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FATHER FACTS™ 9

NINTH EDITION

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**National
Fatherhood
Initiative®**

Thirty Years of Championing Fatherhood

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Foreword

Christopher A. Brown,
President, National Fatherhood Initiative®

Welcome to the ninth edition of *Father Facts*™, the flagship research publication of National Fatherhood Initiative® (NFI).

Wow. What a difference five years makes! Since NFI published the eighth edition of *Father Facts*™ in 2019, the data and research on father involvement grew by leaps and bounds and diversified further. We also lived through a pandemic that generated unique studies on father involvement. It offered a way to examine father involvement that none of us could have imagined.

Since joining NFI in 2000, I've never been more excited about a new edition of *Father Facts*™. We reorganized it to reflect the evolution in the data and research: toward a focus on the benefits of father involvement rather than the consequences of father absence. **We added more new chapters and sections than in any previous edition, 21 in fact.** Some of the topics are eye-opening. I can't pick a few to highlight—there are so many! So, I'll let you peruse the topics to see what opens your eyes. (Go ahead. Turn to the Table of Contents and take a peek. I'll wait.)

As with previous editions, we made a truckload of new entries. But, oh my, is that truckload overflowing this time around. **In total, we added more than 370 entries of data and research that represent what we know about the topics!**

And that's not all.

We added research on father involvement completed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the pandemic's major impact on parent-child relationships, it created a natural, time-bound experiment that affected the involvement of fathers with their children. Because of the unique nature of this research, we included a sampling of studies in Appendix B. This might be the only edition of *Father Facts*™ that will include those studies. (Unless, of course, more published research is forthcoming!)

Some of the pandemic-related studies involved non-United States populations. That's a reflection of the expanding research on father involvement across the globe. We included more international studies than ever throughout this edition.

Despite these changes, what hasn't changed is the same inescapable conclusion of this huge body of research: **fathers matter to healthy children, families, and communities!** The first chapter captures why that's still true and emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balanced research agenda. Don't skip reading it. It sets the stage for the entire publication.

As with the previous edition, this one has the following structure.

- “What We Know” summaries at the start of each section. Each summary distills what we know related to the topic addressed in the section. (We updated summaries when the new entries warranted it.)
- In each section, entries of descriptive data, data analysis/statistics (called “data” to avoid confusion), and abstracts of studies that inform what we know about the topic.
 - In sections that carried over from the eighth edition, most of these entries were published since its release (2020-2023). In some of those sections, a few new entries were published before we released the eighth edition but that slipped by us.

—continued

FOREWORD

- In sections new to this edition, all of the entries are new to *Father Facts*™.
- The data and research are representative of the topics. They are not exhaustive.
- To maintain the focus of *Father Facts*™ on the most recent information, we included data and research published only in the past 10-12 years, with a few exceptions for topics that are new to *Father Facts*™.
- An appendix with historical tables on rates of father presence in the United States (U.S.), updated with the most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau at the time of publication.

The beauty of *Father Facts*™ is its versatility. It offers a multitude of benefits. Whether you want to enhance your organization's ability to support dads, foster father involvement in your community, secure media coverage for your work with dads, gather research for grant proposals, or advocate for fatherhood programming or legislation, *Father Facts*™ is an indispensable resource that you can rely on time and time again.

Father Facts™ is only a part of the story here at NFI. **We do a whole lot more.** Please visit our websites, fatherhood.org and fathersource.org, to learn about our state-of-the-art portfolio of evidence-based and evidence-informed fatherhood skill-building materials, trainings, collaborative services, and technical assistance. Please follow us on Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), and LinkedIn, and subscribe to our blog, *Championing Fatherhood*, to stay connected to all of the work that we and our partners across the country do to ensure a brighter future for our nation's children.

Wishing you the very best,



Christopher A. Brown

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher A. Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

President
National Fatherhood Initiative®

IV. Individual Influences on Father Involvement

A host of factors influence father involvement. Some of these factors are the cultural, social, relational, and systemic influences covered in Chapters V, VI, and VII. This chapter presents data and studies on the factors in individuals that influence father involvement, namely Americans' attitudes about father involvement and “predictors” of father involvement. Sections in previous editions of *Father Facts*™ included in this edition are relationship and marriage stability, father time spent with and in the care of children, paternal and maternal pre-natal and post-natal stress and depression, and typical differences in paternal and maternal behavior.

In this edition, we include five new sections on individual influences that impact father involvement: coparenting, the impact of child age, paternity (parental) leave taking, paternal self-efficacy (or a sense of agency and confidence in parenting), and other predictors of father involvement. We also include a sixth new section: the development of measurement tools/scales for research on father involvement. The addition of these six sections reflects the reframing of *Father Facts*™ as a tool for creating positive change using a strengths-based and solutions-oriented approach.

Attitudes About Father Involvement

What We Know

Over the past two decades, there has been a shift toward a lower proportion of childless men in the United States expressing the desire to become fathers. This shift could partly explain why there are fewer Millennials having children. Nevertheless, for those Millennials who are fathers, they prioritize being a good parent as one of the most important aspects of their lives.

There has also been a shift in what it means to be a father. Data has emerged around the concept of the “new” father or “hybrid” father. Fathers are still expected to be breadwinners and increasingly expected to be involved in the direct care of their children and to be equal partners with mothers in caring for the home. Fathers are more likely to experience role strain because of these multiple demands. Encouragingly, there have been recent shifts among fathers in their attitudes on fatherhood that have facilitated the adoption of these demands.

Studies on lower-income fathers indicate that while these fathers feel marginalized, they still want to provide financial assistance to their children. Most fathers, including lower-income fathers, place importance on the ability to financially provide for their children. Millennial fathers place parenthood and marriage above career and financial success. There are significant differences in how much fathers, compared to mothers, worry about their children and in their parenting approaches.

When it comes to Americans in general, most value fatherhood, believe children should grow up with a father, and believe that fatherhood is more difficult today than it was decades ago. Mothers also hold varying attitudes about fathers and fatherhood. Mothers who live with the fathers of their children have positive attitudes about the quality of their partners' fathering, while women who live apart from fathers are less satisfied with the quality of fathering. Most fathers believe that being a father is an important part of their identity and enjoy spending time with their children. While much of the research investigating fathers focuses on maternal and child outcomes, some studies have focused on paternal attitudes toward

INDIVIDUAL INFLUENCES ON FATHER INVOLVEMENT

fathering. From these studies, we know that fathers' attitudes toward parenting can be influenced by maternal expectations and child-rearing responsibilities.

The Data and Research

In this study, a researcher used data on childless men from the National Survey of Family Growth, the Monitoring the Future study, and the Panel Study of Income Dynamics' Transition to Adulthood supplement to examine trends in expectations for and attitudes toward fatherhood among childless men across the first two decades of the 2000s. The researcher found that a growing share of childless men do not want children and increasingly, a lack of children would not bother them at all. Additionally, certainty in having children among childless men had waned over time and fewer childless men were concerned with parental leave policies when evaluating their job options.

Source: Bozick, R. (2023). An increasing disinterest in fatherhood among childless men in the United States: A brief report. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 85(1), 293-304.

Using a nationally-representative survey of 3,800 American parents, researchers sought to gauge parents' top worries for their children. They found the following worries at the top of parents' minds in descending order of importance:

- Anxiety and depression
- Being bullied
- Being kidnapped or abducted
- Getting beaten up or attacked
- Having problems with drugs or alcohol
- Getting shot
- Getting pregnant or getting someone pregnant
- Getting in trouble with the police

Fathers and mothers differed significantly, however, in how much space those worries occupy in their minds. Fathers spent much less time worrying about their children's present and future. When it comes to worrying about their children struggling with anxiety and depression, for example, 32% of fathers were worried compared to 46% of mothers. Moreover, the researchers uncovered significant differences in parenting approaches, namely that fathers were:

- More likely to give their children too much freedom.
- More likely to "stick to their guns" too much.
- Less likely to give in too quickly to their children.

Source: Minkin, R. & Horowitz, J.M. (2023). Parenting in America today. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

Using data from the German socioeconomic Panel (1984-2015), researchers estimated motherhood and fatherhood effects in West Germany on life satisfaction and whether the gap in happiness between parents and nonparents in which parents are significantly less happy than non-parents—known as the “parental happiness gap”—has remained or changed over the last three decades. They then traced trends in these effects back to changing parenthood norms. The results indicated that the implications of parenthood converged for men and women. As support for a gendered division of labor lost ground, the transition to parenthood became increasingly conducive to life satisfaction for both genders, and the parental happiness gap vanished (i.e., parents and nonparents are equally happy).

Source: Preisner, K., Neuberger, F., Bertogg, A., & Schaub, J. M. (2020). Closing the happiness gap: The decline of gendered parenthood norms and the increase in parental life satisfaction. *Gender & Society*, 34(1), 31-55.

Drawing on theories of masculinity, this study analyzed how a United States government funded “responsible fatherhood” program used a political discourse of “hybrid” masculinity to shape disadvantaged men's ideas of successful fathering. Using data from three sources that uniquely traced how this discourse traveled from policy to program implementation—including analysis of the curriculum, in-depth interviews with 10 staff, and in-depth interviews and focus groups with 64 participating fathers—the researcher theorized hybrid fatherhood as a discourse of paternal involvement that incorporates stereotypically feminine styles such as emotional expressiveness. Hybrid fatherhood discursively reconfigures patriarchy by drawing distinctions between mothering and fathering and dominant and subordinate forms of masculinity as they relate to men's parenting. The researcher analyzed how the promotion of hybrid fatherhood for poor men of color legitimates and sustains gender, race, and class inequalities through U.S. welfare policy.

Source: Randles, J. (2018). “Manning up” to be a good father: Hybrid fatherhood, masculinity, and US responsible fatherhood policy. *Gender & Society*, 32(4), 516-539.

This qualitative study examined 25 stay-at-home fathers (SAHFs) in the United States and their lived experiences through the perspective of the theory of caring masculinities. Results from semi-structured telephone interviews demonstrated that:

- The majority of SAHFs voluntarily opted to be full-time caregivers, named financial reasons for becoming a SAHF, reported high levels of satisfaction in caring for their children, and experienced little change in their relationship with their spouse or partner because of being a SAHF.
- Becoming a SAHF can create a change in attitudes and masculine identities, such as increases in emotional connection with others and respect for caregiving.
- Overall, SAHFs reported incorporating aspects of masculine and feminine qualities to develop a new masculine identity that best supports their caregiving role and experiences.
- SAHFs identified social isolation and mixed reactions from people as the two main challenges against constructing and maintaining their new masculinity.
- SAHFs also reported support from multiple social networks (e.g., partners, female family members, and other SAHFs) to successfully overcome such challenges.

Source: Lee, J. Y., & Lee, S. J. (2018). Caring is masculine: Stay-at-home fathers and masculine identity. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 19(1), 47-58.

Using national data from the Survey of Contemporary Fatherhood, researchers analyzed a sample of 2,194 fathers to examine adherence to masculine norms, father involvement in terms of both instrumental and expressive fathering behaviors, and the new fatherhood ideal that expects engaged and nurturing parenting. They found that:

- Fathers who adhered to masculine norms were less likely to embrace the new fatherhood ideal.
- Masculine norms continued to shape fathers' behavior: fathers who were more masculine were less involved in instrumental and expressive parenting and were more likely to engage in harsh discipline than fathers who were less masculine.
- Embracing the new fatherhood ideal at least partially mediates the relationship between masculinity and father involvement.

Source: Petts, R., Shafer, K., & Essig, L. (2018). Does adherence to masculine norms shape fathering behavior? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 80, 704-720.

The 2015 Survey of American Parents, which sampled parents with children under age 18, found similarities between mothers' and fathers' assessments of parenting: 57% of fathers, and 58% of mothers, said parenting is extremely important to their identity; 54% of fathers, and 52% of mothers, said that parenting is rewarding all of the time; 46% of fathers, and 41% of mothers, said they found parenting enjoyable all of the time.

Source: Parker, K., & Livingston, G. (2018). 7 facts about American dads. Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center.

Using data from the Chicago Youth Development Study, researchers analyzed a sample of 113 fathers and 126 mothers reporting on 221 children to examine reports on father involvement—in terms of accessibility, engagement, and responsibility—among low-income, minority families. They found that fathers reported higher levels of involvement than mothers reported. They also found that mothers' reports of positive relationship quality with fathers and fathers' residence with their children were associated with smaller discrepancies between fathers' and mothers' reports on father involvement while mothers' and fathers' cohabitation (compared to marriage) and child age were associated with larger discrepancies. Their findings suggest that measures of father involvement should be multidimensional and should use reports directly from fathers.

Source: Charles, P., Spielfogel, J., Gorman-Smith, D., Schoeny, M., Henry, D., & Tolan, P. (2018). Disagreement in parental reports of father involvement. *Journal of Family Issues*, 39, 328-351.

Using a sample of 1,596 coresident couples from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, researchers examined the association between parents' fathering role centrality standards (the importance mothers and fathers assigned to various fathering roles) at the time of their child's birth, father's status centrality (the importance fathers assigned to parenting overall) at the time of their child's birth, and mother and father reports of father involvement 1 and 3 years later in terms of the average amount of direct involvement in various activities with their children. They found that role centrality standards and status centrality standards were linked with father involvement and that there were some distinctions between the influence on mothers' reports and fathers' reports. Centrality of father status, for example, was positively associated with father reports of father involvement at both Years 1 and 3 and with mother reports of father involvement only at Year 3.

Source: Adamsons, K., & Pasley, K. (2016). Parents' fathering identity standards and later father involvement. *Journal of Family Issues*, 37, 221-244.

IX. Consequences of Father Absence

There has been much research conducted in the past five to six decades on the negative effects of father absence on children's well-being. Father absence places children at greater risk, on average, for a range of poor outcomes that include alcohol and substance abuse, child abuse, criminal behavior, lower educational success, emotional and behavioral problems, poorer physical health, poverty, risky sexual activity, suicide, and teen pregnancy. While these are not the only negative effects of father absence, they are the most concerning and well-researched. This chapter provides some of the most recent data and studies on these topics.

Alcohol and Substance Abuse

What We Know

Research links father involvement to lower adolescent drug and alcohol use; however, it appears that the quality of the involvement is more pertinent than quantity of involvement to reducing the risks of adolescent substance use behavior. In international samples, the lack of father involvement increases the risk of substance abuse in adolescents. Having a father in the home may reduce the potential for economic hardship, which may reduce the potential for substance abuse in children and adolescents.

The Data and Research

This study examined the impact of fathers' presence-absence and paternal investment during childhood and adolescence on daughters' substance use frequency and risky sexual behavior. Researchers recruited participants online on Craigslist and Amazon's Mechanical Turk, and the final analytic sample included adult sister pairs from 223 divorced/separated biological families (N = 446). Findings showed that older sisters who had resided with a father who was more socially deviant reported more frequent tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis use during adolescence; however, this effect was not shown in younger sisters. This result might be because younger ones spent less time living with their fathers. There were no effects of the biological father's absence on the daughters, indicating that the quality of the father's behavior is much more important than his absence.

Source: DelPriore, D. J., Brener, S. A., Hill, S. E., & Ellis, B. J. (2021). Effects of fathers on adolescent daughters' frequency of substance use and risky sexual behavior. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 31(1), 153–169.

This study examined the long-term effects of childhood maltreatment (i.e., maltreatment type, and perpetrator identity) and the quality and quantity of father involvement on developmental trajectories of substance use among high-risk youth. Researchers used data on United States adolescents from the Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect (N = 681) who had experienced or were at risk for child maltreatment and their substance use at ages 12, 14, 16, and 18. They found that:

- Child emotional abuse and greater quantity of father involvement were associated with a higher initial number of substances used, while higher quality of father-child relationships was associated with a lower initial number of substances used.
- Emotional abuse and greater quantity of father involvement were associated with slower increases in the number of substances used over time.

The findings suggested that engaging fathers and promoting nurturing parenting and positive parent-adolescent interactions may be important for programs and policies aimed to prevent early adolescent substance use initiation. Furthermore, early identification of emotional abuse among adolescents could help to prevent initial polysubstance use onset.

Source: Yoon, S., Kobulsky, J.M., Shin, S.H., & Coxe, K. (2021). The roles of child maltreatment and fathers in the development of substance use in an at-risk sample of youth: A longitudinal study. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 118, 105130.

CONSEQUENCES OF FATHER ABSENCE

Using data from the Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect (LONGSCAN) (N= 903), this study examined the influence of father structural factors (i.e., father presence in the home and father type/biological relations) and child maltreatment (i.e., the type and timing of child maltreatment [infancy/toddlerhood; early childhood; middle childhood; and adolescence]) on adolescents' alcohol and marijuana use trajectories. Adolescents in the sample were more likely to be Black and live with mothers with no spouse or partner than the adolescents in the full sample. The results found two latent classes/subgroups (stable no/low use and increasing use) for alcohol and marijuana trajectories. Regarding interaction effects between father presence and child maltreatment trajectories, only marijuana use had significant interaction effects. These results implied that promoting father involvement in early childhood is beneficial for preventing later substance use in at-risk adolescents.

Source: Yoon, S., Shi, Y., Yoon, D., Pei, F., Schoppe-Sullivan, S., & Snyder, S. M. (2020). Child maltreatment, fathers, and adolescent alcohol and marijuana use trajectories. *Substance Use & Misuse, 55*(5), 721-733.

Using data from the Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect (N = 685 at-risk youth), researchers found:

- A connection between early childhood (birth to 5) physical abuse and adolescent substance use, but not for later childhood physical abuse or other forms of child maltreatment.
- The quality of father involvement was a protective factor against early substance use, regardless of child gender.
- The quantity of father involvement was not significant, and neither the quality nor quantity of mother involvement was significantly associated with early substance use.

Source: Yoon, S., Pei, F., Wang, X., Yoon, D., Lee, G., McCarthy, K.S., Schoppe-Sullivan, S.J. (2018). Vulnerability or resilience to early substance use among adolescents at risk: The roles of maltreatment and father involvement. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 86*, 206-216.

Using data from the 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, researchers examined correlations between household characteristics (nonresident mother vs. resident mother and nonresident father vs. resident father) and blunt (marijuana wrapped in tobacco leaves) use among Black male and female adolescents. The researchers found that:

- 12% of males and females reported having a nonresident mother, while nearly 55% of males and females reported having a nonresident father.
- The lifetime prevalence for blunt use was 17.1% for males and 15.6% for females.
- While the residency status of mothers did not have an influence on blunt use among Black males or females, Black males with nonresident fathers were significantly more likely to have smoked blunts in their lifetime than Black males with resident fathers.

Source: Montgomery, L., & Marinis, D. (2016). The influence of potentially traumatic household characteristics on blunt use among Black youth. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community, 44*(2), 101-111.

Researchers compared 43 fathers with co-occurring substance abuse and intimate partner violence to 43 fathers who did not have those co-occurring issues (control group). They found the fathers with the co-occurring issues had less positive coparenting and more negative parenting behaviors than the community of control fathers. Those fathers also reported more emotional and behavioral problems in their children.

Source: Smith Stover, C., Easton, C., & McMahon, T.J. (2015). Parenting of men with co-occurring intimate partner violence and substance abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 28*(11), 2290-2314.

Researchers found in a study of 736 adolescents that, on average, adolescents in nuclear families were less likely to participate in alcohol and drug use than adolescents in any other family type.

Source: Harcourt, K. T., Adler-Baeder, F., Erath, S., & Pettit, G. S. (2015). Examining family structure and half-sibling influence on adolescent well-being. *Journal of Family Issues, 36*(2), 250-272.

Using a representative national sample of 2,179 10th-grade students, researchers investigated how parenting practices impacted the likelihood of an adolescent driving while under the influence, or riding with someone impaired drivers in the 11th grade. They found that paternal monitoring was a significant predictive factor against driving while intoxicated.

Source: Li, K., Simons-Morton, B.G., Brooks-Russell, A., Ehsani, J. & Hingson, R. (2014). Drinking and parenting practices are predictors of impaired driving behaviors among U.S. adolescents. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, 75*(1), 5-15.

Drawing from fathers who participated in the Yale Comparative Study on Fathering, researchers interviewed a sample of 40 fathers with histories of substance abuse and intimate partner violence (i.e., physical violence toward their partners) and examined their level of empathy toward their children. The researchers found these fathers:

- Had a very limited capacity to think about the thoughts and feelings of their children.
- Wanted to spend more time with their child and an inability to provide financially were two common themes.

- Had anger toward the child's mother for not providing adequate care and a focus on shielding the child from his anger was also reported frequently.
- Did not report feelings of guilt related to their substance use or aggression in their relationships.

Source: Smith Stover, C., & Spink, A. (2013). Affective awareness in parenting of fathers with co-occurring substance abuse and intimate partner violence. *Advances in Dual Diagnosis, 5*(2), 74-85.

Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, researchers examined the relationship between family structure and marijuana use for 1,069 African American adolescents aged 13-18. They investigated the influence of father absence on marijuana use in Black boys and girls, as well as the effects of mediating factors such as poverty, neighborhood quality, and self-control. The researchers found that:

- Young men with never-married mothers, stepfathers, and early divorce had significantly greater marijuana use rates than those in two-biological family households.
- While family structure significantly impacted young men's marijuana use, it did not affect young women.

The findings suggested that adolescents with absent fathers are at a greater risk for using marijuana for they are more likely to live in poverty and poorer quality neighborhoods.

Source: Mandara, J., Rogers, S. Y., & Zinbarg, R. E. (2011). The effects of family structure on african american adolescents' marijuana use. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 73*(3), 557-569.

Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, researchers examined the relationship between parent-child involvement (e.g., shared communication, shared activity participation, and emotional closeness) and three adolescent alcohol outcomes, including alcohol use, alcohol-related problems, and risky behavior co-occurring with alcohol use. They investigated both paternal and maternal involvement in understanding adolescent alcohol outcomes. Their results indicated that shared communication with fathers and emotional closeness to fathers, but not shared activity participation, has a unique impact on each alcohol outcome and are not related to maternal involvement.

Source: Goncy, E.A., & van Dulmena, M.H. (2010). Fathers do make a difference: Parental involvement and adolescent alcohol use. *Fathering, 8*(1), 93-108.

Child Abuse

What We Know

Child maltreatment is influenced by multiple factors involving interactions at the community, family, and individual levels. Household economic hardship, unemployment, young maternal age, low educational attainment, personal history of abuse or neglect, alcohol or drug over use, parenting stress, and depression can all be related to child maltreatment. While most perpetrators are parents of the children being mistreated, father involvement can be a protective factor for children especially if the perpetrator is the other parent. A nonresident fathers' support (e.g., in-kind informal support and formal child support) can act as a protective factor against child neglect, as most neglect cases in single-parent families are influenced by a lack of economic resources and increased rates of poverty.

The Data and Research

Using data from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), the United States Department of Health and Human Services reported child maltreatment data for 2021. The findings showed:

- An estimated 600,000 children experienced abuse or neglect in 2021 (8.1 victims per 1,000 children), with most victims being younger than 1-year-old (25.3 per 1,000).
- Girls were more likely to be victims than boys (8.7 vs. 7.5 per 1,000).
- American-Indian or Alaska Native children had the highest victimization rate (15.2 per 1,000) with Black children having had the second highest rate (13.1 per 1,000).
- 76.0% of child maltreatment victims experienced neglect, 16.0% were physically abused, 10.1% were sexually abused, and 0.2% were trafficked.
- 23.9% of children were maltreated by their father only, 38.0% by their mother only, 20.0% by both parents, 5.6% by relative(s), and 3.3% by the unmarried partner of a parent.