ENGAGING LOW-INCOME FATHERS

MAUREEN R. WALLER

DEPT. OF POLICY ANALYSIS & MANAGEMENT
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

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1. Changes in father involvement
2. Differences between fathers who live apart from their children
3. Unmarried parents in family court
4. Engaging low-income, unmarried fathers
Mothers, Fathers and Time Spent with Children

Average weekly hours of child care among married mothers and fathers living with their children younger than 18

MOTHERS
10.6
12.9

FATHERS
2.6
6.5


Note: Figures reflect the average number of hours spent in primary child care activities, which includes daily care, teaching and playing.

Living Apart, 1960-2010

% of children younger than 18


PEW RESEARCH CENTER
When Fathers and Children Live Separately

%  

Frequency of visits

- More than once a week: 22%
- 1-4 times a month: 29%
- Several times a year: 21%
- No visits: 27%

Frequency of calls/emails

- Several times a week or more: 41%
- 1-4 times a month: 28%
- Less than once a month: 31%

Notes: Based on fathers who are living apart from at least one child 18 or younger. Frequencies are for the prior year. “Don’t know/Refused” responses not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center calculations of the 2006-08 National Survey of Family Growth
Percent of Custodial Parents Due Child Support in who Received Full Amount: 1993-2009

Never married
Ever Married
Differences between fathers living apart from children

1. The percentage of births to unmarried parents has increased

2. New proposals would bring more unmarried parents into family court for access/visitation

3. New data available to examine unmarried parents, especially fathers
The percentage of births to unmarried parents has increased.
Why look at differences between fathers living apart from children?

1. The percentage of births to unmarried parents has increased

2. New proposals would bring more unmarried parents into family court for access/visitation

3. New data available to examine unmarried parents, especially fathers
Relationships between unmarried parents at child’s birth

- Cohabiting: 51%
- Romantic relationship: 32%
- Friends: 8%
- No relationship: 9%
- Not cohabiting: 49%
Early involvement of unmarried fathers

- **Financial support during pregnancy**
  - Cohabiting: 95.3%
  - Not Cohabiting: 64.1%

- **Other support during pregnancy**
  - Cohabiting: 97.7%
  - Not Cohabiting: 56.1%

- **Name on birth certificate**
  - Cohabiting: 96%
  - Not Cohabiting: 71%

- **Mother wants father involved**
  - Cohabiting: 99.5%
  - Not Cohabiting: 89.3%

- **Father wants to be involved**
  - Cohabiting: 99.5%
  - Not Cohabiting: 87.6%

Source: McLanahan, 2009
Two-thirds of unmarried parents living apart 5 years after child’s birth.
Fathers living apart from children: Summary

- Unmarried fathers without a close relationship to mother at birth had weakest ties 5 years later:
  - Least contact with children
  - Lowest quality relationships with mothers
  - Least likely to have established paternity
  - Lowest level of in-kind support

- Preventative efforts aimed at this group may be important
Unmarried parents’ perceptions of family court

- New proposals would make visitation/access part of child support establishment process
- Limited research on unmarried parents’ perceptions of parenting time
- Investigates low-income, unmarried mothers’ & fathers’ views of using the legal system to establish visitation and custody agreements
Data & Methods

Sample:
40 low-income, unmarried mothers & fathers in NY

Eligibility:
* Never-married
* Living Apart
* Low-income <185% FPL

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tompkins County</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mothers group</td>
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<td>Fathers group</td>
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<td>Mostly White</td>
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Risk of Family Court Involvement

- Preferable to work out an informal agreement rather than letting outside authorities “get in your business”

- Mothers concerned about Child Protective Services (CPS) intervention when had history of domestic violence, addiction:

  - “If I even take the initiative to do that they’re going to pull up my background and see my old stuff. Like I’m dealing with CPS right now and they’re going off eleven years ago…They’re not looking at me now and how much I’ve changed and how I’m taking care of my child. They’re looking at the background years ago and that’s not even me anymore. So it’s like, damn, if I take him for visitation this is what I’m gonna go through. So it’s like, I’d rather just not. And it’s not fair to my son.” (African-American mother)
Fathers also concerned about having backgrounds scrutinized:

“I think a lot of people won’t go to court because they’re scared. Like me? I don’t want to go to court for nothing: no ticket, no nothing. You know what I mean? ...It’s just the judges and the prosecutors period. They scare me. Because I know their job. They job is to throw my ass in jail.” (African-American father)
Parents went to family court as a “last resort” when other options not available to them:

“We’re single parents, we’re single income. A lot of two parent families can afford proper representation and can avoid the courts altogether. And we as single parents and single income families have to use the courts because we have no choice. I was a young mother and I was told that, ‘No, you don’t have custody of your child. You live apart, you’re the mother. But unless you go to court and get a document that says you are the custodial parent, you are not the custodial parent’…If you can’t afford an attorney, your only alternative is to go to court.” (White mother)
1. To clarify their legal rights as unmarried parents (mostly fathers)

2. To protect themselves and/or their children from harm (mostly mothers):

   - “Mine was kind of like a last resort, last straw thing. There was domestic violence involved in my case, so it was like protection for myself and her.” (African-American mother)
Consequences of Going to Family Court

1) High emotional and financial costs

2) Loss of control:

- “In the beginning, it seemed like it was about my daughter. That’s what it seemed like. And the further on it’s gone, I don’t see where any of it’s for my daughter in any way, shape, or form. It becomes a he said, she said. I don’t have any control; she doesn’t have any control. Our entire lives that involve our daughter [are] up in the air, decided by somebody who we haven’t even spent time with.” (White father)
3) Increased conflict between parents:

- “I don’t want to attack him and I don’t know if he wanted to fully attack me, but [the judge] made us attack each other... I would never advise anybody to go to family court because you never know what the outcomes going to be or what can really happen to you and your children, you understand? So I would never advise family court to anybody...It’s called family court and it’s not in the best interest of the child. Period.” (African-American mother)
Discussion

- Perceive risk of family court involvement
- Turn to Family Court as a “last resort” to protect rights, safety
- Can be negative consequences of going through this process:
  - Emotional/financial costs
  - Loss of control
  - Increased parental conflict
Wrap-Up

- More diversity among fathers
- More fathers living apart from children, especially unmarried fathers
- Unmarried fathers without close relationship to mom at birth most likely to disengage
- Unmarried parents have negative perceptions of family court
Engaging Low-Income, Unmarried Fathers: Co-parent Court

- Problem-solving court for unmarried parents
- Partnership between Cooperative Extension, family court and community agencies in Minneapolis, MN

- When parents come to court to establish paternity/child support order:
  - Scheduled for co-parenting workshops
  - Receive help with parenting plan
  - Referred to social services
To view video, use the following website address:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHqKUbyl9tA
NPR: Never-Married Parents Get Help From Special Court by Sasha Aslanian

To listen to the NPR click, use the following website address:
http://www.npr.org/2012/05/07/152157287/never-married-parents-get-help-from-special-court

Joseph Arradondo assists his son Nasir, 2, on the sidelines of his daughter’s soccer game in Brooklyn Park, Minn. Arradondo attended Co-Parent Court about a year ago and says the court helped with communication between him and Nasir’s mother.
Your questions?

- Coparent Court: http://www.co-parentcourt.org/

- For more information about this research, please contact me at: mrw37@cornell.edu

Thank you!!