New Unmarried Dads and Father Involvement: Evidence from the Building Strong Families Evaluation

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Goal of Our Analysis

- Data from BSF evaluation
- **BSF**: voluntary relationship skills program for unmarried parents
- A key goal of these programs: sustained father involvement
- Want to identify BSF families most at risk of poor father involvement outcomes
- Provide guidance for future programs
To be eligible, couples had to be:
- Romantically involved
- Expecting or just had baby
- Unmarried at time baby conceived

More than 5,000 couples applied across eight research sites

BSF data collected from 2005-2011

Analysis uses data from 36-mo follow-up
- When children were three years old
Half of BSF Fathers Nonresident When Their Children Are Three

At Baseline
- Nonresident father, couple not romantic: 38%
- Nonresident father, couple romantic: 21%
- Resident father, couple not romantic: 62%
- Resident father, couple romantic: 3%

At 15 Months
- Nonresident father, couple not romantic: 16%
- Nonresident father, couple romantic: 3%
- Resident father, couple not romantic: 59%
- Resident father, couple romantic: 3%

At 36 Months
- Nonresident father, couple not romantic: 11%
- Nonresident father, couple romantic: 3%
- Resident father, couple not romantic: 46%
Nonresident Fathers Varied Substantially in the Level of Contact with Their Children

Source: Mothers' reports.
Strong Link Between Level of Child Contact and Financial Support

Proportion of Cost of Raising Child Father Covers

Source: Mothers' reports.
Low Contact Nonresident Fathers Report Lower Quality Relationships
Identifying Risk Factors for Being a Low Contact Nonresident Father

- Examine factors linked to being low contact nonresident father
- Regression model controls for baseline characteristics
- Convert results to predicted probabilities
Who’s at Risk of Being a Low Contact Nonresident Father?

- Initial relationship status and quality matters:
  - Nonresident at BSF application
  - Lower quality relationship with mother initially
  - Mother reports pregnancy unwanted
  - Dad’s multi-partner fertility

- Dad’s psychological distress a particularly strong predictor
  - Unemployment, past jail time also increases risk

- Dad’s family background matters
  - Growing up without own father increases risk
  - Being an immigrant reduces it
Closing Thoughts

- Identified group of BSF families with poor father involvement outcomes

- These low contact nonresident fathers:
  - Provide little financial support for their children
  - Have poor relations with children and coparents

- Programs may want to target couples with multiple risk factors for additional support

- Father's psychological distress a particularly strong predictor
  - May need to be a greater focus in future programs