recognition of common law marriage in Texas.

Marriage

Though most unmarried parents are romantically involved and looking toward marriage at the time of their child's birth, prior research shows less than one-fifth are married by the time their child reaches age five.¹¹¹ Data from the Fragile Families Study, along with qualitative data from Time, Love, and Cash, in Couples with Children, suggest a partial explanation for these low marriage rates may lie in parents' perceptions of social and economic barriers to marriage.¹¹² Mothers profiled in *Promises I Can Keep* echoed these sentiments, citing more financial and relationship prerequisites for marriage than they did for parenthood.¹¹³

Survey data collected by CFRP reiterates the relative infrequency of marriage among these couples. Three years after an unmarried birth, just over one-quarter of AOP-signing Texas parents are married (not shown). Of those who are married by the time their child is three, 58 percent did so before the child's first birthday. An additional 21 percent were married in their child's second year, and 21 percent were married after their child turned two [Figure 30].

Figure 30: Age of Child When Parents Married, AOP Signers Married by 3 Years



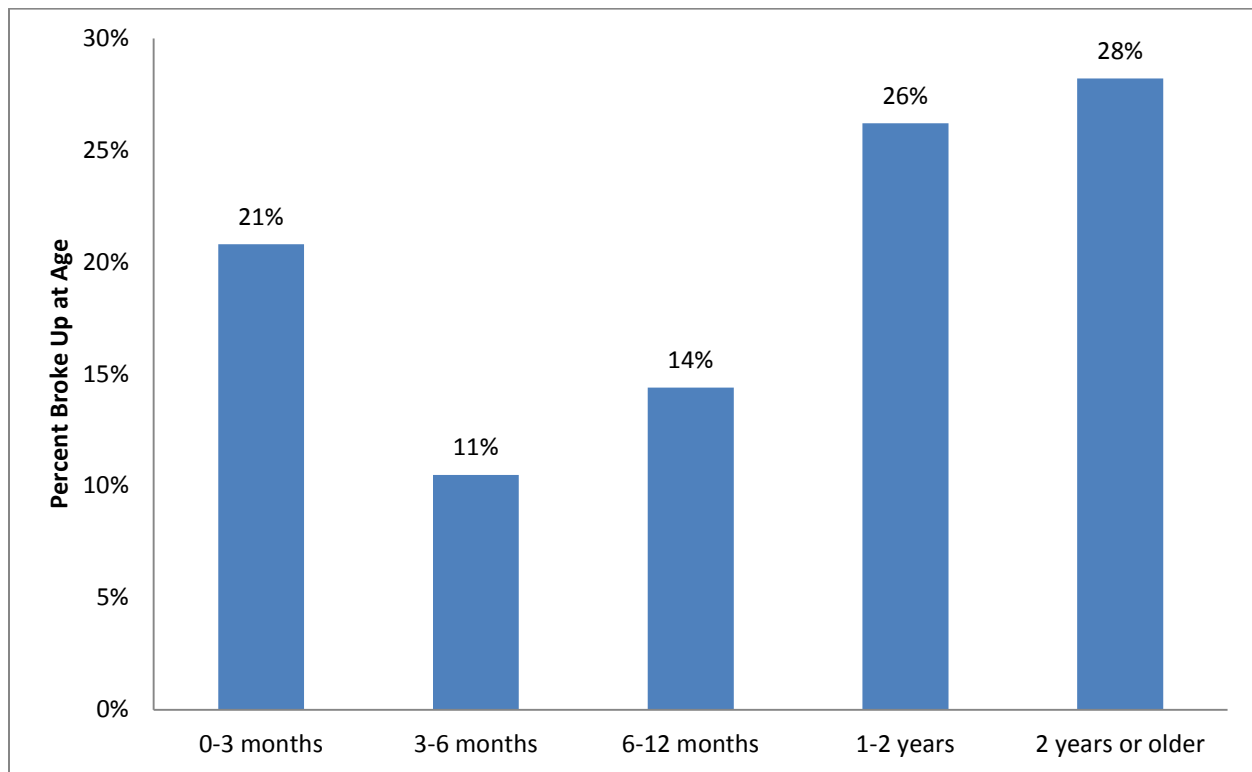
Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

Note: Three years after an AOP is signed, 27 percent of Texas parents are married. Also note, all parents included in the CAS Study signed an AOP; parents who indicate they were married prior to the child's birth may be referring to a common law arrangement. Common law couples are encouraged to sign an AOP form.

Breakup

Many Texas parents who are romantically involved at the time of their child's birth are not only unmarried three years later, but have broken up altogether. When unmarried parents break up, the separation often happens quickly after birth. In fact, a large proportion of AOP-signing parents break up while their child is still in infancy [Figure 31]. Approximately half of those who split up before their child is three years old do so within the first year, and nearly a quarter have broken up by the time their child is three months old. An additional 26 percent break up when the child is between one and two years old, with the remainder (28%) splitting after the child is two.

Figure 31: Age of Child When Parents Broke Up, AOP Signers Broken Up by 3 Years



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

Note: Overall, 30 percent of AOP-signing parents have broken up by the time their child is three years old.

Three years after a nonmarital birth, instability in the parental relationship is common even among those who signed an AOP and who were married or cohabiting at the child's birth.^f Though the majority of those who were cohabiting at birth and remain so three years later report being consistently romantic during that time, a sizable minority (22%) broke up or stopped living together at some point following the child's birth (not shown).

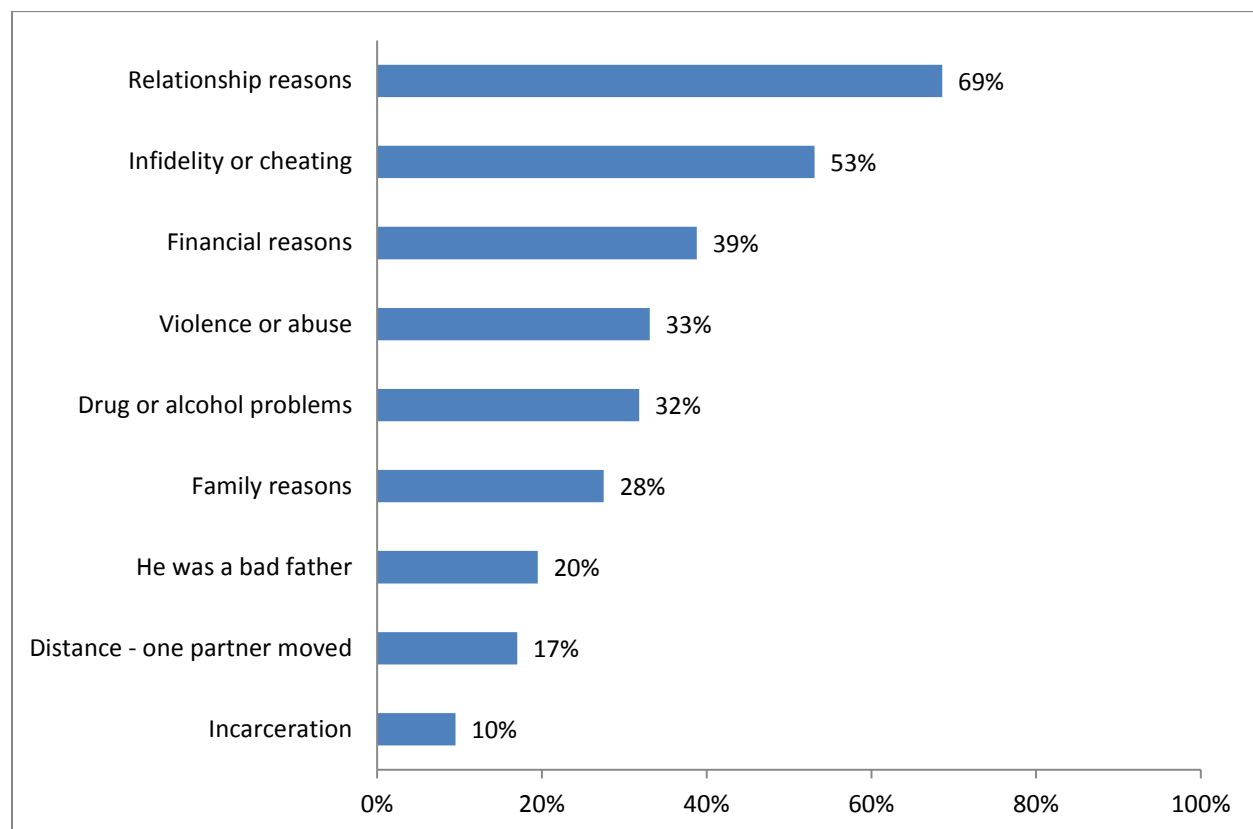
^f Parents who indicate that they were married prior to the child's birth may be referring to a common law arrangement. Common law couples are encouraged to sign an AOP form.

Reasons for Breakup

When asked to identify the reasons they broke up, most unmarried mothers of 3-year-olds cited relationship reasons, infidelity, and financial reasons [Figure 32]. As noted in previous sections of this chapter, distrust regarding sexual infidelity is a common source of contention among unmarried couples. The data on break-ups seem to bear this out; more than half of mothers cited infidelity as a reason for splitting up. The prevalence of financial strain among these couples is also high, with about 4 in 10 pointing to finances as a catalyst for their break-up. The link between financial instability and relationship dissolution has been well-documented in the literature,^{114,115} with several studies connecting increases in economic wellbeing to increased odds of marriage among cohabiting couples.^{116,117}

Domestic violence and substance abuse are also commonly reported reasons for breaking up. Each reason was cited by about one-third of Texas mothers whose relationship with their child's father ended. The associations between domestic violence, substance abuse, and relationship outcomes among AOP signers with 3-year-olds are discussed in greater detail in future sections of this chapter.

Figure 32: Reasons Couples Broke Up at 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

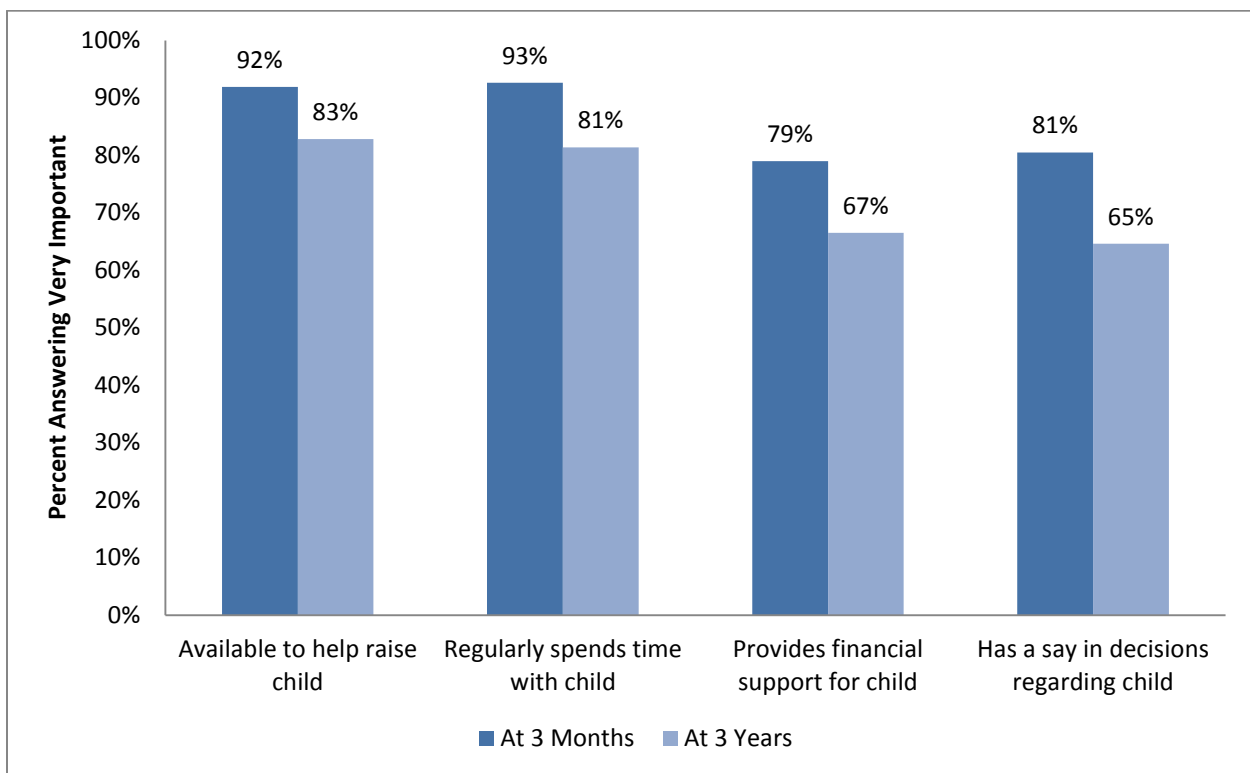
Note: Percentages add to over 100% due to respondents' ability to select more than one reason.

Note: Overall, 30 percent of AOP-signing parents have broken up by the time their child is three years old.

DESIRE FOR FATHER INVOLVEMENT CHANGES OVER TIME

As mother-father relationships dissolve, mothers' desire for paternal involvement may also diminish. Shortly after birth, 92 percent of AOP-signing mothers say it is very important the child's father is available to help raise the child. Three years after birth, however, only 83 percent of AOP-signing mothers feel similarly [Figure 33].⁸ A similar decrease occurs in the percentage of mothers who say it is very important that the father regularly spends time with the child. From shortly after birth to three years later, there is a 12 percentage point drop in the number of AOP-signing mothers who felt this shared time was very important.

Figure 33: Percentage of Mothers Indicating Each Type of Father Involvement is "Very Important" at 3 Months and at 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted / PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted. AOP signers only.

⁸ Throughout this report, CFRP uses two separate samples of Texas mothers to approximate changes over time. The first sample consists of mothers surveyed three months after a nonmarital birth while the second consists of a separate sample of mothers surveyed three years after nonmarital birth where the AOP was signed. In this case, we restrict the first sample to AOP signers only in an effort to estimate how mothers' views of father involvement change over time among similar groups of parents.

Three years after a nonmarital birth, there are even larger declines in the proportion of mothers who feel it is very important for the father to provide financial support or have a role in childrearing decisions. Shortly after birth, nearly 8 in 10 AOP-signing mothers say it is very important the father provide financial support for the child compared to only two-thirds of similar mothers three years later [Figure 33].

The percentage of mothers who say financial support from the father is not important at all also changes, climbing from 1 to 7 percent during this time period. Likewise, the percentage of mothers indicating it is very important that the father has a say in decisions regarding the child drops from 81 to 65 percent. Three years after a nonmarital birth, 1 in 10 mothers feels it is not important at all that the father has a say in decisions, up from only 1 percent around the time of birth.

COPARENTING RELATIONSHIP AT THREE YEARS

Just as a mother's desire for paternal involvement may lapse over time, so may the quality of a mother and father's coparenting relationship. Investigating the state of coparenting relationships three years after a nonmarital birth offers some insight into how well Texas parents get along and share in the act of childrearing over time.

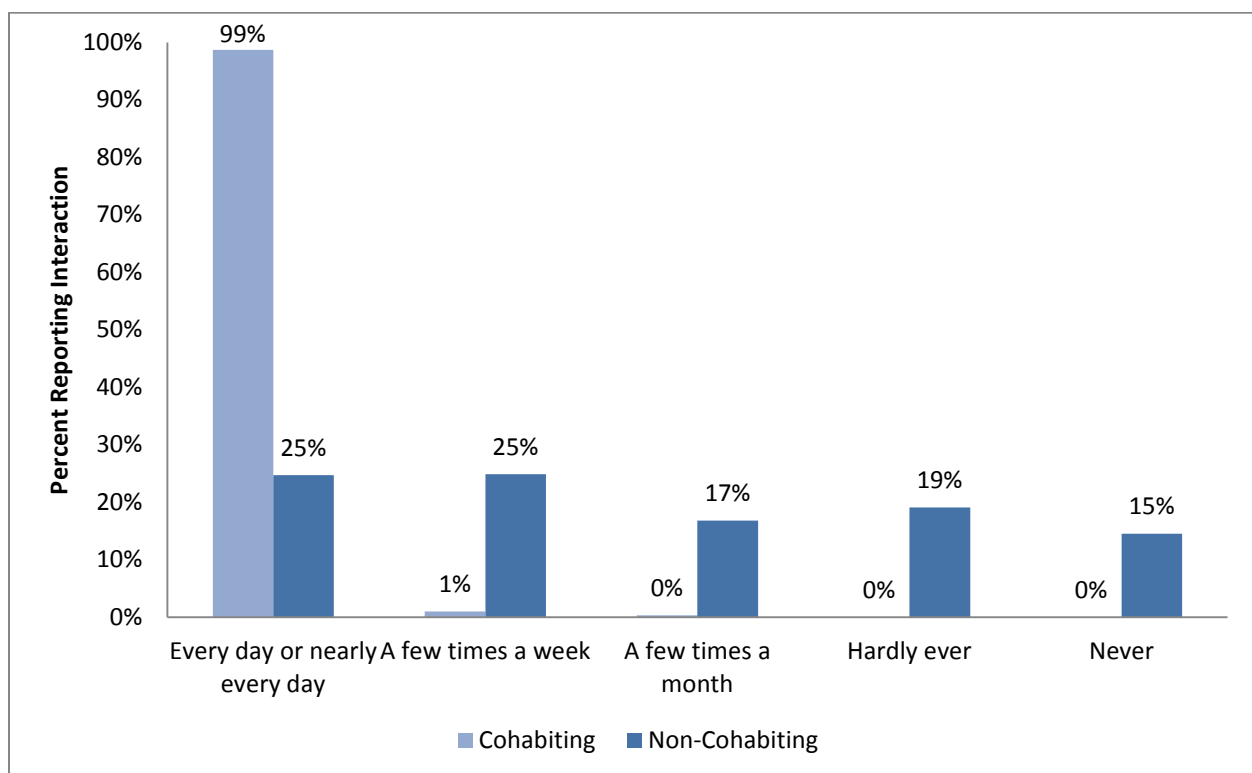
CFRP measured the quality of coparenting relationships through five distinct indicators: 1) frequency of parental contact, 2) frequency of parental conflict, 3) whether the father could be trusted to take care of the child for one week, 4) whether the father acts like the father a mother wants for her child, and 5) how often the father looks after the child when mother needs to do things.

Communication in the Coparenting Relationship

Three years after a nonmarital birth, nearly 7 in 10 mothers report seeing or talking to their child's father every day (not shown). The frequency of parental communication varies widely by cohabitation status, however. Figure 34 shows that nearly all cohabiting couples interact every day or nearly every day (almost by default), compared with just one-quarter of non-cohabiting couples.

Moreover, fully half of non-cohabiting mothers report seeing or talking to the child's father only a few times per month or less. Among non-cohabiting couples with a 3-year-old, more than 1 in 3 mothers report that they never, or hardly ever, see or speak to the child's father.

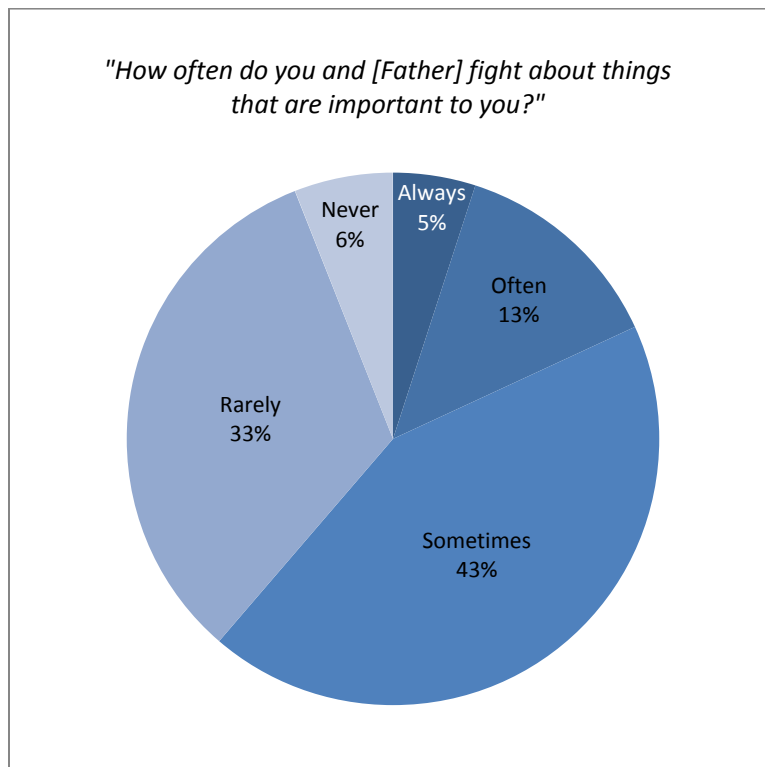
Figure 34: Frequency of Parental Interaction at 3 Years by Cohabitation Status, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

Though some parents have adequate contact with one another, it may not always be positive contact. For many unmarried parents, the coparenting relationship can be contentious. Survey data collected three years after birth reveal that nearly 2 in 10 mothers report “always” or “often” fighting with the child’s father over things that are important to them [Figure 35]. Most parents, however, profess to have largely agreeable relationships; 4 in 10 AOP-signing mothers report fighting with the father of their child rarely or not at all, and another 4 in 10 say they only fight sometimes.

Figure 35: Frequency of Parental Conflict at 3 Years, AOP Signers



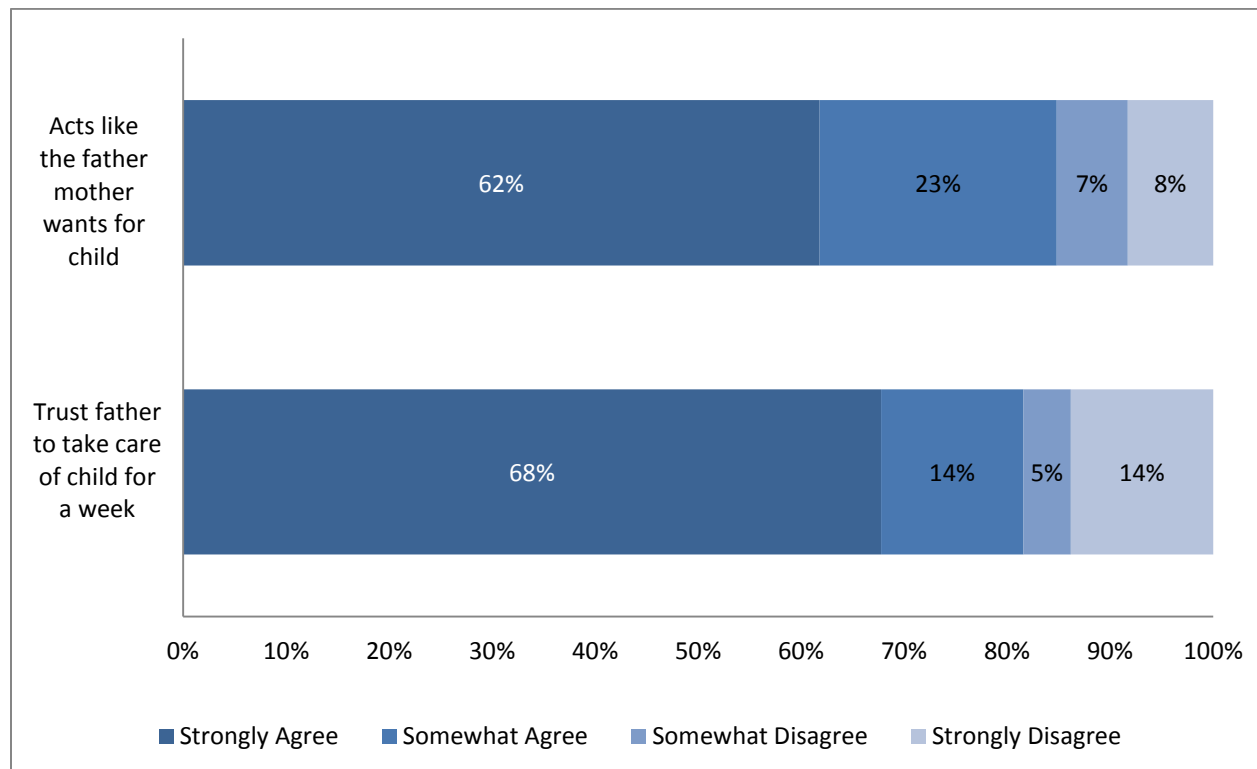
Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

Trust and Shared Responsibility in the Coparenting Relationship

Survey data collected by CFRP also give some indication of the extent to which unmarried Texas parents trust and approve of one another's parenting. Figure 36 below shows that the vast majority of Texas mothers with 3-year-olds agree with the statement, "If you had to go away for one week and could not take [Child] with you, you could trust [Father] to take care of [Child]." A substantial fraction of mothers, however, disagree. In fact, 1 in 5 mothers did not feel the father could be trusted with child supervision in her absence.

Mothers of 3-year-olds were similarly distributed on their agreement with the statement, "When [Father] is with [Child], [Father] acts like the father you want for [Child]." Figure 36 shows that although most Texas mothers approve of the father's behavior around the child, roughly 15 percent do not feel the father acts in accordance with what they would like for the child.

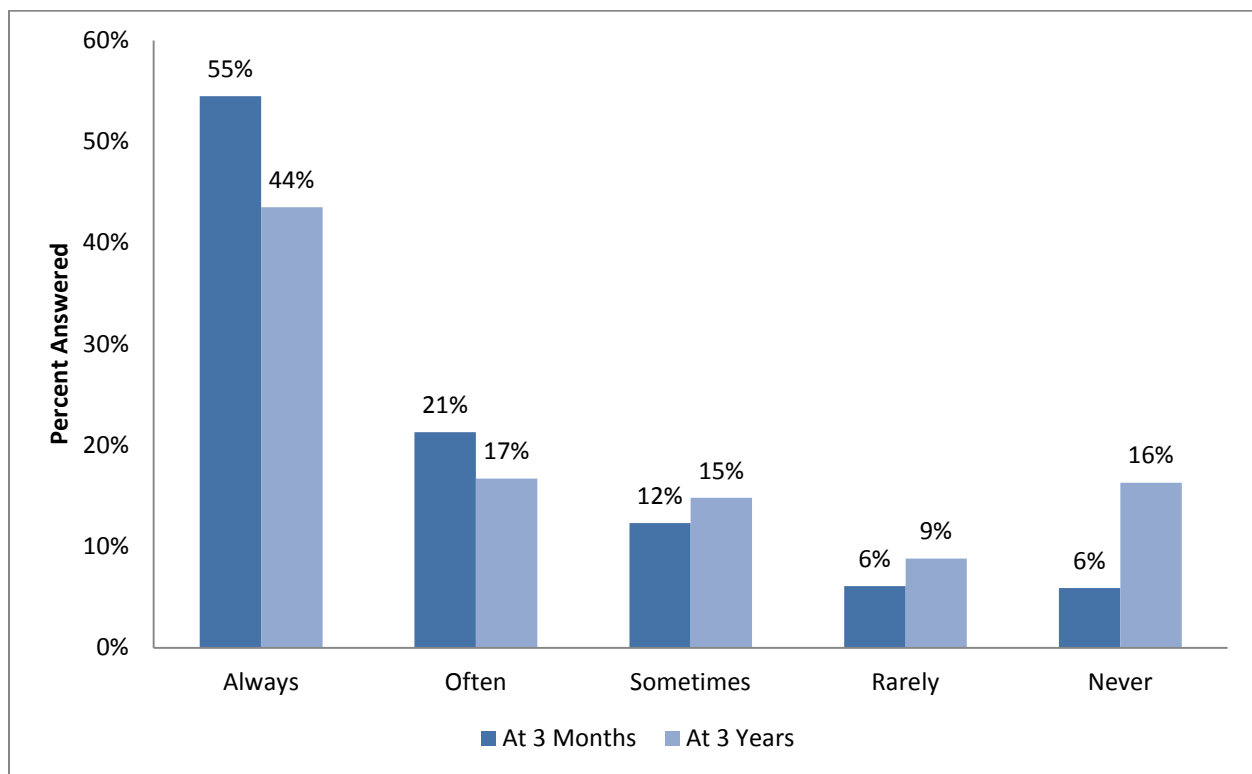
Figure 36: Trust in the Coparenting Relationship at 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

In an effort to approximate changes in the coparenting relationship over time, CFRP asked two cohorts of Texas mothers how often the child's father helps out with childcare when they need to do things. As demonstrated in Figure 37, shortly after a nonmarital birth, three-quarters of AOP-signing mothers indicate that the father *always* or *often* looks after the child when they need to do things. Three years later, the portion of fathers helping to look after the child with similar frequency had declined to 61 percent. Moreover, the percentage of Texas mothers reporting that the child's father *rarely* or *never* looks after the child when she needs to do things more than doubles during this period [Figure 37].

Figure 37: How Often Father Looks after Child When Mother Needs to Do Things at 3 Months and 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted / PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted. AOP signers only.

In general, the data on coparenting suggest that roughly 15 to 20 percent of mothers and fathers struggle to participate in shared parenting three years after a nonmarital birth. Mothers in these relationships report frequent fighting, a lack of trust in the father's ability to take care of the child, disapproval of the father's behavior around the child, and little help with child supervision. To better understand the factors associated with these poor quality relationships, the next section turns to examining the characteristics of various parental relationships among AOP signers with 3-year-olds.

Group Differences by Parental Relationship Three Years After an AOP is Signed

Three years after an AOP is signed, the relationships of Texas parents have evolved considerably. The dense concentration of romantic relationships at birth has scattered into a spectrum of parental arrangements with varying levels of intimacy and cohesion. In this section, we explore the contrast between parents in different types of relationships to identify the characteristics and paternal risk factors most prevalent in each. Apart from evaluating the characteristics associated with different types of relationships, this section also considers the factors most likely to coincide with weak coparenting and diminished expectations for paternal involvement.

Characteristics Associated with Various Types of Parental Relationships

As noted previously in Figure 29, the distribution of parental relationships among AOP signers three years after a birth is as follows: 59 percent are cohabiting, including 27 percent who have married, 9 percent are dating but not cohabiting^h, and 33 percent have no romantic relationship at all. As might be anticipated, the prevalence of risk factors varies widely across these groups.

Table 5 shows the striking difference in characteristics across each type of relationship. Child support orders or plans to open a child support order are fairly rare among cohabiting couples but are quite common among romantic, non-cohabiting couples and parents with no romantic relationship, likely because of the higher levels of risk factors among fathers who are not in cohabiting relationships.

The results show that multipartner fertility is much more common among parents with no relationship – 40 percent of mothers and 42 percent of fathers in this group have children with other partners, compared to just 14 percent of married mothers and 27 percent of married fathers.

Those with no romantic relationship are also more likely to have an array of paternal risk factors, as shown in Table 5. Three years after an AOP is signed, 46 percent of fathers who have no relationship with the mother have been incarcerated at least once and 30 percent have a history of employment instability; by contrast, only 18 percent of married fathers have ever been incarcerated and 19 percent have a history of unemployment.

^h The designation “dating but not cohabiting” includes the “dating” and “casual or on and off again relationship” categories from Figure 29. These categories each round to 4 percent, though when summed they round to 9 percent.

Substance abuse is rare among AOP-signing fathers who are married or cohabiting, but is present in fully one-third of fathers who are no longer romantically involved with the mother. Likewise, domestic violence is strongly associated with the dissolution of the parental relationship. Whereas 7 percent of married mothers experience domestic violence, the prevalence ticks up to 13 percent and 17 percent among cohabiting and dating couples, respectively. Among parents with no romantic relationship, an astonishing 41 percent of mothers report domestic violence.

Though these data only provide snapshots of risk prevalence in each type of relationship, it is reasonable to assume that these patterns may be more than coincidental; the high incidence of paternal risk factors among the least cohesive relationship groups suggests that these factors may play a role in driving couples to change relationship status. Future analyses will attempt to tease out the direction of the forces using later waves of the PES survey.

Table 5: Group Differences by Parental Relationship at 3 Years, AOP Signers

Group Differences by Parental Relationship (Percent)				
	Married	Cohabiting	Dating	No Relationship
<i>N (Unweighted)</i>	89	106	51	283
<i>Weighted Proportion</i>	27%	31%	9%	33%
<i>Child Support</i>				
Child Support Order/Expectations	2%	10%	41%	67%
<i>Multipartner Fertility</i>				
MPF Father	27%	20%	31%	42%
MPF Mother	14%	29%	27%	40%
<i>Threats to the Relationship</i>				
Ever Incarcerated	18%	34%	27%	46%
Employment Instability	19%	27%	26%	30%
Less than High School	25%	35%	26%	31%
Health Problems Limiting Work	6%	6%	12%	3%
Substance Abuse	<1%	3%	7%	33%
Domestic Violence	7%	13%	17%	41%
<i>Father's Race/Ethnicity</i>				
Hispanic/Latino	63%	55%	59%	44%
African American	10%	11%	26%	23%
White, Non-Hispanic	22%	31%	15%	30%

Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

Ns in this table do not align with weighted proportions due to population weighting.

Definitions for terms in this table can be found in Appendix D: Glossary of Terms

Characteristics Associated with High- and Low-Quality Coparenting Relationships

To identify characteristics associated with low-quality coparenting relationships, CFRP divided parents into low- and high-quality coparenting relationship groups.ⁱ Overall, approximately 60 percent of AOP-signing parents have a high-quality coparenting relationship three years after a nonmarital birth.

Many of the characteristics associated with poorer parental relationship outcomes are also associated with low-quality coparenting relationships [Table 6]. Indeed, non-romantic and non-cohabiting relationships are much more prevalent among parents with low-quality coparenting relationships.

Child support orders or expectations for a child support order are also significantly more common in the low-quality coparenting relationship group. Three years after an AOP is signed, more than half of Texas mothers in low-quality coparenting relationships have opened or expect to open child support orders, compared to just 11 percent of those in high-quality coparenting relationships.

As future chapters of this report demonstrate, not only do many of the mothers planning to enter the child support system have tumultuous, low-quality relationships, they are also more likely to be with fathers who have co-occurring risk factors. Although child support may act as an upfront resource for many of these mothers, it may be difficult to elicit full support obligations from associated fathers given the disproportionate prevalence of risks among fathers in this group.

Indeed, the quality of the coparenting relationship is associated with a range of paternal risk factors existing alongside the heightened expectations of child support. As shown in Table 6, rates of fathers' multipartner fertility differ significantly by coparenting relationship quality. Roughly one-quarter of fathers in high-quality coparenting relationships have children with other partners, compared to almost 4 in 10 fathers in low-quality coparenting relationships.

Incarceration, unemployment, substance abuse, and domestic violence are also significantly more prevalent among fathers in poor coparenting relationships [Table 6]. Domestic violence is almost 3 times as prevalent in the low-quality coparenting group as in the high-quality coparenting group. Substance abuse, which is rare among high-quality coparents, is reported by more than a quarter of mothers in the low-quality coparenting group.

ⁱ A coparenting relationship was determined to be high-quality if the mother indicates the father “always” or “often” looks after the child when she needs to do things and if she “somewhat agrees” or “strongly agrees” that the father is the father she wants for her child and if she reports that she could trust the father to look after the child for a week. Chronbach's alpha on these three survey items is .86.

Table 6: Group Differences by Quality of Coparenting Relationship at 3 Years, AOP Signers

Group Differences by Quality of Coparenting Relationship (Percent)			
	High-Quality Coparenting	Low-Quality Coparenting	Sig
<i>N (Unweighted)</i>	222	307	
<i>Weighted Proportion</i>	62%	38%	
<i>Parental Factors</i>			
Child Support Order/Expectations	11%	55%	***
Non-Romantic Relationship	11%	65%	***
Non-Cohabiting	20%	71%	***
<i>Multipartner Fertility</i>			
MPF Father	25%	38%	***
MPF Mother	28%	29%	
<i>Threats to the Relationship</i>			
Ever Incarcerated	29%	39%	**
Employment Instability	22%	31%	*
Less than High School	27%	33%	
Health Problems Limiting Work	5%	6%	
Substance Abuse	3%	26%	***
Domestic Violence	12%	35%	***
<i>Father's Race/Ethnicity</i>			
Hispanic/Latino	57%	49%	
African American	16%	16%	
White, Non-Hispanic	23%	32%	*

Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Note: The "Non-Romantic Relationship" group in the table above includes the "No Relationship" group from Table 5, whereas the "Non-Cohabiting" group includes both the "Dating" and "No Relationship" groups from Table 5.

Ns in this table do not align with weighted proportions due to population weighting.

Definitions for terms in this table can be found in Appendix D: Glossary of Terms

Characteristics Associated with Desire for Father Involvement

To better understand mothers' desire for paternal involvement, CFRP divided Texas mothers into two groups based on mothers' ratings of the importance of paternal involvement. Mothers of 3-year-olds were asked to identify how important it is that their child's father is available to help raise the child, regularly spends time with the child, provides financial support, and has a say in decisions regarding the child.^j Three years after an AOP is signed, two-thirds of Texas mothers feel father involvement is very important.

The characteristics associated with mothers' diminished desire for paternal involvement reiterate the importance of several key factors [Table 7]. Non-romantic and non-cohabiting parents are more prevalent among those who rate father involvement less important. And just as child support orders/expectations are more common among parents with poor relationship or coparenting outcomes, they are also more common among mothers with reduced desire for father involvement. More than half of mothers who feel father involvement is less important have child support orders or expectations; in comparison, fewer than 1 in 5 mothers who feel father involvement is very important have a child support order or expectation.

The same risk factors that threaten the mother-father relationship also appear to diminish the importance of father involvement in a mother's eyes [Table 7]. Among mothers who deem father involvement less than very important, paternal incarceration and a history of employment instability are significantly more prevalent. Problems with substance abuse, noted by 5 percent of mothers who think father involvement is very important, are noted by over a quarter of those who say father involvement is not very important. As seen elsewhere, fathers with a history of abusive behavior are also disproportionately distributed between these groups. Domestic violence is more than 3 times as prevalent in the group of mothers with diminished desire for father involvement.

With regard to race and ethnicity, White fathers are significantly more prevalent in the group of mothers who rate father involvement as less important; there are no significant differences between the two groups in the prevalence of Hispanic or African American fathers.

^j Cronbach's alpha on these four survey items is .89. Mothers who rated at least three of the four facets of father involvement "very important" are in the "father involvement very important" group.

Table 7: Group Differences by Mother's Desire for Father Involvement at 3 Years, AOP Signers

Group Differences by Importance of Father Involvement (Percent)			
	Father Involvement Very Important	Father Involvement Less Important	Sig
<i>N (Unweighted)</i>	296	233	
<i>Weighted Proportion</i>	66%	34%	
<i>Parental Factors</i>			
Child Support Order/Expectations	18%	52%	***
Non-Romantic Relationship	16%	67%	***
Non-Cohabiting	24%	74%	***
<i>Multipartner Fertility</i>			
MPF Father	29%	27%	
MPF Mother	24%	42%	***
<i>Threats to the Relationship</i>			
Ever Incarcerated	28%	44%	***
Employment Instability	20%	37%	***
Less than High School	29%	32%	
Health Problems Limiting Work	5%	7%	
Substance Abuse	5%	28%	***
Domestic Violence	12%	40%	***
<i>Father's Race/Ethnicity</i>			
Hispanic/Latino	57%	49%	
African American	17%	14%	
White, Non-Hispanic	23%	35%	**

Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Ns in this table do not align with weighted proportions due to population weighting.

Definitions for terms in this table can be found in Appendix D: Glossary of Terms

Characteristics Associated with Various Parental Relationships Three Years After an AOP is Signed

Several years after an AOP is signed, many parental relationships have dissolved or weakened considerably. A sizable number of Texas parents, however, appear to have maintained or even strengthened their ties. The previous section of this chapter detailed the dramatic differences between parents in varying types of relationships, with a particular focus on the characteristics associated with suboptimal outcomes.

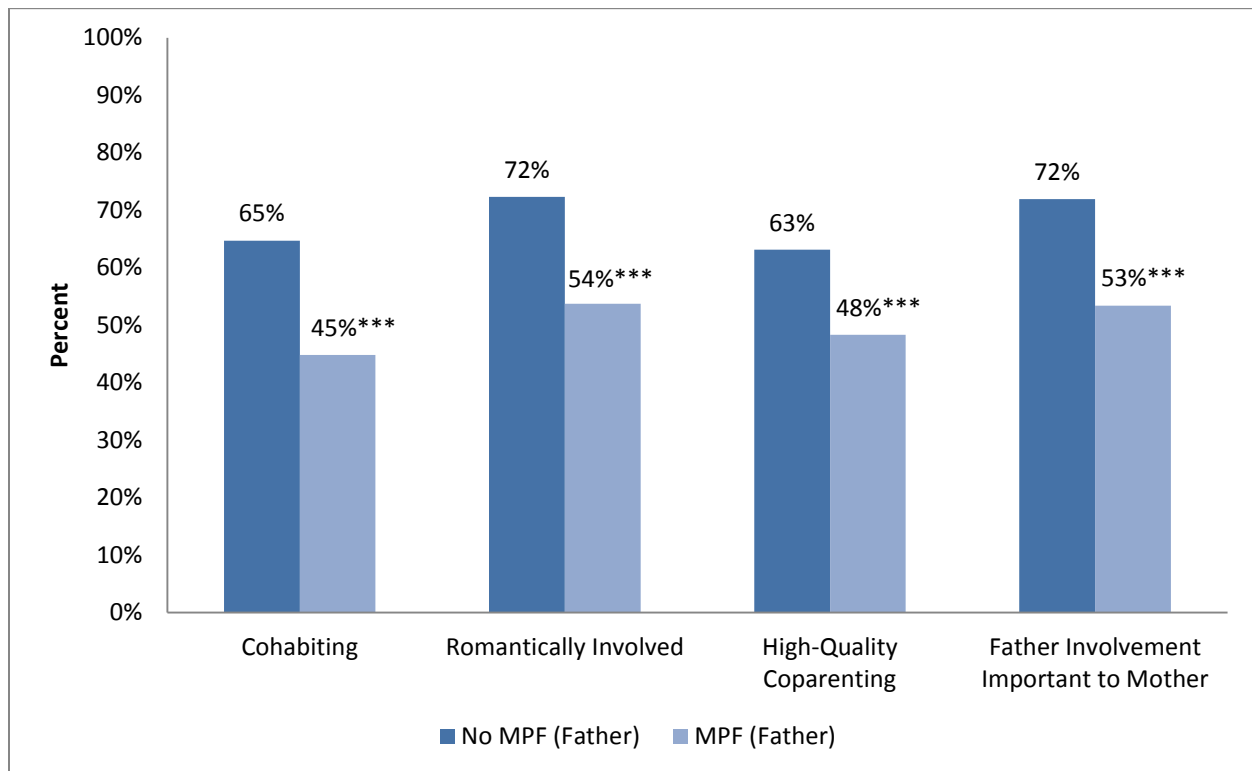
In this section, we take a new approach to analyzing the link between paternal characteristics and the state of the parental relationship. Texas parents are first divided into groups based on the presence or absence of threats to the relationship such as multipartner fertility, incarceration, employment instability, substance abuse, and domestic violence. Each of these groups is then analyzed for the presence of optimal relationship outcomes such as cohabitation, romantic involvement (dating), high-quality coparenting, and the value a mother places on the importance of father involvement. In addition, this section explores the increased prevalence of child support orders or expectations when relationship outcomes are poor.

Multipartner Fertility

Multipartner fertility occurs with some frequency among unmarried parents in Texas. Three years after an AOP is signed, approximately 3 in 10 mothers have children with more than one partner. Over a quarter of those with multipartner fertility have children by three or more partners. Similar to mothers, 30 percent of AOP-signing fathers of 3-year-olds have children by multiple partners.

As described in the previous section of this chapter, paternal multipartner fertility is associated with the absence of a parental romantic relationship, lower quality coparenting, and mothers' devaluing of father involvement. As shown in Figure 38 below, this same pattern is revealed when separating fathers into those with and without multipartner fertility. Texas fathers without children by other partners are significantly more likely than fathers with children from previous relationships to be in cohabiting and romantic relationships with their child's mother three years after an AOP is signed. These fathers are also significantly more likely to be in high-quality coparenting relationships and be associated with mothers who rate their involvement as very important.

Figure 38: Parental Relationship Outcomes by Father's Multipartner Fertility at 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

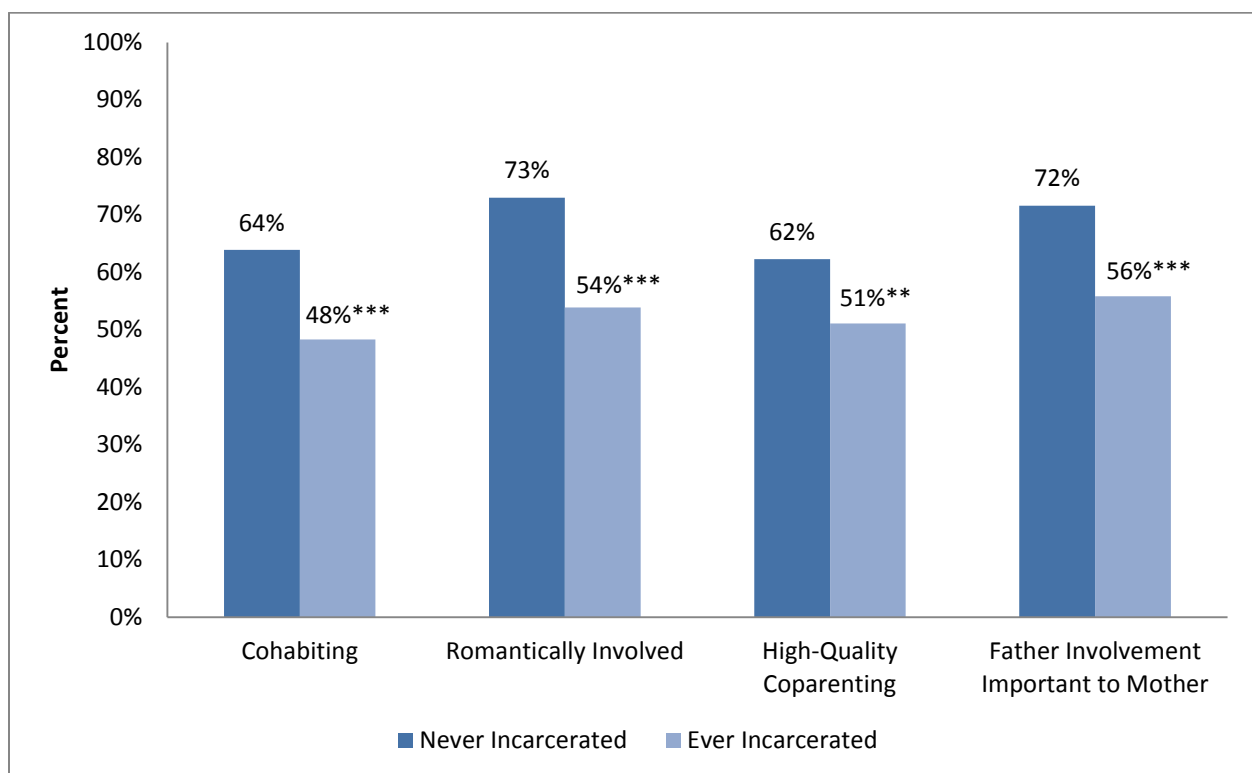
Note: * = $p < .10$, ** = $p < .05$, *** = $p < .01$

Note: The above categories are not mutually exclusive.

History of Incarceration

Texas fathers without a history of incarceration are also significantly more likely to be in cohabiting and romantic relationships with their child's mother three years after an AOP is signed [Figure 39]. Nearly three-quarters of fathers without a history of incarceration are romantically involved with their child's mother, whereas just over half of fathers with a history of incarceration are in romantic relationships. A history of incarceration also significantly reduces an AOP-signing father's likelihood of having a strong coparenting relationship and is associated with a decreased likelihood that his child's mother feels that father involvement is very important.

Figure 39: Parental Relationship Outcomes by Father's History of Incarceration at 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

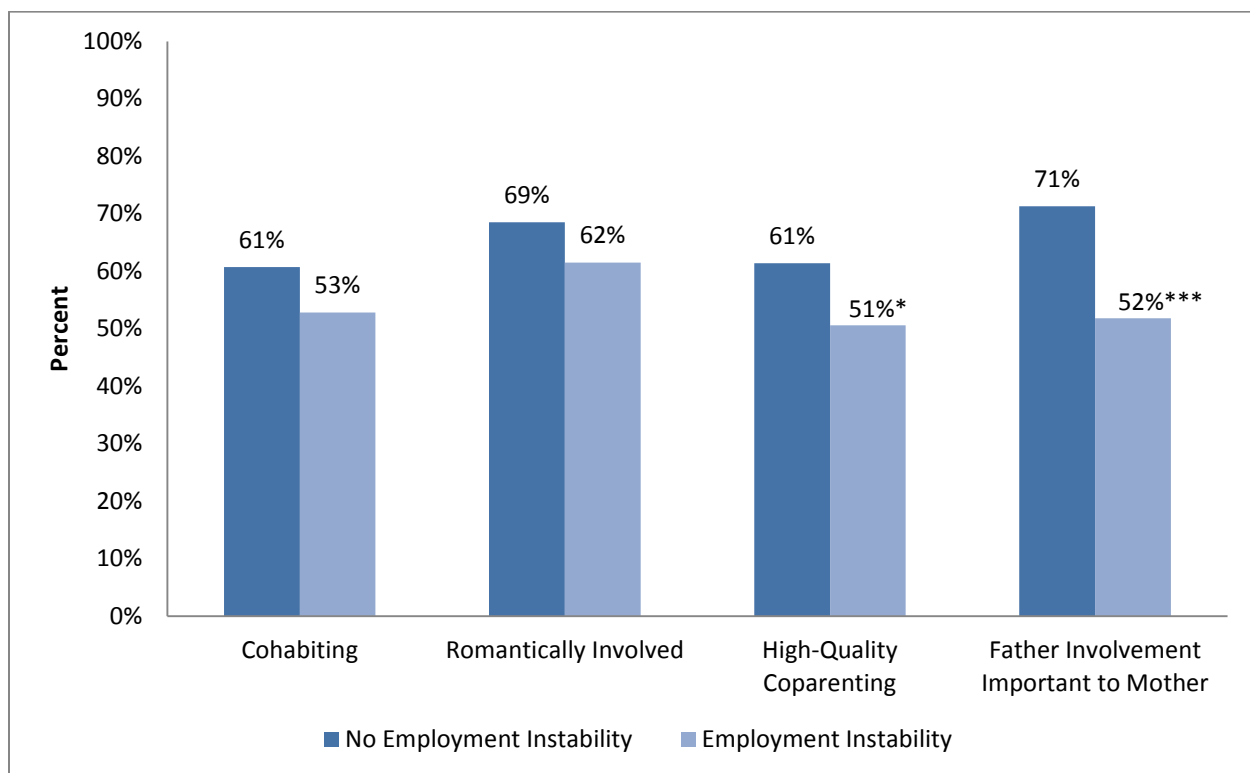
Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Note: The above categories are not mutually exclusive.

Employment Instability

Fathers who have trouble maintaining steady employment are considerably less likely to experience optimal relationship outcomes. As discussed throughout this chapter, employment instability is associated with poorer-quality coparenting and a diminished desire for father involvement among mothers [Figure 40]. Indeed, AOP-signing fathers with 3-year-olds are significantly more likely to have good coparenting relationships and be associated with mothers who value their involvement if they do not have a history of unemployment.

Figure 40: Parental Relationship Outcomes by Father's Employment Instability at 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

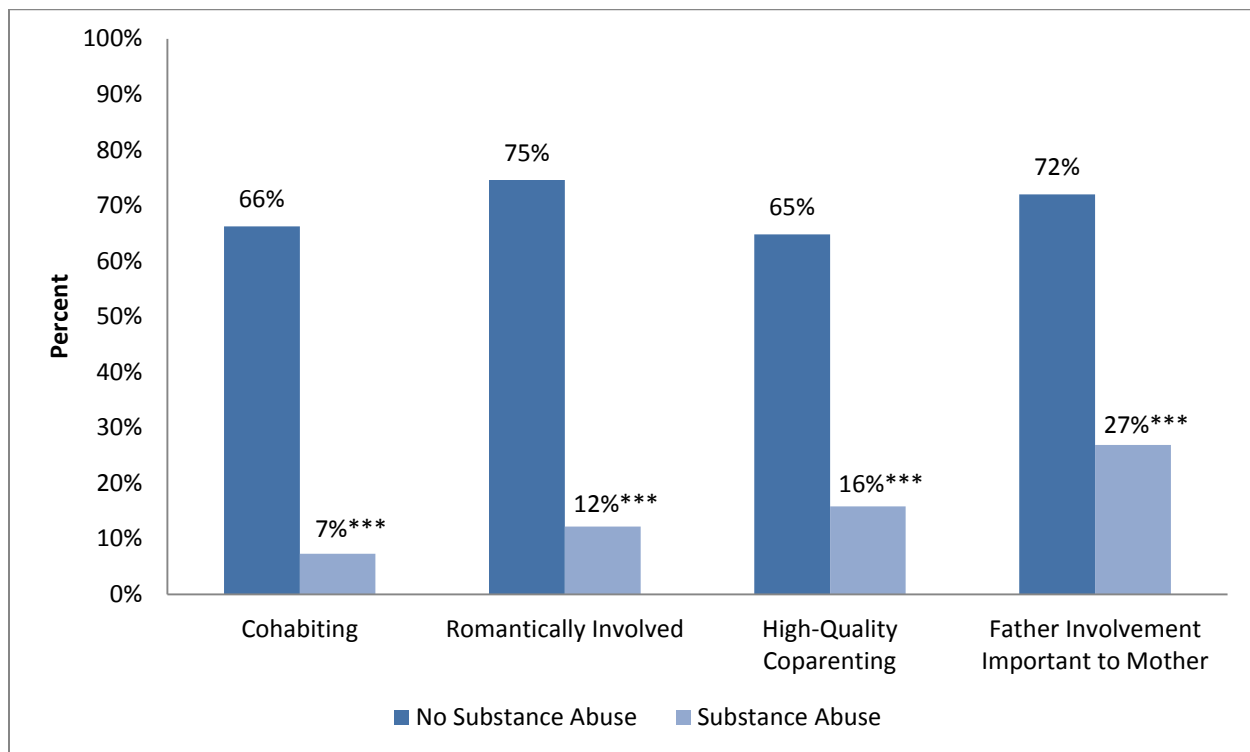
Note: The above categories are not mutually exclusive.

Substance Abuse

Of all the threats to the parental relationship, a father's substance abuse is one of the most salient. Substance abuse is associated with a significantly lower likelihood that Texas fathers will experience good relationship and coparenting outcomes three years after an AOP is signed. As shown in Figure 41, problems with drugs or alcohol drastically curtail the chances that an AOP-signing father will be cohabiting or romantic with the child's mother three years after a nonmarital birth. Among AOP-signing fathers who do not have problems with drugs or alcohol, two-thirds are living with their child's mother and three-quarters are romantic; by contrast, only 7 percent of fathers with substance abuse problems are cohabiting and just 12 percent are romantic.

Substance abuse is also negatively associated with the quality of the coparenting relationship among AOP-signing parents with 3-year-olds. As shown in Figure 41 below, nearly two-thirds of fathers without drug or alcohol problems have high-quality coparenting relationships, whereas only 16 percent of fathers with substance abuse problems have a good coparenting relationship. Among those who do not have problems with drugs or alcohol, nearly three-quarters of associated mothers who say father involvement is very important to them. Among fathers with substance abuse problems, however, only one-quarter of associated mothers say father involvement is very important.

Figure 41: Parental Relationship Outcomes by Substance Abuse at 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Note: The above categories are not mutually exclusive.

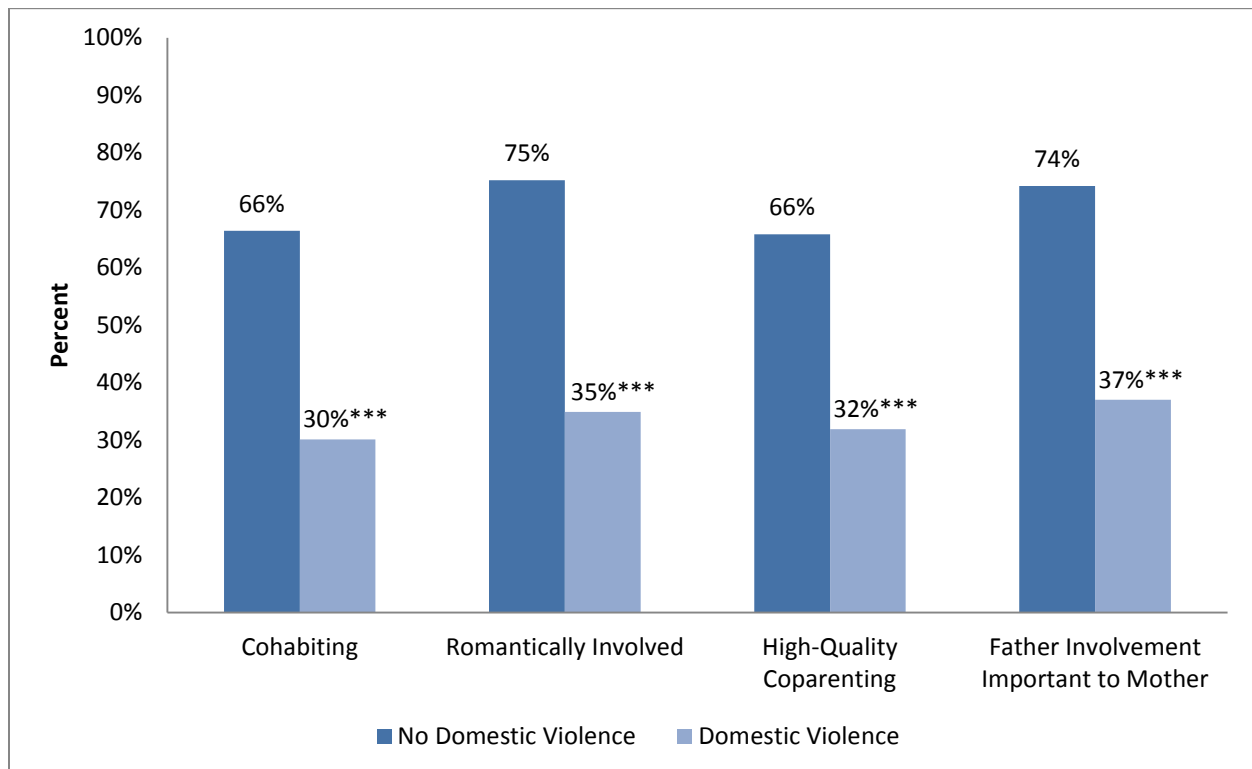
Domestic Violence

The presence of domestic violence among AOP-signing parents with 3-year-olds is high. A troubling 21 percent of Texas mothers report their child's father has put them or their child at risk of physical or emotional harm.

Figure 42 shows that domestic violence significantly reduces the likelihood that AOP-signing parents will be in cohabiting, romantic, or strong coparenting relationships three years after their child is born. Whereas two-thirds of Texas mothers who did not report domestic violence are in cohabiting relationships and high-quality coparenting relationships three years after a nonmarital birth, less than one-third of mothers with abusive partners are in similarly positive relationships.

Moreover, three-quarters of mothers who do not report violence are in romantic relationships with their child's father. By contrast, just 35 percent of mothers who have experienced domestic violence remain in romantic relationships with their child's father. Similarly, nearly three-quarters of Texas mothers who do not report domestic violence think father involvement is very important, whereas fewer than 4 in 10 mothers who experience domestic violence assign similar importance to the father's participation.

Figure 42: Parental Relationship Outcomes by Domestic Violence at 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

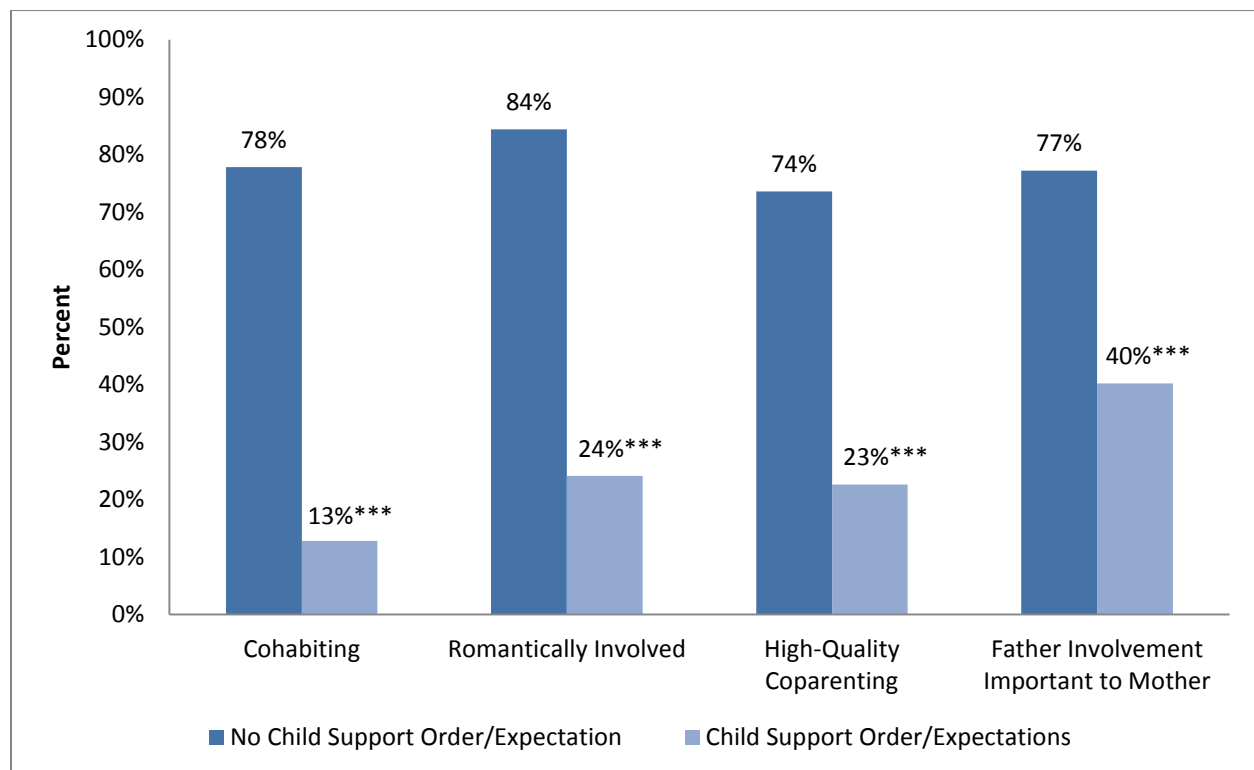
Note: The above categories are not mutually exclusive.

Child Support Orders/ Expectations

Three years after an AOP is signed, mothers who have opened or are considering opening a child support case are significantly less likely to be cohabiting, in romantic relationships, have high-quality coparenting relationships, or to consider father involvement “very important” [Figure 43]. Just as child support orders/expectations are negatively associated with longer, more stable relationships during pregnancy, mothers considering child support are negatively associated with optimal relationship outcomes three years after an AOP is signed.

Figure 43 illustrates the dramatic difference in relationship outcomes between these groups, a stark portrayal of the fractured relationships that are common to Texas mothers seeking aid from the formal child support system. Importantly, these findings do not imply that child support orders weaken the parental relationship, but rather that mothers who have poor relationships with their child’s father are more likely to rely on the formal child support system to ensure the father provides financially for the child.

Figure 43: Parental Relationship Outcomes by Child Support Order/Expectations at 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

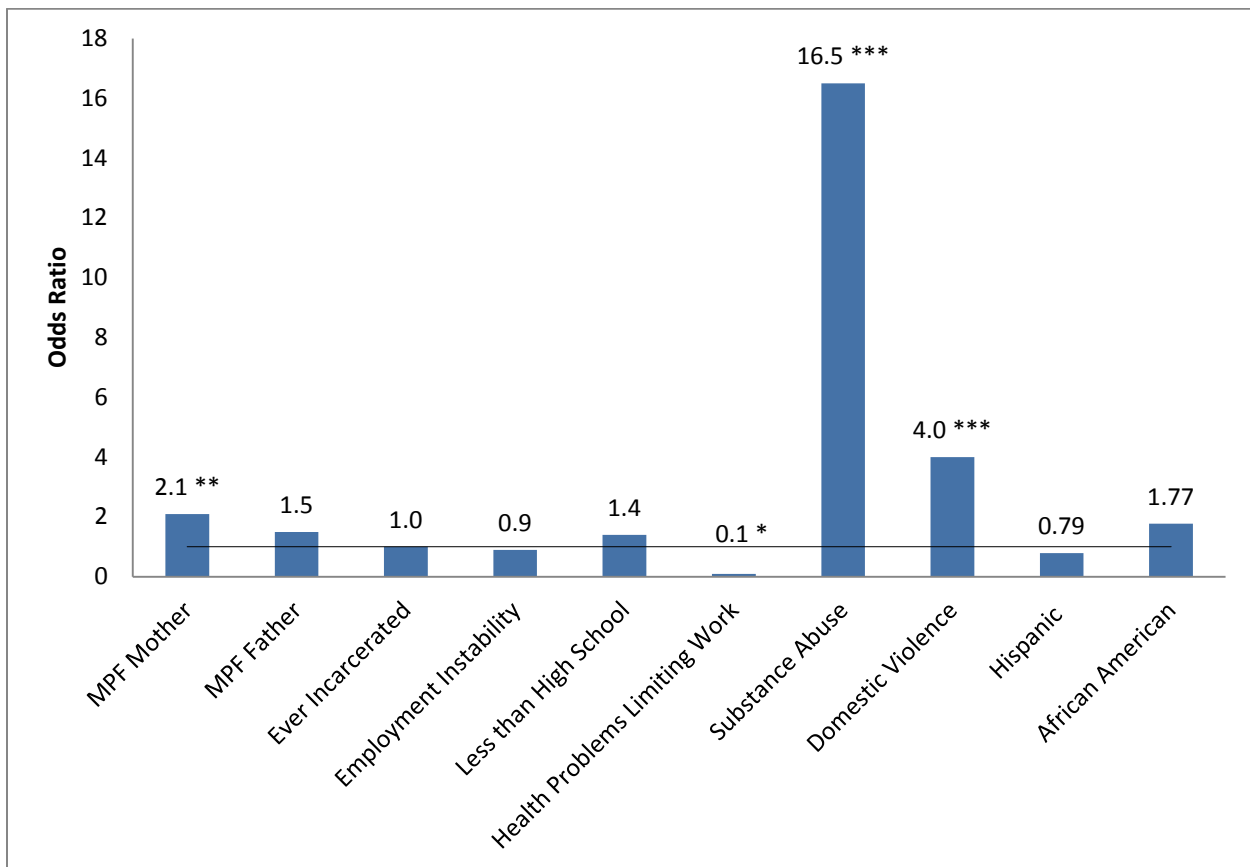
Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Note: The above categories are not mutually exclusive.

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH NO ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

To determine which factors are most associated with parents who have no relationship by the time their child is three, CFRP calculated the relative importance of each characteristic when considered alongside the others. This section seeks to elaborate on the characteristics which have the greatest impact on relationship dissolution. Figure 44 below plots the odds that a father with each characteristic will not be in a relationship with his child's mother three years after an AOP is signed, controlling for all other risk factors and for relationship status when the child was born. An odds ratio of 1 signifies equal odds of having no relationship. Odds ratios higher than 1 reflect an increased odds of not having a relationship, whereas odds ratios lower than 1 reflect a decreased odds of not having a relationship, all else equal.^k

Figure 44: How Various Characteristics Affect the Odds of Having No Relationship at 3 Years



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted logit model

Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Definitions for terms in this table can be found in Appendix D: Glossary of Terms

^k Magnitudes in the graph reflect the relative importance of each characteristic holding all other characteristics constant. This method controls for the influence of other characteristics in the graph (as well as for relationship status at birth, which is not shown in the graph), allowing researchers to isolate relative magnitudes of specific characteristics.

Overall, substance abuse is the factor most associated with the lack of a relationship among AOP-signing parents after three years [Figure 44]. Holding all other factors constant, fathers with reported substance abuse issues are more than 16 times as likely not to be in a relationship with the child's mother. This characteristic is by far the most influential factor associated with a lack of parental relationship.

Figure 44 also shows that domestic violence and multipartner fertility are associated with having no romantic relationship. Holding all other factors constant, fathers with reported domestic violence are 4 times as likely as fathers without reported domestic violence not to be in a relationship with the child's mother three years after an AOP is signed. Multipartner fertility, for both the mother and the father, is also associated with the lack of a parental relationship after three years. Although statistically significant, the association between multipartner fertility and lack of a relationship was not as large as that seen for either substance abuse or domestic violence. Other risk factors such as incarceration, education, employment, and health issues were not statistically significant in this model, though they may still have an influence on the parental relationship status for AOP signers.

Conclusion

At the outset of their journey as parents, most unmarried couples have high hopes for their future together. Three-quarters of unmarried parents in Texas are romantically involved when their children are born and most fully expect to marry. In the first few months after a nonmarital birth, the vast majority of parents would like the father to be greatly involved in raising the child over the coming years.

Despite the high hopes and expectations held by most new parents, a closer examination of nonmarital births reveals that many relationships have begun to fray before the child is even born. A plurality of unmarried parents were not trying to have a baby, and 1 in 5 were dating for less than six months, or not really dating at all, when they became pregnant. One-third of unmarried couples broke up during pregnancy, and overall, unmarried fathers did not offer much support to their children's mothers during pregnancy.

Three years after a nonmarital birth, many parents have a less rosy outlook on their future. Fewer parents are romantically involved, the proportion who cohabit has declined, and many have a weak coparenting relationship. Mothers appear to have tempered their optimism as well. Overall, fewer Texas mothers express a desire for father involvement and many seem wary of granting fathers a say in decisions regarding the child. Despite the general dissipation of many parental relationships however, a little more than half of Texas parents appear to have maintained or even strengthened ties over the first three years of their child's life.

Not all parents, however, are equally likely to remain together and positively engaged in the act of parenting. The existence of multipartner fertility, incarceration, employment instability, substance abuse, and domestic violence all appear to significantly hamstring the ability of unmarried parents to maintain positive relationships. Three years after a nonmarital birth, each of these factors is disproportionately common among Texas parents in unstable and low-quality coparenting relationships. Not only are fathers in these deteriorating relationships more likely to carry a host of risk factors, they are also more likely to be with mothers who are decidedly less enthusiastic about their involvement and already considering the establishment of a formal child support order.

Given the outsized influence of these risk factors on the trajectory of unmarried parental relationships in Texas, cognizance of their presence and impact is central to understanding how fathers support their children emotionally and financially in the years after a nonmarital birth. Indeed, the mother-father relationship has been shown to wield substantial influence on a father's involvement and support.¹¹⁸

Given that children of parents with poor relationships are especially vulnerable to growing up without the benefit of a father's financial and emotional support, the following chapters of this report explore these topics in greater detail. The next chapter turns to examining the role fathers play in the lives of their children, the ways in which it is shaped by a host of parental factors, and how it is likely to develop over time.

CHAPTER 4: FATHER INVOLVEMENT

Background and Motivation

Over the last several decades, research on nonmarital childrearing has devoted growing attention to the important role fathers play in the lives of their children. Though historically the fathering role has been narrowly defined by breadwinning, the modern father is involved in nearly every aspect of parenting – from nurturing, caregiving, and leisure to moral guidance, discipline, and support.¹¹⁹ The extent to which fathers participate in the act of childrearing carries significant implications for the welfare of a child. Indeed, involved fatherhood has been linked to better outcomes on nearly every measure of a child's wellbeing, from cognitive development and educational achievement to self-esteem and pro-social behavior.¹²⁰ When fathers are committed to the lives of their children, those children are also more likely to be healthy, productive, empathetic, and emotionally secure.¹²¹

Chapter 6 elaborates on the literature underpinning these outcomes and offers a nuanced portrait of the intersection between father involvement, economic support, and child wellbeing using survey data collected by CFRP. In this chapter though, we set aside the question of child wellbeing in an effort to sketch the broader landscape of father involvement as it appears three months and three years after a nonmarital birth.

This chapter begins with a review of the relevant literature, including a discussion of how father involvement, and the extent to which it is sustained over time, are contingent upon a variety of paternal characteristics. The subsequent section draws on primary data collected by CFRP to examine the ways in which Texas fathers are involved three months after a nonmarital birth, and how that involvement differs according to various traits of the father. In the final pages of this chapter, we turn to examine the involvement of AOP-signing fathers three years after a nonmarital birth in an effort to better understand the effects of time on paternal participation. We conclude with a discussion of relevant patterns and implications.

NOT ALL FATHERS ARE EQUALLY INVOLVED

A recurrent theme in the literature on involved fatherhood is the vast heterogeneity in levels of involvement among unmarried fathers.¹²² Not all men who have children outside of marriage are equally engaged in the act of childrearing, and research makes clear that a number of interpersonal and environmental factors are highly associated with a father's propensity to be involved.

One factor closely tied to father involvement is the act of establishing paternity. Several studies link fathers who establish paternity shortly after a baby's birth to higher involvement during the first several years of a child's life.¹²³ The *when* and *where* of paternity establishment also seems to matter for involvement, with in-hospital paternity establishment associated with higher father-child contact than paternity established outside of the hospital.¹²⁴

Among the most salient predictors of father involvement is the father's relationship with the mother. A vast body of research supports the notion that when parents get along, both the quantity and quality of father involvement is higher.¹²⁵ In fact, some scholars identify the quality of the parents' romantic relationship as the strongest predictor of paternal involvement.¹²⁶ This tight connection between the mother-father relationship and father involvement – or what has been referred to as the “package deal” – is reinforced throughout the literature with near consensus. Moreover, fathers who are romantically involved with the mother are consistently more likely to be involved with the child across a wide range of demographic, economic, and residential domains.¹²⁷

Given the overlap between fathers who are romantically involved with the mother, and those who live with the mother, cohabitation has been shown to play an equally outsized role in the involvement of unmarried fathers.¹²⁸ Indeed, resident fathers tend to exhibit far greater involvement with their children than nonresident fathers.

Moreover, research suggests that resident and nonresident fathers tend to interact with their children in different ways, with nonresident father involvement more likely to be characterized by leisure and play rather than discipline or cognitive support.¹²⁹ A related strand of research shows that involvement by nonresident fathers—especially those who are not romantic with the mother—may be significantly impacted by the parents' ability to cooperate and engage in positive coparenting.¹³⁰

Outside of the mother-father relationship, a number of characteristics unique to the father may also impinge on his ability to maintain positive involvement with the child. Several studies, for example, connect a father's education, income, and employment to supportive parenting and frequency of father-child contact.¹³¹ Although most research corroborates the idea that fathers with lower human capital are less likely to be involved, not all studies have been able to derive a conclusive link.¹³²

The involvement research is far clearer, however, on the topic of antisocial behavior. Fathers with a history of incarceration, abusive behavior, or drug and alcohol problems pose a high risk to positive interaction and are less likely to maintain contact with their children over time.¹³³

Other research points to the importance of demographic characteristics, such as race and ethnicity, in determining levels of father involvement. Though cultural differences in parenting are well-documented in the literature, the relationship between race and father involvement continues to be entangled with economic and neighborhood factors that obscure straightforward conclusions.¹³⁴ When compared to White fathers, African American fathers are linked to lower levels of engagement and warmth, but higher levels of responsibility.¹³⁵ Hispanic fathers are also found to exhibit more responsibility than White fathers, but show equal levels of warmth.¹³⁶ Among non-cohabiting couples, several studies find White fathers to be less involved than African American or Hispanic fathers, whereas other studies find that nonresident

White fathers are more likely to inhabit the extremes, displaying either very high or very low levels of involvement, depending on education level.¹³⁷

Though many unmarried fathers are involved and living with their children shortly after birth, a large number will transition to non-coresidential relationships within just a few years.¹³⁸ Some fathers will sustain regular involvement under this shift to nonresidence, but many others will become gradually less involved.¹³⁹

Researchers have tracked this general decline in involvement among nonresident fathers, but caution that looking only at averages tends to obscure a more optimistic story underneath. Indeed, though average levels of involvement fall, most individual fathers sustain the same levels of involvement over time. When dichotomized into high- and low-involvement groups, for example, nearly 3 out of 4 nonresident fathers remain in the same category of involvement during the first several years after the child's birth.¹⁴⁰

Much like involvement after birth, the evolution of father involvement over time is also marked by a notable divergence among fathers with different characteristics.¹⁴¹ Nearly all of the risk factors associated with attenuated involvement shortly after birth remain salient in the years following. Fathers who continue to confront the challenges of fragile relationships, low human capital, and destructive antisocial behaviors encounter the compounding effects of these threats on their ability to be good fathers.¹⁴²

For some fathers, new barriers to involvement may also arise. Fathers who go on to re-partner and have children with other mothers, for example, have been shown to decrease contact and economic support of prior children.¹⁴³ Under these circumstances, prior children are apt to receive few contributions from their fathers, whereas new children are likely to receive somewhat higher levels of involvement and support.¹⁴⁴

Taken together, the literature on father involvement suggests that although fathers have an important role to play in the development of their children, that role does not exist in a vacuum. Instead, fathering is nested in a web of interpersonal and environmental factors that exercise significant influence on how involved a father is likely to be.

The remainder of this chapter traces the trajectory of father involvement – from the intentions and actions of fathers shortly after birth, to the ways in which those fathers begin to diversify as various threats impinge on their ability to sustain involvement. In telling this story, we rely almost exclusively on primary data collected from Texas mothers through the PES and CAS Studies.¹

OPERATIONALIZING FATHER INVOLVEMENT

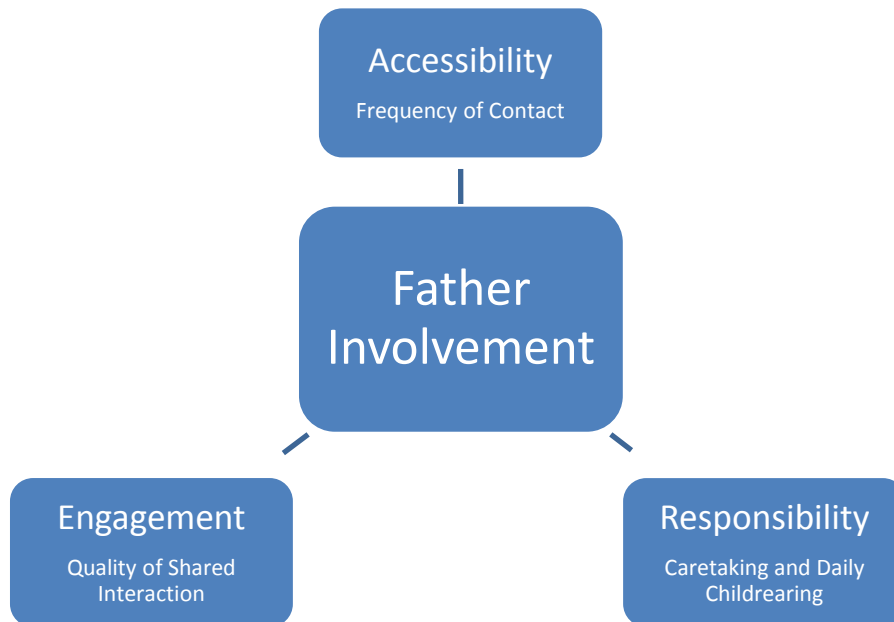
The question of how to measure, or operationalize, father involvement presented a significant challenge to early work on the paternal role. With no clear or consistent definition of the construct, early approximations focused heavily on the quantity or amount of father involvement.¹⁴⁵ In the late 1980s, researchers began to find consensus around a broadened definition that attempted to capture the multidimensionality of what it means to be an “involved father.” That definition sought to incorporate measures of quality and accountability alongside the established measures of quantity. The result was a three-part construct of father involvement that has become a touchstone in the field since being introduced by Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine in 1987 [Figure 45].¹⁴⁶

The guiding definition of father involvement can be divided into three conceptually distinct components: *accessibility* to, *engagement* with, and *responsibility* for the child.¹⁴⁷ *Accessibility* (sometimes called availability) refers to the extent to which a father has contact with his child. Measures of accessibility tend to focus on quantifying a father’s presence, irrespective of the quality or depth of the father-child interaction. The concept of *engagement* (sometimes called interaction) reflects the quality of relationship between father and child, including caregiving, play, teaching, and other shared activities. *Responsibility* captures a father’s involvement in taking care of the daily needs and welfare of the child. This might include tending to the child’s health or childcare, or having a role in major decision-making about the child’s life.¹⁴⁸ Though a certain degree of overlap exists between the three branches, they provide a useful frame for evaluating the various dimensions of father involvement captured in the PES and CAS surveys.

¹ This chapter relies heavily on survey data gathered from mothers in the PES and CAS sample populations. In some cases, CFRP was also able to collect survey responses directly from corresponding fathers, permitting researchers to determine the degree to which mother and father accounts differ on questions related to father involvement. For surveys in which CFRP has both mother and father responses, we calculate correlation coefficients on a number of father involvement indicators. In general, mother and father responses show strong positive correlations [Appendix E]. Due to this high degree of internal consistency between mother and father reports, we confine the majority of our analysis to mother surveys which afford a higher sample size and the use of Texas-wide population weights. It should be noted that past literature has found some predictable discrepancies between mother and father reports. Analyses comparing mother and father reports of father involvement from the Fragile Families Study have found that mothers tend to report lower levels of paternal involvement than fathers.¹ The content of our data does not allow us to say whether one report is more “true” than another, though one might suspect the reality falls somewhere in between. Nevertheless, we urge appropriate caution in the interpretation of our results due to potential biases inherent in the use of a singular reporting source.

¹ Mikelson, Kelly S. (August 2008). He Said, She Said: Comparing Mother and Father Reports of Father Involvement. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70, 613-624.

Figure 45: Components of Father Involvement. Adapted from Lamb et al. (1987)



Source: Lamb, Michael E. et al. "A Biosocial Perspective on Paternal Behavior and Involvement." Parenting Across the Life Span : Biosocial Dimensions. Ed. Jane B. Lancaster et al. New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1987. 111-135.

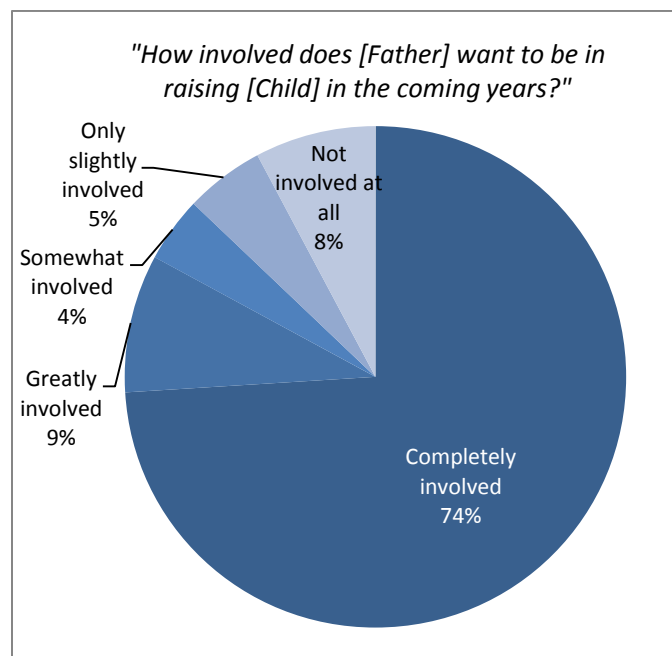
Father Involvement Three Months After Birth

This section provides an overview of how Texas fathers are involved in the lives of their children three months after a nonmarital birth. Survey results paint a largely optimistic portrait of paternal involvement, but also hint at a sizable portion of fathers for whom participation has already begun to collapse. The section concludes by drawing together each dimension of involvement into a summary format that helps set the stage for future sections of the report.

FATHER INTENTIONS AT THREE MONTHS

In the previous chapter, we noted that 81 percent of Texas mothers want the father of their child to be completely involved in childrearing in the coming years [Figure 20]. Mothers were also asked how involved they thought the father wanted to be. Three months after a nonmarital birth, mothers reported that the vast majority of Texas fathers want to be involved in raising their children. Overall, 74 percent of mothers indicated that the father wants to be completely involved compared with just 8 percent of mothers who said that the father does not want to be involved at all [Figure 46]. These largely positive intentions align closely with the self-reported intentions of fathers in the Fragile Families Study, in which 71 percent of fathers indicated a desire to be involved in raising their child in the coming years.^{m,149}

Figure 46: Father Intentions for Involvement at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

^m Similar to other sections of this report, this chapter will make frequent reference to the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, a landmark study of children born to married and unmarried parents in large U.S. cities between 1998 and 2000. A number of parallels between the Fragile Families Study and our own help to place our findings in the context of prevailing research in the field of nonmarital childrearing.

FATHER ACCESSIBILITY AT THREE MONTHS

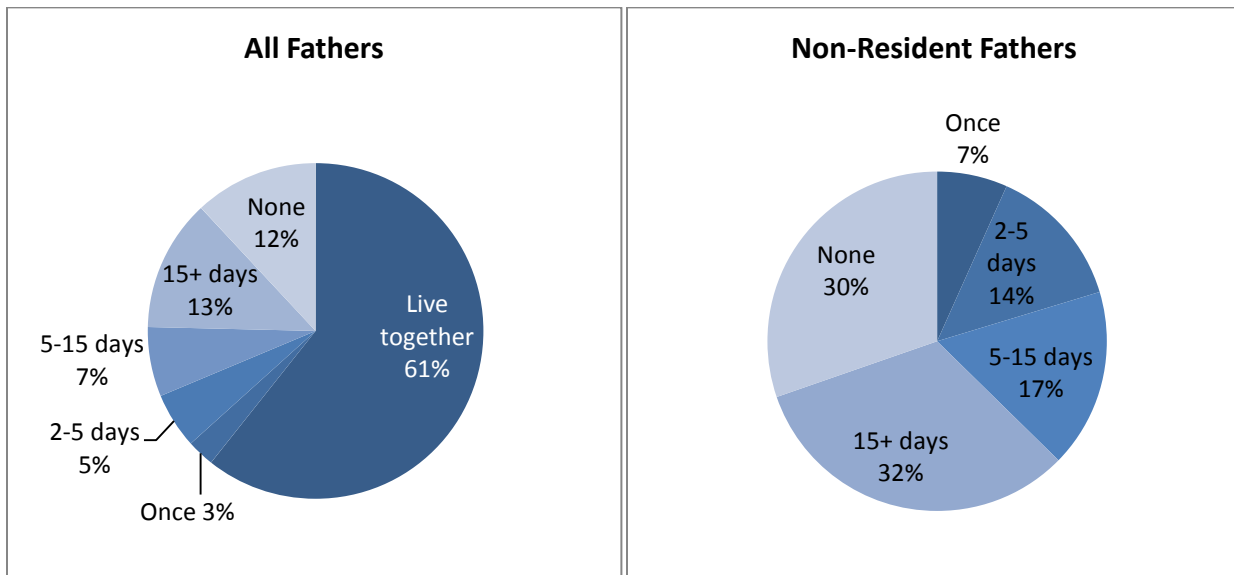
Research on father accessibility has been traditionally characterized by attempts to quantify a father's presence. Early studies relied on measuring the number of hours a father was available to his children per day, with averages in the 1980s ranging from 1.75 to 4 hours per day.¹⁵⁰ Others have characterized father accessibility in relation to mother accessibility, with studies in the 1980s and 1990s pinning father accessibility at about two-thirds that of mothers.¹⁵¹

More recent estimates of accessibility from the Fragile Families Study have operationalized accessibility using the mean number of days a father has seen his child in the last month or year. Among nonresident fathers who had seen their one-year-old more than once in the previous month, for example, the average level of contact was 13 days out of the last 30.¹⁵² Using survey data collected by CFRP, we follow in this tradition by quantifying a father's presence using the number of days a father has seen his child in the last month.

Accessibility Indicators

Three months after a nonmarital birth, more than 6 out of 10 Texas parents live together, implying a high degree of accessibility between most fathers and their children [Figure 47]. Overall, 13 percent of fathers saw their child more than 15 out of the last 30 days, and another 7 percent saw the child between 5 and 15 days. Fully 12 percent—or 1 out of 8 fathers—did not see their 3-month-old at all in the prior month.

Figure 47: Frequency of Father Contact in the Last 30 days



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted / PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted. Nonresident only.

Note: When asked how often the father sees the child, two mothers indicated “we live together”, but did not indicate the same cohabitation status when asked about the parental relationship. This inconsistency produces a small discrepancy between the proportion cohabiting in this graph and those in later analyses of relationship status.

When looking at nonresident fathers only, the tendency of fathers to dichotomize into high and low accessibility groups becomes apparent. Figure 47 shows that although one-third of nonresident fathers had frequent contact (15+ days) with their child over the last month, 3 in 10 did not see their child at all over the same period. Under Texas Family Law, a standard possession order grants the noncustodial parent visitation access to his or her child for 10 to 13 days per month, although courts frequently order less time for children under age 3.ⁿ Fewer than half of nonresident fathers in Texas meet the 10 to 13 day threshold, and more than half saw their child fewer than 5 days in the past month. Still, the regularity of nonresident father contact in our data appears to correspond with general magnitudes seen in the Fragile Families Study.^o

FATHER ENGAGEMENT AT THREE MONTHS

Consistent with previous literature, we define father engagement as the quality of shared father/child interactions in the context of caretaking, play, or leisure.¹⁵³ The purpose of developing an engagement construct is to move beyond the somewhat one-dimensional concepts of father involvement that emphasize quantity toward a more nuanced understanding of the social and emotional bond between father and child. Research from the Fragile Families Study operationalizes engagement as the number of days in the past week that the father has interacted with the child through activities such as singing songs, reading, telling stories, showing physical affection, or playing games.¹⁵⁴

Engagement Indicators

In surveys administered to unmarried mothers three months after birth (PES Study), we identify four indicators of father engagement that mirror measures used in the Fragile Families Study. Mothers are asked to select how many days per week the father typically engages in any of the following activities: reading stories to the child, singing songs or telling stories to the child, hugging or showing physical affection toward the child, and telling the child that he loves him or her.

ⁿ A standard possession order in Texas Family Law stipulates that the noncustodial parent has visitation access to his/her child on the first, third, and fifth weekend of each month, as well as Thursday evenings of each week. In a month with five weekends, the minimum number of days a noncustodial parent has the right to see the child is 13 days in that month. It is important to note that these parameters are generally modified for infants and toddlers in order to phase in overnight visits with the noncustodial parent.

^o Among nonresident fathers who had seen the child at least once in the previous month, 45 percent of fathers had seen the child more than 15 days while another quarter had seen the child between 5-15 days. The equivalent data from Fragile Families is calculated as an average, where nonresident fathers who had seen the child at least once in the last 30 days had an average of 13 days of contact.

Table 8 shows the distribution of father engagement on each activity, from zero days per week to every day. Fathers are most likely to show physical affection or tell the child they love him/her, with each activity performed by about 70 percent of fathers every day in a typical week. Fathers are least likely to read stories to their 3-month-old, with nearly 60 percent of fathers not doing this at all in a typical week.^p More than one-fifth of fathers sing songs or tell stories to the child every day in a typical week, but another one-third of fathers do not do these things at all. Indeed, for any given activity, more than 15 percent of fathers do not participate at all in a typical week.

Table 8: Father Engagement at 3 Months

How many days per week does father do the following with child?				
Days/Week	Read Stories	Sing Songs or Tell Stories	Hug or Physical Affection	Tell Child He Loves Him/Her
0	59%	32%	15%	15%
1	10%	8%	2%	3%
2	10%	8%	4%	3%
3	7%	9%	3%	2%
4	4%	8%	2%	2%
5	3%	8%	3%	2%
6	2%	4%	3%	2%
7	6%	23%	69%	72%
N	700	700	700	700

Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: Cronbach's alpha = .82

Taken together, unmarried fathers engage in these activities for an average of 3.8 days per week. When separated by cohabitation status, however, the numbers diverge considerably. Resident fathers engage in these activities 4.8 days per week whereas nonresident fathers engage for an average of just 2.2 days per week—a statistically significant difference. The latter average aligns precisely with estimates calculated for nonresident fathers in the Fragile Families Study.¹⁵⁵

^p The lack of regular reading among fathers and their children may be more indicative of the children's young age than of low engagement.

FATHER RESPONSIBILITY AT THREE MONTHS

We continue with the conventional taxonomy by defining father responsibility as the degree to which a father shares in taking care of the child through daily duties and childrearing obligations. Scholars have noted that responsibility might involve such tasks as arranging for a babysitter, setting appointments with the pediatrician, or determining when a child needs new clothes.¹⁵⁶

Early surveys conducted on the topic of father responsibility typically asked mothers and fathers directly about the degree to which fathers were responsible for the child or associated childcare tasks.¹⁵⁷ These studies consistently found fathers to be less responsible for their children than mothers, with varying degrees of magnitude.¹⁵⁸ More recent research, however, has added some nuance to early depictions of paternal responsibility. In one study, researchers find that fathers are a significant source of childcare when mothers are working outside the home, providing care as commonly as childcare centers and family day care homes.¹⁵⁹

Responsibility Indicators

Surveys administered to Texas mothers shortly after a nonmarital birth (PES Study) asked four questions related to father responsibility. Mothers were prompted to report how often the father has helped with the following activities since the child was born: 1) Looking after the child when you need to do things, 2) Feeding or helping you feed the child, 3) Changing the child's diaper when it needs changing, and 4) Putting the child to bed at night or helping you get the child ready for bed. Table 9 shows the distribution of responses for each question.

Table 9: Father Responsibility at 3 Months

How often does father do the following to help mother?				
	Look After Child	Feed Child	Change Diaper	Put Child to Bed
Always	45%	29%	22%	25%
Often	18%	27%	28%	23%
Sometimes	13%	17%	17%	18%
Rarely	7%	8%	12%	10%
Never	18%	20%	20%	24%

Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: Cronbach's alpha = .93

On the whole, fathers are most likely to help with looking after the child and least likely to help with putting the child to bed. For each task, approximately half of fathers either always or often help whereas the other half of fathers help sometimes, rarely, or never. In general, the indicators suggest that roughly 7 out of 10 fathers help with childcare tasks at least some of the time, whereas the remaining 3 of 10 help rarely or never.

OVERVIEW OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT AT THREE MONTHS

In an effort to simplify and condense the various aspects of involvement discussed above, fathers were divided into high- and low-involvement groups along each of the three dimensions—accessibility, engagement, and responsibility.^q Fathers were considered to be highly accessible if they had more than 5 days of contact with their child in the last month; fathers with less than 5 days of contact were categorized in the low accessibility group. CFRP selected the 5 day threshold to correspond with Texas’s standard possession order for a parent who is not awarded the primary physical residence of a child.^{160,r} Overall, 80 percent of fathers were classified as highly accessible under this method.

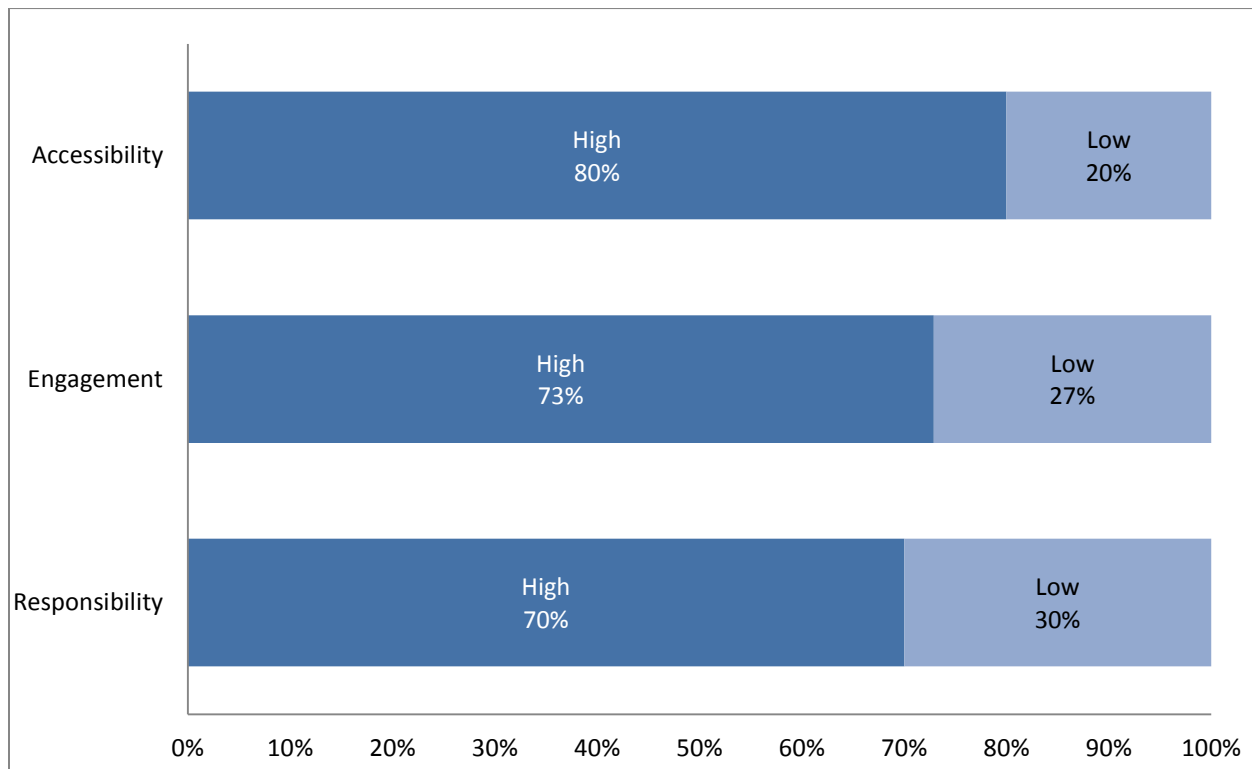
Fathers were also grouped by level of engagement using an aggregated measure of the four engagement indicators presented in Table 8. When the resulting distribution was parceled into high- and low-engagement groups, more than 7 out of 10 fathers were classified as highly engaged. Likewise, fathers were apportioned into high- and low-responsibility groups based on their individual responsibility score generated from each of the four responsibility questions in Table 9. Overall, 70 percent of fathers fell into the high-responsibility group.

^q To determine the appropriate threshold for high or low involvement within each dimension, CFRP plotted the distribution of responses and divided fathers at the most visible point of discontinuity. These points in the distribution implied a breaking point where fathers became substantively different from one another. Though the process of visual inspection usually involves a degree of subjective judgment, most distributions of involvement showed fairly obvious clefts near the 70th percentile and allowed CFRP researchers to parse groups without much normative assessment.

^r As mentioned in a previous footnote, Texas Family Law stipulates that a noncustodial parent—i.e. the parent who is not awarded primary physical residence of a child—has the right to possession of the child on the first, third, and fifth weekend of every month, beginning on Friday evening and ending on Sunday evening. In addition, the noncustodial parent has the right to see the child on Thursdays of each week during the school year, from 6pm to 8pm. Under these stipulations, the minimum number of days a noncustodial parent has the right to see the child is 13 days per month (in a month with five weekends). Though these numbers reflect the parameters of the standard possession order, it is important to note that these parameters are generally modified for infants and toddlers in order to phase in overnight visits with the noncustodial parent. With these considerations, CFRP used the response category “5-15 days” as a minimum accessibility threshold to approximate the parameters in a standard possession order for an infant.

Figure 48 plots all three dimensions of father involvement. The results make clear that roughly 7 in 10 unmarried fathers are involved in the lives of their newborns. These fathers see their children regularly, participate in shared activities, and help out with basic childrearing duties. Perhaps not surprisingly, fathers who are involved in one dimension also tend to be involved in the others. Indeed, statistical analyses reveal that the three constructs share a high degree of internal consistency ($\alpha=.86$). This suggests that accessibility, engagement, and responsibility tend to measure the same general concept and when combined, provide a reasonably good approximation of the broader notion of father involvement.

Figure 48: Father Involvement Indicators at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: Cronbach's alpha=0.86

Group Differences by Father Involvement at Three Months

Though most unmarried fathers are involved in the lives of their children three months after birth, approximately 3 in 10 are not fully involved. This section seeks to better understand this fraction of fathers for whom the father-child connection has begun to fray so soon after birth. Who are these fathers and what are their characteristics? Do some characteristics appear more among this group than others?

At the beginning of this chapter, we highlighted several factors that past literature has deemed relevant to father involvement – AOP signing, the parental relationship, multipartner fertility, a father’s human capital, antisocial behaviors, and race/ethnicity. In this section, we use these factors as a framework for investigating how father involvement is informed by a mix of personal, interpersonal, and environmental forces.

In some cases, the data bear out the importance of these forces, whereas in other cases we find little evidence of a meaningful pattern. Additionally, this section considers the intersection of child support and father involvement three months after a nonmarital birth given that mothers associated with uninvolved fathers may be most likely to turn to child support as a means of ensuring a father’s contributions to his child. Table 10 presents the findings that guide the remaining discussion.

As shown in Table 10, several notable patterns persist across all three dimensions of father involvement. One of the more pronounced patterns to emerge is the clear connection between establishing paternity and involved fatherhood. Fathers who do not sign the AOP in the hospital are vastly overrepresented among all three low involvement categories. Compared to highly accessible fathers, for example, fathers with low accessibility are nearly 6 times more likely not to have signed the AOP.

Fathers who do not have a romantic relationship with the mother are also far more prevalent among uninvolved groups. Indeed, these fathers make up more than a quarter of the low accessibility group and a plurality of both the low engagement and low responsibility groups. In all of our analyses, nothing is as strongly connected to a father’s involvement with his child as his romantic relationship with the child’s mother.

A mother’s feelings about how the father should be involved are also closely linked to his participation. When mothers feel that a father’s influence could be detrimental to the child, they may try to limit contact or discourage involved fatherhood by way of maternal gatekeeping. When mothers feel that the father is not doing enough, however, they may seek to restore a father’s investment by establishing a formal child support order. In both scenarios, high involvement is rare.

Table 10: Group Differences by Father Involvement at 3 Months

Group Differences by Father Involvement (Percent)									
	High Accessibility	Low Accessibility	Sig.	High Engagement	Low Engagement	Sig.	High Responsibility	Low Responsibility	Sig.
<i>N (Unweighted)</i>	565	135		515	185		494	204	
<i>Weighted Proportion</i>	80%	20%		73%	27%		70%	30%	
<i>Parental Factors</i>									
AOP Non-Signers	12%	70%	***	10%	60%	***	10%	55%	***
Non-Romantic Relationship	7%	75%	***	5%	63%	***	6%	55%	***
Non-Cohabiting	23%	98%	***	19%	87%	***	21%	76%	***
Maternal Gatekeeping	5%	11%	**	4%	12%	***	3%	12%	***
Child Support Order/Expectations	16%	62%	***	11%	64%	***	13%	54%	***
<i>Multipartner Fertility</i>									
MPF Father	29%	52%	***	29%	46%	***	29%	44%	***
MPF Mother	28%	38%	**	29%	33%		28%	35%	*
<i>Threats to Involvement</i>									
Incarcerated at Birth	1%	8%	***	1%	6%	***	0%	6%	***
Unemployed	14%	27%	***	14%	23%	***	14%	22%	**
Less than High School	21%	29%	*	23%	23%		22%	25%	
Domestic Violence	11%	55%	***	10%	60%	***	9%	45%	***
<i>Father's Race/Ethnicity</i>									
Hispanic/Latino	59%	46%	***	59%	48%	***	58%	52%	
African American	15%	32%	***	15%	29%	***	15%	27%	***
White, Non-Hispanic	23%	19%		23%	20%		23%	19%	

Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Ns in this table do not align with weighted proportions due to population weighting.

Definitions for terms in this table can be found in Appendix D: Glossary of Terms

Though evidence of maternal gatekeeping is not common among parents in our survey (6%)⁵, fathers in this group were unevenly distributed across high and low involvement groups. In fact, less involved fathers are more than twice as likely to be associated with gatekeeping mothers as compared to their highly involved counterparts.

A father's involvement with his child is also closely related to whether the mother has established – or is considering establishing – a formal child support order. Just three months after birth, mothers look to child support much more commonly in cases where the father is less involved. More than half of the fathers with low accessibility, low engagement, and low responsibility are associated with a mother who is considering formal support, suggesting that lower levels of father involvement may act as a motivating factor in mothers' decisions to enter the formal system. Future analyses will consider the potential for a causal direction between these phenomena using additional waves of survey data.

Compared to highly involved fathers, those with low involvement are also more likely to have children with other partners or be associated with mothers who have children with other partners. The link between father involvement and a father's multipartner fertility (MPF) is statistically significant across all three dimensions of involvement. The association between father involvement and a mother's MPF, however, is more tenuous. Mothers who have children with other partners are linked to fathers that fall disproportionately into low accessibility and low responsibility groups; however, maternal MPF does not significantly correlate with father engagement.

Various paternal risk factors also emerge as significantly related to involvement. Fathers who were incarcerated at their child's birth, are unemployed, or have a history of abusive or threatening behavior, fall disproportionately into low involvement groups. More than 4 out of 10 fathers with low involvement have a history of abusive behavior, for example, and more than 2 in 10 are unemployed.

But whereas employment and involvement appear to share a statistically meaningful link, education and involvement do not. Fathers with less than a high school diploma are proportionally represented among high and low involvement groups, suggesting that low human capital may not always translate into low father participation.

Due to the wide diversity of parenting practices among different ethnic groups, prior research has made an effort to identify how patterns of father involvement may vary by paternal race and ethnicity. Analyses presented in Table 10 reveal a number of interesting findings related to race and involvement. Fathers with high accessibility and high engagement are disproportionately Hispanic, while those with low accessibility, low engagement, and low responsibility are disproportionately African American. Altogether, fathers with low involvement are roughly twice as likely to be African American as fathers with high

⁵ The maternal gatekeeping variable consists of mothers who indicated that the father would like to be more involved than she would like him to be.

involvement. By contrast, White fathers are proportionately distributed across involvement groups and show no significant pattern.

Characteristics Associated with Father Involvement at Three Months

In the early part of this chapter, we provided an overview of how Texas fathers are involved in the lives of their children shortly after a nonmarital birth. The subsequent section then took a closer look at fathers with low involvement, and asked if their diminished participation could be linked to certain traits or circumstances. In this section, we ask a somewhat different question. Instead of documenting the prevalence of various traits within high and low involvement groups, this section divides fathers into categories based on their characteristics – for example, AOP signers vs. non-signers, or employed vs. unemployed – in an effort to illustrate the profound differences in involvement between different types of fathers.

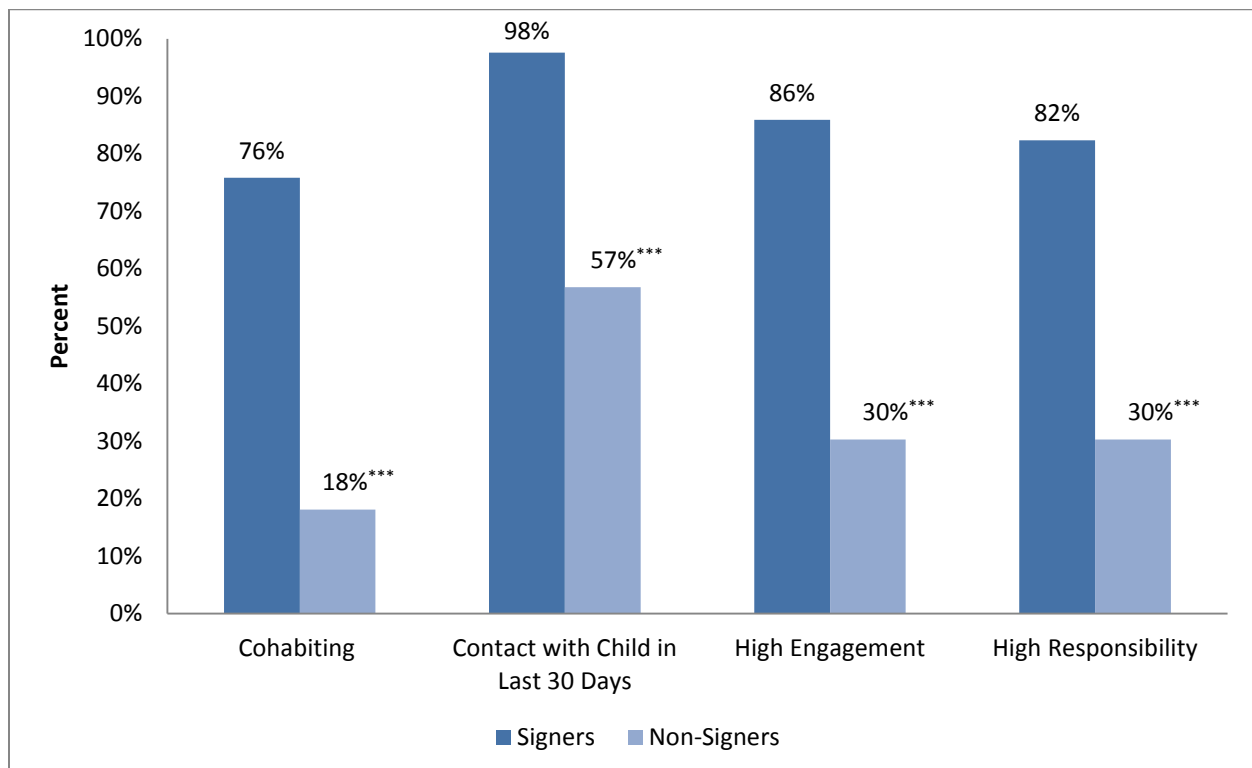
AOP SIGNING

Consistent with previous literature, our results indicate that fathers who sign an in-hospital AOP are considerably more likely to be involved than those who do not. AOP signers are distinguished almost immediately by their intentions for involvement; fathers who sign the AOP are more than twice as likely to desire complete involvement as non-signers. In fact, more than 9 in 10 fathers who sign the AOP want to be completely or greatly involved in raising the child compared with just half of non-signers (not shown).

These intentions are reflected in measures of father accessibility as well. Fathers who sign the AOP are more than 4 times as likely as non-signers to live with the child's mother and almost twice as likely to have had some contact with their child in the past 30 days [Figure 49]. It is important to note that more than 4 out of 10 non-signing fathers have not seen their children at all in the past 30 days.

The dramatic differences in a father's contact with his child are echoed in measures of his engagement and responsibility too. Figure 49 shows that 86 percent of AOP signers are highly engaged compared with just 30 percent of non-signers. Similarly, 8 in 10 AOP signers are categorized as highly responsible, compared with just 3 in 10 non-signers.

Figure 49: Father Involvement by AOP Signing at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

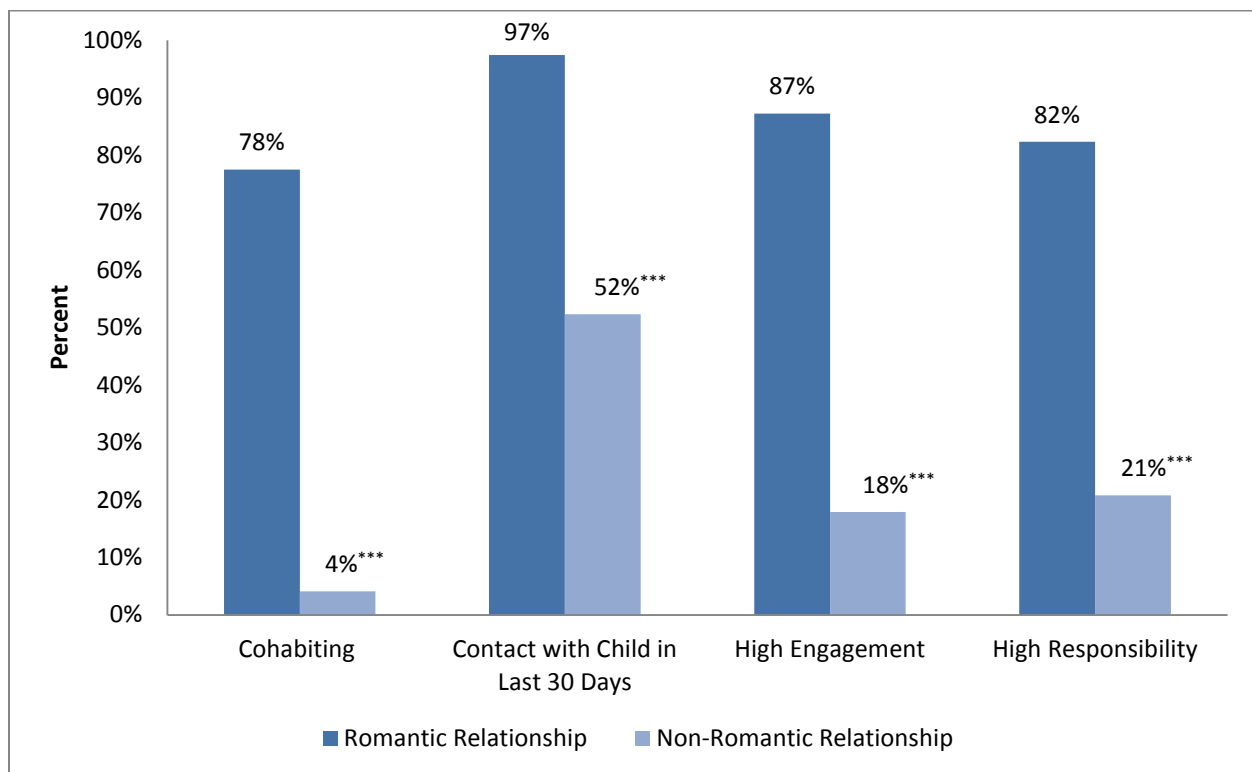
Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

PARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

The literature on father involvement is dense with studies linking the quality of the parental relationship to prevalence of paternal involvement. Survey data collected by CFRP reinforce this conclusion on every measure of father involvement. Nearly all fathers who are romantically involved with the mother three months after the birth want to be involved in raising the child. In contrast, 6 out of 10 fathers who are not romantically involved want to be only slightly involved or not involved at all (not shown).

Figure 50 demonstrates the profound difference in father accessibility between romantic and non-romantic parents. Among parents who are romantically involved, more than three-fourths live together compared to just 4 percent of non-romantic parents. Moreover, fathers who do not have a romantic relationship with the mother are only half as likely to have seen their child in the last 30 days. Indeed, nearly half of fathers without a romantic tie to the mother had no contact with the child in the last month.

Figure 50: Father Involvement by Parent's Romantic Relationship at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

These general patterns hold across measures of father engagement and responsibility too. Fathers who are romantically involved with the mother are nearly five times as likely to be highly engaged as fathers in non-romantic relationships with the mother. A similar difference exists on measures of responsibility related to childrearing. Fathers who have a romantic relationship with the mother are nearly 4 times more likely to be responsible for childrearing than fathers who do not have such a relationship. Among all fathers in non-romantic relationships, only 2 in 10 exhibited characteristics of high engagement and high responsibility.

The stability of the parental relationship during pregnancy and since birth also proves closely associated with father accessibility, engagement, and responsibility. On each dimension of involvement, a large discrepancy exists between parents whose relationship has improved and those for whom it has worsened, reinforcing the implied link between instability in the parental relationship and an impaired connection between father and child (not shown).

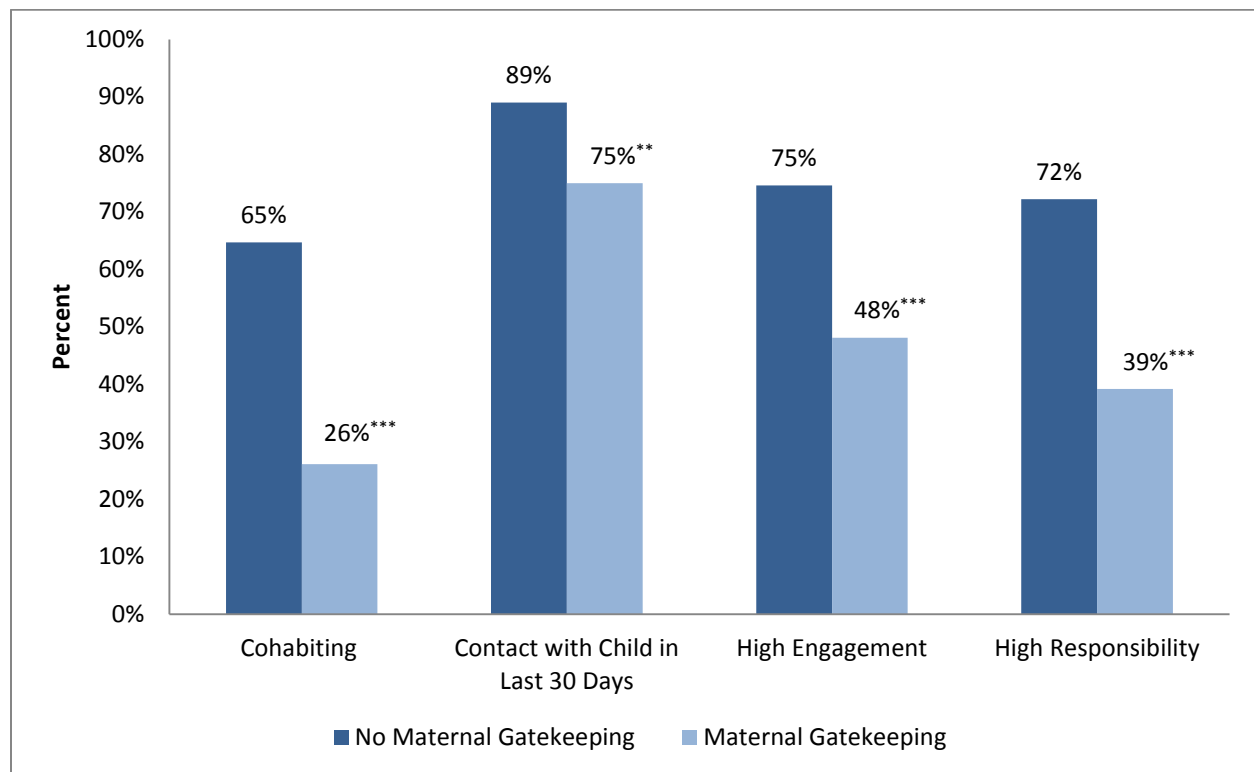
Parental cohabitation is also highly related to father involvement. Fathers who do not live with the child's mother are far less likely to have regular contact with the child. These fathers also tend to participate less in shared activities with the child. Non-cohabiting fathers are nearly 11 times as likely to have low-engagement as their cohabiting counterparts (not shown). Whether or not parents live together is also strongly associated with whether fathers share in basic childrearing duties. Nearly 9 out of 10 cohabiting fathers are highly responsible for their children, compared with less than 4 out of 10 non-cohabiting fathers (not shown).

MATERNAL GATEKEEPING

Maternal gatekeeping is defined as a mother’s “preferences and attempts to restrict and exclude fathers from childcare and involvement with children.”¹⁶¹ Prior research identifies a causal link between maternal gatekeeping and the degree of father involvement.¹⁶² We operationalize the concept of maternal gatekeeping as mothers who indicated that the father wants to be more involved than they want him to be.

Although uncommon (only 6 percent of mothers are classified as gatekeepers using this method), survey results show that maternal gatekeeping appears highly associated with the frequency of contact between father and child.^t In situations where the mother is classified as a gatekeeper, the associated father is less than half as likely to live with the mother and significantly less likely to have seen his child in the past 30 days [Figure 51]. Fathers affiliated with gatekeeping mothers are also substantially less likely to be engaged or responsible for taking care of the child.

Figure 51: Father Involvement by Maternal Gatekeeping at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

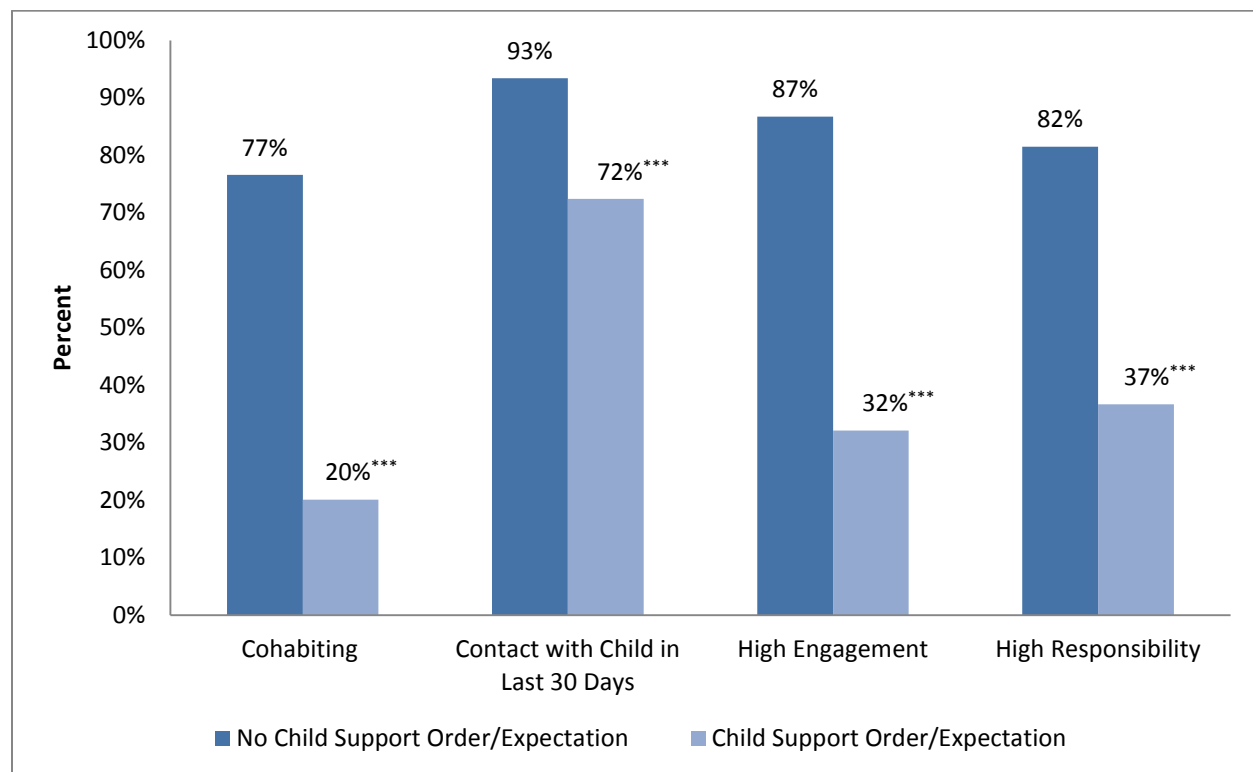
^t An alternate proxy for maternal gatekeeping can be constructed from surveys of fathers conducted three months after birth. Though unrepresentative of unmarried Texas fathers at large, responses revealed that nearly one-third of those surveyed (32%) had asked the mother if they could spend more time with the child.

CHILD SUPPORT ORDERS/EXPECTATIONS

Mothers who have established or are considering establishing a formal child support order are much more likely to be associated with uninvolved fathers than mothers who have no plans to open a child support case. Figure 52 shows that when mothers are considering formal child support, the associated father is significantly less likely to have had contact with his child in the last month. In fact, 28 percent of fathers whose associated mother is considering child support have not seen their child at all in the past 30 days. These fathers are also less than half as likely as other fathers to exhibit the characteristics of high responsibility or high engagement.

Of all the factors associated with weak paternal involvement shortly after birth, a mother's expectations of child support is one of the most telling. The strength of this association suggests that when fathers are not involved, many mothers look to the child support system as a means of restoring a father's contributions.

Figure 52: Father Involvement by Child Support Expectations at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

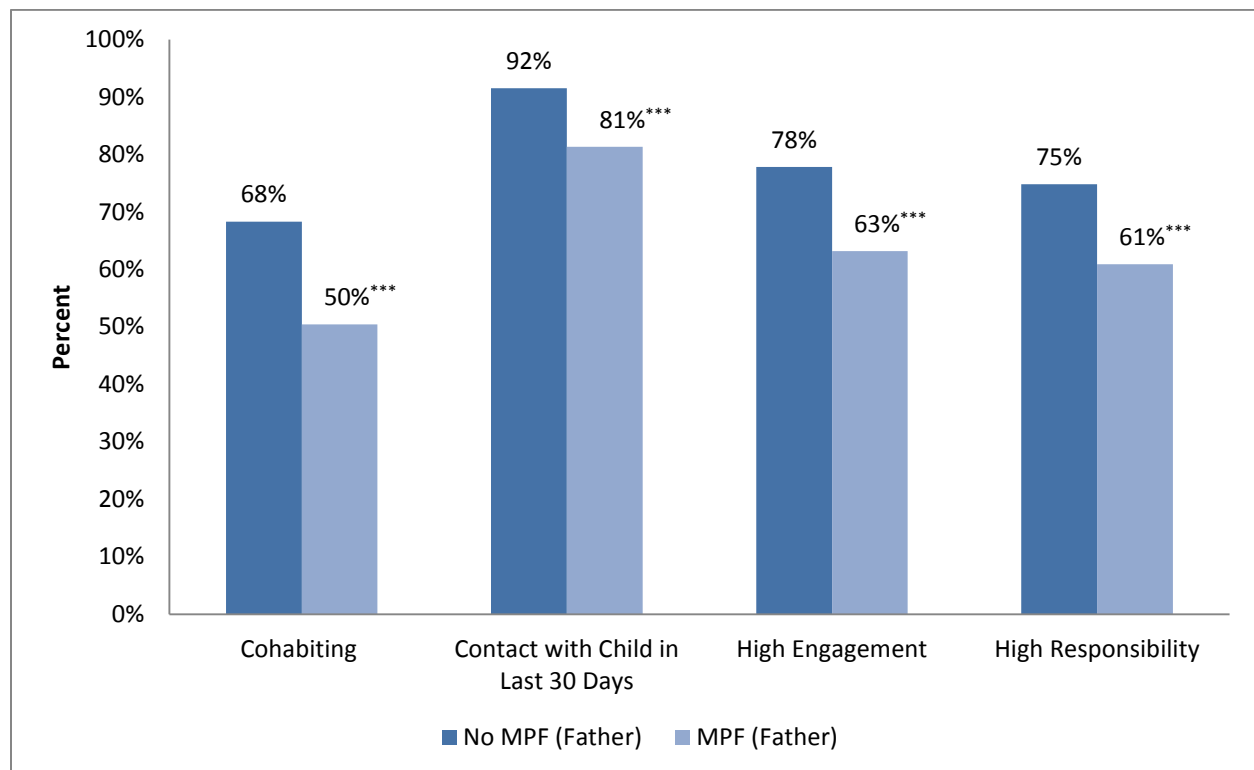
Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

MULTIPARTNER FERTILITY

Prior literature also characterizes multipartner fertility (MPF) as a risk to father involvement, noting that fathers who have children from other partners are more likely to decrease involvement over time as fathers struggle to divide their time and attention between multiple households.¹⁶³ Survey data collected by CFRP reveal that intentions for involvement do appear somewhat muted among fathers with children by other partners. Whereas 80 percent of fathers who have not had children with another partner desire complete involvement in raising the child, just 62 percent of fathers with multipartner fertility feel similarly (not shown).

These intentions seem to play out accordingly when comparing fathers with and without MPF along each dimension of father involvement. Figure 53 shows that significantly fewer fathers with MPF have seen their child in the last 30 days than fathers without MPF. In fact, nearly 20 percent of MPF fathers have not seen their child at all in the past 30 days compared to just 8 percent of fathers without MPF. Fathers who have children with other partners are also less likely to exhibit the characteristics of high engagement and high responsibility when compared to fathers without multipartner fertility.

Figure 53: Father Involvement by Paternal Multipartner Fertility at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Whether or not a mother has children with other partners, however, appears to have a smaller association with father involvement (not shown). MPF mothers tend to report that fathers have less contact with the child than non-MPF mothers. Similarly, mothers who have children with other partners tend to report that fathers are less engaged and less likely to help with childcare tasks. The differences in father involvement reported by mothers with multipartner fertility versus those without are significant, but they are small. Taken together, the data suggest that although multipartner fertility can introduce environmental factors that compete for parental time and resources, the barriers to positive father involvement may be larger among MPF fathers than MPF mothers.

INCARCERATION

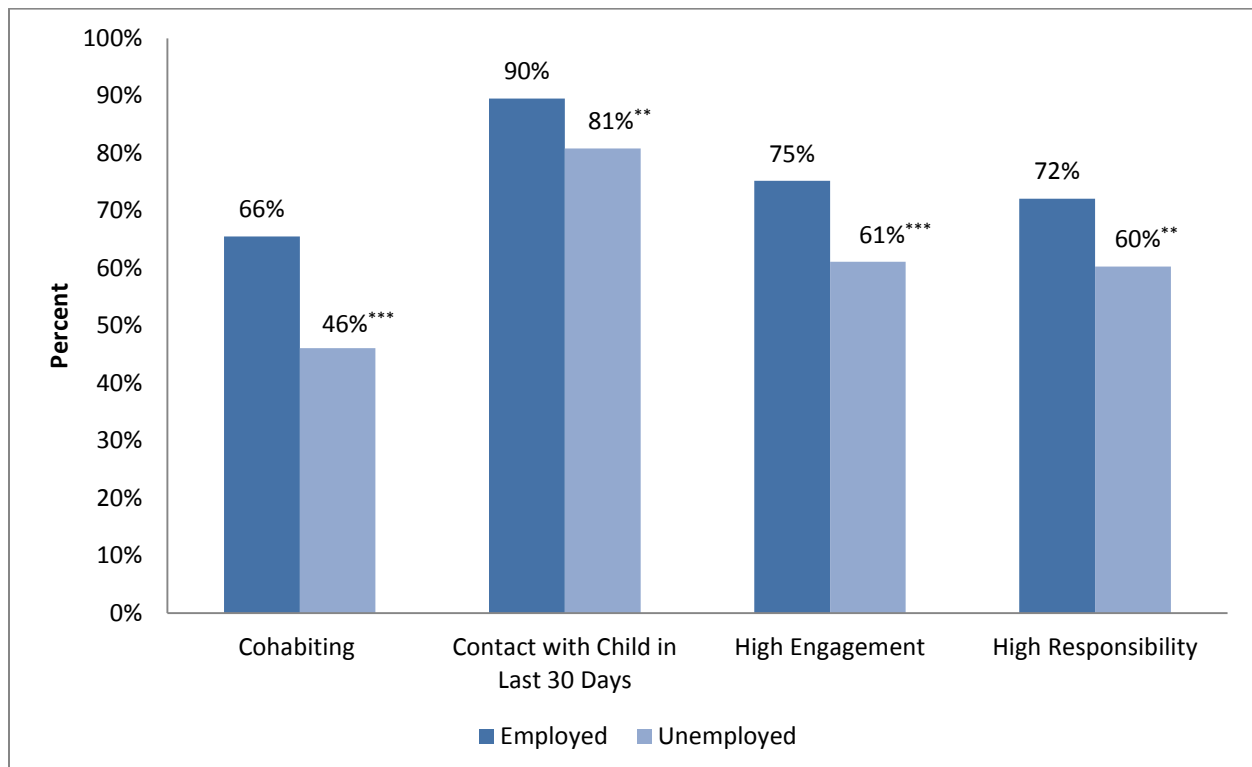
Incarceration plays an outsized role in father involvement by way of the physical barrier erected between father and child. Due to the small number of fathers who were incarcerated at birth however ($N=14$), the results should be interpreted with a great deal of caution. Among fathers who were incarcerated at birth, 64 percent had not seen the child at all in the last 30 days, compared to just 11 percent of non-incarcerated fathers (not shown). Fathers who were incarcerated at birth also tended to score substantially lower on measures of engagement and responsibility.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Though past literature links father employment status to various indicators of father involvement, survey data collected three months after birth provide only partial evidence of a meaningful connection. When mothers were asked about the father's intentions for involvement, unemployed fathers were just as likely as employed fathers to desire high levels of involvement in raising the child (not shown).

Further inquiry into each dimension of father involvement, however, does reveal a modest association between father employment status and a father's degree of involvement [Figure 54]. When compared to unemployed fathers, fathers with current employment are more likely to live with the mother and more likely to have had contact with the child in the last 30 days. Employed fathers also tend to have higher levels of engagement and responsibility, interacting with the child through shared activities and helping with childcare tasks more often. While notable, many of the differences in involvement by father employment status are less distinctive than other parental characteristics, suggesting that unemployment for some fathers may be temporary and generally unrelated to involvement with their child.

Figure 54: Father Involvement by Employment Status at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

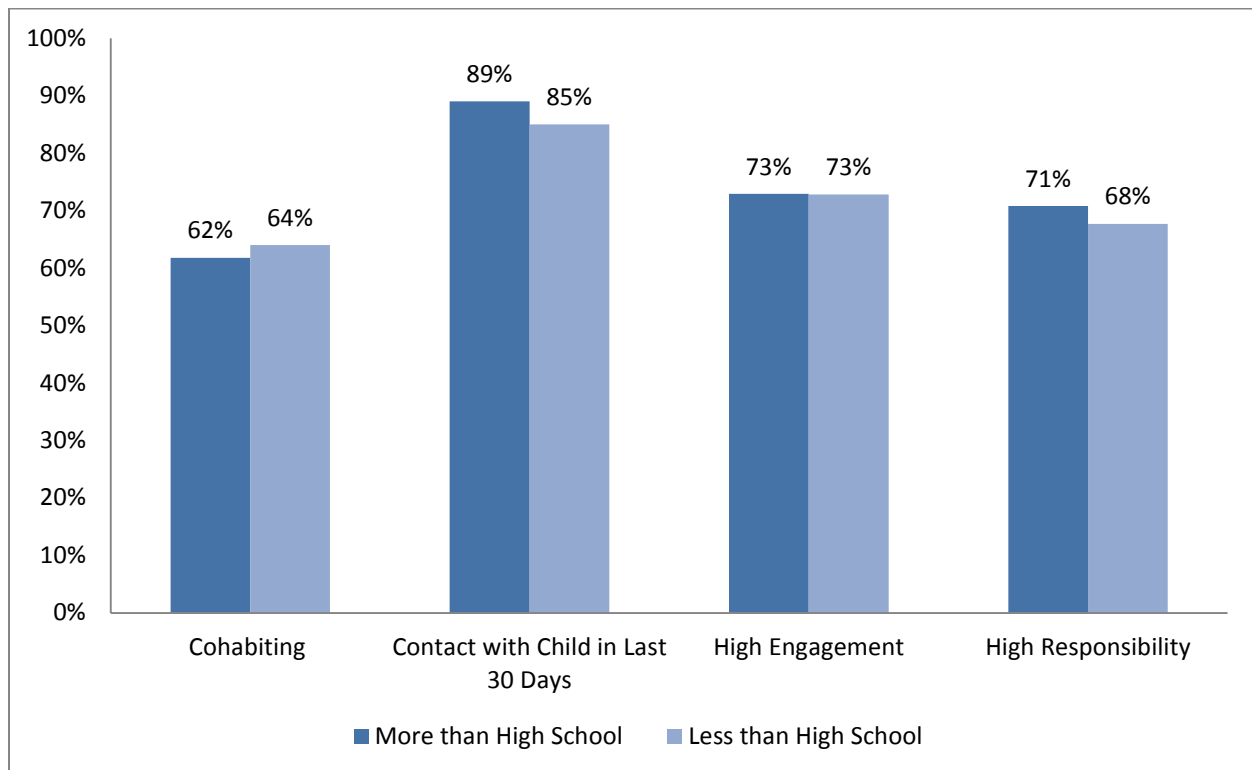
Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

EDUCATION

A father's education level appears only weakly associated with his involvement in the life of his child. Fathers with less than a high school degree, for example, are slightly less likely to desire high levels of involvement in raising the child than their more educated counterparts (not shown). Fathers with limited education are also more likely to have had little or no contact with the child in the last 30 days, but the difference is not statistically significant. Interestingly, however, less educated fathers are also more likely to live with the mother suggesting that fathers with less than a high school degree may possess substantial variation in their levels of involvement [Figure 55].

On the topic of father engagement, father education level appears to play no role; fathers with less than a high school diploma are just as engaged as fathers with a high school diploma or higher. Fathers with more education do appear to score marginally higher on measures of father responsibility; however the difference is not statistically significant.

Figure 55: Father Involvement by Education at 3 Months

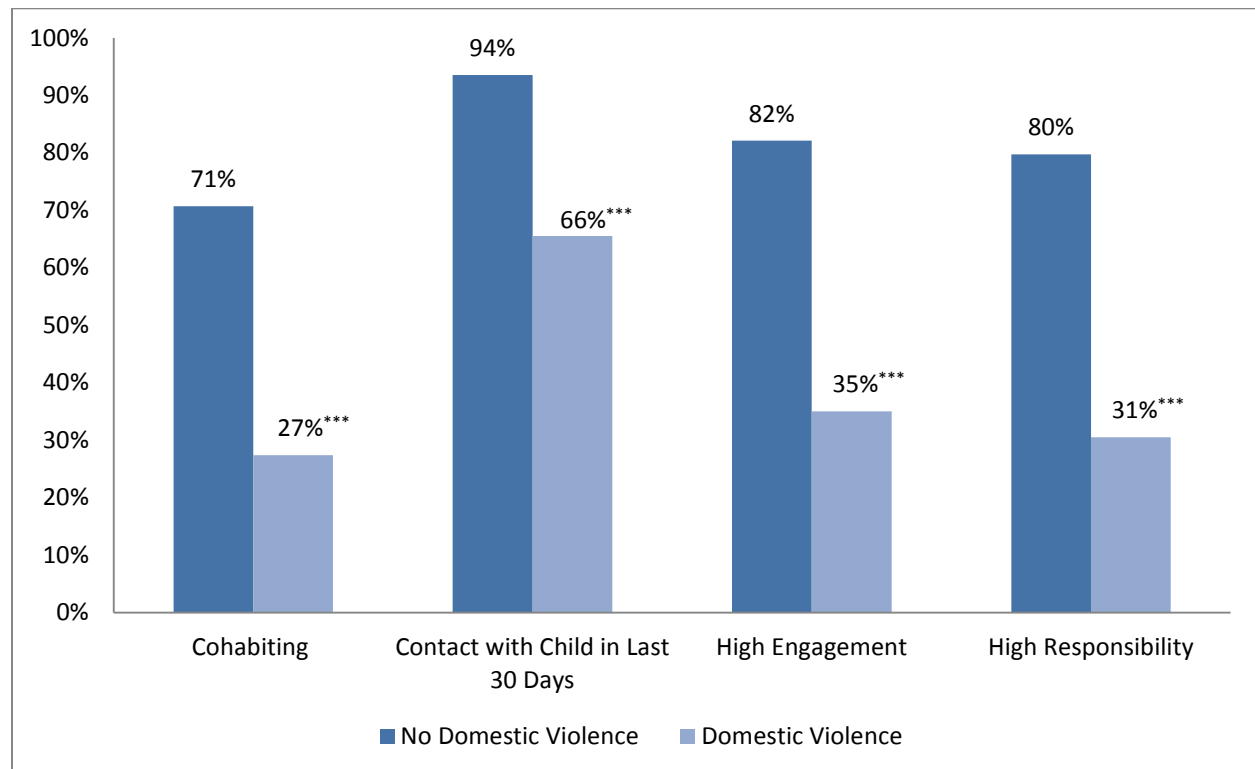


Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Among the possible risks to positive parenting, paternal history of physical or emotional abuse ranks among the more significant obstacles to involved fathering. Mothers who report that the father is abusive or threatening also indicate that these fathers are less than half as likely to desire complete involvement with the child as their non-abusive counterparts (not shown). When compared to fathers without a history of abuse, abusive fathers are also nearly 6 times as likely not to want to be involved at all (not shown).

Figure 56: Father Involvement by Domestic Violence at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

As shown in Figure 56, fathers with a history of domestic violence are also far less inclined to be accessible to the child. Abusive fathers are less than half as likely to live with the mother and significantly less likely to have had contact with the child in the last month. Overall, 1 in 3 fathers with a history of domestic violence had not seen the child at all in the last 30 days. From a policy perspective, it is equally important to note that the inverse is also true – roughly two-thirds of abusive fathers have had contact with their children over the last month.

As might be expected, abusive behavior also shows strong negative associations with father engagement and responsibility [Figure 56]. More than 8 in 10 non-abusive fathers exhibit the characteristics of high engagement compared with less than 4 in 10 abusive fathers. Abusive fathers are substantially less likely to undertake childrearing responsibilities as well; only 3 in 10 fathers with a history of physically or emotionally abusive behavior are highly responsible, compared with 8 in 10 fathers without these characteristics.

Father Involvement Three Years After Birth

In a separate survey, CFRP contacted a different sample of Texas mothers who had given birth outside of marriage during the summer of 2009. Importantly, this sample contained only those cases in which the father had signed the AOP form in the hospital at the time of the child's birth. At the time of the survey (CAS Study), these mothers had children who had reached the age of three.

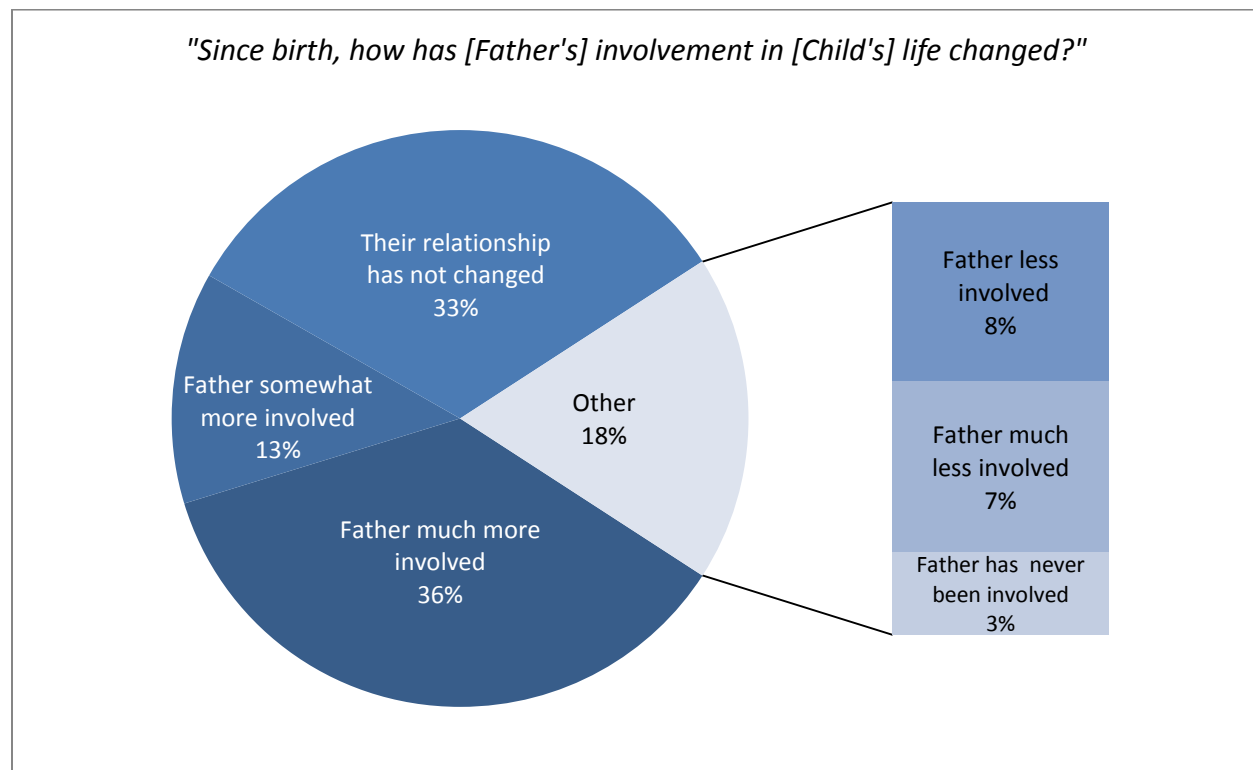
This section explores several dimensions of father involvement within this population. The survey results permit insight into how father involvement may have evolved over time. Because this population is categorically different from the population used to draw earlier inferences regarding father involvement, we urge caution in conceptualizing the two samples as equivalents. Nonetheless, the two surveys do lend themselves to comparison where characteristically similar groups can be identified and examined in contrast.

FATHER INVOLVEMENT OVER TIME

The conventional wisdom holds that, on average, father involvement declines among nonresident fathers during the years following a nonmarital birth.¹⁶⁴ A handful of studies detail this erosion in father-child interaction, yet the pattern proves far from homogenous.¹⁶⁵ In fact, recent data from the Fragile Families Study suggest that most fathers maintain existing levels of involvement during the first few years after birth, whereas roughly equal proportions of fathers increase and decrease involvement throughout the same period.¹⁶⁶

Survey data collected by CFRP from Texas mothers three years after a nonmarital birth paint a rather optimistic picture of father involvement over time. Figure 57 shows that in nonmarital births in which the father signed an AOP, the vast majority of mothers report that father involvement has either increased or remained the same (82%). In fact, mothers are more likely to indicate that the father has become much more involved over time (36%) than any other response option. In contrast, less than 1 in 5 mothers report that the father has either decreased involvement or never been involved to begin with.

Figure 57: Change in Father Involvement at 3 Years



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

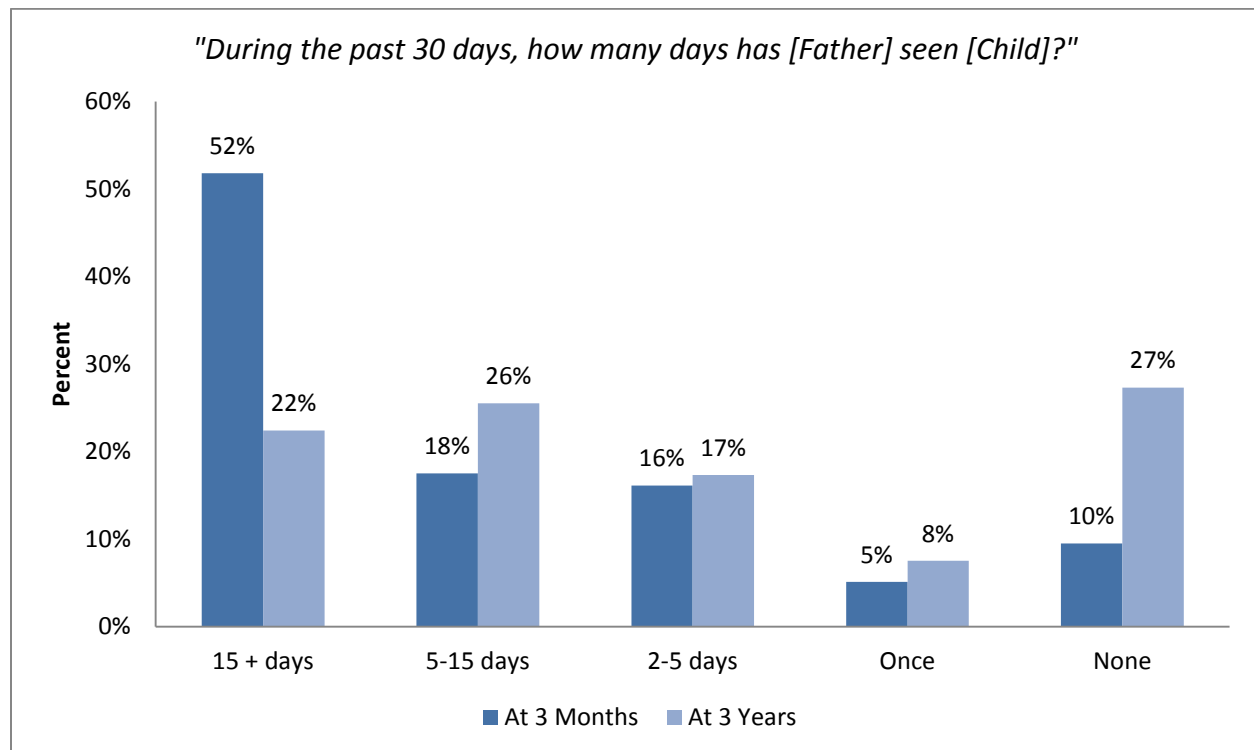
FATHER ACCESSIBILITY AT THREE YEARS

Turning to more specific measures of involvement, however, reveals a slightly more nuanced picture. Among fathers who signed an AOP, nearly 60 percent live with the mother three years later (not shown). These fathers maintain high levels of contact with the child. Among fathers who are not cohabiting with the mother, roughly half have seen the child five days or more in the last month. More than a quarter however, have not seen the child at all in the last 30 days.

To better understand how these numbers stack up against fathers of newborns, we restrict the sample of mothers surveyed three months after birth (PES Study) to cases with nonresident, AOP-signing fathers only. This permits us to examine a characteristically similar group of fathers at three months and three years and approximate a comparison of accessibility.

Figure 58 demonstrates the dramatic difference in father accessibility between fathers with 3-month-olds and fathers with 3-year-olds. Among nonresident, AOP-signing fathers with newborns, half have seen the child more than 15 days out of the last 30, compared with just 22 percent of similar fathers with 3-year-olds. Fathers with toddlers are also nearly 3 times as likely *not* to have seen the child at all in the last 30 days. Although drawn from separate samples, the two snapshots imply a precipitous decline in nonresident father contact over the first several years of a child's life.

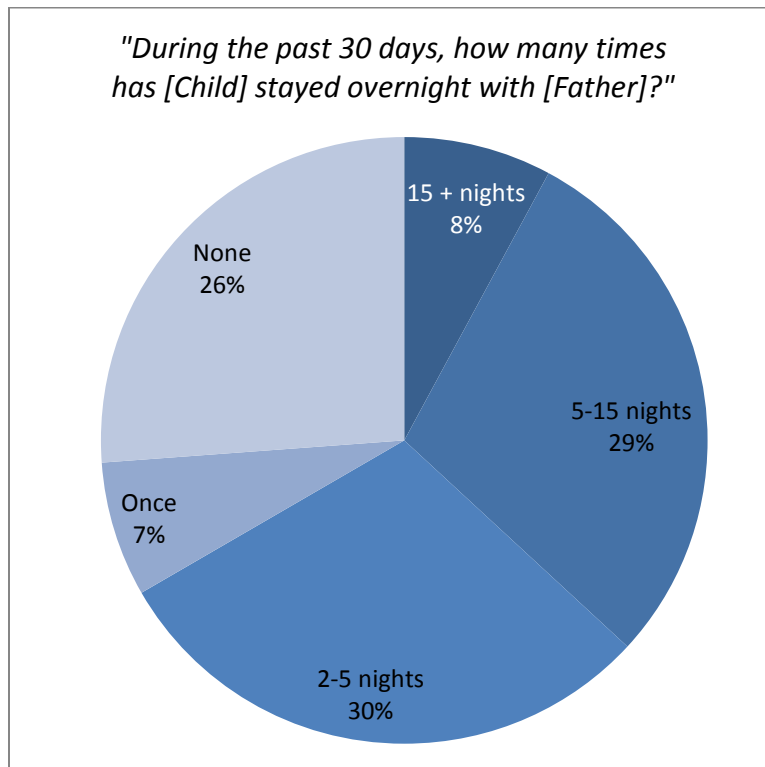
Figure 58: Father Accessibility at 3 Months and 3 Years, Nonresident AOP Signers



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted. AOP Signers, Nonresident Only / CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted. Nonresident only.

Three years after birth, many children who do not live with their father have also begun to stay overnight with him. Figure 59 shows that among children who had seen their nonresident father at least once in the past month, most stayed the night with him between 2 and 15 nights. Though a few stay the night more than 15 times per month, many more stay the night once or not at all. In fact, more than a quarter of 3-year-olds had not stayed overnight with their nonresident father at all in the last 30 days.

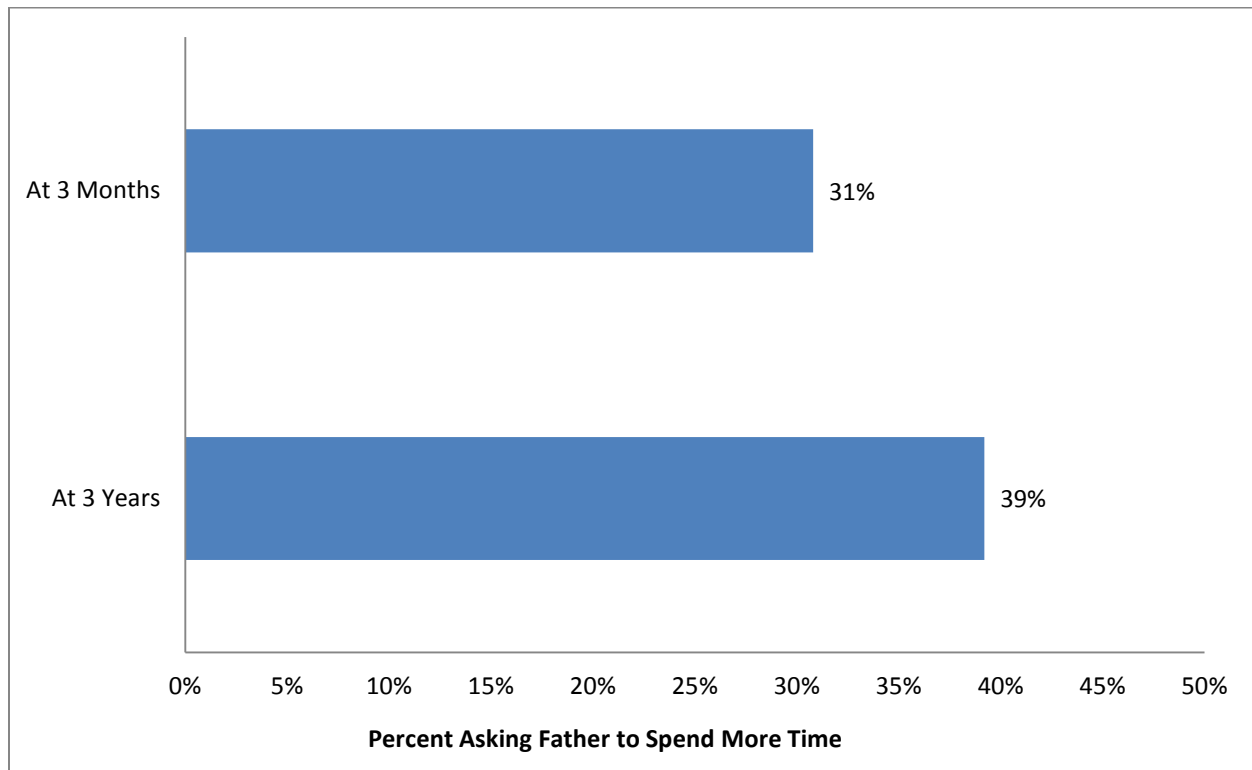
Figure 59: Overnight Father Accessibility at 3 Years, Nonresident AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted. Nonresident Fathers who had seen the Child at least once in the past month.

Mothers in both samples also report whether they have ever asked the father to spend more time with the child [Figure 60]. Among AOP-signing fathers with a newborn, 31 percent were asked to spend more time with the child. By comparison, 39 percent of AOP-signing fathers with a 3-year-old were asked to spend more time with the child. The slight but noticeable bump in mothers' appeal for additional father-child contact implies a decline in the participation of AOP-signing fathers during the first several years of a child's life.

Figure 60: Mothers' Request for Father Accessibility at 3 Months and 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted. AOP Signers only/ CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted.

FATHER RESPONSIBILITY AT THREE YEARS

Mothers surveyed three years after the child's birth (CAS Study) still give fathers a generally favorable review with regards to childrearing responsibilities. Roughly 6 in 10 mothers say the father always or often looks after the child when they need to do things; more than 8 in 10 report that they can rely on the father to spend time with the child when he says he will, and another 8 in 10 say the father can be trusted to take care of the child for one week if the mother has to leave [Table 11].

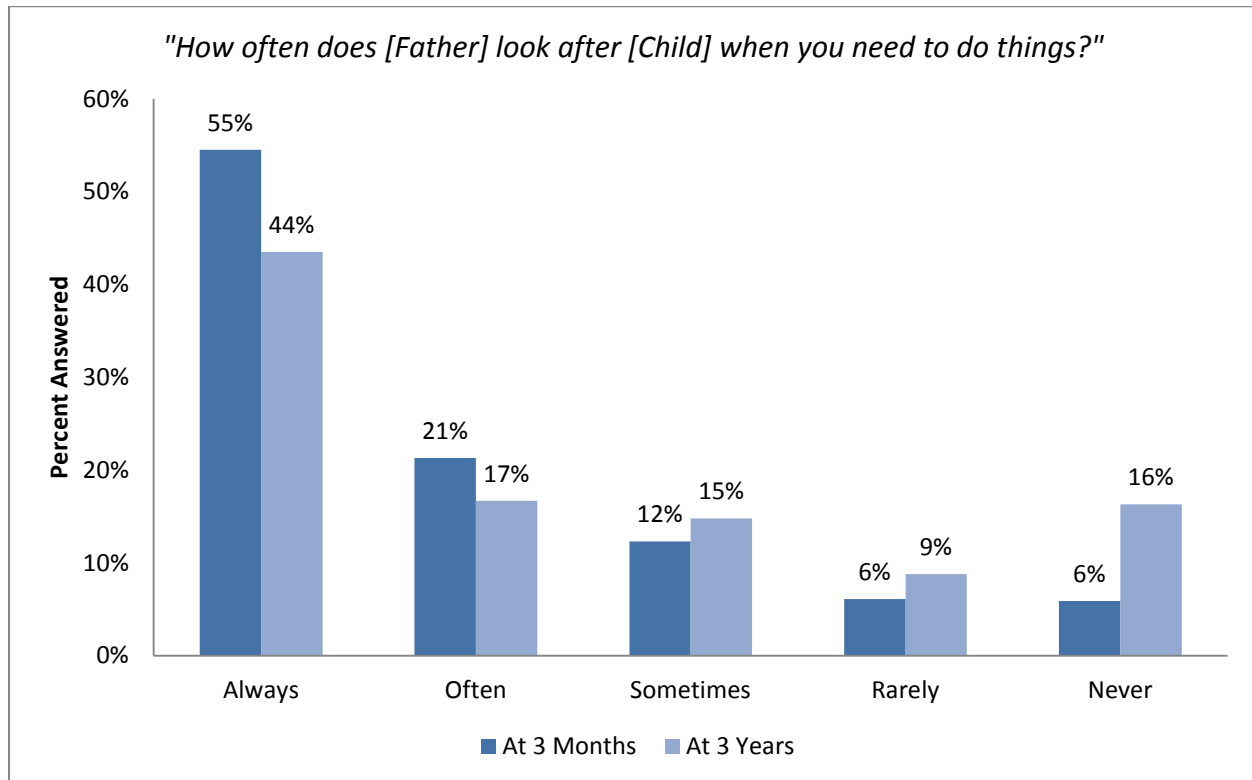
Table 11: Father Responsibility Measures at 3 Years

Responsibility Measures	
<i>"How often does [Father] look after [Child] when you need to do things?"</i>	
Always	44%
Often	17%
Sometimes	15%
Rarely	9%
Never	16%
<i>"You can rely on [Father] to spend time with [Child] when he says he will."</i>	
Strongly Agree	69%
Somewhat Agree	15%
Somewhat Disagree	6%
Strongly Disagree	11%
<i>"You could trust [Father] to take care of [Child] if you had to go away for one week."</i>	
Strongly Agree	68%
Somewhat Agree	14%
Somewhat Disagree	5%
Strongly Disagree	14%

Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted.

When comparing similar groups of parents at three months and three years, the results imply a modest reduction in fathers' propensity to help out with childcare [Figure 61]. Among AOP-signing fathers with newborns, 76 percent always or often help with looking after the child. Only 61 percent of fathers with 3-year-olds help similarly; moreover, these fathers are nearly 3 times as likely to never help to look after the child. Overall, the numbers indicate a pattern of declining father involvement similar to the moderate declines seen in measures of father accessibility.

Figure 61: Father Responsibility at 3 Months and 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted. AOP Signers only / CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

Group Differences by Father Involvement at Three Years

When disaggregated by relationship indicators, incidence of child support, multipartner fertility, and threats to father involvement, the scene at three years reiterates the salience of several key factors in shaping father involvement. Table 12 shows the underlying characteristics of AOP-signing fathers with high and low involvement three years after a nonmarital birth.

Consistent with previous discussions, fathers with low accessibility and low responsibility are significantly more likely to be non-romantic with the mother, have a child support order (or expectations of one), and share children with multiple partners. Uninvolved fathers are also disproportionately characterized by a history of incarceration, domestic violence, and substance abuse.

Fathers with a history of employment instability are significantly overrepresented among the low responsibility and low accessibility groups. Interestingly, fathers with physical or mental health problems limiting their ability to work are significantly more prevalent in the high accessibility group but distribute equally on measures of responsibility. The high accessibility among fathers with health problems may be indicative of a disability or other injury that permits them to stay at home and have increased contact with their children. A father's race is not significantly associated with any involvement outcomes.

Table 12: Group Differences by Father Involvement at 3 Years

Group Differences by Father Involvement (Percent)						
	High Accessibility	Low Accessibility	Sig.	High Responsibility	Low Responsibility	Sig.
<i>N (Unweighted)</i>	330	199		325	204	
<i>Weighted Proportion</i>	78%	22%		78%	22%	
<i>Parental Factors</i>						
Non-Romantic Relationship	16%	96%	***	17%	92%	***
Child Support Order/ Expectations	18%	72%	***	17%	76%	***
<i>Multipartner Fertility</i>						
MPF Father	25%	47%	***	24%	52%	***
MPF Mother	27%	32%		28%	30%	
<i>Threats to Involvement</i>						
Ever Incarcerated	29%	47%	***	29%	49%	***
Employment Instability	23%	35%	**	23%	34%	**
Less than High School	28%	37%	*	29%	34%	
Health Problems Limiting work	6%	2%	**	5%	6%	
Substance Abuse	6%	39%	***	5%	40%	***
Domestic Violence	16%	42%	***	14%	46%	***
<i>Father's Race/Ethnicity</i>						
Hispanic/Latino	55%	49%		55%	49%	
African American	14%	21%		15%	20%	
White, Non-Hispanic	27%	26%		26%	29%	

Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

Note: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Ns in this table do not align with weighted proportions due to population weighting.

Definitions for terms in this table can be found in Appendix D: Glossary of Terms

Characteristics Associated with Father Involvement at Three Years

The characteristics associated with declining father involvement three years after birth iterate the same patterns observed throughout this report. With some regularity, the story of reduced paternal involvement seems to be typified by an undercurrent of threats that gradually penetrate the father-child connection and drive it apart.

This section adopts two new approaches that help further our understanding of the dynamics between these characteristics and paternal participation over time. First, we examine whether fathers with certain characteristics are actually more likely than fathers without these characteristics to exhibit diminished involvement from three months after birth to three years after birth. Second, we develop a statistical model to determine which of the characteristics may matter most when it comes to father involvement.

CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH FATHER ACCESSIBILITY OVER TIME

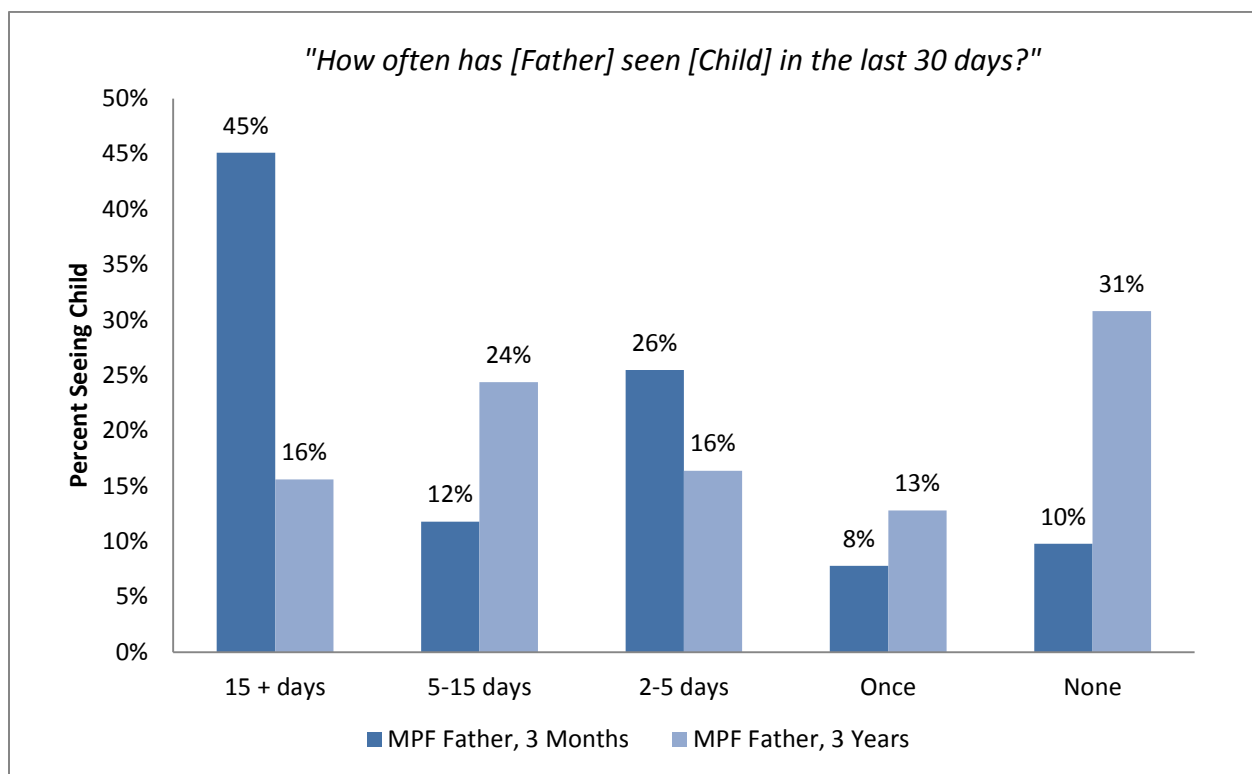
The following discussion relies on restricted samples from two separate surveys to investigate how various characteristics appear to impact the involvement of similar fathers over time. Though previous sections of this chapter established the occurrence of a general decline in father involvement over the first several years of a child's life—especially among nonresident fathers [Figure 58]—that decline is decidedly more pronounced among fathers with various risk factors. Figure 62 to Figure 66 demonstrate this pattern among similar samples of fathers with particular characteristics in an effort to tease out the link between those characteristics and diminished involvement over time; for comparison to changes in the broader sample of nonresident fathers, please refer to Figure 58.

Multipartner Fertility

Among nonresident, AOP-signing fathers who have children with other partners, there is a noticeable drop in father-child contact from three months to three years after birth [Figure 62]. Whereas nearly half of these fathers see their child frequently three months after birth, only 16 percent of similar fathers see their child with equal frequency at three years.

Moreover, many of these fathers seem to have disappeared from their child's life completely by year three. One in ten fathers with multipartner fertility have not seen their newborn at all in the last month; by contrast, more than 3 in 10 similar fathers have not seen their 3-year-old during this time. Even with this decline in father-child contact, however, it should be noted that 4 in 10 nonresident fathers with multipartner fertility are still seeing their child regularly (5+ days per month).

Figure 62: Father Accessibility by Father Multipartner Fertility at 3 Months and 3 Years, Nonresident AOP Signers

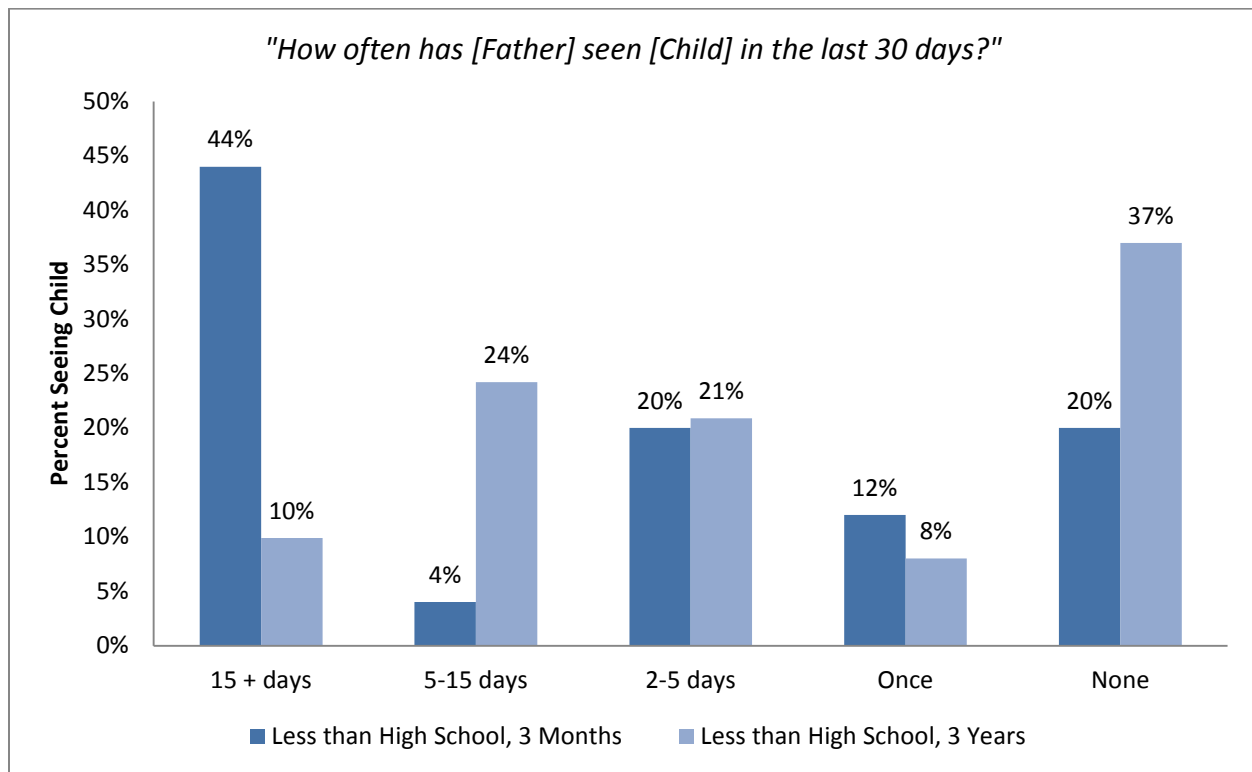


Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted. Nonresident AOP Signers only / CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted. Nonresident only.

Education

A similar pattern emerges among fathers with low education. For nonresident, AOP signers with less than a high school diploma, the shift from frequent to minimal father-child contact is dramatic. Figure 63 reveals that nearly half of these fathers see their newborn more than 15 days per month. Three years later, however, only 10 percent of similar fathers see their child with the same frequency. The portion of less-educated fathers who have not seen their child at all in the last month surges from 2 in 10 among fathers of newborns to nearly 4 to 10 among fathers of toddlers.

Figure 63: Father Accessibility by Education at 3 Months and 3 Years, Nonresident AOP Signers

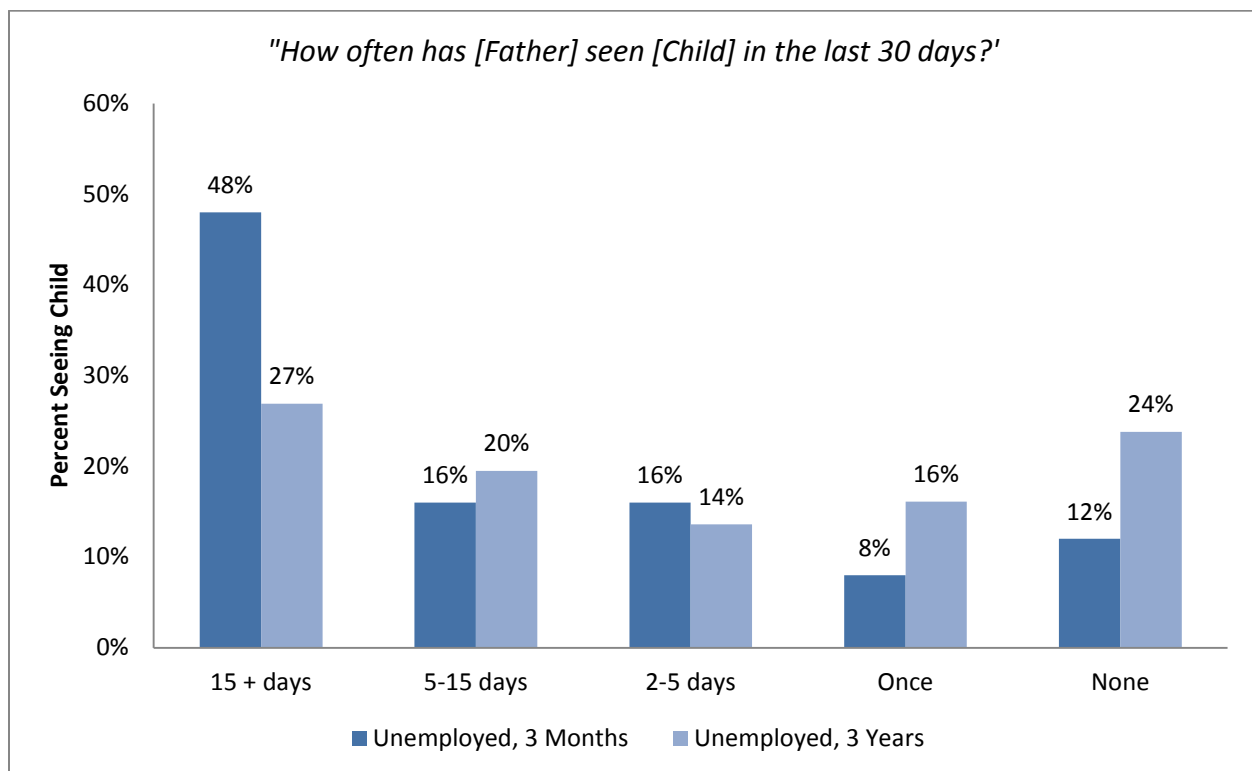


Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted. Nonresident AOP Signers only / CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted. Nonresident only.

Employment Status

Employment problems are suggestive of potential backsliding in father-child contact as well. Among nonresident AOP signers who are unemployed, the percentage who see their child more than 15 days per month falls by nearly half from fathers of newborns to those of 3-year-olds [Figure 64]. Offsetting this decline in frequent contact is an implied rise in the portion of unemployed fathers who have little or no contact with their children. From shortly after birth to the time a child reaches the age of three, nonresident fathers without current employment become twice as likely to have no contact with their child in the last month.

Figure 64: Father Accessibility by Unemployment at 3 Months and 3 Years, Nonresident AOP Signers



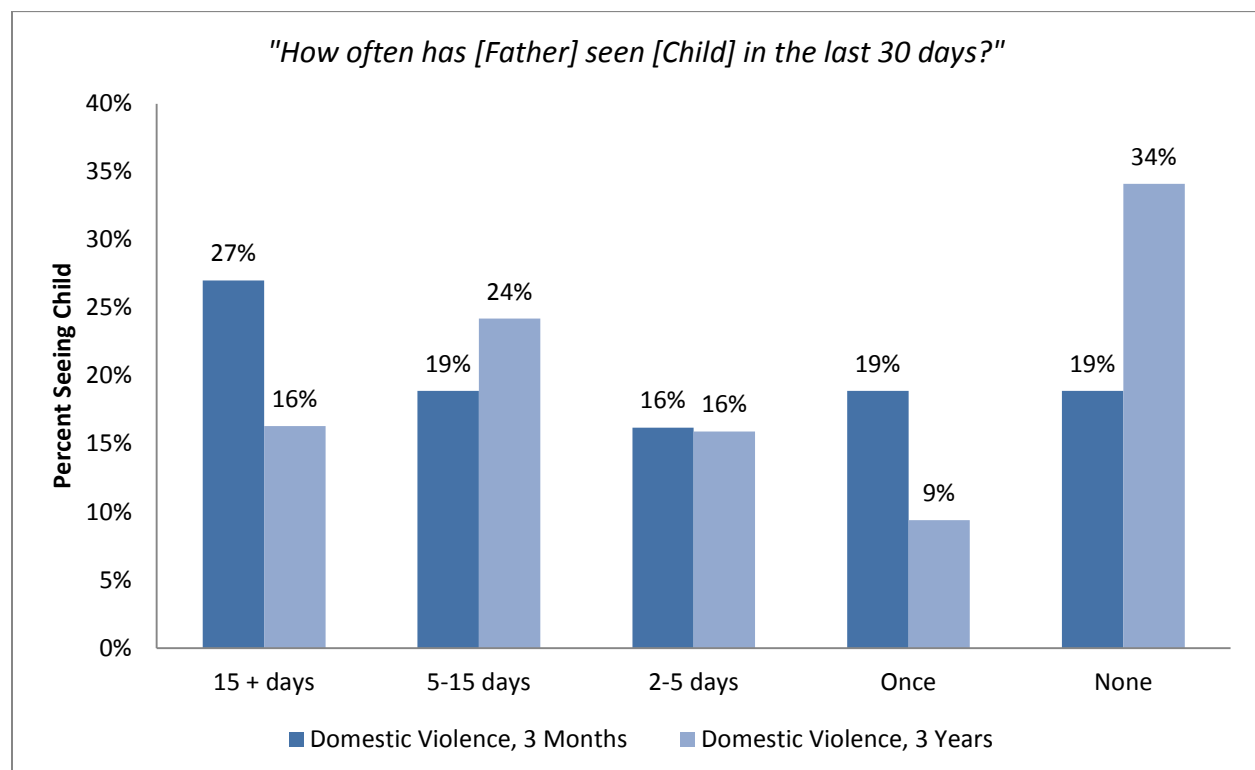
Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted. Nonresident AOP Signers only / CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted. Nonresident only.

Domestic Violence

Consistent with patterns seen elsewhere, domestic violence appears to play a potent role in the erosion of father involvement over time. Figure 65 suggests that nonresident, AOP signers with a history of abusive behavior experience a marked decline in the frequency of father-child contact over the first three years of their child's life. Interestingly, however, fathers with a history of domestic violence are far more likely to have only moderate or weak contact with their children from the beginning, making the apparent shift to lower levels of involvement somewhat less pronounced.

For example, the percentage of abusive fathers who see their newborn more than 5 days per month (46%) is not substantially different from the percentage of abusive fathers who see their 3-year-old with similar regularity (40%). In fact, most fathers with a history of domestic violence embark on the act of fathering with attenuated involvement almost immediately. The true shift in father involvement seems to take place within the lower levels of father-child contact, in which many abusive fathers transition from seeing their child infrequently to not at all.

Figure 65: Father Accessibility by Domestic Violence at 3 Months and 3 Years, Nonresident AOP Signers



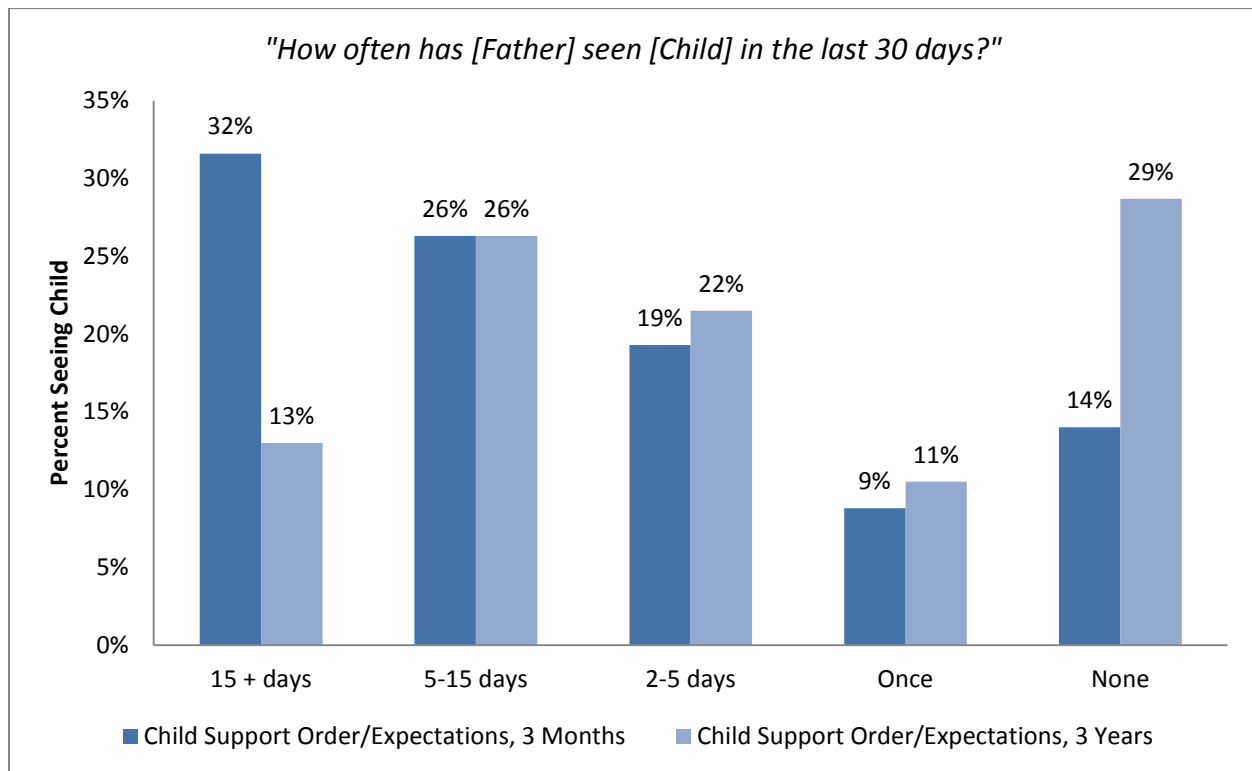
Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted. Nonresident AOP Signers only / CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted. Nonresident only.

Child Support Order/Expectations

Distinct from other associations presented in this section, child support is more likely to be an outgrowth of low involvement than it is to be a driver of waning father-child contact. In fact, prior research suggests that formal child support may actually increase the likelihood of future father-child contact.¹⁶⁷ The distributions presented in Figure 66 below reiterate the tendency of mothers associated with uninvolved fathers to turn to child support as a means of restoring a father's contributions to his child.

Figure 66 plots the difference in father-child contact between nonresident AOP-signing fathers with newborns and those with 3-year-olds in cases where the mother has opened, or is considering opening, a child support case. In the first three years after the birth of their child, there is a marked decline in the involvement of these fathers, suggesting that diminished involvement may be partly responsible for prompting the move to formal support. The proportion who see their child frequently falls from 32 percent to 13 percent, whereas the fraction who have not seen their child at all in the last month show the same trend in reverse, rising from 14 percent to 29 percent over the first three years.

Figure 66: Father Accessibility by Child Support Order/Expectations at 3 Months and 3 Years, Nonresident AOP Signers



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted. Nonresident, AOP Signers only / CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted. Nonresident only.

Compared to nonresident, AOP-signing fathers at large [Figure 58], those facing a child support order are less likely to be seeing their child at both three months *and* three years. There is some suggestion, however, that fathers facing a child support order at three years are more similar to their nonresident, AOP-signing counterparts who are not facing a child support order at three years. That is, the gap in father-child contact appears larger between fathers facing child support and those not facing child support when the child is only 3-months-old. That gap, though still present at three years, appears to have narrowed somewhat, suggesting that child support may be bolstering the involvement of some nonresident, AOP-signing fathers.

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH FATHER INVOLVEMENT

To determine which factors are most associated with diminished father-child contact three years after an AOP is signed, CFRP calculated the relative importance of each characteristic when considered alongside one another. Put simply, this final section seeks to understand which characteristics matter most when it comes to father involvement. Given that father-child contact is likely to be high among parents who cohabit, the analyses in this section are restricted to nonresident, AOP-signing fathers only.

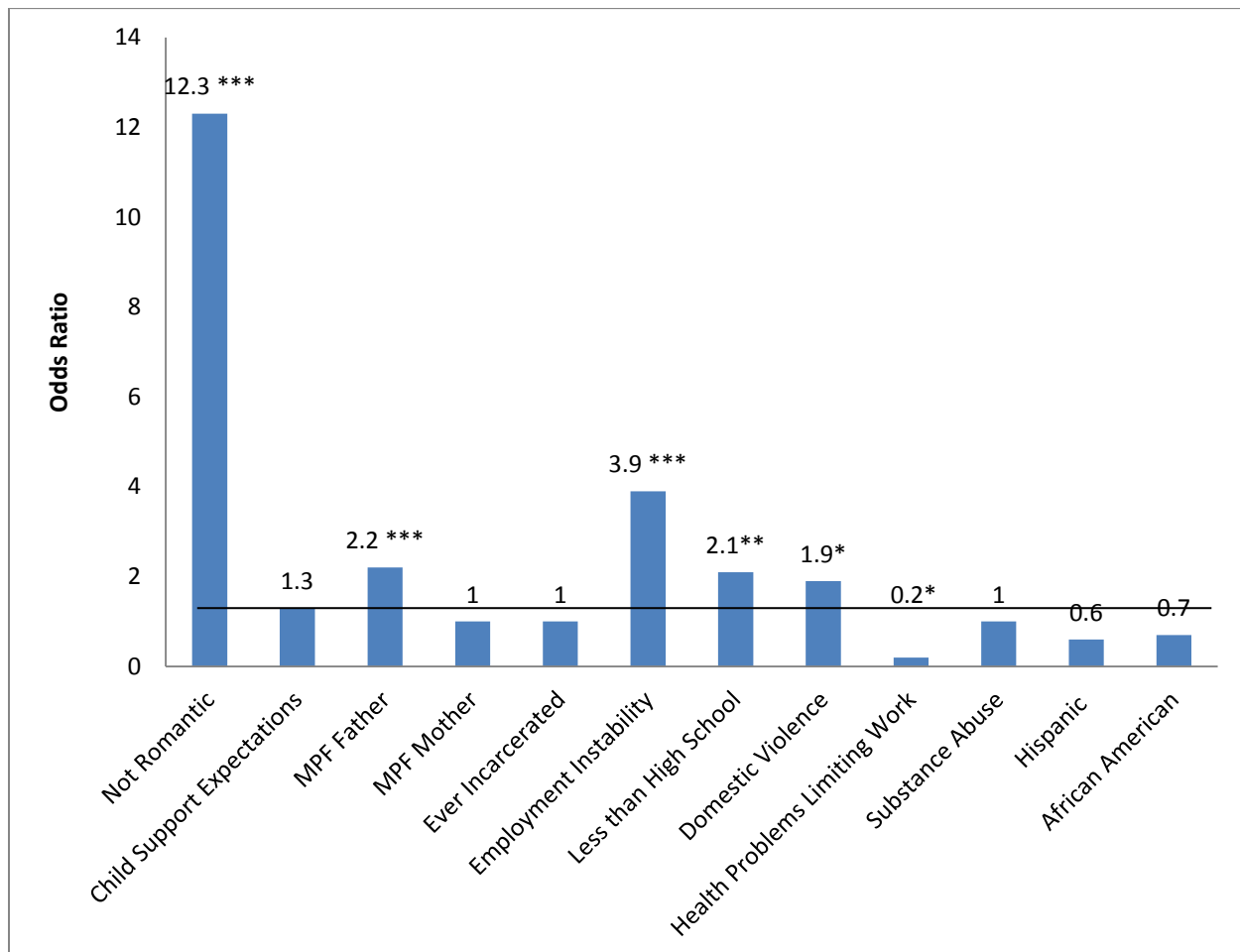
Figure 67 plots the odds that a father with each given characteristic will have low accessibility to his child at age three, controlling for all other factors associated with father involvement.^u An odds ratio of 1 signifies equal odds of having low accessibility; odds ratios higher than 1 reflect an increased odds of having low accessibility, whereas odds ratios lower than 1 reflect a decreased odds of having low accessibility, all else equal.^v

Previous sections of this report established that fathers who cohabit with the mother tend to have frequent contact with their children. These fathers are also likely to be romantically involved with the mother. Yet even when fathers do not live with the child's mother, the parents' romantic relationship is the factor most associated with father-child contact. Holding all other factors constant, nonresident fathers who are not romantic with the mother are more than 12 times as likely to have had little or no contact with their 3-year-old in the last month. The importance of the parental relationship to father involvement cannot be overstated; more than any other factor, it is primarily a father's relationship with the mother that determines his relationship with the child.

^u Low Accessibility is defined here as seeing the child once or not at all in the last 30 days.

^v Magnitudes in the graph reflect the relative importance of each characteristic holding all other characteristics constant. This method "controls" for the influence of other characteristics in the graph, allowing researchers to isolate relative magnitudes of specific characteristics.

Figure 67: How Various Characteristics Affect the Odds of Low Accessibility at 3 Years, Nonresident AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted logit model.

Note: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

Definitions for terms in this graph can be found in Appendix D: Glossary of Terms

Beyond the parental relationship, however, several other factors emerge as significantly associated with low father-child contact when the child is three years old. Among nonresident fathers who signed the AOP, a history of employment instability, paternal multipartner fertility, low education, and domestic violence appear highly associated with reduced father involvement. Fathers who have trouble maintaining steady employment are almost 4 times as likely as other fathers to have had minimal contact with their 3-year-old in the last month. Fathers who have children with other partners are also tightly linked to low father involvement; controlling for all other factors, MPF fathers are more than twice as likely as fathers without this trait to have had little or no contact with their child. Fathers with less than a high school education or a history of domestic violence were roughly twice as likely as other fathers to have had minimal contact with their child over the last month, all else equal.

Other threats to father involvement considered in previous sections of this chapter appear somewhat subdued alongside the importance of the parental relationship, employment instability, paternal multipartner fertility, low education, and domestic violence. Though a mother's expectations of child support do appear to have some association with father-child contact, the link does not emerge as statistically significant when controlling for other paternal characteristics, suggesting that low involvement is primarily explained by factors outside of a mothers' desire for child support.

Interestingly, incarceration, substance abuse, and maternal multipartner fertility do not surface as telling indicators of father-child contact among nonresident, AOP signers with 3-year-olds when other factors are considered. Instead, a father's presence in the life of his child seems to depend mostly on his bond with the mother, his ability to secure steady employment, his education, the existence of domestic violence, and whether or not he has children with other partners.

Conclusion

In broad terms, father involvement has been increasing for decades.¹⁶⁸ A 2013 report from Pew shows that since 1965, fathers have nearly tripled the time they spend with their children.¹⁶⁹ The general rise in paternal involvement has been accompanied by an evolving notion of fatherhood as the old conceptions of father as "distant breadwinner" or male "role model" have given way to a more holistic rendering of father as "equal co-parent."¹⁷⁰ At the same time, researchers have taken a growing interest in documenting and understanding the paternal role – especially as it applies to unmarried fathers. In this chapter, we examined the ways in which unmarried fathers are involved in the lives of their children.

Shortly after a nonmarital birth, most Texas fathers are involved. Roughly 7 out of 10 see their children regularly, participate in shared activities, and help out with basic childrearing duties. These fathers want to play a role in the lives of their children and for the most part are following through. Very soon after birth, however, another 3 in 10 fathers are quickly vanishing from the lives of their children. These fathers are disproportionately found in non-romantic relationships with the mother. They are more likely to have children with other partners, or be with mothers who have children by multiple fathers. They are also disproportionately unemployed, abusive, and entangled with the criminal justice system. These are the fathers who overwhelmingly declined to establish paternity, and who are with mothers already considering entry into the formal child support system.

In the second half of this chapter, we looked forward three years to examine the involvement of a separate group of fathers and their toddlers. In cases where the father signed an AOP, the vast majority of mothers contend that the father's participation has remained stable or even flourished over time. In general, the underlying numbers tend to agree with this view. Roughly 3 out of 4 AOP signers are accessible and responsible three years out. Though high, these numbers fall behind involvement measures for similar fathers with 3-month-olds, suggesting a nontrivial decline in the involvement of some fathers over time.

What is more, for those who have strayed, there is evidence to suggest that a similar combination of forces may have led them astray. Uninvolved fathers are exceedingly distinguished by non-romantic relationships with the mother and a tendency toward paternal multipartner fertility. They have a history of domestic violence, substance abuse, and incarceration.

Moreover, the mothers associated with these fathers have overwhelmingly looked to child support as a means of restoring wayward fathers to the commitment of shared parenthood. Indeed, as the involvement of these fathers gradually dissolves, their economic support becomes increasingly important to the wellbeing of the mother and child. In the next chapter, we turn to examining the topic of support more fully. Chapter 5 sets out to understand not only how fathers support their children, but what each type of support implies and how it changes over time.

CHAPTER 5: FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Background and Motivation

The previous chapter of this report examined the breadth and depth of the father-child bond, detailing the various ways in which fathers are involved in the lives of their children and how that involvement is likely to change over time. Though the emotional participation of fathers carries significant implications for child wellbeing, these emotional investments are just one way unmarried fathers can support their children—equally important is the financial support a father provides.

For some children, financial support from their fathers is the difference between living above or below the poverty line. Even when paternal support does not lift a family out of poverty, it is still likely to close that family's "poverty gap"—i.e. reduce the depth of poverty for that family.¹⁷¹ Research on the impact of formal child support shows that in 2008, nearly half a million children in the U.S. would have lived in deep poverty (below 50 percent of the federal poverty level) were it not for their child support income.¹⁷²

Indeed, for many poor families child support acts as a substantial source of income. On average, child support payments account for 40 percent of total income for poor families and 63 percent of total income for deeply poor families who receive it.¹⁷³ The benefits of this economic support are wide-ranging. A large body of research has linked child support payments to a host of positive child outcomes, including greater academic achievement, fewer behavioral problems, and reduced rates of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.¹⁷⁴

Financial support is closely related to other topics discussed throughout this report. Previous chapters demonstrated an enduring interconnectedness between AOP signing, the parental relationship, and father involvement that is echoed in analyses of financial support itself. Just as father involvement varies by AOP signing, so does the amount and type of support a father provides. Previous research demonstrates that fathers who voluntarily establish paternity are more likely to pay child support (despite being less likely to have a child support order), pay more over the long term, and tend to increase their payments over time.¹⁷⁵

Among young parents in the Fragile Families Study, research finds that cohabitation is a strong predictor of in-kind support.¹⁷⁶ Though these informal arrangements are likely to yield positive outcomes for the child, other research shows that they are highly dependent upon the state of the parental relationship. Following the dissolution of the parents' romantic relationship and/or cohabitation, fathers' willingness to informally provide financial support generally decreases over time.¹⁷⁷

Previous chapters also established that although a range of risk factors such as multipartner fertility, incarceration, domestic violence, and unemployment, are prevalent among unmarried parents at large, they are most prevalent among fathers who failed to sign an AOP, and soon

after, withdrew from the lives of their children. Many of these same risk factors are disproportionately prevalent in fathers who do not provide support.

Past studies, for example, show that fathers with multipartner fertility are likely to provide less informal support than fathers without this characteristic.¹⁷⁸ Imprisonment takes a significant toll on paternal support too. Incarceration leads to drastic declines in household incomes¹⁷⁹ and significantly interferes with parents' ability to establish informal agreements, thus limiting both formal and informal support.^{180,181} Finally, there is little doubt that unemployment and underemployment wield considerable influence on a father's ability to provide financial support; prior research has shown that lack of income is a significant barrier to child support payments for 16 to 33 percent of young noncustodial fathers.¹⁸²

Domestic violence deserves particular attention because of its complex association with in-hospital AOP signing, child support, future parental contact, and maternal economic independence. As previous research shows, more than 90 percent of women with current or former abusive partners would like to pursue child support if they can do so safely.¹⁸³ Given that paternity establishment is a precursor to opening a child support order, it is important to find methods that allow victims of domestic violence to establish paternity and open a child support order safely. Signing an AOP in the hospital may be the least preferred method of paternity establishment in instances of domestic violence.

A father's presence in the hospital at the time of birth does not necessarily mean his relationship with the mother is positive; mothers with abusive partners may lack the appropriate information, resources, or capacity to prevent a violent father from establishing paternity. Moreover, when a mother establishes paternity or opens a child support case, this has the potential to trigger violent behavior or give the abuser personal information that would put the mother and child in danger.¹⁸⁴

Although there are currently procedures in place to screen and flag cases in which domestic violence is present, not all instances can be successfully detected and the safety of the mother and child is not necessarily guaranteed. Moreover, low disclosure rates of domestic violence may occur when a mother is not comfortable with the person assessing her case, fears the involvement of child protective services, experiences paternal coercion, or other reasons. Given these limitations, it is important to bear in mind the potential for negative fallout from in-hospital paternity establishment, especially when assessing policies that seek to increase AOP signing rates. Chapter 6 provides an extended discussion of policy considerations around the intersection of domestic violence, child support, and in-hospital paternity establishment.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

This chapter provides an overview of how Texas fathers support their children in the years following a nonmarital birth. We begin with a presentation of the support arrangements most common to parents in different types of relationships at three months and three years. The chapter then looks at the expectations of support among unmarried mothers, and whether or not they evolve alongside changes to informal and formal support provision. We conclude with an examination and comparison of families relying on informal support arrangements and those relying on formal child support arrangements.

Throughout this chapter, the status of the parental relationship and a sweep of paternal risk factors help to frame the discussion of how fathers support their children. Indeed, the support arrangements of Texas families appear to be deeply influenced by these factors, with wide variance in arrangements between relationships and fathers with different characteristics.

CFRP data suggest that informal support arrangements are likely to give way to formal support arrangements when parental relationships dissolve, and that the risk of children receiving neither formal nor informal support rises considerably when parents are not romantically involved and/or did not sign the AOP.

Further, children both in and out of the formal child support system are more likely to receive *no* support when fathers engage in antisocial behaviors such as domestic violence, substance abuse, and criminal activities. From a policy perspective, it is important to note that these and other risk factors are considerably more prevalent among parents relying on formal support arrangements, underscoring the importance of the child support system as a safety net for Texas's most fragile families.

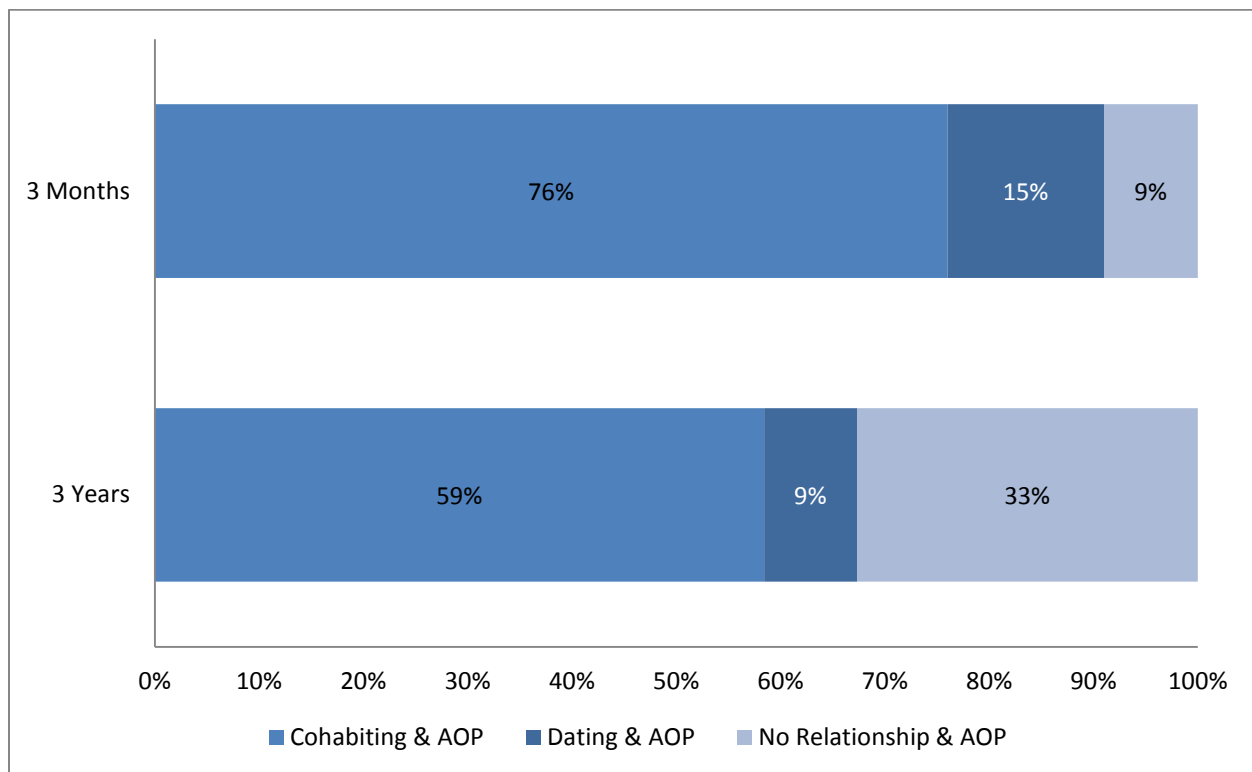
Support Arrangements

Fathers can provide financial support to their children in two ways: 1) formal support arrangements (i.e., child support orders) and 2) informal support arrangements, which may involve monetary and/or in-kind support. This section presents distributions of the ways in which Texas fathers support their children at three months and three years after a nonmarital birth. The distributions are parsed by parental relationship status to illustrate the association between the mother-father relationship and provision of financial support. In each of the figures presented, a clear pattern emerges. Cohabiting fathers are most likely to provide support through informal arrangements. Among non-cohabiting parents, those who are dating are more likely than those who have no relationship to rely on informal arrangements. Children of fathers who did not sign an AOP, however, appear to be at the greatest risk—the majority are receiving no financial support from their fathers at three months.

Figure 68 below shows the overall distribution of relationships among AOP-signing parents at three months and three years. In both periods, the vast majority of AOP-signing parents are cohabiting, with the remainder either dating or in no relationship. There is, however, a marked decline in the proportion of parents still cohabiting or romantically involved three years after birth—from 91 to 69 percent.

This decline, as shown throughout this chapter, parallels a similar decline in the proportion of families relying on informal arrangements. As families transition out of cohabiting relationships into no relationship, much of the slack in informal support is picked up by a corresponding increase in the proportion of families entering the formal child support system.

Figure 68: Relationship Type at 3 Months and 3 Years, AOP Signers



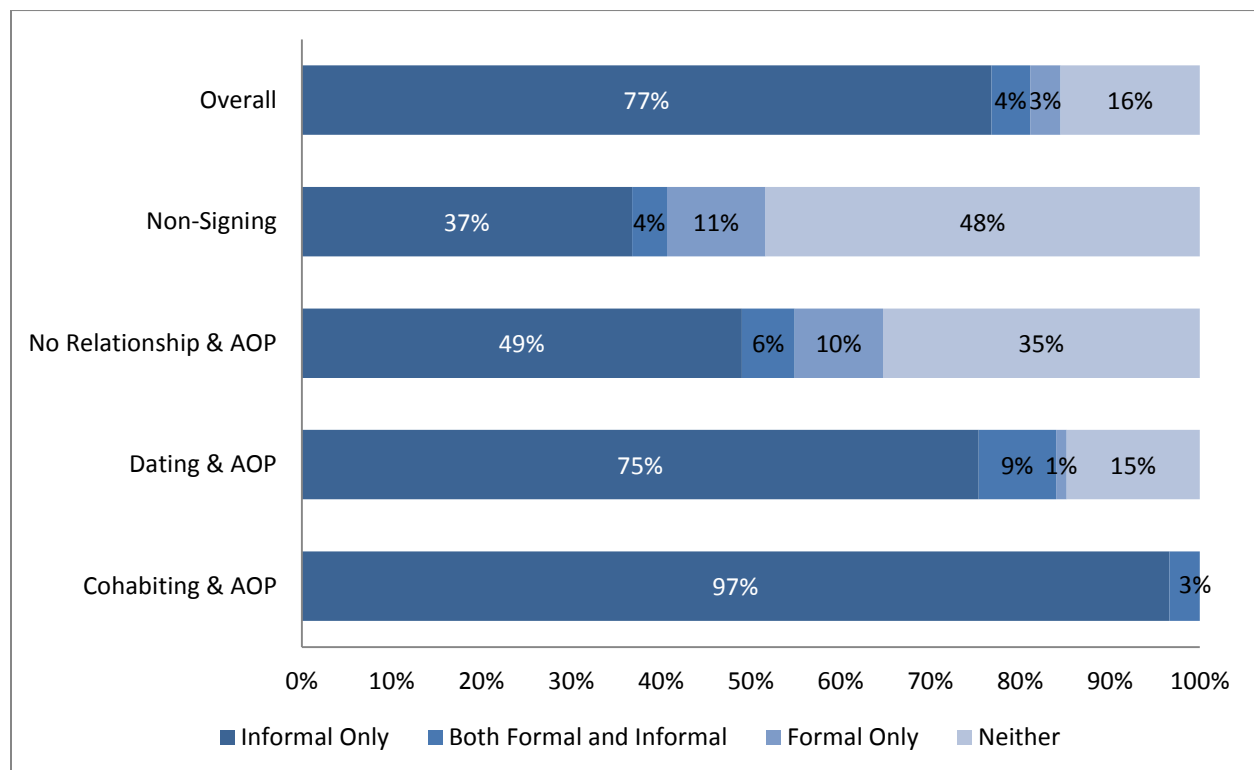
Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted: AOP Signers only. CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

OVERVIEW OF HOW TEXAS FATHERS PROVIDE SUPPORT

Three months after a nonmarital birth, more than three-quarters of Texas mothers receive support only through informal arrangements with the child's father [Figure 69]. Roughly 16 percent of mothers have neither formal nor informal arrangements (i.e., receive no support from the father), and a small portion of mothers receive support through either formal arrangements only or both formal and informal arrangements.

The distribution of support arrangements varies widely across parental relationships and whether or not parents signed the AOP, however. Figure 69 illustrates that the vast majority of cohabiting, AOP-signing fathers provide support only through informal arrangements; in comparison, approximately half of AOP-signing fathers who are not romantically involved with the child's mother three months after the child's birth provide support only through informal arrangements. The comparison to non-signers follows the same trend—less than 4 in 10 non-signing fathers provide support through informal arrangements alone, and nearly half provide no support at all just three months after birth.

Figure 69: Support Arrangements by Relationship Type at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Note: The "non-signing" category includes all respondents who did not sign, including those who were cohabiting or romantic.

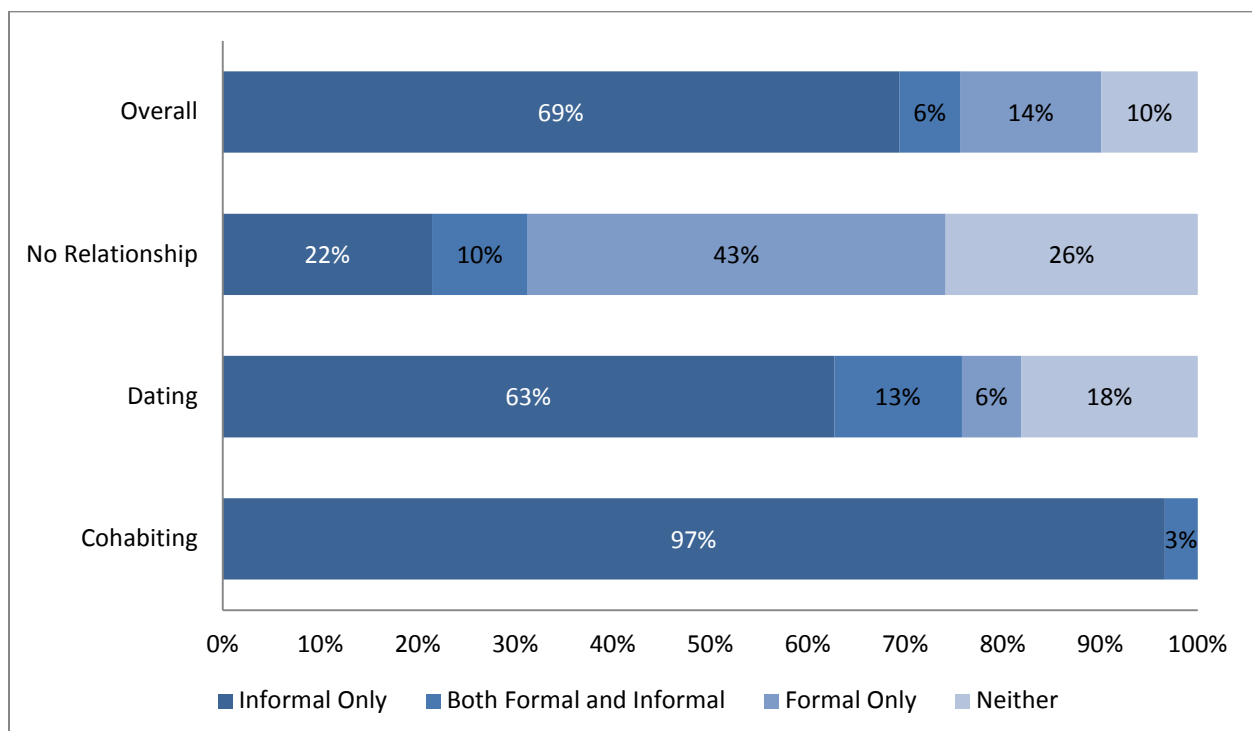
Note: Formal arrangements consist of mothers who have a formal child support order for the current child, or for a previous child with the same father.

Three years after a nonmarital birth, the support arrangements of AOP signers distribute similarly as they do at three months after a nonmarital birth. Figure 70 below shows that overall, 7 in 10 Texas families who signed the AOP rely on informal arrangements alone. An additional 6 percent rely on both informal and formal support, and 14 percent rely only on formal arrangements. Three years after an AOP is signed, 1 in 10 Texas families have neither a formal or informal support arrangement.

When compared to Texas families three months after birth [Figure 69], Figure 70 also illustrates how support arrangements may change over time. Among AOP signers who are not romantically involved, 10 percent have entered the child support system at three months whereas 43 percent have entered the child support system at three years. The surge in formal support arrangements among parents in this group is offset primarily by a reduction in two other types of arrangements—informal support and no support. Cohabiting couples, however, do not appear to change their support arrangements over time. At both three months and three years, nearly all Texas parents who live together rely solely on informal arrangements.

Even though the distribution of support arrangements within each relationship type remains fairly consistent over time, it is important to note that parents are also moving between relationship types over time. Fewer couples are cohabiting or dating three years after a nonmarital birth; a transition that is associated with a lower likelihood of informal support.

Figure 70: Support Arrangements by Relationship Type at 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

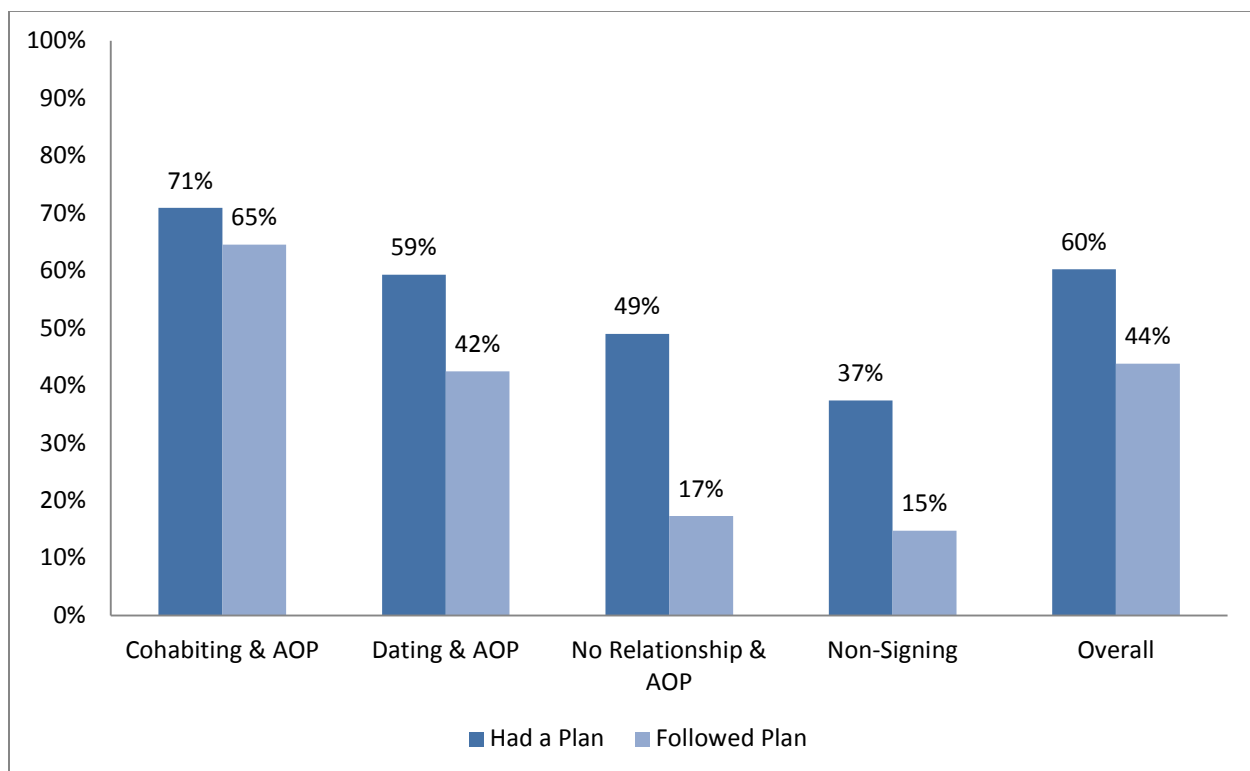
Note: Formal arrangements consist of mothers who have a formal child support order for the current child.

Planning and Importance of Financial Support

Having a plan for financially supporting a child is a key indicator of mutual understanding and shared expectations between unmarried parents. Not only are many unmarried pregnancies unplanned (as described in Chapter 3), but many unmarried parents do not have a plan for how they will support their child.

Whether parents have a plan for financial support before their child is born and whether they follow that plan after the child is born varies considerably by AOP signing and parental relationship type. In fact, many of the same disparities between cohabiting and non-signing couples seen above are echoed in the parents' plans and follow-through for financial support. Mothers' ratings of the importance of financial support from the child's father also vary by AOP signing, though most mothers do rate financial support very important, regardless of whether an AOP was signed.

Figure 71: Having/Following a Plan for Financial Support by Relationship Type at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted

Overall, 3 in 5 unmarried Texas mothers report planning for finances with the child's father during pregnancy [Figure 71].^w This proportion is even higher among parents who cohabit and

^w Parents were determined to have a plan if the mother "strongly agrees" with the statement, "Before your child was born, you and the father had a plan or an understanding as to how you two would take care of and support the child."

sign the AOP, in which more than 7 in 10 report having a plan before the child's birth and nearly as many report that they are still following that plan at three months.

Among AOP signers who are dating but not living together, or who have no romantic relationship, the percentages of parents who planned for financial support falls to 59 percent and 49 percent, respectively. The proportion of mothers in those groups who report following their plan plunges even more sharply, to 42 percent and 17 percent, respectively. Parents who do not sign an AOP are least likely to have planned for financial support—just over one-third say they had a plan before their child was born, and fewer than half of those are following the plan at three months.

Though many parents do not plan for financial support before their child is born, most mothers value support from their child's father. Three months after a nonmarital birth, nearly three-quarters of unmarried Texas mothers feel it is "very important" for the father to provide some type of support. Again however, there is noticeable variation by AOP signing. Whereas 8 in 10 AOP signers felt that financial support from the father was "very important", fewer than 6 in 10 non-signers felt similarly (not shown).

Over time, mothers ratings of the importance of financial support from fathers diminishes somewhat. Three years after an AOP is signed, the percentage of mothers indicating financial support is very important has declined to 66 percent. Among non-cohabiting mothers of 3-year-olds, just over half say financial support is very important (not shown). It is unclear whether these declines in the value mothers place on financial support from the father are due to reduced desire for the father's contributions or tempered expectations over time.

Families Relying on Informal Arrangements

The vast majority of couples who have a child outside of marriage will not establish a formal child support order in the first three years. This section addresses the question of how Texas fathers who are not in the child support system provide support for their children through informal arrangements.

Because informal support may involve different types of support (financial, in-kind, both, or none), we disaggregate the types of informal support provided by Texas fathers at three months and three years after a nonmarital birth. These distributions of informal support are also classified by parental relationship and AOP signing to illustrate the wide variation across each category. Just as AOP-signing fathers in romantic relationships are more likely to support their children through informal arrangements alone, they are also more likely to provide both financial and in-kind support. By contrast, the vast majority of non-signing fathers provide no support at all.

As shown in the first part of this chapter, the evolution of support arrangements closely tracks the change in relationship status among Texas parents. When the parental relationship

dissolves, unmarried parents become less likely to rely on informal support, and increasingly turn to the formal system as a hedge against the alternative of no support.

Interestingly, this falloff in informal support is not the only change occurring over time; the type of informal support provided by fathers outside the system also shifts. Among AOP-signing parents who are not in a romantic relationship, the proportion of fathers providing no support at all grows considerably over the first three years after the child is born.

Though support arrangements and the types of support fathers provide both change over time, CFRP data show the dollar amount of financial support mothers expect is similar at three months and three years after a nonmarital birth. Mothers' expectations of opening a child support case, however, are likely to evolve over time as parental relationships wane and expectations of support are transformed alongside them.

This section ends with a discussion of the risk factors most prevalent among fathers providing various types of informal support. Many of the same risk factors that are tightly linked to the quality of the mother-father relationship and father involvement also emerge as salient factors in a father's provision of financial support.

TYPES OF INFORMAL SUPPORT FATHERS PROVIDE

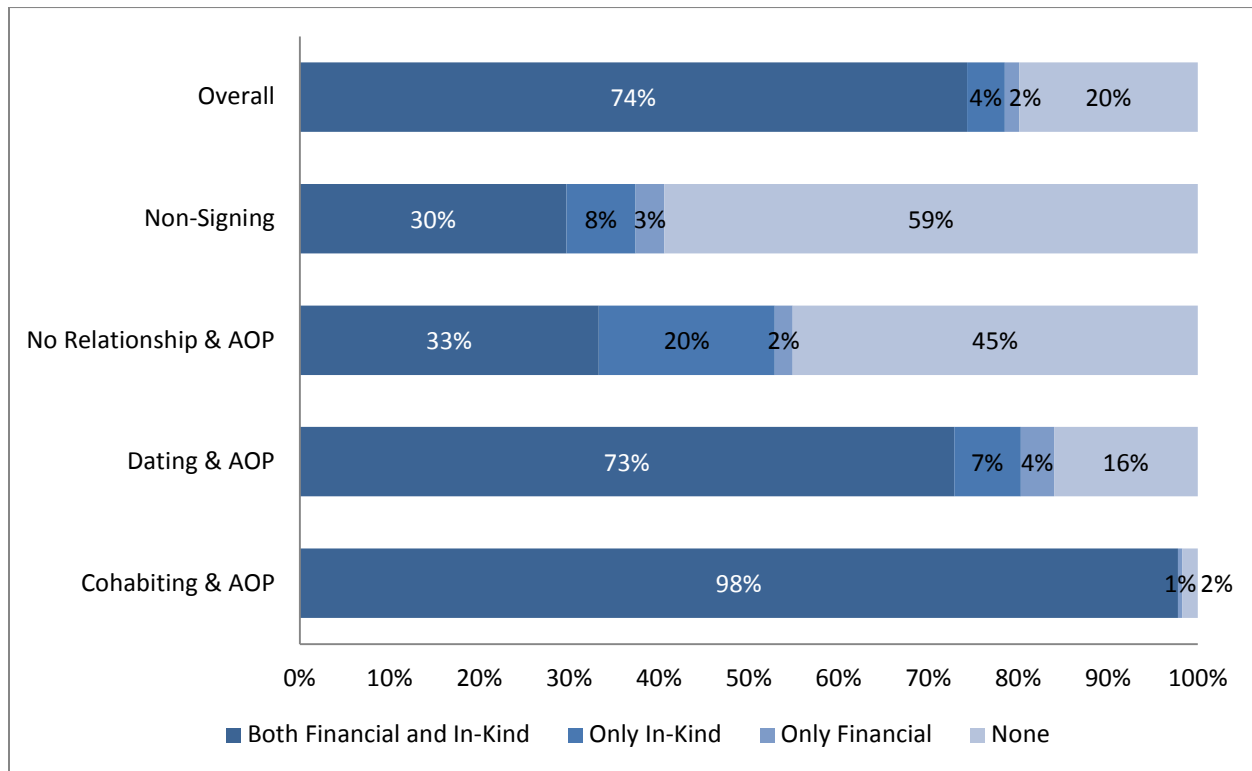
Three Months After a Nonmarital Birth

Three months after a nonmarital birth, 93 percent of Texas mothers do not have a formal child support order with the father [Figure 69]. Approximately 4 percent of these mothers report they are planning to establish an order, but have not yet started the process (not shown).^x

Figure 72 below shows that among all families relying on informal arrangements, 74 percent of fathers provide both financial and in-kind support, 6 percent provide either financial or in-kind support, and 20 percent provide neither. The type of support these fathers provide varies widely by AOP signing and relationship status, however. Figure 72 shows that nearly all cohabiting and AOP-signing fathers provide both financial and in-kind support,^y whereas roughly three-quarters of dating couples and one-third of non-romantic couples have informal arrangements in which the father provides both financial and in-kind support [Figure 72]. Fewer non-signing fathers provide both financial and in-kind support; and in fact, most (59%) provide no support at all.

^x For the purposes of this chapter, mothers are not considered to be in the child support system until they have begun the process of establishing an order.

^y Cohabiting mothers of 3-month-olds who live with the child's father and strongly agree with the statement "You and [Father] share responsibility for supporting [Child]" were assumed to be receiving both financial and in-kind support for the purposes of this chapter.

Figure 72: Types of Informal Support Provided by Relationship Type at 3 Months

Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, not in formal child support system, weighted

Note: Informal arrangements consist of mothers who do not have a formal child support order for the current child or a previous child with the same father AND who are not in the process of opening a formal child support order.

Three Years After an AOP is Signed

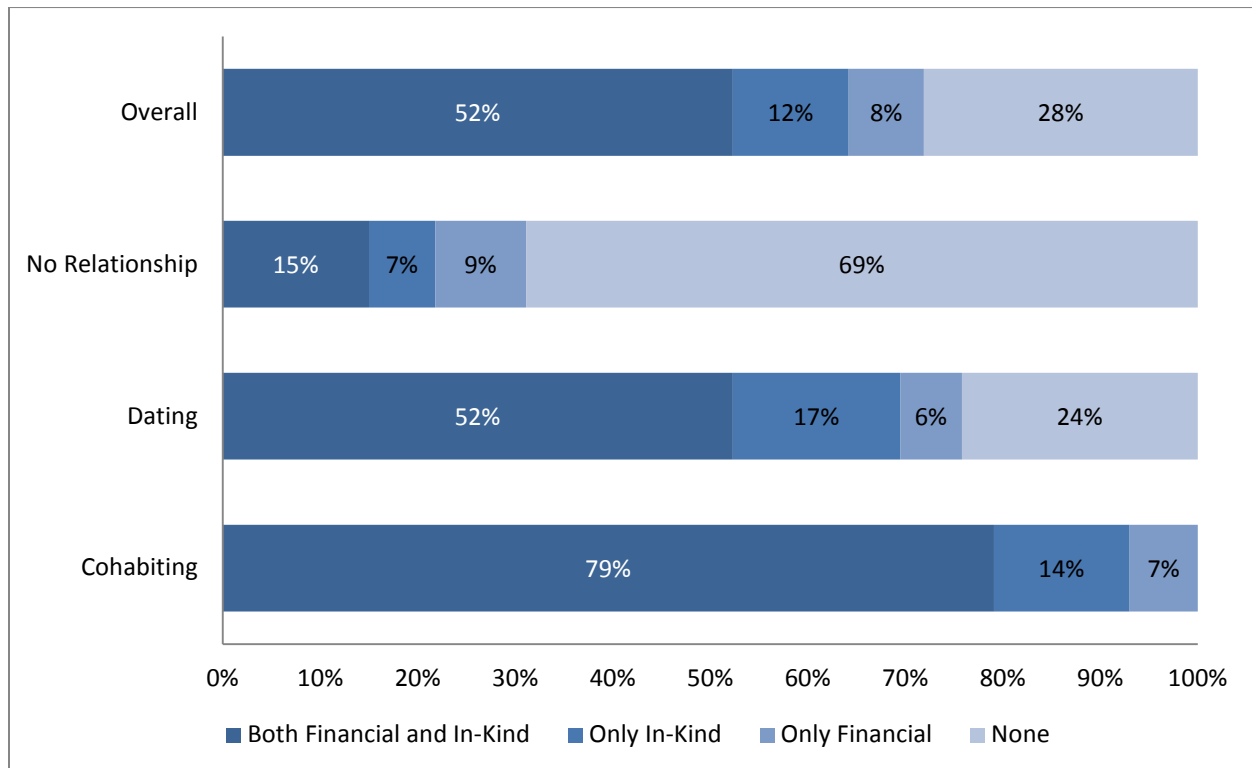
Three years after an AOP is signed, many Texas families who once relied on informal support arrangements have moved into the formal child support system. Despite this transition, the vast majority of AOP-signing parents—nearly 8 in 10—continue to rely exclusively on informal support three years after the birth of their child [Figure 70].

Overall, roughly half of AOP-signing fathers in informal arrangements are providing both financial and in-kind support three years after a nonmarital birth [Figure 73]. Another 3 in 10 of these fathers, however, are providing nothing.

When separated by relationship status, the type of informal support provided by fathers at three years varies in much the same way it did at three months. As shown in Figure 73, approximately 8 in 10 cohabiting fathers provide both financial and in-kind support.^z By contrast, roughly half of non-cohabiting fathers and just 15 percent of fathers who are not romantically involved provide both financial and in-kind support.

AOP-signing fathers who are not romantic with the mother are also much more likely to provide no support at all. Nearly 7 in 10 AOP-signing fathers who are not romantic with the mother and do not have an active child support order provide no support at three years, a considerable increase from the 45 percent of similar fathers who provide no support at three months [Figure 72].

^z Some cohabiting mothers of 3-year-olds who live with the child's father indicated they receive no support from the father but wrote in statements such as, "We share everything, he doesn't 'give' me money," an indication that many of these couples pool resources. Due to the difficulty in determining the exact details of cohabiting couples support arrangements, cohabiting mothers of 3-year-olds were assumed to be receiving both financial and in-kind support.

Figure 73: Types of Informal Support Provided by Relationship Type at 3 Years, AOP Signers

Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, not in formal child support system, weighted

Note: Informal arrangements consist of mothers who do not have a formal child support order for the current child AND who are not in the process of opening a formal child support order.

Mothers' Expectations for Financial Support

Though the overall distribution of support arrangements changes considerably in the first three years after a nonmarital birth, there are *not* noteworthy changes in the dollar amount mothers expect from fathers. Among AOP-signing mothers who felt that the nonresident father should provide something, expectations of financial support averaged \$368 at three months and \$379 at three years (not shown).^{aa} These similar expectations suggest that even as informal arrangements fade and more families move into the formal system, the amount of money mothers believe the father should provide on a monthly basis remains remarkably consistent.

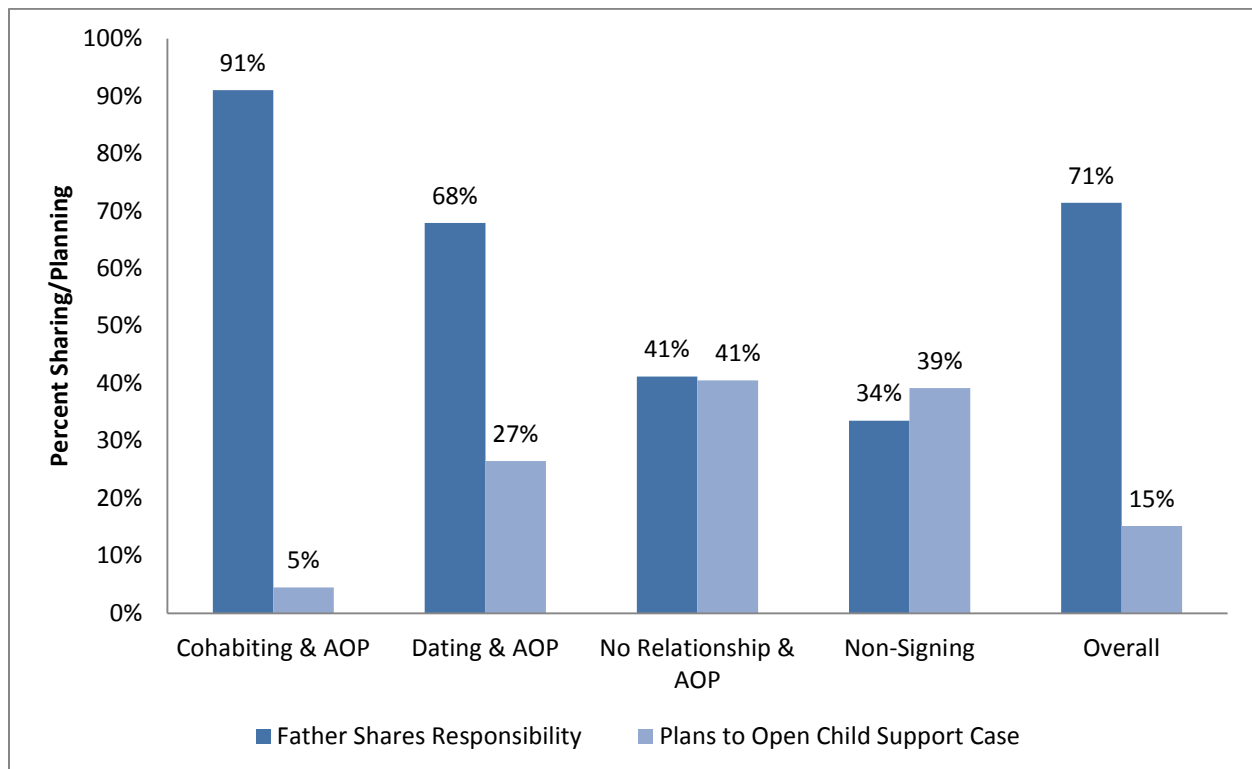
^{aa} Average expectations of financial support were derived from two separate samples of mothers—AOP signers at three months and AOP signers at three years—making the similarity in dollar amounts even more striking.

Mothers' Expectations for Opening a Child Support Case

Though many mothers express similar expectations about the amount of financial support fathers should provide, not all mothers are equally likely to receive that support. For many mothers, the formal child support system is a favorable alternative to the prospect of little or no support.

Mothers' expectations for opening a child support case, however, vary considerably across parental relationships. As shown in Figure 74 below, just 5 percent of AOP-signing mothers who live with the father plan to open a child support case three months after a nonmarital birth.^{bb} This small fraction contrasts sharply with the expectations of mothers who are not romantically involved with the child's father, in which more than 4 in 10 mothers are considering opening a child support case.

Figure 74: Plans to Open a Child Support Case and Shared Responsibility by Relationship Type at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, not in formal child support system, weighted

^{bb} This designation includes mothers who plan to open a case but have not started the process, as well as mothers who are unsure if they will open a case.

Importantly, Figure 74 also shows that nearly 40 percent of non-signing Texas mothers are considering opening a child support case despite not having taken the initial step to establish paternity. It may be the case that some of these parents are not aware that paternity establishment is necessary for opening a child support order. In other cases—especially where domestic violence or other harmful behaviors exist—it may be preferable for these families to establish paternity and child support in the courts, given the ability to define legal parameters around paternal visitation rights. Chapter 6 of this report gives additional attention to the policy considerations surrounding AOP signing and child support.

Shared Responsibility

Mothers were also asked to rate their agreement with the statement “You and [Father] share responsibility for supporting [Child].” Similar to patterns seen elsewhere, the proportion of mothers who report that they share responsibility for support with the child’s father varies widely across parental relationship types.

Moreover, Figure 74 above shows a clear inverse relationship between mothers’ perceptions of shared responsibility and their expectations of opening a child support case. An overwhelming majority of cohabiting mothers strongly agree that they share responsibility with the child’s father, whereas less than half of those in no relationship feel similarly. As the proportion of mothers indicating shared responsibility decreases, there is a corresponding increase in the proportion considering opening a child support case.

Interestingly, similar proportions of mothers in the no relationship /AOP-signing and non-signing groups are considering opening a child support case, despite a gap in the percentage who feel they share responsibility with the child’s father. The low perceptions of shared responsibility among non-signing mothers may be indicative of stunted expectations for financial support from non-signing fathers in this group.

GROUP DIFFERENCES BY INFORMAL SUPPORT PROVIDED

Though many Texas parents have entered the child support system three years after signing an AOP, the vast majority still rely exclusively on informal support arrangements. This section examines the characteristics and risk factors associated with families relying on informal support. To gain some insight into the patterns associated with the breakdown of informal support, AOP-signing fathers outside the formal child support system are divided into three groups: 1) cohabiting, 2) not cohabiting and providing support, and 3) not providing support.

As shown in Table 13 below, many of the risk factors discussed throughout this report surface in a familiar pattern across groups. In general, these factors are most prevalent among those providing no support, less prevalent among non-cohabiting fathers who provide support, and least prevalent among cohabiting fathers. This gradient of risk suggests that the most troubled fathers are those least likely to provide support, and perhaps most likely to eventually move into the formal child support system.

Table 13: Group Differences by Informal Support Type at 3 Years, AOP Signers

Group Differences by Informal Support Type at 3 Years (Percent)				
	No Child Support Order			Overall Not in Child Support System
	Cohabiting	Non-Cohabiting Informal Support	No Support	
<i>N (Unweighted)</i>	179	48	40	267
<i>Weighted Proportion</i>	72%	16%	12%	77%
<i>Parental Factors</i>				
Strongly Disagree that Father is Providing Enough Support	2%	4%	61%	7%
Plans to Open a Child Support Case	3%	27%	30%	10%
<i>Multipartner Fertility</i>				
MPF Father	23%	21%	38%	24%
MPF Mother	22%	42%	33%	26%
<i>Threats to Informal Support</i>				
Ever Incarcerated	27%	27%	34%	28%
Employment Instability	23%	12%	43%	24%
Less than High School Education	30%	26%	31%	29%
Health Problems Limiting Work	6%	4%	5%	6%
Substance Abuse	2%	11%	42%	7%
Domestic Violence	11%	23%	43%	17%
<i>Father's Race/Ethnicity</i>				
Hispanic/Latino	58%	53%	44%	56%
African American	10%	26%	9%	13%
White, Non-Hispanic	27%	18%	47%	28%

Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, not in formal child support system, weighted

Note: Informal arrangements consist of mothers who do not have a formal child support order for the current child AND who are not in the process of opening a formal child support order.

Ns in this table do not align with weighted proportions due to population weighting.

Definitions for terms in this table can be found in Appendix D: Glossary of Terms

One indication that a family may move into the formal child support system is whether or not the mother feels that she receives adequate support from the father. Table 13 gives the percentage of mothers in each group who strongly disagree with the statement “The support [Father] provides is enough.” Few Texas mothers outside the formal child support system feel strongly that the father does not provide enough support, particularly if they live with the father or receive informal support from a nonresident father.

Mothers outside of the formal system who receive no support, however, are much more likely to feel that the father’s support is not enough (61%); by implication, it is interesting to note that roughly 4 in 10 mothers receiving no support do *not* feel strongly that the father’s support is inadequate. This sizable minority may provide another indication that some mothers have tempered, if not given up on, their expectations of support from the child’s father [Table 13].

Another interesting detail to emerge from Table 13 is the discrepancy between those who feel they receive inadequate support and those who plan to open a child support case. Among mothers receiving no support from the father, 60 percent report that the father’s support is inadequate yet only 30 percent plan to open a child support order, suggesting that 30 percent of mothers in this group do not plan to enter the formal system despite feeling that the father’s support is not enough.

Among mothers receiving informal support from a nonresident father, only 4 percent feel the support is not enough yet 27 percent are planning to open a child support case. This gap implies that nearly one-quarter of mothers in this group plan to enter the formal system despite receiving what they feel is adequate support from the father.

Three years after an AOP is signed, plans to open a child support case^{cc} are rare among cohabiting mothers but common among mothers receiving informal support from a nonresident father or no support at all. As shown in Table 13, nearly 3 in 10 Texas mothers who receive informal support from a nonresident father are considering opening a child support case; a similar number of Texas mothers receiving no support are considering entry into the formal child support system.

As described in previous chapters of this report, multipartner fertility may strain a father’s ability to support his children. This theme is reiterated in Table 13, where roughly 2 in 10 cohabiting fathers and nonresident fathers who provide informal support have children with other partners; by contrast, fathers providing no support are nearly twice as likely to have children with other partners.

^{cc} This designation includes mothers who plan to open a case but have not started the process, as well as mothers who are unsure if they will open a case.

Table 13 also shows the prevalence of risk factors and antisocial behaviors among fathers in various informal support arrangements. Overall, fathers with a history of incarceration, substance abuse, and domestic violence are most prevalent among the no support group and least prevalent among the cohabiting group. Nearly half of mothers who receive no support report domestic violence, compared with 11 percent of mothers receiving support from a cohabiting father.

The incidence of substance abuse emerges with similar discrepancy across groups; more than 4 in 10 mothers receiving no support reported that the father has problems with drugs or alcohol compared to just 2 percent of mothers who live with the father. Three years after an AOP is signed, both domestic violence and substance abuse are profoundly overrepresented among Texas fathers providing no support. Given that mothers in this group are less likely to turn to child support than their need would suggest, it may be the case that a concern for safety or a desire to avoid the father is curbing their propensity to seek formal child support arrangements.

Interestingly, employment instability is least common among nonresident fathers providing informal support; in fact, when compared to nonresident fathers providing informal support, cohabiting fathers are nearly twice as likely to have trouble maintaining steady employment, and those providing no support are more than 3 times as likely.

Families Relying on Formal Child Support Arrangements

Although informal support arrangements are often parents' first choice, many mothers of children born outside of marriage eventually turn to formal support arrangements. As described in previous sections of this chapter, informal support arrangements are inclined to follow the same trajectory as the mother-father relationship. Just as a father's involvement with his child may begin to wane with the dissolution of the parental relationship, so too may his financial support. Under these circumstances, many mothers will turn to the child support system as a backstop for the father's dwindling support.

This section addresses the question of who enters the child support system and why. Given the scarcity of families in the child support system three months after birth, this section begins with the distribution of AOP-signing parents in the child support system at three years, disaggregated by parental relationship type. Patterns traced throughout this report are echoed in these distributions; though very few cohabiting parents are in the formal child support system at three years, the majority of parents with no romantic relationship have entered into formal arrangements.

Following this analysis, the section then turns to a discussion of the most common reasons for opening a child support case. The most commonly cited reasons by Texas mothers are a need for money to support the child, a desire to establish custody or visitation arrangements, and a desire to hold the father accountable.

Similar to previous sections of this report, we map the risk factors of parents in the formal child support system and, in an effort to provide contrast, present a side-by-side comparison of risks for each of the three informal arrangement categories shown previously. Collectively, the distribution of risk factors across those in and out of the child support system helps to underscore the importance of the child support system as a safety net for many of Texas's most vulnerable families.

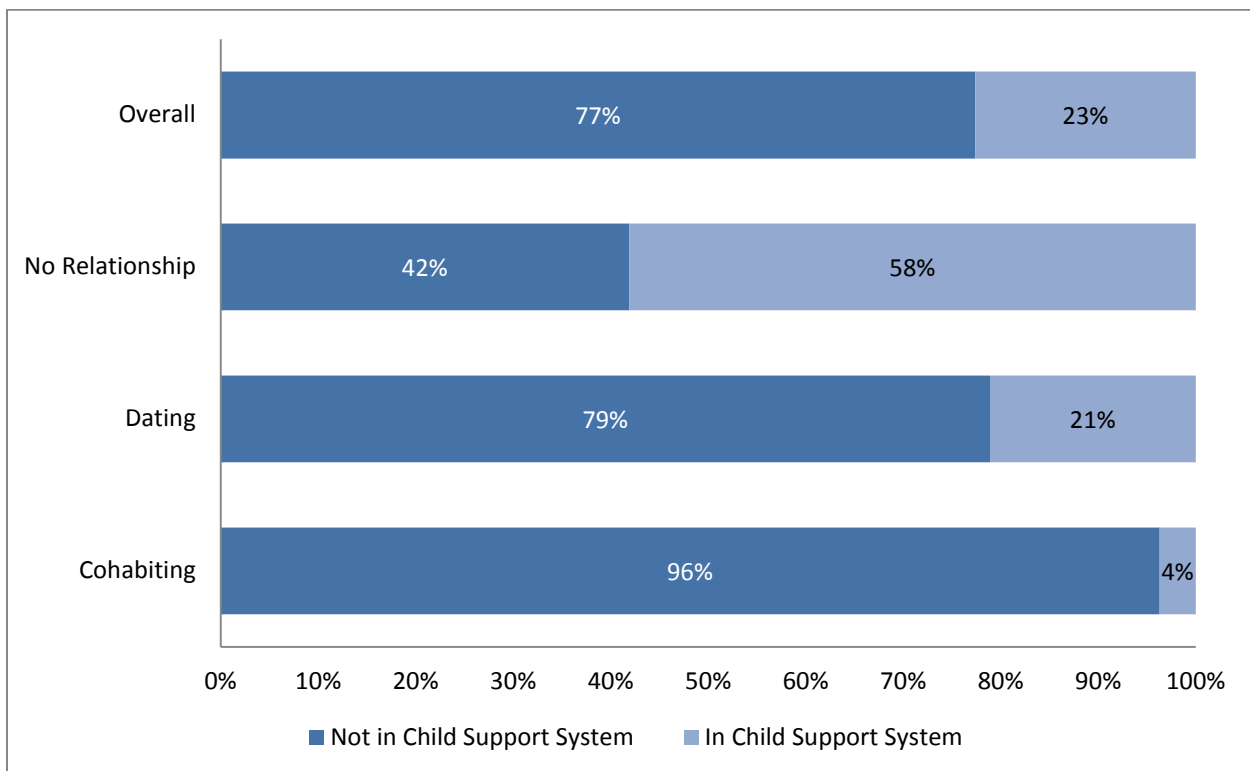
We conclude this section with a discussion of child support compliance, again highlighting the role of the risk factors such as incarceration, substance abuse, and domestic violence in undermining fathers' ability or willingness to support their children.

ENTRANCE INTO THE CHILD SUPPORT SYSTEM

Entrance Into the Child Support System by Relationship Type

As shown in Figure 75, the status of the parental relationship clearly correlates with the presence of a formal support order. Three years after an AOP is signed, 23 percent of families overall are in the child support system. The vast majority of cohabiting fathers (96%) are not in the child support system, whereas the majority of fathers who are not in a romantic relationship with the child's mother (58%) are in the formal child support system. The dramatic asymmetry between these groups accentuates the salience of the parental relationship in determining parents' entrance into the formal system.

Figure 75: Entrance into the Child Support System, by Relationship Type at 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

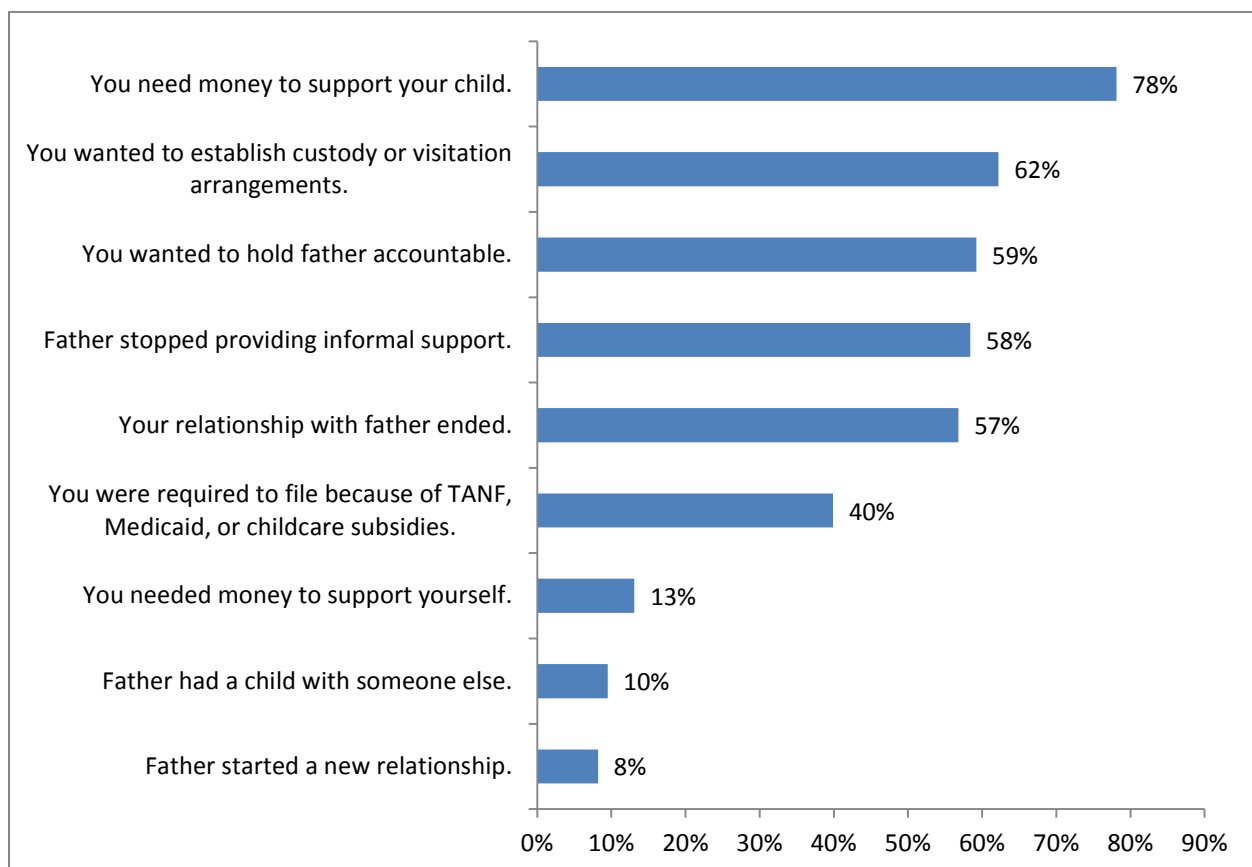
Note: "In Child Support System" consists of mothers who have a formal child support order for the current child OR who are in the process of opening a formal child support order.

Reasons Child Support Order was Established

Texas parents who have entered into the formal child support system cite a number of reasons for doing so. Three years after an AOP is signed, non-cohabiting mothers in the formal system were most likely to say they opened a child support case because they needed money to support the child [Figure 76]. Roughly 6 in 10 mothers reported that they opened a child support case to establish custody/visitation arrangements, to hold the father accountable, or because the father stopped providing informal support. Another 6 in 10 mothers cited the end of the parental relationship as a reason for opening a child support case.

From a policy perspective, it is interesting to note that nearly 4 in 10 mothers report being required to open a child support case to access public benefits such as TANF, Medicaid, or childcare subsidies. Only 7 percent of these mothers, however, selected TANF, Medicaid, or childcare subsidies as the *only* reason for opening a child support case (not shown).

Figure 76: Reasons Mothers Opened a Child Support Case at 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, in formal child support system, non-cohabiting

Note: Percentages add to over 100% due to respondents' ability to select more than one reason.

Note: This graph consists of mothers who have a formal child support order for the current child OR who are in the process of opening a formal child support order.

GROUP DIFFERENCES BY ENTRANCE INTO THE CHILD SUPPORT SYSTEM^{dd}

Three years after an AOP is signed, there are substantial differences in characteristics between those who enter the child support system and those who do not. Table 14 below compares the risk factors of fathers in and out of the child support system. The detailed break-out of fathers not in the system presented in the previous section [Table 13] is presented again here to allow for comparison between each of the informal arrangement groups and the in-system group.

Table 14: Group Differences by Support Type at 3 Years, AOP Signers

Group Differences by Informal Support Type at 3 Years (Percent)				
	No Child Support Order			Overall In Child Support System
	Cohabiting	Non-Cohabiting Informal Support	No Support	
<i>N (Unweighted)</i>	179	48	40	262
<i>Weighted Proportion</i>	72%	16%	12%	23%
<i>Parental Factors</i>				
Strongly Disagree that Father is Providing Enough Support	2%	4%	61%	42%
Plans to Open a Child Support Case	3%	27%	30%	N/A
<i>Multipartner Fertility</i>				
MPF Father	23%	21%	38%	49%
MPF Mother	22%	42%	33%	36%
<i>Threats to Informal Support</i>				
Ever Incarcerated	27%	27%	34%	51%
Employment Instability	23%	12%	43%	32%
Less than High School Education	30%	26%	31%	31%
Health Problems Limiting Work	6%	4%	5%	5%
Substance Abuse	2%	11%	42%	30%
Domestic Violence	11%	23%	43%	37%
<i>Father's Race/Ethnicity</i>				
Hispanic/Latino	58%	53%	44%	47%
African American	10%	26%	9%	26%
White, Non-Hispanic	27%	18%	47%	24%

Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

Note: "In Child Support System" includes those who have a formal child support order for the current child OR those who are in the process of opening a formal child support order.

Ns in this table do not align with weighted proportions due to population weighting.

Definitions for terms in this table can be found in Appendix D: Glossary of Terms

^{dd} For the purposes of this chapter, parents are considered to be "in the child support system" if either parent has established an order or is in the process of establishing an order.

As shown in Table 14, the proportion of mothers in the child support system who feel their child's father is not providing enough support is generally greater than the proportion of mothers outside the system who feel this way. The primary exception to this pattern exists among mothers outside of the system receiving no support; these mothers are considerably more likely than mothers in the formal system to say the father provides inadequate support.

Table 14 also gives the prevalence of multipartner fertility across groups. More so than fathers in any type of informal arrangement, Texas fathers in the child support system are most likely to have children with other partners. Nearly half of fathers with 3-year-olds in the child support system have at least one child with another partner. In addition, fathers in the child support system are much more likely to have been incarcerated than fathers outside the system. Three years after an AOP is signed, more than half of Texas fathers in the child support system have been incarcerated; in comparison, roughly 3 in 10 fathers outside of the formal system have a history of incarceration.

Certain antisocial behaviors, such as substance abuse and domestic violence, also exist with some prevalence among AOP-signing fathers in the child support system. Three in ten fathers in the child support system have problems with drugs and alcohol and nearly 4 in 10 have a history of domestic violence against the mother or child.^{ee} Though these numbers are significantly higher than similar numbers for most parents operating under informal arrangements, they are not as high as the rates reported by mothers outside the formal system receiving no support [Table 14].

As noted previously, nearly half of mothers outside the formal system who receive no support report a history of domestic violence. The higher rates of abuse experienced by mothers in this group may be due in part to an uncertainty about whether or not they can receive formal child support safely without incurring further domestic violence from the father. Additional policy considerations around family violence and child support are discussed in Chapter 6 of this report, and will be explored further in future CFRP reports.

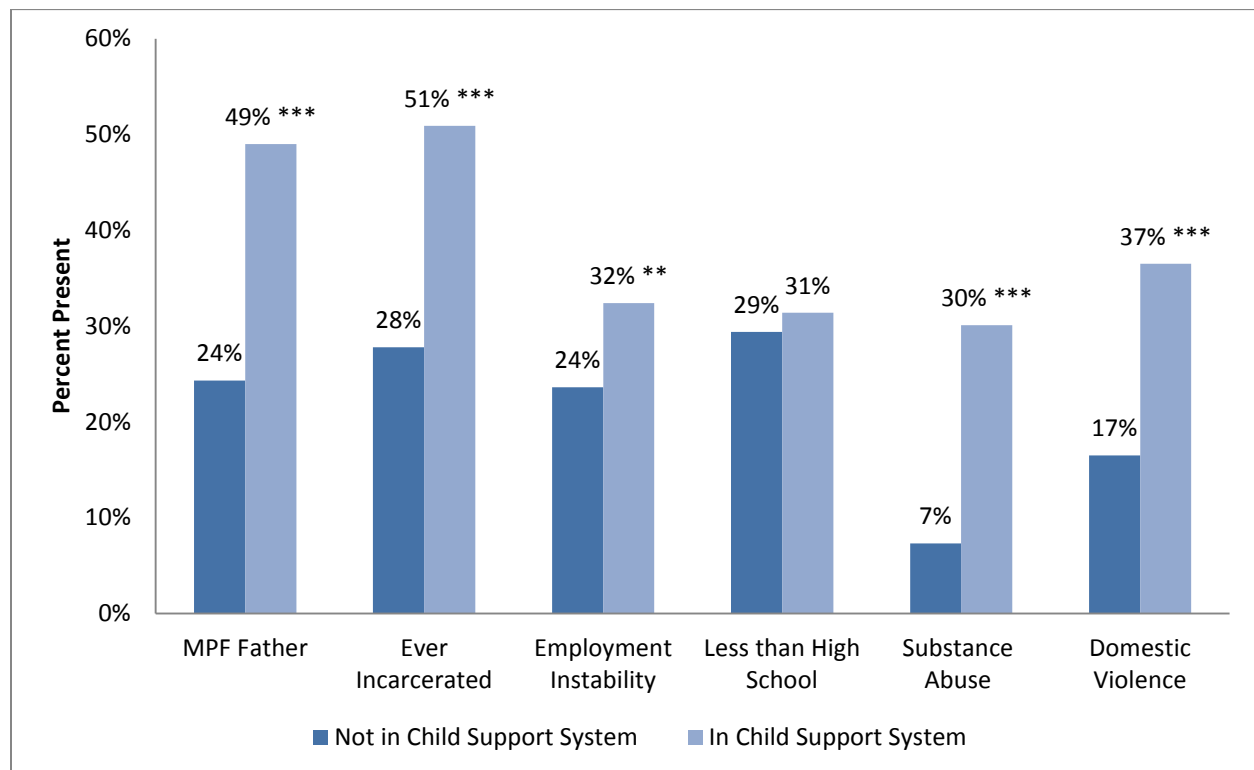
^{ee} Actual incidence of domestic violence among families in the child support system is likely to be higher than numbers here would suggest. The CAS survey from which these statistics are calculated employed a sampling methodology which first removed all Texas child support cases containing a domestic violence flag in OAG administrative records—fully 15 percent of cases. CFRP then drew a stratified random sample of AOP-signing mothers in Texas who gave birth outside of marriage in June of 2009 using the restricted population of mothers without a domestic violence flag. As a result, the prevalence of domestic violence among Texas families in the child support system is underestimated throughout this report.

CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH FATHER SUPPORT

Overall, risk factors such as multipartner fertility, incarceration, domestic violence, and substance abuse are more prevalent among fathers in the child support system than fathers not in the child support system. In this section, we collapse the three informal support categories into a singular group in an effort to illustrate the disparity in risk factors between those in and out of the formal child support system [Figure 77].

Although many risk factors are more prevalent among fathers in the formal support system, they are also quite common among fathers operating under informal arrangements—especially those providing no support as noted in Table 14 above. Figure 77 below shows the pervasive nature of these risks across AOP-signing fathers in Texas, regardless of whether they are in or out of the formal child support system. Still, for some factors such as multipartner fertility, incarceration, substance abuse, and domestic violence, the gap in the prevalence between those in and out of the system is more than 20 percentage points. Other characteristics of the father, such as a low education, do not appear to be markedly different between AOP-signing fathers in and out of the formal child support system.

Figure 77: Risk Factors by Child Support Order at 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

Note: $p < .10 = *$, $p < .05 = **$, $p < .01 = ***$

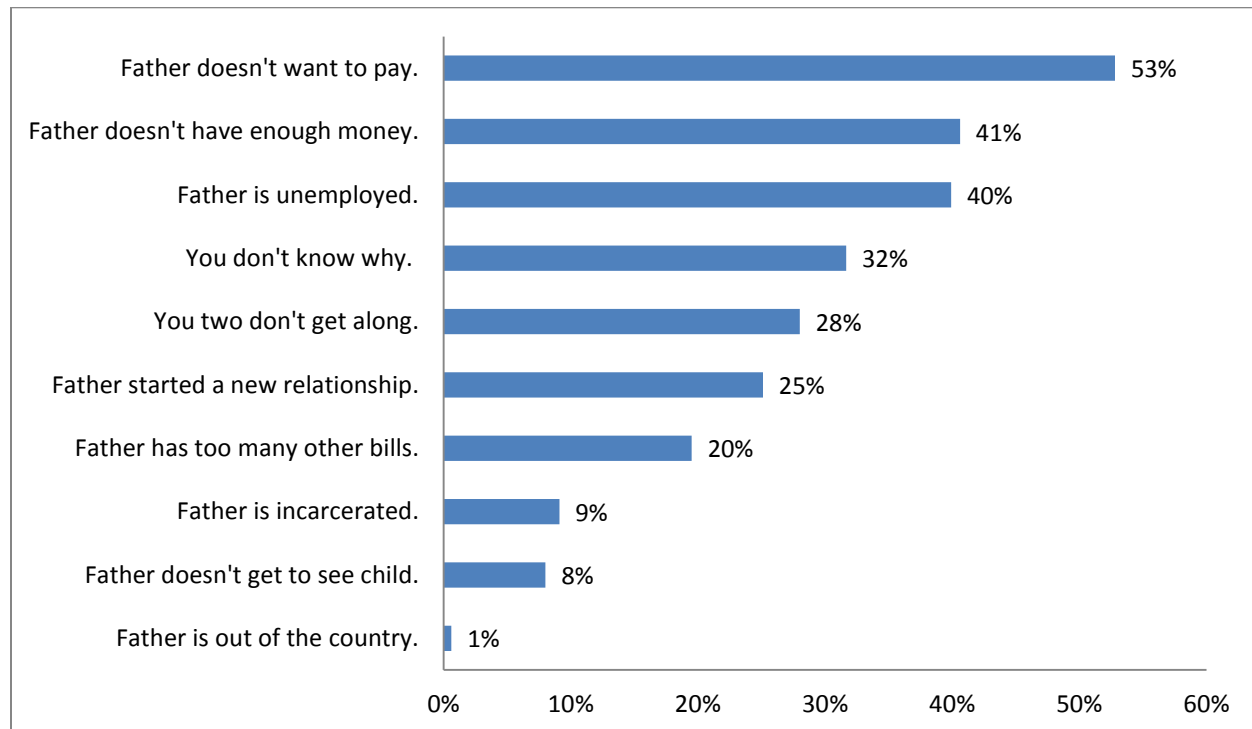
Note: "In Child Support System" includes those who have a formal child support order for the current child OR those who are in the process of opening a formal child support order.

CHILD SUPPORT COMPLIANCE

Not all Texas fathers who have a child support order regularly pay child support. Although 20 percent of AOP-signing parents have entered the formal child support system three years after the birth of their child, only 54 percent of mothers in this group report receiving the full amount of child support more than half of the time (not shown). Over one-quarter of mothers report never receiving the full amount of child support they are owed. When asked why their child's father does not pay child support regularly, mothers cited a variety of reasons discussed below [Figure 78].

Nearly 7 in 10 mothers say that the father does not pay his child support obligation because he is irresponsible, and more than half of mothers believe that noncompliant fathers do not pay simply because they do not want to. Four in ten mothers also stated that the father's nonpayment is due to being unemployed or not having sufficient money to pay. The next most common set of responses point to relationship reasons as the underlying cause of nonpayment; roughly a quarter of mothers say the father does not pay child support because they do not get along or because he started a new relationship. A sizable portion of mothers—1 in 3—reported that they do not know why the father does not pay. In general, Texas mothers seem to characterize fathers' noncompliance with child support as an outgrowth of irresponsibility, insufficient funds, and contentious parental relationships.

Figure 78: Reasons Father Does Not Pay Child Support at 3 Years – Mothers' Reports, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, in formal child support system but not receiving payment regularly, weighted

GROUP DIFFERENCES BY COMPLIANCE

Just as there are differences between fathers in and out of the child support system, there are also differences between fathers who comply with child support orders and those who do not^{ff}. Table 15 presents the characteristics of fathers based on their compliance with child support.

As described in previous sections of this chapter, weakened parental relationships are associated with diminished financial support from fathers. Three years after an AOP is signed, non-compliant fathers are significantly more likely to be in a non-romantic relationship with the mother of their child. Not surprisingly, they are also significantly less likely to be living with the mother.

Additionally, non-compliant fathers are far more likely to be uninvolved in their child's life.^{gg} Nearly 90 percent of the non-compliant fathers are uninvolved with their children; in comparison, 60 percent of compliant fathers are uninvolved [Table 15]. The high proportion of uninvolved fathers in the child support system overall aligns with data presented in Chapter 4, and suggests that even when fathers are compliant with child support, many do not see their children regularly or share responsibility for childrearing with the child's mother.

Table 15 also shows the prevalence of multipartner fertility among compliant and non-compliant fathers. Texas fathers who fail to pay child support regularly are significantly more likely to have children with more than one partner. Nearly two-thirds of non-compliant fathers have children with multiple partners, whereas 38 percent of compliant fathers have children with multiple partners.

In addition, there are significant differences between compliant and non-compliant fathers on several factors related to a father's ability to pay. Table 15 shows that non-compliant fathers are significantly more likely to have a history of incarceration when compared to their compliant counterparts—fully 72 percent of non-compliant fathers have been incarcerated, whereas 36 percent of compliant fathers have been in jail or prison at some point. Non-compliant fathers are also significantly more likely to have problems maintaining steady employment—more than half of non-compliant fathers have a history of unstable employment compared to 19 percent compliant fathers.

The presence of antisocial behaviors such as substance abuse and domestic violence also differ significantly between compliant and non-compliant fathers. As shown in Table 15, 44 percent of

^{ff} Fathers were determined to be compliant if the mother reported receiving the full amount she is owed more than half of the time.

^{gg} A father was deemed to be “involved” if he met at least one of two criteria, 1) he cohabits with the child, or 2) he has seen the child five or more times in the past month *and* is deemed to be moderately responsible by the child's mother. A father's responsibility was determined by the degree to which mothers reported that he: 1) helps look after the child, 2) spends time with the child when he says he will, and 3) can be trusted to take care of the child in the mother's absence.

non-compliant fathers have a history domestic violence and a similar percentage of non-compliant fathers have a substance abuse problem. By comparison, 28 percent of compliant fathers have a history of domestic violence and 18 percent have trouble with drugs and alcohol. Finally, with regard to race, non-compliant fathers are significantly more likely to be African American whereas compliant fathers are significantly more likely to be White [Table 15].

Table 15: Group Differences by Child Support Compliance at 3 Years, AOP Signers

Group Differences by Child Support Compliance (Percent)			
	Compliant	Not Compliant	Sig.
<i>N (Unweighted)</i>	132	105	
<i>Weighted Proportion</i>	54%	46%	
<i>Parental Factors</i>			
Non-Romantic Relationship	78%	90%	**
Non-Cohabiting	85%	98%	***
Not Involved	60%	89%	***
<i>Multipartner Fertility</i>			
MPF Father	38%	65%	***
MPF Mother	33%	37%	
<i>Threats to Support</i>			
Ever Incarcerated	36%	72%	***
Employment Instability	19%	54%	***
Less than High School Education	25%	36%	
Health Problems Limiting Work	4%	6%	
Substance Abuse	18%	45%	***
Domestic Violence	28%	44%	**
<i>Father's Race/Ethnicity</i>			
Hispanic/Latino	47%	48%	
African American	17%	35%	**
White, Non-Hispanic	34%	23%	**

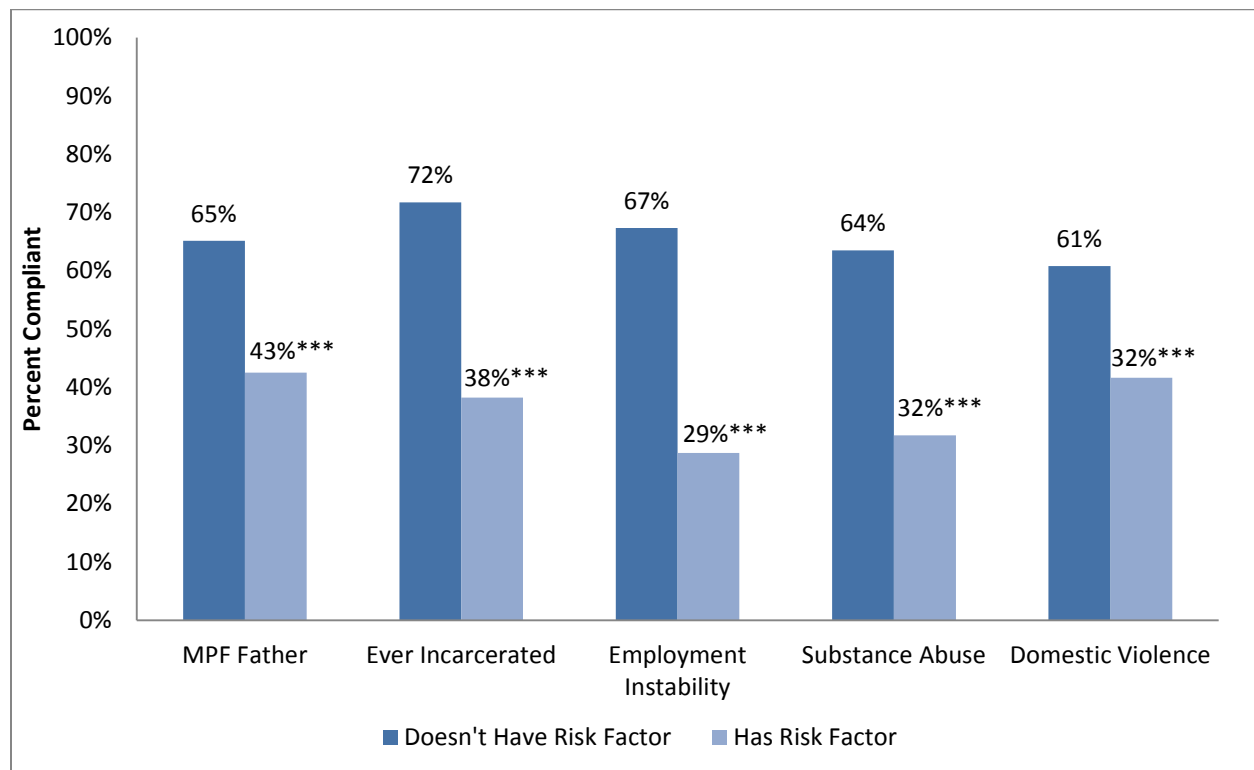
Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, currently in formal child support system, weighted
Ns in this table do not align with weighted proportions due to population weighting.
Definitions for terms in this table can be found in Appendix D: Glossary of Terms

CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH COMPLIANCE

In this section, we take a final look at the intersection of child support compliance and paternal risk factors. Figure 79 illustrates how each of these characteristics is associated with child support compliance. Fathers with multipartner fertility, a history of incarceration, trouble maintaining steady employment, substance abuse, and domestic violence are significantly less likely to comply with their child support order than fathers without these traits.

This pattern, which parallels trends seen among fathers providing no support outside the formal system, demonstrates the strong relationship between many of these characteristics and a father's propensity to support his child. Nearly all of the risk factors examined throughout this report are most common among fathers providing the least support, and represent a serious challenge for any policy or program attempting to increase formal or informal support provision. Moreover, the same sweep of risk factors are tightly correlated with poor relationships, diminished father involvement, lower levels of informal support, and decreased compliance in the formal child support system, rendering cause and effect somewhat difficult to isolate. Future reports by CFRP will use additional waves of survey data to tease out causal relationships between these phenomena in hopes of granting additional insight to policy decisions around AOP signing, child support, and father involvement.

Figure 79: Compliance with Child Support Order by Risk Factor at 3 Years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, in formal child support system, weighted.

Note: $p < .10 = *$, $p < .05 = **$, $p < .01 = ***$

Conclusion

Prior research shows children benefit from paternal financial support in numerous ways. Not only does child support lift large numbers of children out of poverty each year, but it is associated with a range of improved academic and behavioral outcomes for children.^{185,186,187} Past research also demonstrates that formal child support orders are far less common among fathers who voluntarily establish paternity, yet when these fathers do enter the formal system they are considerably more likely to pay.¹⁸⁸

CFRP data presented throughout this chapter builds on these findings by examining the trajectory of support arrangements among unmarried parents over time—especially as their evolution is patterned alongside the status of the parental relationship and an array of paternal characteristics.

Three months after a nonmarital birth, the vast majority of Texas families (93%) are not in the child support system. A partial explanation for the large proportion of parents outside the formal system may lie in the child's young age, a parental relationship newly invigorated by the birth of a child, or the pervasive provision of informal support.

Three years later however, many families who previously relied on informal arrangements have moved into the formal child support system. CFRP data suggest the pronounced movement away from informal arrangements and into the formal system is associated with the dissolution of the parental relationship. When support arrangements are isolated by the relationship status of the parents, a clear pattern emerges. Nearly all cohabiting fathers provide support through informal arrangements. Among non-cohabiting parents, those who are dating are more likely than those who have no relationship to rely on informal arrangements.

Just as support arrangements vary by parental relationship, financial plans vary as well. Cohabiting couples are more likely than dating couples to report having made a plan to support their child before the child was born. Likewise, dating couples are more likely than those in no relationship to have discussed plans for supporting their child. Those with no relationship are not only the least likely to have come up with a plan for support, they are also the least likely to follow a plan if they do have one.

Mothers' plans for opening a child support case also vary considerably by relationship status. Three months after a nonmarital birth, very few cohabiting mothers are considering opening a child support case, whereas more than 4 in 10 mothers without a parental relationship are considering entry into the formal system.

Three years after an AOP is signed, 23 percent of parents have moved into the formal child support system. Among couples who signed an AOP and are not romantically involved, the number is much higher; nearly 6 in 10 have moved into the formal child support system. Numerous risk factors associated with the dissolution of the parental relationship are also

associated with entrance into the child support system. Specifically, fathers in the formal child support system are more likely than fathers not in the system to have children with other partners, a history of incarceration, problems with drugs or alcohol, and a history of abusive behavior towards the mother or child.

Whether inside or outside the formal system, the existence of these same risk factors is also associated with a lower likelihood that a father will provide informal support to his child. The final chapter of this report draws together many of the patterns seen throughout this and other chapters in an effort to encapsulate the overall landscape of involvement and support among unmarried fathers in Texas, especially as it relates to child outcomes. The report concludes with a discussion of relevant policy considerations for AOP signing, father involvement, and financial support.

This page intentionally left blank.

CHAPTER 6: OUTCOMES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Background and Motivation

A growing body of research associates high-quality father involvement and support with improved child outcomes on a wide range of measures, including cognitive development, academic achievement, and social and emotional wellbeing.¹⁸⁹ Though there is little doubt that children benefit from financially and emotionally supportive fathers, many children born outside of marriage grow up without that support. One of the contextual factors that may contribute to fathers' lack of involvement and support is a broader societal undervaluing of fathers. More directly, previous chapters of this report have detailed the extent to which father involvement and support are influenced by the parents' relationship, as well as a range of paternal risk factors. A better understanding of unmarried parental relationships and the risk factors that may lead to their dissolution can help researchers and policymakers find solutions to help increase positive involvement and support for children.

This chapter begins with a review of the literature linking paternal involvement and support to improved outcomes for children. Drawing on survey data collected by CFRP, the following section then introduces nine father typologies, which broadly classify AOP-signing fathers of 3-year-olds into distinct categories based on their level of involvement, cohabitation status, and the means by which they provide financial support. The father typologies are then examined for the prevalence of various risk factors in an effort to understand the degree to which these characteristics negatively affect a father's emotional and financial contributions.

Here, the narrative arc traced throughout the course of this report arrives at a culmination; the distribution of paternal risk factors such as domestic violence, substance abuse, and multipartner fertility settle across typologies in a remarkably consistent pattern. Although fathers with lower levels of involvement and support carry disproportionate risks to positive fathering, many of these risk factors still exist in concerning numbers throughout the population of unmarried parents in Texas. Indeed, even among involved and supportive fathers who have signed the AOP, participation in childrearing is often tenuous and subject to dissolution. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the relevant considerations for public policy, with particular emphasis on the policy levers most likely to influence paternal involvement, AOP signing, and child support.

Father Involvement, Support, and Child Outcomes

The following literature review summarizes prior research on the positive effects of high-quality father involvement and financial support, including a discussion of prior research on factors that may influence father involvement. As described in Chapter 4 of this report, a father's antisocial behavior is not the only threat to high-quality father involvement; the parents' relationship and cohabitation status also impact the nature and extent of paternal

participation. Each of these factors carries significant implications for the scope of a father's contributions, and in turn, the current and future wellbeing of his child.

PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT AND POSITIVE CHILD OUTCOMES

High-quality paternal involvement is associated with better outcomes on nearly every measure of a child's development. When both parents are committed to the lives of their children, those children are more likely to be healthy, productive, and well-adjusted. Children with involved fathers, on average, perform better in school, have higher self-esteem, and exhibit greater empathy, emotional security, curiosity, and pro-social behavior.¹⁹⁰

The positive impact of involved fathers begins early. Father-child interactions within the first nine months of a child's life are associated with reduced cognitive delay in early infant development.¹⁹¹ Additionally, father engagement has significant effects on the cognition, language, and social and emotional development of children during the first several years of life.¹⁹²

Factors Associated with Father Involvement and Child Wellbeing

Not all paternal involvement yields similar gains for children, however. The benefits of involved fatherhood appear to hinge on several dynamics, including parental cohabitation, the quality of the coparenting relationship, and paternal risk factors. Though it may be the case that increased father involvement, especially in positive family settings, leads to improvements in child wellbeing, a number of studies in this area are unable to derive a strict causal link and leave open the possibility of selection. That is, it may be the case that fathers who are more likely to be involved have a set of positive characteristics that enhance both their ability to be involved as well as the likelihood that their children will experience positive outcomes.

Cohabitation

The effects of paternal involvement on child outcomes depend in part on the amount of time a father spends with his child. Given the increased opportunity for shared time when children live with their fathers, children with resident fathers tend to fare better overall than children with fathers who do not live with them.

Past research shows that children with resident fathers are significantly less likely to be poor, use drugs, commit crimes, experience emotional or behavioral problems, or experience child abuse.¹⁹³ Greater involvement by resident fathers has also been linked to many positive developmental outcomes for children, including decreased delinquency and behavioral problems, improved cognitive development, increased educational attainment, and better psychological wellbeing.¹⁹⁴

Though much of the literature on resident fathers is confined to middle-class samples, a growing body of research on low-income fathers with pre-school-aged children has shown similar benefits to cognition, language, and behavior from positive father-child interaction.¹⁹⁵

The research on the effects of involvement by nonresident fathers on child outcomes is less conclusive. Although a number of studies link nonresident father involvement to fewer internalizing and externalizing problems in children and adolescents, the beneficial impacts of involvement seem to depend on the quality of the father-child relationship.¹⁹⁶ Mere contact is not enough to influence a child's development; rather, it is the type and quality of interaction between the father and child that is most important.¹⁹⁷

Children who share a warm and supportive bond with their nonresident father are less likely to act out in school, show signs of depression, and exhibit antisocial or aggressive behavior.¹⁹⁸ These effects are observed independent of the mother-child relationship, suggesting that nonresident fathers make a unique contribution to their children's wellbeing.

Coparenting Relationship

The mother-father relationship also affects whether increased involvement from nonresident fathers is detrimental or beneficial for children. When a child's mother and father do not get along, for example, frequent visitation from the nonresident father can generate negative behavioral outcomes in the child.¹⁹⁹

Research on the topic of coparenting affirms this idea, especially with regard to nonresident fathers—whereas increased paternal involvement from resident fathers generally yields improved behavioral outcomes in children, greater interaction from nonresident fathers is only associated with better behavioral outcomes when the mother and father have a strong coparenting relationship.²⁰⁰

Paternal Risk Factors

Researchers have also cautioned that the benefits of involved fatherhood may depend on a father's history of antisocial behavior. Greater involvement by nonresident fathers who have spent time in jail or prison, for example, does not appear to generate better child behavioral outcomes, though greater involvement by never-incarcerated fathers does.²⁰¹ Similarly, a father's involvement may not be beneficial if the father has a history of harmful behavior, such as violence or abuse.²⁰² Given that nonresident fathers are more likely than resident fathers to have experience with depression, drugs, alcohol, crime, and incarceration, accounting for these behaviors remains critical as they may compound existing challenges to positive nonresident fathering.²⁰³

In summary, the literature on father involvement makes clear that fathers have an important role to play in the development of their children. The benefits of that involvement, however, are not universal and may depend on a number of other forces. Improved child outcomes are considerably more likely if a father lives with the mother, shares in a positive coparenting relationship, and has no history of antisocial behavior.

PATERNAL SUPPORT AND POSITIVE CHILD OUTCOMES

The act of childrearing requires both emotional and financial support from parents. For many low-income single mothers, a father's financial support is an important source of income. According to data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, child support payments help lift roughly one million families above the poverty line each year.²⁰⁴ Informal financial support and in-kind support also reduce material hardship, helping to offset many of the harmful effects associated with living in poverty, which include reductions in health, cognitive ability, and economic potential from childhood to adulthood.²⁰⁵

Given the large body of research linking poverty to detrimental child outcomes, reducing child poverty becomes central to efforts aimed at improving child wellbeing. The risk of low birth weight is 1.7 times higher for poor children than for children who are not poor; parents of poor children are also 1.8 times more likely than non-poor parents to report that their children are in fair or poor health. Poor children experience higher rates of lead poisoning, infant mortality, stunting (being in the fifth percentile for height between 2-17 years of age), and number of short-term hospital episodes.²⁰⁶

Poverty also undermines a child's cognitive and behavioral development; the risk of having a developmental delay or learning disability is at least 1.3 times higher for poor children than for children who are not poor.²⁰⁷ Moreover, research shows poor children are more likely, on average, to have repeated a grade, been expelled from school, dropped out of high school, or had an emotional or behavioral problem lasting more than three months.²⁰⁸

A causal link between poverty, parenting behavior, and subsequent child outcomes has been established in the literature. Poverty is associated with an array of material hardships such as difficulty paying bills, lack of food or medical care, and inadequate housing, which can increase parental stress. Increased parental stress and relationship conflict, in turn, can negatively affect child outcomes.

Research shows that as income increases, material hardship and parental stress are reduced; moreover, these reductions are associated with increases to positive parenting and parental investment in children.²⁰⁹ In turn, increases in positive parenting and parental investment are found to significantly predict increases in cognitive ability and social skills among children in low-income families.²¹⁰

Paternal financial support can help offset negative outcomes associated with poverty. When a father's support is provided through the child support system, it is associated with positive child outcomes, including improved emotional wellbeing and academic achievement.²¹¹ Paternal financial support may also help reduce maternal stressors, thereby increasing the amount of time, emotional support, and financial investments that a mother can provide for her child.

Although the effect of paternal financial support on child outcomes varies by type (informal, formal, or both), amount, and whether the father is resident or nonresident, research finds that greater formal financial support from fathers is associated with a wide range of positive cognitive and emotional outcomes for children.²¹²

Father Typologies

To better understand the involvement and support children receive from their fathers, CFRP categorized AOP-signing fathers with 3-year-olds into nine distinct types. The nine father typologies classify fathers along three dimensions—the type of financial support they provide, whether or not they cohabit with the mother, and whether or not they are involved with their children.^{hh}

Taken together, the father typologies paint a broad portrait of unmarried Texas fathers three years after an AOP signed. By implication, the typologies also depict the levels of involvement and support Texas children receive from their fathers, both of which can wield substantial influence on their development and future wellbeing.ⁱⁱ

Informal Support

Three years after an AOP is signed, informal support is the most common form of financial child support among Texas fathers. Figure 80 shows that among AOP-signing fathers with 3-year-olds, 7 in 10 currently provide informal cash or in-kind support to their children. The majority of these fathers live with the mother and are involved in the lives of their children. Three years after an AOP is signed, nearly 6 in 10 Texas fathers are providing informal support, cohabiting with the mother, and involved with their children.

Another fraction of fathers providing informal support do not live the mother. In Texas, 13 percent of AOP-signing fathers are providing informal support but living away from the mother and child. Within this group, most remain involved in the lives of their children; 9 percent of Texas fathers are providing informal support, not living with their child's mother, and are involved in their child's life.

Another 4 percent of Texas fathers currently providing informal support do not live with the mother or meaningfully participate in the life of their child. Though these uninvolved, non-cohabiting fathers providing informal support comprise a relatively small group, they are of particular concern. As discussed throughout this report, paternal involvement and support can

^{hh} CFRP determined the type of financial support provided by fathers based on mothers' reports. A father was considered to be in the child support system if the mother indicated the existence of a child support order; a father was considered to be providing informal support if the mother reported he was currently providing cash or in-kind support (e.g. food, clothing). Fathers who are in the child support system and also provide informal support were included in the child support categories. A father was deemed to be "involved" if he cohabits with the child, or if he has seen the child five or more times in the past month *and* is deemed to be moderately responsible by the child's mother. A father's responsibility was determined by the degree to which mothers reported that he: 1) helps look after the child, 2) spends time with the child when he says he will, and 3) can be trusted to take care of the child in the mother's absence.

ⁱⁱ Future analyses by CFRP will contribute to our understanding of these phenomena by linking AOP signing, financial support, and father involvement to child outcomes using additional waves of the PES survey. The current analyses rely solely on data collected through the CAS survey and measured at a single point in time. Through PES, CFRP will track Texas families over time, permitting additional insight into the drivers of child wellbeing.

be tenuous among unmarried fathers and may diminish in the years following a child's birth. Given this trajectory, it is reasonable to expect that some fraction of these fathers, already uninvolved, will cease to provide financial support in the years ahead.

Formal Child Support

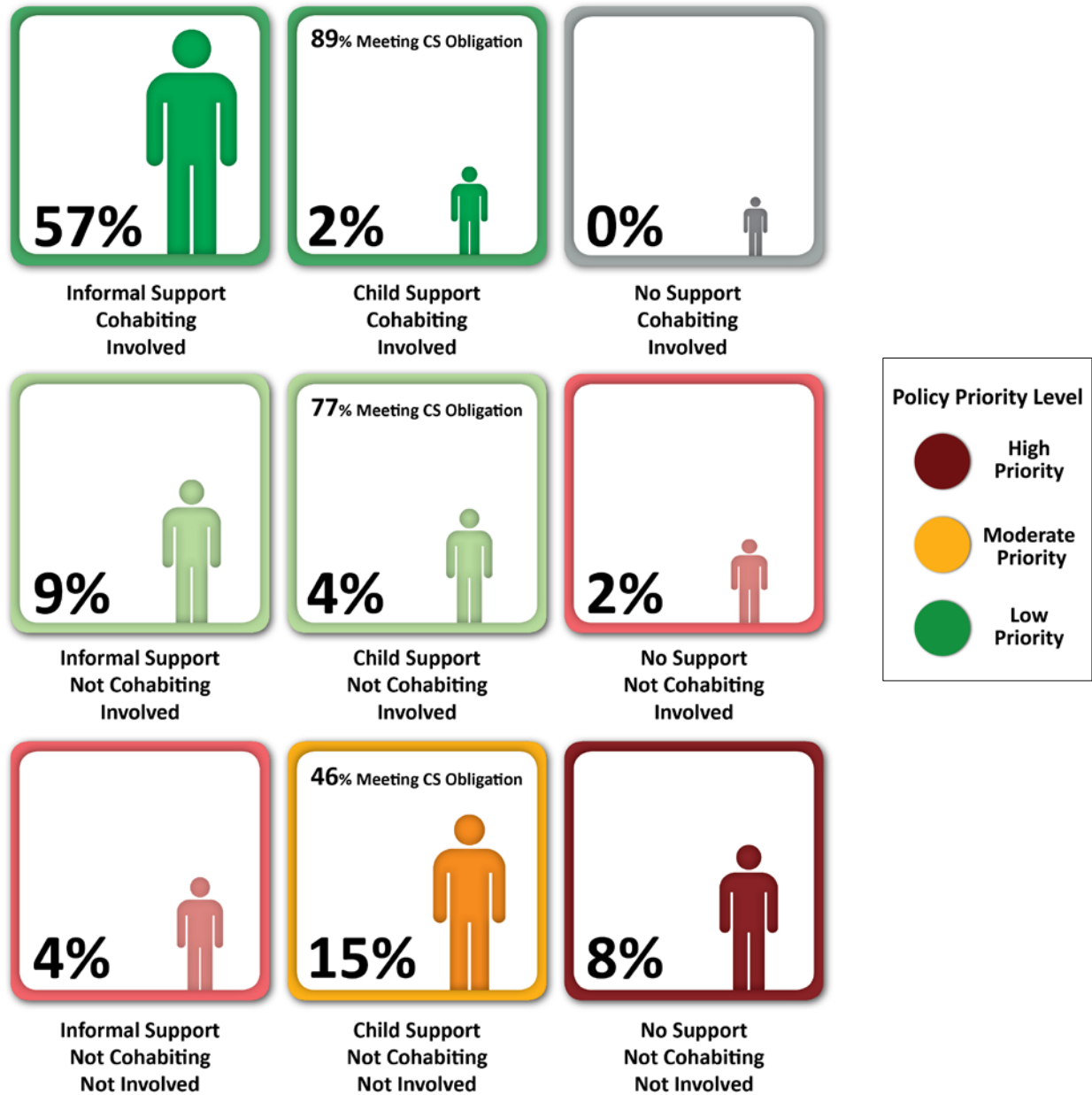
Three years after a nonmarital birth, a sizable fraction of parents have entered the formal child support system [Figure 80]. Though less common than informal support, mothers report that more than 1 in 5 Texas fathers are in the child support system three years after an AOP is signed. Of these unmarried fathers who signed the AOP, only a small portion are cohabiting and involved with the child. Though AOP-signing fathers in the child support system who are cohabiting and involved constitute just 2 percent of Texas fathers overall, this group is the most reliable with regard to meeting their child support obligations. Nearly 9 out of 10 Texas fathers in this group regularly meet their legal child support obligation.^{jj}

A slightly larger portion of Texas fathers in the child support system are involved with their children but do not live with the mother and child. Overall, roughly 4 percent of AOP-signing fathers with 3-year-olds fit this description. Of these fathers, 77 percent are regularly meeting their child support obligations at three years.

The greatest percentage of Texas fathers in the child support system, however, are not involved or living with their children. Three years after a nonmarital birth, 15 percent of Texas fathers who signed the AOP fall into this category. These fathers are legally obligated to provide financial support for their children but fewer than half are doing so. Mothers report that 46 percent of non-cohabiting and uninvolved fathers are meeting their formal child support obligation at three years.

^{jj} CFRP determined fathers were meeting child support obligations if the mother reports he pays the full amount "all" or "more than half," of the time.

Figure 80: Father Typologies at 3 years, AOP Signers



Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted.

Note: Based on mother responses to a series of survey questions, a small percentage of fathers fell into the category labeled "No Support, Cohabiting, Involved." Further inspection of survey responses from this group revealed that limitations in the survey instrument may have led to confusion among respondents, prompting them to indicate that they received no support in cases where they were likely to be receiving informal support instead. This small group was re-categorized and added to the group labeled "Informal Support, Cohabiting, Involved."

No Support

As shown in Figure 80, three years after a nonmarital birth approximately 1 in 10 AOP-signing fathers provide no financial or in-kind support and are not subject to a child support order. Some of these fathers remain involved in their children's lives, but most do not—in fact, 80 percent of Texas fathers providing no support are also uninvolved in their children's lives. These fathers constitute roughly 8 percent of AOP-signing fathers overall.

Among fathers who provide no financial or in-kind support, 2 in 10 still manage to be involved in their children's lives. These fathers do not cohabit with the mother or provide any type of support; nevertheless, they appear to maintain adequate levels of father-child contact and exhibit some degree of responsibility for their child.

Because both involvement and support are subject to erosion over time, the involvement of these fathers may be tenuous. Like other non-cohabiting fathers, these fathers may benefit from programs that strengthen their coparenting relationships, thereby reducing the risk that they will withdraw their participation alongside their dwindling support.

Involvement and Cohabitation

As discussed above, paternal involvement and support are critical to the development of Texas children. Though three years after an AOP is signed nearly three-quarters of Texas fathers are involved and 6 in 10 are living with their children, many fathers may not remain in these categories over time. Changes in employment, cohabitation, mother-father relationship quality, incarceration, or substance abuse, among others, could influence a father's willingness or ability to financially support and stay involved in the life of his child.

An important trend to emerge from the visual portrayal of father typologies in Figure 80 is the skewed distribution of fathers within each support column. Among fathers providing informal support, the largest proportion is cohabiting and involved and the smallest proportion is not cohabiting and uninvolved.

The opposite is true of fathers in the child support system—these fathers are more likely to be uninvolved than involved, and more likely to live away from their children. This is not to say that a child support obligation makes fathers less likely to be involved, but rather that the two are concomitant.

As discussed in previous chapters, the same factors that are most likely to drive reductions in financial support are also likely to drive reductions in involvement. Policies targeted at sustaining or increasing the involvement of fathers in and out of the formal support system, as well as programs designed to improve the coparenting skills of non-cohabiting parents, may prevent fathers from dropping out of their children's lives over time.

GROUP DIFFERENCES BY FATHER TYPOLOGY

Previous chapters of this report detailed the disproportionate prevalence of paternal risk factors among fathers in poor relationships with the mother and child, as well as fathers who do not provide support. In this section, we map the familiar group of risk factors onto a subset of the father typologies. Multipartner fertility, employment instability, substance abuse, and domestic violence all differ significantly across father types. Understanding the degree to which these factors are linked with particular combinations of involvement, support, and cohabitation may facilitate better targeting of policies aimed at improving outcomes for Texas children.

Table 16 shows the prevalence of risk factors for the four most common father types: informal support/cohabiting/involved, informal support/not cohabiting/involved, child support/not cohabiting/not involved, and no support/not cohabiting/not involved. This subset of fathers facilitates an examination across a variety of combinations and encompasses roughly 89 percent of all AOP-signing fathers three years after their child's birth.

The overarching trend across all four typologies is a greater prevalence of risk factors among those fathers who are less supportive and less involved. A history of incarceration, employment instability, low levels of education, substance abuse, and domestic violence all generally increase as involvement, cohabitation, and support decrease [Table 16].

Though the distribution of risk factors across father typologies reveals a compelling pattern in outcomes, survey data do not permit us to establish whether these risk factors *cause* fathers to switch between categories or not. For example, it is difficult to know whether fathers are less involved because they are unemployed, or whether they are both unemployed and uninvolved due to another personal characteristic. Regardless, these analyses provide an opportunity to examine the prevalence of risk characteristics across different types of fathers and may help inform policy interventions aimed at improving father involvement and support.

An important finding for child support policymakers is that the fathers who have the highest levels of risks are the fathers who are the most likely to be in the formal child support system, or to be outside of the formal system but providing no support. Fathers in the latter group who are not providing any support to their child may need to have a formal child support order established. Fathers who are living with their child's mother and/or providing informal support for the child have significantly lower levels of risks, and mothers in these groups are substantially less likely to be considering formal child support.

The high prevalence of risk factors among fathers in the child support system not only increases the difficulty of enforcing extant child support obligations within the child support system, but may also reduce child wellbeing. Although the child support system is aware that parents typically seek their help when the mother-father relationship turns sour, the findings in Table 16 reveal the enormity of differences in some risk factors (such as domestic violence, substance abuse, and multipartner fertility) between families that need the child support system and those who do not.

Table 16: Group Differences by Father Typology at 3 Years, AOP Signers

Group Differences by Father Typology (Percent)				
	Informal Support Cohabiting Involved	Informal Support Not Cohabiting Involved	Child Support Not Cohabiting Not Involved	No Support Not Cohabiting Not Involved
<i>N (Unweighted)</i>	180	36	182	50
<i>Weighted Proportion</i>	57%	9%	15%	8%
<i>Child Support</i>				
Child Support Order/Expectations	3%	22%	100%	41%
<i>Multipartner Fertility</i>				
MPF Father	23%	30%	58%	44%
MPF Mother	22%	42%	32%	35%
<i>Threats</i>				
Ever Incarcerated	27%	31%	57%	40%
Employment Instability	23%	16%	38%	37%
Less than High School	30%	24%	32%	36%
Health Problems Limiting Work	6%	6%	5%	0%
Substance Abuse	2%	15%	39%	46%
Domestic Violence	11%	24%	42%	52%
<i>Father's Race/Ethnicity</i>				
Hispanic/Latino	58%	51%	49%	43%
African American	10%	32%	25%	15%
White, Non-Hispanic	27%	15%	23%	41%

Source: CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

Ns in this table do not align with weighted proportions due to population weighting.

Definitions for terms in this table can be found in Appendix D: Glossary of Terms

Multipartner fertility is a risk to paternal involvement because it requires fathers to allocate their limited time and resources across children in multiple households. AOP-signing fathers who have children with other partners are much more common among uninvolved groups in the child support or no support categories. Nearly 6 in 10 fathers who are uninvolved and have an open child support order have children with another partner, and more than 4 in 10 uninvolved fathers providing no support have multipartner fertility. By comparison, roughly a quarter of fathers in each of the involved/informal support categories have children with other partners.

A history of incarceration also poses a threat to father involvement and support. More than half of uninvolved fathers with a child support order, and 4 in 10 uninvolved fathers who are providing no support have been incarcerated. Though less prevalent in some subsets of fathers, incarceration is still quite common among all fathers who signed an AOP in Texas – even among

fathers who are providing informal support, cohabiting, and involved, more than one-quarter have been incarcerated. A father's intersection with the criminal justice system presents a serious risk to involvement and father-child relationships, especially in light of research showing the tainted benefits of father-child interaction when a father has been incarcerated.

Unemployment affects a father's income, stability, and relationships. Of all the characteristics associated with a father's involvement and support, employment instability appears to be distributed across typologies in one of the more interesting patterns. Nonresident fathers who provide informal support and remain involved in the lives of their children are the least likely to have trouble maintaining a job. In contrast, poor employment history is *most* prevalent among Texas fathers who are in the child support system and uninvolved; nearly 4 out of 10 fathers in this group struggle with unstable work [Table 16].

Almost as many fathers in the no support/uninvolved category have a history of unemployment. This characteristic, which has a large impact on a father's ability to provide financial support, provides valuable insight into the way fathers are distributed across typologies. Even among fathers who are providing informal support, living with the mother, and participating in the life of their child, more than 2 in 10 have trouble maintaining steady employment.

Programs designed to reduce unemployment among unmarried fathers in Texas, whether through job training or job search assistance, may prevent some fathers from withdrawing their provision of emotional and financial support. The NCP Choices program has achieved notable results in employment, job retention, and child support collections among those fathers already in the child support system, and may provide a model for addressing the needs of fathers who might otherwise end up in the formal system.

The familiar pattern that emerges across other threats to paternal involvement and support is echoed in the distribution of fathers with substance abuse. Fathers with lower levels of involvement and support are more likely to have problems with drugs and alcohol. Among involved and cohabiting fathers, whether providing informal or formal support, mother reports of substance abuse are rare (not shown).

Only 2 percent of fathers who are involved, cohabiting, and providing informal support have problems with drugs or alcohol. Among fathers who are involved and providing informal support, but who do not live with their children, the prevalence of substance abuse ticks up to 15 percent. Uninvolved fathers in the formal child support system or who provide no support are even more likely to have problems with substance abuse. Nearly 4 in 10 nonresident, uninvolved fathers in the formal system struggle with the abuse of drugs or alcohol, and the incidence is even higher among nonresident, uninvolved fathers who provide no support at all.

The ways in which substance abuse interacts with other hardships faced by these fathers is unclear. Though it is conceivable that drug and alcohol problems could provoke or result from breakups, unemployment, and incarceration, increasing access to treatment and recovery

programs for fathers could help to mitigate the powerful negative effects that addiction has on relationships and by extension, outcomes for children.

Distinct from many of the risk factors examined throughout this report, domestic violence holds a unique designation as an extreme and pernicious antisocial behavior. Similar to other risk factors, however, it too is much more common among uninvolved fathers providing no support, or who are in the formal child support system. Three years after an AOP is signed, fully half of Texas mothers who receive no support from uninvolved, nonresident fathers report having experienced domestic violence [Table 16]. Nearly as many mothers receiving formal child support from uninvolved fathers report a history of domestic violence (42%).^{kk} Even among involved fathers providing informal support, however, the prevalence of domestic violence is high. Of Texas fathers in this group, 11 percent of those living with the mother and 24 percent of those not living with the mother have exhibited abusive behavior towards the mother and/or child.

The high levels of domestic violence across all groups necessitate policy intervention and protection for the mothers and children associated with these fathers. The OAG has trained all child support workers in the state on how to identify and handle cases involving domestic violence, but more training of judges and other personnel is warranted. In addition, mothers would benefit from education and guidance on how to safely establish a child support order; in particular, mothers in these circumstances should be made aware that establishing a legal visitation order may help to protect their children from an abusive father by erecting legal parameters around the visits.

Each of the threats to paternal involvement and support is present in disproportionate numbers among AOP-signing fathers in Texas. Across fathers of all types, the incidence of paternal risk factors is high—even among those who might be considered more stable.

Still, an unmistakable pattern emerges. Factors such as multipartner fertility, employment instability, substance abuse, and domestic violence surge among nonresident fathers who are uninvolved and providing support through the formal system or not at all. These fathers are the least stable, the least involved, and the least disposed to provide support.

Moreover, many of the risks they carry have clear and damaging effects on children. The lost potential among children of absent or troubled fathers is concerning not only from a developmental perspective, but also from a social and economic perspective. Policy efforts to

^{kk} Actual incidence of domestic violence among families in the child support system is likely to be higher than numbers here would suggest. The CAS survey from which these statistics are calculated employed a sampling methodology which first removed all Texas child support cases containing a domestic violence flag in OAG administrative records—fully 15 percent of cases. CFRP then drew a stratified random sample of AOP-signing mothers in Texas who gave birth outside of marriage in June of 2009 using the restricted population of mothers without a domestic violence flag. As a result, the prevalence of domestic violence among Texas families in the child support system is underestimated throughout this report.

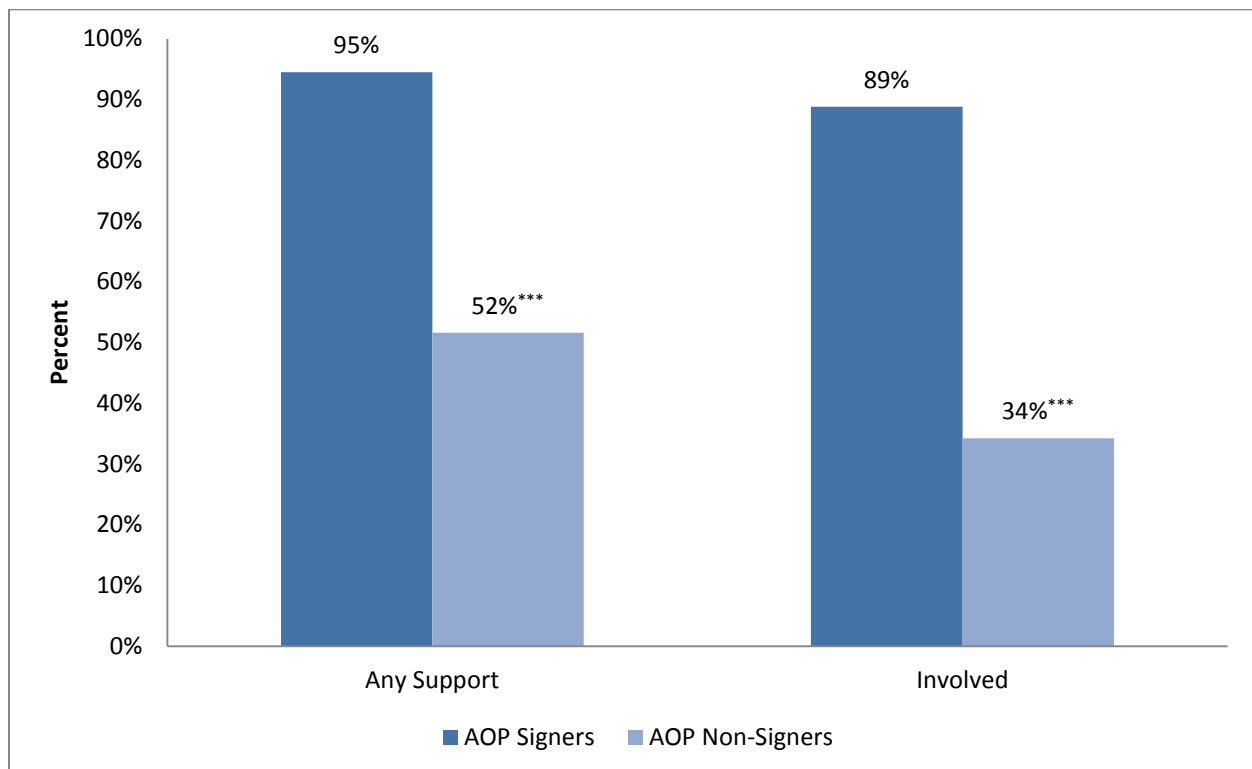
reduce the incidence of these risk factors may have collateral benefits that ripple from fathers to children through increases in involvement, support, a father's positive influence.

SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT BY AOP SIGNING

The father typologies presented in Figure 80 broadly categorize Texas fathers with 3-year-olds by financial support and involvement. Each of these fathers also signed an AOP in the hospital. Though CFRP did not survey non-signing parents with 3-year-olds, a separate survey conducted among AOP-signing and non-signing parents three months after a nonmarital birth (PES Study) permits some insight into how non-signers fare on broad measures of support and involvement. Figure 81 plots the proportion of AOP signers and non-signers who are involved and giving any type of financial support.

Consistent with themes seen throughout this report, signing an AOP is associated with much higher rates of financial support and involvement. Three months after a nonmarital birth, nearly all AOP-signing fathers in Texas are still providing at least some type of support. By contrast, approximately half of fathers who did not sign an AOP are providing some kind of support. This dramatic disparity is present in measures of father involvement, as well. Roughly 9 in 10 AOP signers remain involved with their child three months after birth whereas only one-third of the fathers who did not sign an AOP are still involved.

Figure 81: Paternal Support and Involvement by AOP Signing at 3 Months



Source: PES Mothers at 3 months at 3 months, weighted

The statistics presented in Figure 81 make clear that failure to establish paternity is a serious red flag for children. Because a lack of paternal involvement and support carries so many negative consequences for children, policy efforts to increase AOP signing in the hospital are likely to yield significant positive outcomes.

Importantly however, the underlying explanation for why some fathers fail to sign an AOP may be the same factors that lead to negative outcomes for their children (e.g. poor relationship quality with the child's mother, substance abuse, domestic violence). In these cases, signing an AOP is not sufficient; policies must aim to reduce the risk factors that inhibit AOP signing and lead to a serious deficit in father involvement, support, and child wellbeing.

Policy Discussion

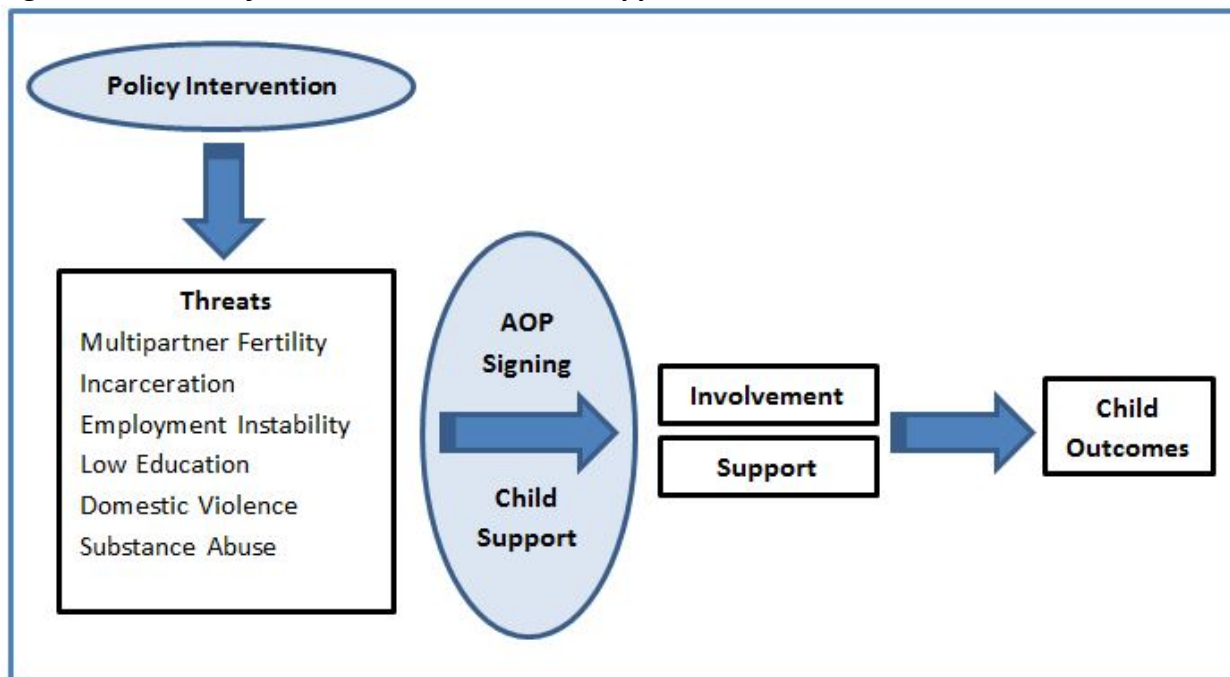
As noted at the beginning of this chapter, high-quality father involvement and support are associated with positive child outcomes on a wide range of measures, including cognitive development, health, and emotional wellbeing. Policy levers intended to increase positive involvement and support may therefore have the ability to exert an indirect influence on child wellbeing.

In designing policies to improve the emotional and financial investments of unmarried fathers however, it is important to account for the host of risk factors related to paternal involvement and support. Factors such as multipartner fertility, domestic violence, substance abuse, and incarceration may mitigate the positive effects that fathers have on their children and remain a critical consideration for policymakers in this area.

Under these circumstances, policies that seek to increase the number of fathers who sign the AOP should also bear in mind the risk factors associated with those least likely to sign. In short, the failure to sign the AOP may serve as a proxy for a father's underlying characteristics given the tendency for these fathers to disproportionately carry an array of interpersonal and social risk factors. Policies that are mindful of the prevalence of these risk factors among unmarried parents, or perhaps even address these issues prior to the time of signing, may serve not only to increase AOP signing, but also to improve high-quality coparenting, involvement, and support.

Figure 82 illustrates the influence of these risks and the corresponding effects many have on child outcomes in relation to father involvement and support. It also highlights the role of policy to help mitigate these threats, encourage high-quality involvement and support, and improve child outcomes.

Figure 82: Model of Father Involvement and Support



Drawing on this framework, the following section discusses the policy implications of addressing these risk factors as they relate to paternity establishment and child support among Texas fathers. It then discusses CFRP’s findings in relation to those fathers least likely to sign an AOP and those most likely to enter the formal child support system. The final section explores potential avenues for increasing AOP signing among unmarried parents in Texas and offers considerations for the direction of future research related to in-hospital paternity establishment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF PATERNITY, INVOLVEMENT, AND SUPPORT

Acknowledgment of paternity is associated with a number of positive outcomes for children and families, especially when paternity is established voluntarily in the hospital shortly after a child is born. Previous research shows that fathers who voluntarily acknowledge paternity are more likely to have seen their children in the past 30 days, comply with child support orders, and spend the night with their children than fathers who acknowledge paternity outside of the hospital or not at all.²¹³

Although the association between AOP signing and increased paternal involvement and support is well-established, researchers have not yet identified whether the relationship is causal or based on selection effects. That is, are fathers who are more likely to be involved and supportive also more likely to sign an AOP (selection effect) or does signing an AOP lay the groundwork for more involved and supportive parenting (causal impact)?

Data from CFRP suggest that a selection effect may be at work, with paternal involvement and support often concomitant with the health of the mother-father relationship. A consistent

theme running throughout our analyses is the tight link between fathers in romantic, cohabiting relationships and a father's likelihood of signing the AOP, being involved, or providing support. These positive outcomes also tend to coexist alongside a dramatically lower incidence of risk characteristics.

To the extent that the type of father who signs an AOP is also apt to be the type of father who has a good relationship with the mother, feels motivated to be involved and supportive, and carries fewer risks, then the story of AOP signing may be mostly one of selection. This implies that encouraging fathers to sign the AOP without changing the underlying reasons that limit their voluntary signing may not improve father involvement or child wellbeing.

Alternatively, there is also evidence that stronger state mandates to increase paternity establishment rates have succeeded in increasing the proportion of children who receive support from nonresident fathers and, perhaps as a result, the amount of contact those fathers have with their children.^{214,215} These findings indicate that AOP signing may have a causal relationship with paternal involvement and support, and imply that increasing information and opportunities around AOP signing may have beneficial impacts on children.

Given the conflicting research on the causal direction between AOP signing and involved and supportive fatherhood, it is important to understand the common characteristics and behaviors that pose threats to involvement and support among non-signers, even among those who are currently engaged and supportive.

Texas fathers who do not sign an AOP are much more likely to possess characteristics that negatively impact, or at least reduce the benefits of, their involvement and support. The most relevant policy implication for in-hospital AOP signing is that it may lay the groundwork for increased and more beneficial paternal involvement and support—an improvement that has the capacity to significantly strengthen the wellbeing of Texas children. Even in cases where the link between AOP signing and elevated involvement and support might be attributed to selection, encouraging and increasing in-hospital paternity establishment still provides a child with two legal parents and improves his or her prospects for support in the case that informal support is absent or abandoned.

Conversely, failure to voluntarily establish paternity is correlated with much lower levels of support and involvement, as well as a much higher incidence of risks that threaten to extinguish the already diminished levels of involvement and support. In short, although in-hospital paternity establishment does not negate the effects of risk factors discussed throughout this report, it may mitigate them, and even if it does not, the pathway to a formal child support order is at least expedited. The facilitation of child support is especially relevant given that non-signers are much more likely than signers to indicate that they are considering opening a formal child support order.

In light of these considerations, policy interventions aimed at improving child outcomes should be mindful of the broader context that accompanies many unmarried births in Texas. Opportunities to address relevant risk factors during the prenatal period, whether through employment programs, substance abuse counseling, or coparenting classes, may provide an avenue for intervention before an unmarried father is confronted with the decision to sign an AOP.

Policies that seek to cultivate child wellbeing by increasing voluntary paternity establishment should also take account of the risk characteristics among those who decline to sign the AOP. Indeed, signing an AOP in the hospital is cause for concern for those fathers who are prone to domestic violence, substance abuse, or other characteristics that have the potential to harm the child or mother. In these instances, establishing paternity through the courts is preferable to in-hospital establishment given the ability to set appropriate legal parameters for a father's visitation access.

Policymakers may also find opportunities to address risk factors among those who do not establish paternity in the hospital. Conceptualizing the failure to sign an AOP as a sort of red flag, policymakers could consider developing programs to reduce the harm from or prevalence of risk factors among non-signing fathers in conjunction with, or shortly after the birth of their child. Targeted interventions around substance abuse or unemployment, for example, may help non-signing fathers to begin addressing these challenges while their children are still young.

Policymakers may also consider intervening to establish a child support order for fathers who fail to sign an AOP form. Court ordered child support and visitation arrangements may increase security for those families in which substance abuse and domestic violence are present. Moreover, most non-signers will fail to provide informal support to their children by the time the child is three years old; in these cases, a formal child support order may increase financial support to some of Texas' most vulnerable families.

From the state's perspective, establishing a child support order for non-signers may increase efficiency; these fathers are likely to enter the child support system by the time the child is three years old. Getting these fathers attached to the child support system early may increase their willingness to pay sooner and reduce the amount of back child support that may be ordered at establishment.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR INCREASING VOLUNTARY PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT

Efforts to increase voluntary paternity establishment should begin with parents' awareness of the benefits of establishing paternity as well as the basic process involved. Three months after a nonmarital birth, 4 in 10 unmarried mothers reported learning about the establishment of paternity only after giving birth—an inopportune time to fully digest the far-reaching implications of legal fatherhood. As discussed in Chapter 2, nearly 7 out of 10 mothers would have preferred to learn about paternity establishment while or before becoming pregnant.

Adapting the timing or increasing the number of channels through which parents can learn about paternity establishment is likely to be helpful. Although parents reported feeling most receptive to information about establishing paternity when they were at the hospital, rates of voluntary paternity establishment may have the potential for further increases as future research identifies or refines additional points of contact by which to deliver targeted information to those parents least likely to sign an AOP. Future data collected through two forthcoming studies – PEEP (Paternity Establishment among Expecting Parents) and PPAS (Professionals Paternity Acknowledgment Study) – will lend additional insight into when and where parents prefer to learn about the AOP.

Adjusting when parents hear about paternity establishment may be complemented by increasing the number of sources providing that information. At present, those who learn about paternity establishment in the hospital are likely to learn about it from a birth registrar. Although birth registrars have the information and training to establish paternity, they may face restrictions on time as well as a host of other barriers, such as the sensitivity of questions regarding true paternity in the moments following a birth.

Additionally, as described in Chapter 2, some parents do not recall ever meeting with a birth registrar whereas others did not find the meeting to be informative or helpful. Among those who recall meeting with the birth registrar, parents who did not establish paternity are less likely than parents who did establish paternity to rate their overall experience favorably.

A clear majority of mothers surveyed three months after birth indicated that they would have liked to have heard about paternity establishment from their doctor or nurse. Although this would not supplant the birth registrar's work, it suggests a possible point of intervention.

Future research by CFRP will offer further insight into the dynamics surrounding in-hospital AOP signing in Texas, especially with regard to the perspectives of those who administer the AOP. This upcoming study (PPAS) will solicit the views of healthcare providers, support workers, and AOP administrators (i.e., birth registrars and midwives) at AOP certified entities and AOP certification training sites to in an effort to inform future recommendations.

Beyond increasing awareness and opportunities for paternity establishment, it is also important to consider the extent to which threats to involvement and support are present even at the moment of birth. Of the fathers who did not sign an AOP, 6 in 10 were not present at the hospital. This could be due to poor relationship quality, incarceration, domestic violence, or nonattendance caused by other obligations. Regardless of the cause, a father's absence presents a significant barrier to legal and timely paternity establishment.

Efforts to increase voluntary establishment of paternity without addressing these threats are likely to be less successful. In some cases, failure to establish paternity in the hospital may even be preferable; from a policy standpoint, fathers who inflict harm on the mother and child should not sign an AOP given the implicit right to visitation established under these

circumstances. Mothers experiencing family violence should not sign the AOP in the hospital, but instead should seek the aid of the court system to establish paternity and formal child support and visitation orders.

Though preferable to in-hospital signing, even the courts are unlikely to provide a panacea in complex circumstances and policymakers should be wary that establishing paternity or child support in cases of domestic violence has the potential to trigger violent behavior in the abuser regardless of court involvement.²¹⁶ Currently, little to no research exists on mothers who are positively screened for domestic violence in the hospital at the time of birth and encouraged to establish paternity in court.

Furthermore, the process for domestic violence screening and intervention in the hospital may pose challenges to establishing paternity when violence is present. Research indicates that domestic violence is rarely disclosed due to victims' unfamiliarity with service providers, a belief that others will be unable to help, fear of negative repercussions from Child Protective Services, fear of the abuser, and shame.²¹⁷ These barriers raise questions about the efficacy and appropriateness of screening and/or intervention at time of delivery. Birth registrars typically have only a short amount of time with parents, making it difficult or impractical to establish the necessary rapport to encourage disclosure.²¹⁸ On the other hand, the birth of a child may be one of the few opportunities to reach mothers in unsafe situations.

Policymakers should also be wary of the difficulty and potential danger in screening for domestic violence when an abusive parent is present at the birth. Survey data collected by CFRP reveal that 54 percent of fathers identified as abusive were present in the hospital at the time of birth (not shown). In these cases, speaking with both parents about domestic violence may put the safety of mother and child at risk.

Birth registrars may benefit from support and training to effectively identify abuse while also maintaining the safety of mother and child. Utilizing trained crisis intervention staff such as the hospital social worker may also be appropriate in some cases. It is important to bear in mind that relationship violence involves the use of power and control on the part of the abuser. Paternity establishment may be used as one form of control.

In addition, the intersection of paternity establishment and child support adds another layer of complexity. Research indicates that economic self-sufficiency is one of the most important factors allowing survivors to leave an abusive relationship.²¹⁹ Mothers seeking a child support order to achieve economic independence will need avenues to do so safely, including an avenue to safe paternity establishment. Future research is required to better understand how policy should intervene in cases where domestic violence is present, especially given its complex relationship with paternity establishment and child support.

IMPLICATIONS OF PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT ON CHILD SUPPORT

Consistent with prior research, our results indicate that informal support is a very common arrangement among unmarried parents—especially when they cohabit. But as other studies have shown, the total support mothers receive typically declines once couples stop living together and informal support begins to wane.²²⁰ Several years later, total support recovers slightly as formal child support picks up the slack wrought by dwindling informal support.

An unintended consequence of this transition, however, may be the dissolution of any remaining informal support. Research shows that strong child support enforcement leads fathers to exchange informal support for formal support, or in other words, that the two methods of support act as substitutes, not complements.²²¹ When informal cash support is replaced by formal child support—a tradeoff some studies have shown to be equal in size—it often comes with the loss of in-kind support as well.

Moreover, when the two offsetting methods of cash support are considered alongside the evaporation of in-kind support, the net effect is a lower level of total support for those in the child support system.²²² But even though mothers under a strong child support enforcement regime may be worse off than their counterparts under informal/in-kind arrangements, they are still likely to be better off than they would have been under the counterfactual scenario without strong enforcement—especially in the long run.

Indeed, though total support never reaches amounts received when parents first stop cohabiting, findings suggest that strong child support enforcement may act as a safety net for families who would otherwise see a sure decline.²²³ In addition, research shows that strong enforcement may be especially effective among fathers who have cohabited with the mother in the past. Fathers who never lived with the mother, on the other hand, have a lower ability to pay and are more likely to be unaffected by strong enforcement.²²⁴

Ensuring the wellbeing of families within the child support system often means considering more than just the financial support they receive. A comprehensive approach to family policy also calls for an understanding of the involvement between unmarried fathers and their children.

Throughout this report, our findings point to a number of implications regarding the intersection of support and involvement. When considered alongside prior literature, several considerations arise. Not only do higher levels of involvement tend to coincide with the provision of informal support, but other studies identify some evidence of a causal direction. When nonresident fathers have at least monthly contact with their children, this appears to positively impact both the likelihood and amount of informal support several years later.²²⁵ The reverse, however, is less true; informal support has weaker and less consistent effects on future father involvement. This finding suggests that programs targeted at increasing father involvement may have the collateral benefit of sustaining or boosting future levels of informal support.

Paternal involvement does not appear to drive future child support in the same way, however. Instead, research suggests that formal child support may increase the likelihood of future father-child contact.²²⁶ A number of studies confirm the link between strong child support enforcement and higher levels of nonresident father involvement.²²⁷ Findings like these suggest that formal child support may bring about benefits that lie beyond the realm of economics alone, helping to promote the social bond between father and child.²²⁸ Child support enforcement has also been linked to decreases in risky sexual behaviors, nonmarital births, and welfare utilization, making strong enforcement policies one potential lever for improving the long-term wellbeing of men and women in these families.²²⁹

Others have argued, however, that strict child support enforcement may have the unintended consequence of damaging father involvement. Child support enforcement may increase conflict between the mother and father, thus undermining the coparenting relationship and dampening fathers' involvement with their children.²³⁰ Fathers with a weakened connection to their child may, in turn, have less incentive to pay their assigned support.²³¹ Other studies note that fathers may have to work longer hours to afford support payments, thereby diminishing their availability for involvement.²³²

On the whole, however, both our research and the research of other studies suggest that child support is most common among those families for whom other, more informal options have been exhausted. Data presented throughout the course of this report underline the idea that it is the most troubled fathers who arrive in the formal system—those from whom the mother expects and receives little. Policymakers would benefit from additional study of formal child support's role as a safeguard against worsening circumstances, and whether it is more apt to yield improvements in family outcomes, or simply exacerbate existing strife in the parental relationship.

Of course, many of the forces at work in these families lie outside of the home. Whether child support enforcement improves or depreciates the father-child bond must be considered alongside a host of contextual factors that define day-to-day life for many of these families. Many men in these communities face a staggering number of barriers, including lack of education, dismal economic prospects, discrimination, criminal records, substance abuse, violence, and mental illness. Social services to address these challenges, especially with regard to employment, housing, and health, may help to improve the lives of these fathers and their children.²³³

Moreover, some fathers may be unable to meet their formal support obligations specifically because of these forces.²³⁴ Rampant unemployment, underemployment, and employment instability imply that the child support enforcement system may be able to improve collections and overall family wellbeing by helping unmarried fathers to obtain stable employment at a living wage.²³⁵ The NCP Choices program serves as one example of relevant policy interventions in this area, and may even function as a model for employment programs among non-signing fathers outside of the formal child support system.

Employment programs may also carry attendant benefits, such as reductions in poverty and crime. Indeed, without a source of reliable and sufficient wages, fathers who have substantial support obligations may find it difficult to survive on their remaining income, increasing the likelihood that they will be driven into poverty or the underground economy. Though a shift to the informal labor market may permit some fathers to avoid the automatic garnishment of wages, it may also lead to incarceration or other detrimental outcomes for fathers' economic and emotional participation. Ensuring that award amounts are flexible enough to adjust for job loss or changes in wages may help ensure fathers are not driven into illicit employment activities to meet outdated obligations based on previous wages.²³⁶

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Several policy considerations arise from data analyzed throughout this report. Table 17 below highlights several of the most relevant options for policymakers on the topics of AOP signing and child support. Future reports by CFRP will expand on these policy implications as new studies and additional waves of survey data lend further insight into areas where intervention may be most effective.

Table 17: Policy Considerations for AOP Signing and Child Support Enforcement

Policy Considerations	
1.	Provide more information during pregnancy on the need for paternity establishment; adopt additional channels for outreach, and allow for more opportunities to voluntarily sign the AOP during pregnancy.
2.	In cases where domestic violence or substance abuse is present, encourage mothers to establish paternity through the court process. Provide education to birth registrars, doctors, families, and child support workers on why this route to paternity establishment is preferable, highlighting the safety of the mother and child and an ability to set legal limits on the father's access to the child.
3.	Request a waiver from the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) to automatically establish a child support order for fathers who do not sign the AOP in the hospital. Families can choose to opt-out of having a child support case opened, but most of the mothers associated with non-signers plan to open a child support case in the near future and would benefit from the automatic enrollment. Non-signing fathers have substantially higher risk factors and will likely end up in the formal child support system by the time the child is three years old. The automatic enrollment would reduce the back child support that may be ordered when a formal order is ultimately established, and increase the likelihood that a father will pay his child support and contribute to the wellbeing of the child.
4.	Recognize that fathers who enter the child support system are the highest-risk fathers. These fathers do not arrive in the formal system as a result of breakups alone. A sizable number never had a relationship with the mother to begin with, and many are characterized by a high number of risks that lead mothers to devalue their presence and involvement. Efforts to increase child support payments among some fathers in this group should consider ways to increase involvement (if safe) and address relevant risk factors.

Conclusion

Children do better when their fathers are emotionally and financially involved. These paternal investments are less beneficial, however, when parents struggle to get along or when fathers have a history of antisocial behavior. In general, improving the amount of involvement and support that fathers provide is beneficial for child outcomes. Given these benefits, it is crucial to understand what causes fathers to increase or decrease the level of emotional and financial involvement they have with their children.

Using survey data collected by CFRP, this chapter categorized AOP-signing fathers with 3-year-olds into 9 types based on designations of support, involvement, and cohabitation. Mapping the risk factors discussed throughout this report onto different father types reveals that specific paternal characteristics such as employment instability, substance abuse, and multipartner fertility, are consistently more common among fathers with lower levels of involvement and support. Reducing these risk factors is likely one of the best ways to improve outcomes for children. Policies designed to increase paternal involvement and support, and by extension, child wellbeing, must first address the pervasive catalog of risks that threaten to undermine a father's contributions to his family.

Improving voluntary paternity establishment is one way to lay the groundwork for increased involvement and support. CFRP data show that adapting the source, timing, and delivery of information about paternity establishment may help families to prepare for and better understand the AOP process. In addition, efforts to improve rates of paternity establishment may benefit from targeted outreach designed to educate and aid those fathers least likely to sign the AOP. Although modifications to the timing and information channels associated with AOP signing may have the ability to swell the ranks of signers, it is important to note that these efforts are likely to prove ineffectual with regards to involvement and support efforts to simultaneously address the risks associated with many of these fathers.

This chapter, though illustrative of many themes discussed throughout this report, also raises a number of questions. Three years after an AOP is signed, a majority of Texas fathers are cohabiting, involved, and supportive of their new families in ways that would be considered positive for child outcomes. Nevertheless, many of these fathers have risk profiles that foreshadow a gradual erosion of their involvement and support in the years to come.

Future waves of the PES Study should permit some insight into the factors most associated with a father's tendency to withdraw contact and informal support over time. Meanwhile, additional research on the AOP process will develop a round of new survey instruments to solicit the perspectives of AOP administrators and healthcare providers across the state of Texas. Together, these future efforts will seek further opportunities to leverage the intersection of social science research and well-informed public policy for improving the lives of Texas children.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: PES Study Information

PES Study (Baseline)	
Sampling Methodology/Collection Details	Measures/Research Topics
<p><u>Recruitment Strategy:</u> Contact stratified random sample of all unmarried parents with children born in Texas during the first two weeks of January 2013. (N ~ 6,500). The sample was first stratified by child support region, then by birthing entity.</p> <p>The OAG provided HBPP data on all relevant births as well as parent surveys with up-to-date contact information.</p> <p>All parents were mailed a recruitment letter and consent form giving them the opportunity to contact CFRP and participate. Researchers recruited remaining parents by phone or email.</p> <p>Surveys administered by telephone and online.</p> <p>All Material available in English and Spanish</p> <p><u>Survey Collection Dates</u> April 2013 – June 2013 (Children were approximately 3 months old at the time of the survey)</p> <p><u>Sample Size</u> Mothers: N= 807 Fathers: N=294</p> <p><u>Analytic Sample Size</u> Mothers: N=700 Fathers: N=294</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic information (age, race, education) • Relationship status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Relationship with other bio-parent ○ Supportiveness of current partner (if in a relationship) • Financial Situation • Birth order of child/MPF • Prenatal Care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Birth Control ○ Use of prenatal care ○ Father involvement with prenatal appointments ○ Pregnancy complications • Delivery information (if applicable) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Manner of delivery ○ Complications ○ Father's presence/name on birth certificate • Learning about Paternity Establishment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ When parents are most receptive to PE messages ○ Understanding of PE information ○ AOP signing ○ AOP rescission • Attitudes about fatherhood • Child support intentions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Intention toward or status of child support order ○ Child support compliance ○ Informal support

Note: The analytic sample is limited to observations without any missing data on key outcome variables related to AOP signing, parental relationship, father involvement, and support categories.

PES survey weights

The sampling methodology used in PES intentionally oversampled unmarried parents who did not sign the AOP to improve the reliability of estimates calculated for this subgroup. In order to create a dataset that was representative of all unmarried births in Texas during the first two weeks of January 2013, we weighted the data to correct for the oversampling of non-signers. We calculated the weights as the inverse of the probability that a person would participate based on the population. These weights do not account for the different response rates between groups and regions.

Appendix B: CAS Study Information

CAS Study	
Sampling Methodology/Collection Details	Measures/Research Topics
<p><u>Recruitment Strategy</u> Contact stratified random sample of all AOP signers with children born in Texas during June 2009 ($N \sim 9880$). The sample was first stratified child support region, then by birthing entity.</p> <p>The OAG provided HBPP data on all relevant births. The data will include available contact information, date the AOP was signed, and records of child support orders and compliance.</p> <p>All parents were mailed a recruitment letter and consent form giving them the opportunity to contact CFRP and participate. Researchers recruited remaining parents by phone or email.</p> <p>Surveys administered by telephone and online.</p> <p>All material available in English and Spanish</p> <p><u>Survey Collection Dates</u> January 2013 – March 2013 (Children were approximately 3 and a half years old at the time of the survey)</p> <p><u>Sample Size</u> Mothers: $N=597$ Fathers: $N=84$</p> <p><u>Analytic Sample Size</u> Mothers: $N=529$ Fathers: $N=84$</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Information • Mother/Father Relationship • Father Involvement and Coparenting • Mother’s Parenting Practices • Maternal Stressors • Prenatal and Birth Information • AOP Experience • Child Support • Informal Support • Multipartner Fertility • Mother’s Fatherhood Attitudes • Father’s Fatherhood Attitudes • Knowledge about Child Support and Paternity • Mother Financial Status • Material Hardship • Father Financial Status • Current Partner • Social Support • Maternal Outcomes • Child Outcomes • Mother Demographics • Father Demographics

Note: The analytic sample is limited to observations without any missing data on key outcome variables related to parental relationship, father involvement, and support categories.

CAS survey weights

The sampling methodology used in CAS intentionally oversampled unmarried parents in the formal child support system to improve the reliability of estimates calculated for this subgroup. In order to create a dataset that was representative of all AOP signers in Texas in June 2009, we weighted the data to correct for the oversampling of families in the child support system. We calculated the weights as the inverse of the probability that a person would participate based on the population. These weights do not account for the different response rates between groups and regions.

Appendix C: CAS and PES Study Demographics

CAS & PES Study Demographics (Percent)				
	Paternity Establishment Study (PES) N=700 (Unweighted)		Checking in with AOP Signers (CAS) N=529 (Unweighted)	
	Mothers %	Fathers %	Mothers %	Fathers %
<i>In-Hospital AOP Signing</i>				
AOP Signers	77%	77%	100%	100%
<i>Child Support Order</i>				
Current Child Support Order	6%	6%	21%	N/A
<i>Race</i>				
Hispanic/Latino	56%	56%	58%	54%
African American	14%	18%	11%	16%
Asian	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Native American	1%	<1%	<1%	2%
White, Non-Hispanic	26%	22%	27%	27%
Other	2%	2%	2%	1%
<i>Age</i>				
Average Age	24	27	28	30
<i>Citizenship Status</i>				
U.S. Citizen	83%	80%	83%	83%
Lawful Permanent Resident	3%	4%	5%	6%
Authorized to Work	2%	3%	2%	2%
None of the Above	12%	13%	9%	9%
<i>Education</i>				
No Formal Schooling	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%
1-8 Years	3%	6%	3%	6%
9-12 Years	15%	17%	10%	23%
High School Graduate	30%	37%	37%	40%
Some College	34%	24%	17%	12%
Associate's Degree	7%	5%	20%	10%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	10%	5%	14%	5%
Don't Know	N/A	6%	N/A	3%
<i>Employment</i>				
Currently Unemployed	56%	16%	40%	16%
<i>Multipartner Fertility</i>				
Multipartner Fertility	30%	34%	28%	30%

Appendix C Continued: CAS and PES Study Demographics

CAS & PES Study Demographics Continued (Percent)				
	Paternity Establishment Study (PES) N=700 (Unweighted)		Checking in with AOP Signers (CAS) N=529 (Unweighted)	
	Mothers %	Fathers %	Mothers %	Fathers %
Parental Relationship				
Married	6%	6%	27%	27%
Living Together and Romantically Involved	55%	55%	31%	31%
Not Living Together and Romantically Involved	14%	14%	4%	4%
Casual or On and Off Relationship	4%	4%	4%	4%
Living Together but Not Romantically Involved	1%	1%	<1%	<1%
Separated or Divorced	2%	2%	6%	6%
Just Friends	5%	5%	8%	8%
Not In Any Type of Relationship	13%	13%	18%	18%
Father Risk Factors				
Incarcerated at Birth	-	2%	-	N/A
Ever Incarcerated	-	N/A	-	33%
Currently Unemployed	-	16%	-	16%
Employment Instability	-	N/A	-	26%
Less than High School	-	23%	-	30%
Domestic Violence	-	19%	-	21%
Health Problems Limiting Work	-	N/A	-	5%
Substance Abuse	-	N/A	-	13%

Source: PES Mothers at 3 months, weighted; CAS Mothers at 3 years, weighted

Note: Information about father demographics is based on mothers' reports. Six percent of PES mothers do not know if their child's father is unemployed and 4 percent do not know if their child's father has children with other partners. Seven percent of CAS mothers do not know if their child's father is unemployed and 6 percent do not know if their child's father had children with other partners.

Appendix D: Glossary of Terms

Term	Survey	Definition
Child Support Order/ Expectations	PES	Mother has a legal agreement or child support order that requires Father provide financial support for child—OR—mother is in the process of establishing a child support order, is planning to open a case but has not started, or is not sure whether she will open child support case.
Child Support Order/ Expectations	CAS	Mother has a legal agreement or child support order that requires Father to provide financial support for child—OR— mother is in the process of establishing a child support order, is planning to open a case but has not started, tried to get a court order but it was never established, or is not sure whether she will open child support case.
Domestic Violence	PES	Mother reports being physically hurt in an argument with the father since becoming pregnant, or feeling that the father has put her or the child at risk of physical or emotional harm
Domestic Violence	CAS	Mother reports feeling that the father has put her or the child at risk of physical or emotional harm since becoming pregnant— OR—mother indicates violence or abuse as a reason for moving out, breaking up, ending the romantic relationship, or not being in a relationship
Employment Instability	CAS	Father does not currently work for pay—OR—Father did not work for pay before child was born—OR—mother indicates unemployment as a reason that father is not currently paying formal child support or providing informal support.
Ever Incarcerated	CAS	Father has been convicted of a crime since child was born—OR— father has ever spent time in jail or prison—OR—mother indicates incarceration as a reason for moving out, breaking up, ending the romantic relationship, not being in a relationship, not providing formal or informal financial support
Health Problems Limiting Work	CAS	Father has physical or mental health conditions that limit the kind or amount of work he can do
Incarcerated At Birth	PES	Mother indicates father was not present at the birth due to incarceration
Maternal Gatekeeping	PES	Mother indicates that the father would like to be more involved than she would like him to be
Multipartner Fertility	PES/CAS	Mother or father has one or more child by another partner
Substance Abuse	CAS	Father has problems such as keeping a job or getting along with family and friends because of alcohol or drug use
Unemployed	PES	Father does not currently work for pay

Appendix E: Response Consistency Among Matched Parents

Table 18: Response Consistency on Father Involvement at 3 Months

Consistency in Responses between Matched Mothers and Fathers	
	<i>Correlation Coefficient</i>
Accessibility	
# Days Dad seen Child in 30 days	0.8297
Engagement	
Read Stories	0.7177
Sing Songs	0.7266
Hug or Physical Affection	0.7032
Tell Child love him/her	0.6005
Responsibility	
Look after Child	0.6939
Feed Child	0.6224
Change Diaper	0.7115
Put Child to Bed	0.7204

Source: PES Matched Pairs at 3 months, unweighted

ENDNOTES

-
- ¹ Fagan, J., & Palkovitz, R. (2007). Unmarried, nonresident fathers' involvement with their infants: A risk and resilience perspective. *Journal of Family Psychology, 21*(3), 479.
- ² Waller, M. R., & Swisher, R. (2006). Fathers' risk factors in fragile families: Implications for "healthy" relationships and father involvement. *Social Problems, 53*(3), 392-420.
- ³ Cancian, M., Meyer, D. & Park, O. (2003). The importance of child support for low-income families. Report to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty.
- ⁴ Amato, P. R., & Gilbreth, J. G. (1999). Nonresident fathers and children's well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 557-573*.
- ⁵ Knox, V. W. (1996). The effects of child support payments on developmental outcomes for elementary school-age children. *Journal of Human Resources, 816-840*.
- ⁶ Argys, L. M., Peters, H. E., Brooks-Gunn, J., & Smith, J. R. (1998). The impact of child support on cognitive outcomes of young children. *Demography, 35*(2), 159-173.
- ⁷ Brown, P., & Cook, S. (2008). A Decade of Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgment in Wisconsin: 1997-2007. *Report to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development*.
- ⁸ Carlson, Marcia J. and Katherine Magnuson. (2011) Low-Income Fathers' Influence on Children. The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. 635:95. 95-116.; Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn. (2007, September) Fathers' Involvement and Young Children's Behavior in Fragile Families. Extended Abstract.; Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan. (2009, May 11) Fathers in Fragile Families. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. Working Paper WP09-14-FF.; Harris, Kathleen Mullan, Frank F. Furstenberg, and Jeremy K. Marmer. (1998). Paternal involvement with adolescents in intact families: The influence of fathers over the life course. *Demography, 35* (2), 201-216.; Carlson, M. J. (2006), Family Structure, Father Involvement, and Adolescent Behavioral Outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 68*: 137-154.
- ⁹ United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2011, July). *Promoting Responsible Fatherhood: Effective Parenting*. Federal Research Site. Retrieved from <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/Parenting/index.shtml>
- ¹⁰ Gershoff, E. T., Aber, J. L., Raver, C. C., & Lennon, M. C. (2007). Income is not enough: Incorporating material hardship into models of income associations with parenting and child development. *Child development, 78*(1), 70-95.
- ¹¹ Knox, V. W. (1996). The effects of child support payments on developmental outcomes for elementary school-age children. *Journal of Human Resources, 816-840*.
- ¹² Child Trends. July 2013. Births to Unmarried Women: Indicators on Children and Youth. Retrieved from http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/75_Births_to_Unmarried_Women.pdf
- ¹³ Martin, Joyce A., et al. Births: Final data for 2011. *National Vital Statistics Reports, 62*(1). Supplemental Tables. June 2013. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr62/nvsr62_01_tables.pdf.
- ¹⁴ Kennedy, S., & Bumpass, L. (2008). Cohabitation and children's living arrangements: New estimates from the United States. *Demographic research, 19*, 1663.
- ¹⁵ Aquilino, W. S. (1996). The life course of children born to unmarried mothers: Childhood living arrangements and young adult outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 293-310*.
- ¹⁶ McLanahan, S., & Percheski, C. (2008). Family structure and the reproduction of inequalities. *Annu. Rev. Sociol, 34*, 257-276.
- ¹⁷ McLanahan, S., & Percheski, C. (2008). Family structure and the reproduction of inequalities. *Annu. Rev. Sociol, 34*, 257-276.
- ¹⁸ Child Trends. July 2013. Births to Unmarried Women: Indicators on Children and Youth. Retrieved from http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/75_Births_to_Unmarried_Women.pdf

- ¹⁹ Martin, Joyce A., et al. Births: Final data for 2011. National Vital Statistics Reports, 62(1). Supplemental Tables. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr62/nvsr62_01_tables.pdf.
- ²⁰ Shattuck, Rachel M., Kreider, Rose M. Social and Economic Characteristics of Currently Unmarried Women With a Recent Birth: 2011. American Community Survey Reports. May 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/acs-21.pdf>.
- ²¹ Poverty in this instance is defined as “the poverty level of the householder for all people in the listed geographic area.” For additional information, see *Ibid*, p. 7.
- ²² Shattuck, Rachel M., Kreider, Rose M. Social and Economic Characteristics of Currently Unmarried Women With a Recent Birth: 2011. American Community Survey Reports. May 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/acs-21.pdf>.
- ²³ McLanahan, S., & Percheski, C. (2008). Family structure and the reproduction of inequalities. *Annu. Rev. Sociol.*, 34, 257-276.
- ²⁴ Aquilino, W. S. (1996). The life course of children born to unmarried mothers: Childhood living arrangements and young adult outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 293-310.
- ²⁵ McLanahan, S., & Sandefur, G. D. (1994). *Growing up with a single parent: What hurts, what helps*. Harvard University Press.
- ²⁶ Amato, P. R. (1991). Parental absence during childhood and depression in later life. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 32(4), 543-556.
- ²⁷ Brown, S. L. (2004). Family structure and child well-being: the significance of parental cohabitation. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(2), 351-367.
- ²⁸ Carlson, M. J., & McLanahan, S. S. (2010). Fathers in fragile families. The role of the father in child development, 5, 241-269.
- ²⁹ Amato, P. R. (2005). The impact of family formation change on the cognitive, social, and emotional well-being of the next generation. *The Future of Children*, 15(2), 75-96.
- ³⁰ *Ibid*.
- ³¹ Marsiglio, W., Amato, P., Day, R. D., & Lamb, M. E. (2000). Scholarship on fatherhood in the 1990s and beyond. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62(4), 1173-1191.
- ³² Martin, A., Ryan, R. M., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2007). The joint influence of mother and father parenting on child cognitive outcomes at age 5. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22(4), 423-439.
- ³³ Marsiglio, W., Amato, P., Day, R. D., & Lamb, M. E. (2000). Scholarship on fatherhood in the 1990s and beyond. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62(4), 1173-1191.
- ³⁴ Amato, P. R., & Gilbreth, J. G. (1999). Nonresident fathers and children's well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 557-573.
- ³⁵ Knox, V. W. (1996). The effects of child support payments on developmental outcomes for elementary school-age children. *Journal of Human Resources*, 816-840. Amato, P. R., & Gilbreth, J. G. (1999). Nonresident fathers and children's well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 557-573.
- ³⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2009). Summary of performance and financial information: Fiscal year 2009. Retrieved from http://www.hhs.gov/about/budget/fy2011/spfi_report.pdf.
- ³⁷ Brooks-Gunn, Jeanne and Greg J. Duncan. (1997). The Effects of Poverty on Children. *The Future of Children*, Children and Poverty, 7 (2), 55-71.; Aber, J. L., Bennett, N. G., Conley, D. C., & Li, J. (1997). The effects of poverty on child health and development. *Annual review of public health*, 18(1), 463-483.
- ³⁸ Duncan, G. J., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2000). Family poverty, welfare reform, and child development. *Child development*, 71(1), 188-196.
- ³⁹ Aber, J. L., Bennett, N. G., Conley, D. C., & Li, J. (1997). The effects of poverty on child health and development. *Annual review of public health*, 18(1), 463-483.; Raphael, D. (2011). Poverty in childhood and adverse health outcomes in adulthood. *Maturitas*, 69(1), 22-26.; Magnuson, Katherine and Elizabeth Votruba-Drzal. (2009). Enduring influences of childhood poverty, *Institute for Research on Poverty, Focus*, 26(2).

- ⁴⁰ Mincy, R., Garfinkel, I., & Nepomnyaschy, L. (2005). In-Hospital Paternity Establishment and Father Involvement in Fragile Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(3), 611-626.; Argys, L. M., & Peters, H. E. (2001). Interactions between unmarried fathers and their children: The role of paternity establishment and child support policies. *The American Economic Review*, 91(2), 125-129.
- ⁴¹ The Attorney General of Texas. (2011). *Paternity Child Support and You*. Retrieved from https://www.oag.state.tx.us/AG_Publications/pdfs/Paternity_CSandYou.pdf.
- ⁴² Wattenberg, E, Resnick, MD, and Brewer, R, A. (1991). A study of paternity decisions of young, unmarried parents. New York: Ford Foundation.
- ⁴³ Pearson, J., & Thoennes, N. (1996). Acknowledging paternity in hospital settings. *Public Welfare*, 54(3), 44.
- ⁴⁴ Mincy, R., Garfinkel, I. & Nepomnyaschy, L. (2005). In-hospital paternity establishment and father involvement in fragile families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(3), 611-626.
- ⁴⁵ Argys, L. M., & Peters, H. E. (2001). Interactions between unmarried fathers and their children: The role of paternity establishment and child support policies. *The American Economic Review*, 91(2), 125-129.
- ⁴⁶ Mincy, R., Garfinkel, I., & Nepomnyaschy, L. (2005). In-Hospital Paternity Establishment and Father Involvement in Fragile Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(3), 611-626.
- ⁴⁷ Brown, P. R., Cook, S. T. & Wimer, L. (2004). Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgment. *Report of the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development*. Retrieved from <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/irpweb/research/childsup/cspolicy/pdfs/volpat.pdf>.
- ⁴⁸ Brown, P. R., & Cook, S. T. (2008). A decade of voluntary paternity acknowledgment in Wisconsin: 1997–2007 (Report to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development). Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty.
- ⁴⁹ "Child Support Enforcement Program; State Plan Requirements, Standards for Program Operations, and Federal Financial Participation," 64 Federal Register 46 (10 March 1999), pp. 11802 - 11810.
- ⁵⁰ The Texas Office of the Attorney General. (2012). *FFY 2010 AOP Quarterly Report*. Unpublished raw data.
- ⁵¹ The Texas Office of the Attorney General. (2012). *FFY 2012 AOP Quarterly Report*. Unpublished raw data.
- ⁵² United States Code, Social Security Act, Title IV, §658, subchapter IV, chapter 7, Title 42 Sec. 458. [42 U.S.C. 658a].
- ⁵³ The Texas Office of the Attorney General. (2012). *FFY 2012 AOP Quarterly Report*. Unpublished raw data.
- ⁵⁴ Guzzo, K. (2009). Paternity establishment for men's nonmarital births. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 28(6), 853-872.
- ⁵⁵ Puder, K.S., Gonik, B., & Schrauben, E. (2003). Paternity establishment: variables associated with failed implementation. *Primary Care Update for OB/GYNs*, 10(5), 258-260.
- ⁵⁶ Argys, L. M., & Peters, H. E. (2001). Interactions between unmarried fathers and their children: The role of paternity establishment and child support policies. *The American Economic Review*, 91(2), 125-129.
- ⁵⁷ Mincy, R., Garfinkel, I., & Nepomnyaschy, L. (2005). In-Hospital Paternity Establishment and Father Involvement in Fragile Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(3), 611-626.
- ⁵⁸ Puder, K.S., Gonik, B., & Schrauben, E. (2003). Paternity establishment: variables associated with failed implementation. *Primary Care Update for OB/GYNs*, 10(5), 258-260.
- ⁵⁹ Brown, P. R. 2006. The Father-Child Relationship in Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgment Cases. Report submitted to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Bureau of Child Support. Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin.
- ⁶⁰ Mincy, R., Garfinkel, I., & Nepomnyaschy, L. (2005). In-Hospital Paternity Establishment and Father Involvement in Fragile Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(3), 611-626.
- ⁶¹ Guzzo, K. (2009). Paternity establishment for men's nonmarital births. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 28(6), 853-872.
- ⁶² Mincy, R., Garfinkel, I., & Nepomnyaschy, L. (2005). In-Hospital Paternity Establishment and Father Involvement in Fragile Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(3), 611-626.
- ⁶³ Guzzo, K. (2009). Paternity establishment for men's nonmarital births. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 28(6), 853-872.

- ⁶⁴ Guzzo, K. (2009). Paternity establishment for men's nonmarital births. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 28(6), 853-872.
- ⁶⁵ Waller, M. R., & Swisher, R. (2006). Fathers' Risk Factors in Fragile Families: Implications for 'Healthy' Relationships and Father Involvement. *Social Problems*, 53(3), 392-420.
- ⁶⁶ Waller, M. R., & Swisher, R. (2006). Fathers' Risk Factors in Fragile Families: Implications for 'Healthy' Relationships and Father Involvement. *Social Problems*, 53(3), 392-420.
- ⁶⁷ Fagan, J., & Palkovitz, R. (2007). Unmarried, nonresident fathers' involvement with their infants: A risk and resilience perspective. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21(3), 479-489.
- ⁶⁸ Waller, M. R., & Swisher, R. (2006). Fathers' Risk Factors in Fragile Families: Implications for 'Healthy' Relationships and Father Involvement. *Social Problems*, 53(3), 392-420.
- ⁶⁹ The Attorney General of Texas. (2013). Incarcerated Parents and Child Support. *The Handbook for Incarcerated Parents*. Retrieved from https://www.oag.state.tx.us/AG_Publications/pdfs/incarcerated.pdf
- ⁷⁰ Department of Health and Human Services. *In-Hospital Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgment Program – Effective Practices in Parent Outreach*. Office of the Inspector General Report, 1997. Retrieved from <http://oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/oei-06-95-00163.pdf>.
- ⁷¹ Pearson, J., & Thoennes, N. (1996). Acknowledging paternity in hospital settings. *Public Welfare*, 54(3), 44.
- ⁷² Guzzo, K. (2009). Paternity establishment for men's nonmarital births. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 28(6), 853-872.
- ⁷³ Mincy, R., Garfinkel, I. & Nepomnyaschy, L. (2005). In-hospital paternity establishment and father involvement in fragile families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(3), 611-626.
- ⁷⁴ Argys, L. M., & Peters, H. E. (2001). Interactions between unmarried fathers and their children: The role of paternity establishment and child support policies. *The American Economic Review*, 91(2), 125-129.
- ⁷⁵ Ryan, R. M., Kalil, A., & Ziolo-Guest, K. M. (2008). Longitudinal patterns of nonresident fathers' involvement: The role of resources and relations. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(4), 962-977.
- ⁷⁶ Carlson, M. J., McLanahan, S. S., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2008). Coparenting and nonresident fathers' involvement with young children after a nonmarital birth. *Demography*, 45(2), 461-488.
- ⁷⁷ Nelson, T. J. (2004). Low-income fathers. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 427-451.
- ⁷⁸ Doherty, W. J., Kouneski, E. F., & Erickson, M. F. (1998). *Responsible fathering: An overview and conceptual framework*. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 277– 292.
- ⁷⁹ Doherty, W. J., Kouneski, E. F., & Erickson, M. F. (1998). *Responsible fathering: An overview and conceptual framework*. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 277– 292.
- ⁸⁰ Brown, P.R. (2006). The Father-Child Relationship in Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgment Cases. Report submitted to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Bureau of Child Support. Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin.
- ⁸¹ Guzzo, K. (2009). Paternity Establishment for Men's Nonmarital Births. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 28 (6), 853 – 827.
- ⁸² Ryan, R. M., Kalil, A., & Ziolo-Guest, K. M. (2008). Longitudinal patterns of nonresident fathers' involvement: The role of resources and relations. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(4), 962-977.
- ⁸³ Carlson, M. J., McLanahan, S. S., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2008). Coparenting and nonresident fathers' involvement with young children after a nonmarital birth. *Demography*, 45(2), 461-488.
- ⁸⁴ Nelson, T. J. (2004). Low-income fathers. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 427-451.
- ⁸⁵ Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D., Vogel, C., Tamis-Lemonda, C., Ryan, R. M., Brooks-Gunn, J., ... & Cohen, R. (2004). Low-income fathers' involvement in their toddlers' lives: Biological fathers from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Study. *Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice about Men as Fathers*, 2(1), 5-30.
- ⁸⁶ Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. (2007, June). Parents' Relationship Status Five Years After a Non-Marital Birth. Fragile Families Research Brief. Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, Princeton University. Social Indicators Survey Center, Columbia University.

- ⁸⁷ Furstenberg Jr, F. F. (1991). *Divided families: What happens to children when parents part* (Vol. 1). Harvard University Press.
- ⁸⁸ Johnson Jr, W. E. (2001). Paternal involvement among unwed fathers. *Children and youth services review*, 23(6), 513-536.
- ⁸⁹ Fagan, J., & Palkovitz, R. (2007). Unmarried, nonresident fathers' involvement with their infants: A risk and resilience perspective. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21(3), 479.
- ⁹⁰ Waller, M. R., & Swisher, R. (2006). Fathers' risk factors in fragile families: Implications for "healthy" relationships and father involvement. *Social Problems*, 53(3), 392-420.
- ⁹¹ Waller, M. R., & Swisher, R. (2006). Fathers' risk factors in fragile families: Implications for "healthy" relationships and father involvement. *Social Problems*, 53(3), 392-420.
- ⁹² Fagan, J., & Palkovitz, R. (2007). Unmarried, nonresident fathers' involvement with their infants: A risk and resilience perspective. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21(3), 479.
- ⁹³ Edin, K., & Kefalas, M. (2011). *Promises I can keep: Why poor women put motherhood before marriage*. University of California Pr.
- ⁹⁴ Osborne, C. (2002). *Diversity Among Unmarried Parents: Human Capital, Attitudes, and Relationship Quality*. Working paper #02-01-FF Princeton, NJ: Center for Research on Child Wellbeing.
- ⁹⁵ Osborne, C., Manning, W. D., & Smock, P. J. (2007). Married and cohabiting parents' relationship stability: A focus on race and ethnicity. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(5), 1345-1366.
- ⁹⁶ Edin, K., Nelson, T. (2013). *Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the inner city*. University of California Pr.
- ⁹⁷ Edin, K., England, P., & Linnenberg, K. (2003, September). Love and distrust among unmarried parents. In *National Poverty Center Annual Poverty Conference, Washington*.
- ⁹⁸ Edin, K., Nelson, T. (2013). *Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the inner city*. University of California Pr.
- ⁹⁹ Edin, K., & Kefalas, M. (2011). *Promises I can keep: Why poor women put motherhood before marriage*. University of California Pr.
- ¹⁰⁰ Edin, K., England, P., & Linnenberg, K. (2003, September). Love and distrust among unmarried parents. In *National Poverty Center Annual Poverty Conference, Washington*.
- ¹⁰¹ Cabrera, N. J., Fagan, J., & Farrie, D. (2008). Explaining the long reach of fathers' prenatal involvement on later paternal engagement. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(5), 1094-1107.
- ¹⁰² Coley, R. L., & Hernandez, D. C. (2006). Predictors of paternal involvement for resident and nonresident low-income fathers. *Developmental psychology*, 42(6), 1041.
- ¹⁰³ Cox, M.J. & Paley, B. (1997). *Families as Systems*. Annual Review of Psychology, 48, 243-267.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ryan, R. M., Kalil, A., & Ziol-Guest, K. M. (2008). Longitudinal patterns of nonresident fathers' involvement: The role of resources and relations. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(4), 962-977.
- ¹⁰⁵ Carlson, M. J., & Furstenberg, F. (2007). The consequences of multi-partnered fertility for parental involvement and relationships. *Princeton, NJ: Bendheim-Thomas Center for Research on Child Wellbeing*.
- ¹⁰⁶ Carlson, M. J., & Furstenberg, F. (2007). The consequences of multi-partnered fertility for parental involvement and relationships. *Princeton, NJ: Bendheim-Thomas Center for Research on Child Wellbeing*.
- ¹⁰⁷ Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D., Vogel, C., Tamis-Lemonda, C., Ryan, R. M., Brooks-Gunn, J., ... & Cohen, R. (2004). Low-income fathers' involvement in their toddlers' lives: Biological fathers from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Study. *Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice about Men as Fathers*, 2(1), 5-30.
- ¹⁰⁸ Gee, C. B., McNERNEY, C. M., Reiter, M. J., & Leaman, S. C. (2007). Adolescent and young adult mothers' relationship quality during the transition to parenthood: Associations with father involvement in fragile families. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 36(2), 213-224.
- ¹⁰⁹ Bumpass, L., & Lu, H. H. (2000). Trends in cohabitation and implications for children's family contexts in the United States. *Population Studies*, 54(1), 29-41.
- ¹¹⁰ Osborne, C., Manning, W. D., & Smock, P. J. (2007). Married and cohabiting parents' relationship stability: A focus on race and ethnicity. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(5), 1345-1366.

¹¹¹ Carlson, M. J., & McLanahan, S. S. (2010). Fathers in fragile families. *The role of the father in child development*, 5, 241-269.

¹¹² Gibson-Davis, C. M., Edin, K., & McLanahan, S. (2005). High Hopes but Even Higher Expectations: The Retreat from Marriage among Low-Income Couples. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(5), 1301-1312.

¹¹³ Edin, K., & Kefalas, M. (2011). *Promises I can keep: Why poor women put motherhood before marriage*. University of California Pr.

¹¹⁴ Halliday Hardie, J., & Lucas, A. (2010). Economic factors and relationship quality among young couples: Comparing cohabitation and marriage. *Journal of marriage and family*, 72(5), 1141-1154.

¹¹⁵ Kalmijn M, Loeve A, Manting D. Income dynamics in couples and the dissolution of marriage and cohabitation. *Demography*. 2007;44:159–179.

¹¹⁶ Edin, K., & Reed, J. M. (2005). Why don't they just get married? Barriers to marriage among the disadvantaged. *The Future of Children*, 15(2), 117-137.

¹¹⁷ Manning, W. D., & Smock, P. J. (1995). Why marry? Race and the transition to marriage among cohabitators. *Demography*, 32(4), 509-520.

¹¹⁸ Doherty, W. J., Kouneski, E. F., & Erickson, M. F. (1998). *Responsible fathering: An overview and conceptual framework*. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 277– 292.

¹¹⁹ Marsiglio, W., Amato, P., Day, R. D., & Lamb, M. E. (2000). Scholarship on Fatherhood in the 1990s and beyond. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62 (4), 1173-1191.; Palkovitz, R. (2002). Involved Fathering and Child Development: Advancing Our Understanding of Good Fathering. In C. S. Tamis-LeMonda & N. J. Cabrera (Eds.), *Handbook of Father Involvement* (pp. 33-64). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

¹²⁰ Rosenberg, Jeffrey, and Wilcox, W. Bradford. United States Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children and Families. Child Welfare Information Gateway. *The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children*. Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S. Children's Bureau, 2006. Retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/chaptertwo.cfm>; Bronte-Tinkew, Jacinta et al. *Involvement Among Resident Fathers and Links to Infant Cognitive Outcomes*. *Journal of Family Issues*. Volume 29 Number 9. September, 2008. 1211-1244.; Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2007). Fathers' Influence on Their Children's Cognitive and Emotional Development: From Toddlers to Pre-K. *Applied Developmental Science*, 11(4), 208-213; Black, M. M., Dubowitz, H., & Starr, R. H., Jr. (1999). African American Fathers in Low Income, Urban Families: Development, Behavior, and Home Environment of Their Three-Year-Old Children. *Child Development*, 70 (4), 967-978.; Carlson, Marcia J. and Katherine Magnuson. (2011) Low-Income Fathers' Influence on Children. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 635:95. 95-116.; Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn. (2007, September) Fathers' Involvement and Young Children's Behavior in Fragile Families. Extended Abstract.; Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan. (2009, May 11) Fathers in Fragile Families. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. Working Paper WP09-14-FF.; Harris, Kathleen Mullan, Frank F. Furstenberg, and Jeremy K. Marmar. (1998). Paternal involvement with adolescents in intact families: The influence of fathers over the life course. *Demography*. 35 (2), 201-216.; Carlson, M. J. (2006), Family Structure, Father Involvement, and Adolescent Behavioral Outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68: 137–154.

¹²¹ United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2011, July). *Promoting Responsible Fatherhood: Effective Parenting*. Federal Research Site. Retrieved from <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/Parenting/index.shtml>

¹²² Lerman, R., & Sorensen, E. (2000). Father involvement with their nonmarital children: Patterns, determinants, and effects on their earnings. *Marriage and Family Review*, 29, 137 – 158.; Lerman, R. I. (1993). A National Profile of Young Unwed Fathers. In R. I. Lerman & T. J. Ooms (Eds.), *Young Unwed Fathers: Changing Roles and Emerging Policies*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

¹²³ Mincy, R., Garfinkel, I., & Nepomnyaschy, L. (2005). In-Hospital Paternity Establishment and Father Involvement in Fragile Families. *Journal of Marriage & Family*, 67(3), 611-626.; Argys, Laura M. and H. Elizabeth Peters. (2001, May). Interactions between Unmarried Fathers and Their Children: The Role of Paternity Establishment and Child-

Support Policies. *The American Economic Review*, Papers and Proceedings of the Hundred Thirteenth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association, 91 (2), 125-129.

¹²⁴ Mincy, R., Garfinkel, I., & Nepomnyaschy, L. (2005). In-Hospital Paternity Establishment and Father Involvement in Fragile Families. *Journal of Marriage & Family*, 67(3), 611-626.

¹²⁵ Doherty, W. J., Kouneski, E. F., & Erickson, M. F. (1998). *Responsible fathering: An overview and conceptual framework*. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 277– 292; Gee, C. B., McNERNEY, C. M., Reither, M. J., & Leaman, S. C. (2007). *Adolescent and young adult mothers' relationship quality during the transition to parenthood: Associations with father involvement in fragile families*. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 36(2), 213-224; Ryan, R. M., Kalil, A. & Ziolo-Guest, K. M. (2008). *Longitudinal patterns of non-residential fathers' involvement: The role of resources and relations*. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(4), 962-977.

¹²⁶ Gavin, L. E., Black, M. M., Minor, S., Abel, Y., Papas, M. A., & Bentley, M. E. (2002). Young, disadvantaged fathers' involvement with their infants: An ecological perspective. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 31, 266–276.

¹²⁷ Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan. (2009, May 11) Fathers in Fragile Families. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. Working Paper WP09-14-FF.; Doherty, W. J., Kouneski, E. F., & Erickson, M. F. (1998). *Responsible fathering: An overview and conceptual framework*. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 277– 292; Gee, C. B., McNERNEY, C. M., Reither, M. J., & Leaman, S. C. (2007). *Adolescent and young adult mothers' relationship quality during the transition to parenthood: Associations with father involvement in fragile families*. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 36(2), 213-224; Ryan, R. M., Kalil, A. & Ziolo-Guest, K. M. (2008). *Longitudinal patterns of non-residential fathers' involvement: The role of resources and relations*. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(4), 962-977; Fagan, J., & Palkovitz, R. (2007). Unmarried, Nonresident Fathers' Involvement with Their Infants: A Risk and Resilience Perspective. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21 (3), 479-489.; Gavin LE, Black MM, Minor S, Abel Y, PapasMA, BentleyME (2002) Young, disadvantaged fathers' involvement with their infants: An ecological perspective. *J Adolesc Health* 31:266–276.

¹²⁸ Carlson, M. J., & McLanahan, S. S. (2004). Early Father Involvement in Fragile Families. In R. D. Day & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Conceptualizing and Measuring Father Involvement* (pp. 241-271). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum; Fagan, J., & Palkovitz, R. (2007). Unmarried, Nonresident Fathers' Involvement with Their Infants: A Risk and Resilience Perspective. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21 (3), 479-489.

¹²⁹ Marsiglio, W., Amato, P., Day, R. D., & Lamb, M. E. (2000). Scholarship on Fatherhood in the 1990s and beyond. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62 (4), 1173-1191.; Furstenberg, F. F., & Cherlin, A. (1991). *Divided Families: What Happens to Children When Parents Part*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

¹³⁰ Carlson, M. J., McLanahan, S. S., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2008). COPARENTING AND NONRESIDENT FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT WITH YOUNG CHILDREN AFTER A NONMARITAL BIRTH. *Demography*, 45(2), 461-488.; Sobolewski JM, King V. "The Importance of the Coparental Relationship for Nonresident Fathers' Ties to Children" *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 2005;67:1196–212; Coley, R. L., & Hernandez, D. C. (2006). Predictors of Paternal Involvement for Resident and Nonresident Low-Income Fathers. *Developmental Psychology*, 42(6), 1041-1056.; Doherty, W. J., Kouneski, E. F., & Erickson, M. F. (1998). *Responsible fathering: An overview and conceptual framework*. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 277– 292.

¹³¹ Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2007). Fathers' Influence on Their Children's Cognitive and Emotional Development: From Toddlers to Pre-K. *Applied Developmental Science*, 11(4), 208-213; Coley, R., & Chase-Lansdale, P. (1999). Stability and Change in Paternal Involvement Among Urban African American Fathers. *Journal Of Family Psychology*, 13(3), 416-435.; Castillo, Jason T., Greg W. Welch, and Christian M. Sarver. *The Relationship Between Disadvantaged Fathers' Employment Stability, Workplace Flexibility, and Involvement With Their Infant Children*. *Journal of Social Service Research*, Vol. 39, Iss. 3, 2013.

¹³² Cabrera, N. J., Fagan, J., & Farrie, D. (2008). Explaining the Long Reach of Fathers' Prenatal Involvement on Later Paternal Engagement. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(5), 1094-1107.; Carlson, M. J., & McLanahan, S. S. (2004). Early Father Involvement in Fragile Families. In R. D. Day & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Conceptualizing and Measuring Father Involvement* (pp. 241-271). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.; Ryan, R. M., Kalil, A. & Ziolo-Guest, K. M.

(2008). Longitudinal patterns of non-residential fathers' involvement: The role of resources and relations. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(4), 962-977.

¹³³ Waller, Maureen R. and Raymond Swisher. (August 2006). Fathers' Risk Factors in Fragile Families: Implications for "Healthy" Relationships and Father Involvement. *Social Problems*, 53 (3), 392-420.; Fagan, J., & Palkovitz, R. (2007). Unmarried, Nonresident Fathers' Involvement with Their Infants: A Risk and Resilience Perspective. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21 (3), 479-489.

¹³⁴ Hofferth, Sandra L. (2003, March). Race/Ethnic Differences in Father Involvement in Two-Parent Families: Culture, Context, or Economy? *Journal of Family Issues*. 24: 185-216.

¹³⁵ Hofferth, Sandra L. (2003, March). Race/Ethnic Differences in Father Involvement in Two-Parent Families: Culture, Context, or Economy? *Journal of Family Issues*. 24: 185-216.

¹³⁶ Hofferth, Sandra L. (2003, March). Race/Ethnic Differences in Father Involvement in Two-Parent Families: Culture, Context, or Economy? *Journal of Family Issues*. 24: 185-216.

¹³⁷ Cabrera, Natasha J.; Ryan, Rebecca M.; Mitchell, Stephanie J.; Shannon, Jacqueline D.; Tamis-LeMonda, Catherine S. (2008, August). Low-income, nonresident father involvement with their toddlers: Variation by fathers' race and ethnicity. *Journal of Family Psychology*, Vol 22(4), 643-647.; King, Valarie, Kathleen Mullan Harris and Holly E. Heard. (Feb., 2004). Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Nonresident Father Involvement. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(1), 1-21.; Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan. (2009, May 11) Fathers in Fragile Families. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. Working Paper WP09-14-FF.

¹³⁸ Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan. (2009, May 11) Fathers in Fragile Families. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. Working Paper WP09-14-FF.

¹³⁹ Amato, Paul and Sandra Rezac. (1994, June). Contact with Nonresident Parents, Interparental Conflict, and Children's Behavior. *Journal of Family Issues*, 15(2), 191-207.; Seltzer, Judith A. (1991, Feb.) Relationships between Fathers and Children Who Live Apart: The Father's Role after Separation. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 53(1), 79-101.

¹⁴⁰ Ryan, R. M., Kalil, A. & Ziol-Guest, K. M. (2008). *Longitudinal patterns of non-residential fathers' involvement: The role of resources and relations*. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(4), 962-977.

¹⁴¹ Lerman, R., & Sorensen, E. (2000). Father involvement with their nonmarital children: Patterns, determinants, and effects on their earnings. *Marriage and Family Review*, 29, 137 – 158.; McLanahan, S., & Sandefur, G. (1994). *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts? What Helps?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

¹⁴² Gee, C. B., Mc Nerney, C. M., Reither, M. J., & Leaman, S. C. (2007). *Adolescent and young adult mothers' relationship quality during the transition to parenthood: Associations with father involvement in fragile families*. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 36(2), 213-224.

¹⁴³ Manning, W. D., & Smock, P. J. (1999). New Families and Nonresident Father-Child Visitation. *Social Forces*, 78(1), 87-116.; Stewart, S. D. (2003). Nonresident Parenting and Adolescent Adjustment: The Quality of Nonresident Father-Child Interaction. *Journal of Family Issues*, 24(2), 217-244.

¹⁴⁴ Harknett, K. and Knab, J. (2007), More Kin, Less Support: Multipartnered Fertility and Perceived Support Among Mothers. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69: 237–253.

¹⁴⁵ McBride, Brent A., Gail Mills, *A comparison of mother and father involvement with their preschool age children*. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Volume 8, Issue 4, 1993, 457-477.; Cabrera, Natasha J., et al. *Measuring Father Involvement In The Early Head Start Evaluation: A Multidimensional Conceptualization*. Mathematica. September 1999. <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/PDFs/measurefather.pdf>

¹⁴⁶ Lamb, Michael E. et al. "A Biosocial Perspective on Paternal Behavior and Involvement." *Parenting Across the Life Span : Biosocial Dimensions*. Ed. Jane B. Lancaster et al. New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1987. 111-135. Print.

¹⁴⁷ Cabrera, Natasha J., et al. *Measuring Father Involvement In The Early Head Start Evaluation: A Multidimensional Conceptualization*. Mathematica. September 1999. <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/PDFs/measurefather.pdf>

¹⁴⁸ Lamb, Michael E. et al. "A Biosocial Perspective on Paternal Behavior and Involvement." *Parenting Across the Life Span : Biosocial Dimensions*. Ed. Jane B. Lancaster et al. New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1987. 111-135. Print;

- McBride, Brent A., Gail Mills, *A comparison of mother and father involvement with their preschool age children*. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, Volume 8, Issue 4, 1993, 457-477.
- ¹⁴⁹ Perry, A. R. and Langley, C. (2013, June). Even with the Best of Intentions: Paternal Involvement and the Theory of Planned Behavior. *Family Process*, 52(2): 179–192.
- ¹⁵⁰ Lamb, Michael E. et al. "A Biosocial Perspective on Paternal Behavior and Involvement." *Parenting Across the Life Span : Biosocial Dimensions*. Ed. Jane B. Lancaster et al. New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1987. 111-135. Print.
- ¹⁵¹ Doherty, W. J., Kouneski, E. F., & Erickson, M. F. (1998). *Responsible fathering: An overview and conceptual framework*. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 277– 292.
- ¹⁵² Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan. (2009, May 11) Fathers in Fragile Families. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. Working Paper WP09-14-FF.
- ¹⁵³ Cabrera, Natasha J., et al. *Measuring Father Involvement In The Early Head Start Evaluation: A Multidimensional Conceptualization*. Mathematica. September 1999. <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/PDFs/measurefather.pdf>
- ¹⁵⁴ Fagan, J. and Palkovitz, R. (2011), Coparenting and Relationship Quality Effects on Father Engagement: Variations by Residence, Romance. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 73: 637–653.; Gibson-Davis, C. M. (2008), Family Structure Effects on Maternal and Paternal Parenting in Low-Income Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70: 452–465.
- ¹⁵⁵ Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan. (2009, May 11) Fathers in Fragile Families. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. Working Paper WP09-14-FF.
- ¹⁵⁶ Lamb, Michael E. et al. "A Biosocial Perspective on Paternal Behavior and Involvement." *Parenting Across the Life Span : Biosocial Dimensions*. Ed. Jane B. Lancaster et al. New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1987. 111-135. Print
- ¹⁵⁷ Lamb, Michael E. et al. "A Biosocial Perspective on Paternal Behavior and Involvement." *Parenting Across the Life Span : Biosocial Dimensions*. Ed. Jane B. Lancaster et al. New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1987. 111-135. Print
- ¹⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁹ Doherty, W. J., Kouneski, E. F., & Erickson, M. F. (1998). *Responsible fathering: An overview and conceptual framework*. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 277– 292.
- ¹⁶⁰ Texas Family Code. Title 5. The Parent-Child Relationship and the Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship. Subtitle B. Suits Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship. Chapter 153. Conservatorship, Possession, and Access. Retrieved from <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/FA/htm/FA.153.htm>.
- ¹⁶¹ Fagan, Jay and Marina Barnett. The Relationship between Maternal Gatekeeping, Parental Competence, Mothers' Attitudes about the Father Role, and Father Involvement. *Journal of Family Issues* November 2003 vol. 24 no. 8 1020-1043.
- ¹⁶² Fagan, Jay and Marina Barnett. The Relationship between Maternal Gatekeeping, Parental Competence, Mothers' Attitudes about the Father Role, and Father Involvement. *Journal of Family Issues* November 2003 vol. 24 no. 8 1020-1043.
- ¹⁶³ Fagan, J., & Palkovitz, R. (2007). Unmarried, Nonresident Fathers' Involvement with Their Infants: A Risk and Resilience Perspective. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21 (3), 479-489.
- ¹⁶⁴ Coley, R., & Chase-Lansdale, P. (1999). Stability and Change in Paternal Involvement Among Urban African American Fathers. *Journal Of Family Psychology*, 13(3), 416-435.; Rangarajan, A., & Gleason, P. (1998). Young unwed fathers of AFDC children: Do they provide support? *Demography*, 35, 175 – 186.
- ¹⁶⁵ Kalil, A., Ziol-Guest, K. M., & Coley, R. L. (2005). Perceptions of father involvement patterns in teenage-mother families: Predictors and links to mothers' psychological adjustment. *Family Relations*, 54, 197 – 211.; Lerman, R., & Sorensen, E. (2000). Father involvement with their nonmarital children: Patterns, determinants, and effects on their earnings. *Marriage and Family Review*, 29, 137 – 158.; Cutrona CE, Hessling RM, Bacon PL, Russell DW (1998) Predictors and correlates of continuing involvement with the baby's father among adolescent mothers. *Journal of Family Psychology* 12:369–387.
- ¹⁶⁶ Ryan, R. M., Kalil, A. & Ziol-Guest, K. M. (2008). *Longitudinal patterns of non-residential fathers' involvement: The role of resources and relations*. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(4), 962-977.

- ¹⁶⁷ Nepomnyaschy, L. (2007). Child support and father-child contact: Testing reciprocal pathways. *Demography*, 44(1), 93-112.
- ¹⁶⁸ Doherty, W. J., Kouneski, E. F., & Erickson, M. F. (1998). Responsible fathering: An overview and conceptual framework. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 277– 292.; Lamb, Michael E. et al. "A Biosocial Perspective on Paternal Behavior and Involvement." *Parenting Across the Life Span : Biosocial Dimensions*. Ed. Jane B. Lancaster et al. New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1987. 111-135. Print.
- ¹⁶⁹ Parker, Kim and Wendy Wang. Modern Parenthood: Roles of Moms and Dads Converge as They Balance Work and Family. Pew Research Center. March 14, 2013.
- ¹⁷⁰ Doherty, W. J., Kouneski, E. F., & Erickson, M. F. (1998). Responsible fathering: An overview and conceptual framework. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 277– 292.
- ¹⁷¹ Cancian, M., Meyer, D. & Park, O. (2003). The importance of child support for low-income families. Report to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty.
- ¹⁷² Sorensen, E. (2010). *Child support plays an increasingly important role for poor custodial families*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- ¹⁷³ Sorensen, E. (2010). *Child support plays an increasingly important role for poor custodial families*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- ¹⁷⁴ Knox, V. W. (1996). The effects of child support payments on developmental outcomes for elementary school-age children. *Journal of Human Resources*, 816-840.; Amato, P. R., & Gilbreth, J. G. (1999). Nonresident fathers and children's well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 557-573.; Argys, L. M., Peters, H. E., Brooks-Gunn, J., & Smith, J. R. (1998). The impact of child support on cognitive outcomes of young children. *Demography*, 35(2), 159-173.
- ¹⁷⁵ Brown, P., & Cook, S. (2008). A Decade of Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgment in Wisconsin: 1997-2007. *Report to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development*.
- ¹⁷⁶ Gee, C. B., Mc Nerney, C. M., Reiter, M. J., & Leaman, S. C. (2007). Adolescent and young adult mothers' relationship quality during the transition to parenthood: Associations with father involvement in fragile families. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 36, 213-224.
- ¹⁷⁷ Nepomnyaschy, L., & Garfinkel, I. (2010). Child support enforcement and fathers' contributions to their nonmarital children. *The Social service review*, 84(3), 341.
- ¹⁷⁸ Nepomnyaschy, L., & Garfinkel, I. (2010). Child support enforcement and fathers' contributions to their nonmarital children. *The Social service review*, 84(3), 341.
- ¹⁷⁹ Holzer, H. J., Offner, P., & Sorensen, E. (2005). Declining employment among young black less-educated men: The role of incarceration and child support. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 24(2), 329-350.
- ¹⁸⁰ Mincy, R., & Nepomnyaschy, L. (2005). *Child support and minority fathers in Fragile Families* (No. 20055-23). Working Paper. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, Center for Research on Child Wellbeing.
- ¹⁸¹ Swisher, R. R., & Waller, M. R. (2008). Confining fatherhood incarceration and paternal involvement among nonresident white, African American, and Latino fathers. *Journal of Family Issues*, 29(8), 1067-1088.
- ¹⁸² Mincy, R. B., & Sorensen, E. J. (1998). Deadbeats and turnips in child support reform. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 17(1), 44-51.
- ¹⁸³ Family Ties: Improving Paternity Establishment Practices and Procedures for Low-Income Mothers, Fathers and Children.(2000). National Women's Law Center. Center on Fathers, Families and Public Policy. <http://www.cffpp.org/publications/commonground.pdf>
- ¹⁸⁴ Family Ties: Improving Paternity Establishment Practices and Procedures for Low-Income Mothers, Fathers and Children.(2000). National Women's Law Center. Center on Fathers, Families and Public Policy. <http://www.cffpp.org/publications/commonground.pdf>
- ¹⁸⁵ Amato, P. R., & Gilbreth, J. G. (1999). Nonresident fathers and children's well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 557-573.
- ¹⁸⁶ Knox, V. W. (1996). The effects of child support payments on developmental outcomes for elementary school-age children. *Journal of Human Resources*, 816-840.

- ¹⁸⁷ Argys, L. M., Peters, H. E., Brooks-Gunn, J., & Smith, J. R. (1998). The impact of child support on cognitive outcomes of young children. *Demography*, 35(2), 159-173.
- ¹⁸⁸ Brown, P., & Cook, S. (2008). A Decade of Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgment in Wisconsin: 1997-2007. *Report to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development*.
- ¹⁸⁹ Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2007). Fathers' influence on their children's cognitive and emotional development: From toddlers to Pre-K. *Applied Developmental Science*, 11(4), 208-213. Lamb, M. E. (Ed.). (2004). *The role of the father in child development*. John Wiley & Sons. Knox, V. W. (1996). The effects of child support payments on developmental outcomes for elementary school-age children. *Journal of Human Resources*, 816-840.
- ¹⁹⁰ United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2011, July). *Promoting Responsible Fatherhood: Effective Parenting*. Federal Research Site. Retrieved from <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/Parenting/index.shtml>
- ¹⁹¹ Bronte-Tinkew, Jacinta et al. *Involvement Among Resident Fathers and Links to Infant Cognitive Outcomes*. *Journal of Family Issues*. Volume 29 Number 9. September, 2008. 1211-1244.
- ¹⁹² Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2007). Fathers' Influence on Their Children's Cognitive and Emotional Development: From Toddlers to Pre-K. *Applied Developmental Science*, 11(4), 208-213; Black, M. M., Dubowitz, H., & Starr, R. H., Jr. (1999). African American Fathers in Low Income, Urban Families: Development, Behavior, and Home Environment of Their Three-Year-Old Children. *Child Development*, 70 (4), 967-978.
- ¹⁹³ United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2011, July). *Promoting Responsible Fatherhood: Effective Parenting*. Federal Research Site. Retrieved from <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/Parenting/index.shtml>
- ¹⁹⁴ Carlson, Marcia J. and Katherine Magnuson. (2011) Low-Income Fathers' Influence on Children. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 635:95. 95-116.; Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn. (2007, September) Fathers' Involvement and Young Children's Behavior in Fragile Families. Extended Abstract.; Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan. (2009, May 11) Fathers in Fragile Families. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. Working Paper WP09-14-FF.; Harris, Kathleen Mullan, Frank F. Furstenberg, and Jeremy K. Marmer. (1998). Paternal involvement with adolescents in intact families: The influence of fathers over the life course. *Demography*. 35 (2), 201-216.; Carlson, M. J. (2006), Family Structure, Father Involvement, and Adolescent Behavioral Outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68: 137-154.
- ¹⁹⁵ Shannon, J. D., Tamis-LeMonda, C., London, K., & Cabrera, N. (2002). Beyond Rough and Tumble: Low-Income Fathers' Interactions and Children's Cognitive Development at 24 Months. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 2 (2), 77-104.; Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2007). Fathers' Influence on Their Children's Cognitive and Emotional Development: From Toddlers to Pre-K. *Applied Developmental Science*, 11 (4), 208-213.; Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Shannon, J. D., Cabrera, N. J., & Lamb, M. E. (2004). Fathers and Mothers at Play with Their 2- and 3-year-olds: Contributions to Language and Cognitive Development. *Child Development*, 75, 1806-1820.; Martin, A., Ryan, R. M., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2007). The Joint Influence of Mother and Father Parenting on Child Cognitive Outcomes at Age 5. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22, 423-439.
- ¹⁹⁶ Amato, P. R., & Gilbreth, J. G. (1999). Nonresident Fathers and Children's Well-Being: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61 (3), 557-573.; King, V. and Sobolewski, J. M. (2006), Nonresident Fathers' Contributions to Adolescent Well-Being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68: 537-557.; Carlson, M. J. (2006), Family Structure, Father Involvement, and Adolescent Behavioral Outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68: 137-154.
- ¹⁹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁹⁸ King, V. and Sobolewski, J. M. (2006), Nonresident Fathers' Contributions to Adolescent Well-Being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68: 537-557.
- ¹⁹⁹ Amato, P. R., & Rezac, S. (1994). Contact with nonresidential parents, interparental conflict, and children's behavior. *Journal of Family Issues*, 15, 191-207.; Healy, J. M., Malley, J. E., & Stewart, A. J. (1990). Children and their fathers after parental separation. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 60, 531-543.
- ²⁰⁰ Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan. (2009, May 11) Fathers in Fragile Families. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. Working Paper WP09-14-FF.

- ²⁰¹ Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn. Fathers' Involvement and Young Children's Behavior in Fragile Families. Extended Abstract. September 2007.
- ²⁰² Jaffee, S. R., Moffitt, T. E., Caspi, A., & Taylor, A. (2003). Life with (or without) Father: The Benefits of Living with Two Biological Parents Depend on the Father's Antisocial Behavior. *Child Development*, 74 (1), 109-126.
- ²⁰³ Carlson, Marcia J. and Katherine Magnuson. (2011) Low-Income Fathers' Influence on Children. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 635:95. 95-116.;
- ²⁰⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2009). Summary of performance and financial information: Fiscal year 2009. Retrieved from http://www.hhs.gov/about/budget/fy2011/spfi_report.pdf.
- ²⁰⁵ Brooks-Gunn, J., & Duncan, G. J. (1997). The effects of poverty on children. *The future of children*, 55-71.
- ²⁰⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁰⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁰⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁰⁹ Gershoff, E. T., Aber, J. L., Raver, C. C., & Lennon, M. C. (2007). Income is not enough: Incorporating material hardship into models of income associations with parenting and child development. *Child development*, 78(1), 70-95.
- ²¹⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹¹ Knox, V. W. (1996). The effects of child support payments on developmental outcomes for elementary school-age children. *Journal of Human Resources*, 816-840.
- ²¹² Ibid.
- ²¹³ Mincy, R., Garfinkel, I., & Nepomnyaschy, L. (2005). In-Hospital Paternity Establishment and Father Involvement in Fragile Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(3), 611-626.
- ²¹⁴ Mincy, R., Garfinkel, I., & Nepomnyaschy, L. (2005). In-Hospital Paternity Establishment and Father Involvement in Fragile Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(3), 611-626.
- ²¹⁵ Argys, L. M., & Peters, H. E. (2001). Interactions between unmarried fathers and their children: The role of paternity establishment and child-support policies. *The American Economic Review*, 91(2), 125-129.
- ²¹⁶ Family Ties: Improving Paternity Establishment Practices and Procedures for Low-Income Mothers, Fathers and Children.(2000). *National Women's Law Center. Center on Fathers, Families and Public Policy*. Retrieved from <http://www.cffpp.org/publications/commonground.pdf>
- ²¹⁷ Lyon, E. (2000). Welfare, Poverty, and Abused Women: New Research and its Implications. *National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence*, 10, 1-15.
- ²¹⁸ Family Ties: Improving Paternity Establishment Practices and Procedures for Low-Income Mothers, Fathers and Children.(2000). *National Women's Law Center. Center on Fathers, Families and Public Policy*. Retrieved from <http://www.cffpp.org/publications/commonground.pdf>
- ²¹⁹ Lyon, E. (2000). Welfare, Poverty, and Abused Women: New Research and its Implications. *National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence*, 10, 1-15.
- ²²⁰ Nepomnyaschy, Lenna and Irwin Garfinkel. (2010). Child Support Enforcement and Fathers' Contributions to Their Nonmarital Children. *The Social Service Review*. 84(3): 341-380.
- ²²¹ Nepomnyaschy, Lenna and Irwin Garfinkel. (2010). Child Support Enforcement and Fathers' Contributions to Their Nonmarital Children. *The Social Service Review*. 84(3): 341-380.
- ²²² Nepomnyaschy, Lenna and Irwin Garfinkel. (2010). Child Support Enforcement and Fathers' Contributions to Their Nonmarital Children. *The Social Service Review*. 84(3): 341-380.
- ²²³ Nepomnyaschy, Lenna and Irwin Garfinkel. (2010). Child Support Enforcement and Fathers' Contributions to Their Nonmarital Children. *The Social Service Review*. 84(3): 341-380.
- ²²⁴ Nepomnyaschy, Lenna and Irwin Garfinkel. (2010). Child Support Enforcement and Fathers' Contributions to Their Nonmarital Children. *The Social Service Review*. 84(3): 341-380.
- ²²⁵ Nepomnyaschy, L. (2007). Child support and father-child contact: Testing reciprocal pathways. *Demography*, 44(1), 93-112.

²²⁶ Nepomnyaschy, L. (2007). Child support and father-child contact: Testing reciprocal pathways. *Demography*, 44(1), 93-112.

²²⁷ C. Huang. Mothers' reports of nonresident fathers' involvement with their children: Revisiting the relationship between child support payment and visitation. *Family Relations*, 58 (2009), pp. 54–64.; C. Huang. Child support enforcement and father involvement for children in never-married mother families. *Fathering*, 4 (1) (2006), pp. 97–111.; H.E. Peters, L.M. Argys, H.W. Howard. Legislating love: The effect of child support and welfare policies on father-child contact. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 2 (2004), pp. 255–274.; C. Huang, W. Han, I. Garfinkel. Child support enforcement, joint legal custody, and parental involvement. *The Social Service Review*, 77 (2) (2003), pp. 255–278.

²²⁸ Nepomnyaschy, L. (2007). Child support and father-child contact: Testing reciprocal pathways. *Demography*, 44(1), 93-112.

²²⁹ Huang, Chien-Chung and Ke-Qing Han. (2012, April). Child support enforcement in the United States: Has policy made a difference? *Children and Youth Services Review*. Vol. 34 (4), P. 622–627.

²³⁰ J.A. Seltzer, S.S. McLanahan, T.L. Hanson. Will child support enforcement increase father-child contact and parental conflict after separation? I. Garfinkel, S.S. McLanahan, D.R. Meyer, J.A. Seltzer (Eds.), *Fathers under fire: The revolution in child support enforcement*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York (1998), pp. 157–190.; Bouchet, Stacey and Allison Hyra. (2013, March). *Taking Him Downtown: Child Support in the Words of Women*. *Wifi: Women in Fatherhood*. Policy Brief. Retrieved from web, 8/10/2013.

²³¹ Bouchet, Stacey and Allison Hyra. (2013, March). *Taking Him Downtown: Child Support in the Words of Women*. *Wifi: Women in Fatherhood*. Policy Brief. Retrieved from web, 8/10/2013.
<http://www.fathersincorporated.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Policy+Brief-Child+support+in+th+words+of+women+030813.pdf>

²³² Huang, Chien-Chung and Ke-Qing Han. (2012, April). Child support enforcement in the United States: Has policy made a difference? *Children and Youth Services Review*. Vol. 34 (4), P. 622–627.

²³³ Bouchet, Stacey and Allison Hyra. (2013, March). *Taking Him Downtown: Child Support in the Words of Women*. *Wifi: Women in Fatherhood*. Policy Brief. Retrieved from web, 8/10/2013.

²³⁴ Bouchet, Stacey and Allison Hyra. (2013, March). *Taking Him Downtown: Child Support in the Words of Women*. *Wifi: Women in Fatherhood*. Policy Brief. Retrieved from web, 8/10/2013.

²³⁵ Huang, Chien-Chung and Ke-Qing Han. (2012, April). Child support enforcement in the United States: Has policy made a difference? *Children and Youth Services Review*. Vol. 34 (4), P. 622–627.

²³⁶ Bouchet, Stacey and Allison Hyra. (2013, March). *Taking Him Downtown: Child Support in the Words of Women*. *Wifi: Women in Fatherhood*. Policy Brief. Retrieved from web, 8/10/2013.

CHILD & FAMILY

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

Child and Family Research Partnership
Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs
The University of Texas at Austin
P.O. Box Y | Austin, Texas 78713
855-471-CFRP (2377) | 512-471-3536
childandfamilyresearch.org
info@childandfamilyresearch.org



Find us on the Web
childandfamilyresearch.org



Sign-up for Email List
<http://bit.ly/XPzRVD>



Like us on Facebook
facebook.com/cfrplbj



Follow us on Twitter
[@cfrplbj](https://twitter.com/cfrplbj)