

The Impact of Head Start Fathers on the Lives of their Children

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Introduction

One of the goals of Head Start, a program designed to serve low-income families, is to strengthen families in their role as the primary nurturers of their children. Consequently, part of the mission of the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) has been to investigate how families work to support and nurture their children.

Low-income families experience varied sources of stress, including stress from within their family, from their neighborhood, or from more broad based sources, such as Federal and State welfare reform. These stresses have implications for many parents in terms of daily family functioning and what they are able to do with their children. The burden of family responsibilities may become heavier in households where fathers are not present. Unfortunately, this may come at a cost for the children.

This poster reports on early findings about fathers who are present or not present in the homes of Head Start children, as noted in the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES). It begins to explore how Head Start fathers, through activities with their children and involvement in child rearing, may contribute positively to the development of their children.

Method

3,600 families were randomly selected from a sample of 40 randomly selected Head Start programs. To ensure a representative sample, programs were stratified on geographic region, urbanicity, and minority enrollment. Head Start centers were randomly selected within each program (range = 1 to 8 centers from each program; mode = 4), and families were randomly selected from each center (range = 40 to 256 families per program).

Selected families were recruited into the study by on-site coordinators, who worked with the cooperation of the local Head Start staff. Most interviews were completed at the local Head Start centers (79.6%) or the child's home (14.4%).

Individual interviews were completed with primary caregivers from 3,156 families in the fall of 1997 and 2,688 follow-up interviews were completed in the spring of 1998. These findings are from the fall 1997 baseline parent interview, except as noted. Most interviews lasted about one hour, and respondents received \$15.00 upon completion of the interview.

Instrument

The FACES Parent Interview was designed to collect basic, descriptive information about the respondent, the child, and each child's household. In addition to demographics, information was collected on the following topics:

Satisfaction and Activities With Head Start

Family Activities With the Child

Disabilities

Primary Caregiver's Assessment of Child Skills and Social Behavior

Household Rules

Employment, Income, and Housing

Use of Community Services

Child Care

Family Health Care

Home Safety Practices

Home and Neighborhood Characteristics

Ratings of Social Support

Feelings of each Primary Caregiver About Herself/Himself

Interview Respondents

All respondents reported that they were a primary caregiver of the child

87.8% were the mother of the Head Start child

5.1% were the father of the Head Start child

4.2% were the grandmother of the Head Start child

2.9% were other relatives

Therefore, in almost every case, the data reflect the mothers reports about the fathers.

Results

Results cover the following

Basic demographic descriptions of fathers who are present or not present in the household

The effect of having a father present or not present in the home on the fathers' reported activities with the child

The effect of having a father present or not present in the home on the child and the family

Findings on Children Without Their Father in the Household

44.3% of the children live with their father in the home.

61.3% of the children living without their father in the household are reported to have a father-figure available to them.

50.0% are the mother's spouse or partner

38.7% are relatives

10.5% are family friends

26.5% live with the child

8.4% of the children living without their father in the household rarely or never see their father and have no reported father-figure. This represents 4.9% of the entire child sample.

Demographic Descriptions of Fathers Who Are Present or Not Present in the Household

Fathers present in the household
(44.3%)

82.5% were reported to be working

31.6% had less than a high school diploma or GED

47.7% of the mothers work

Household income (all sources) for previous month estimated at \$1456.14

Size of Household: 4.98 members

Fathers not present in the household
(55.6%)

73.9% were reported to be working

54.5% had less than a high school diploma or GED

56.1% of the mothers work

Household income (all sources) for previous month estimated at \$1072.25

Size of Household: 4.11 members

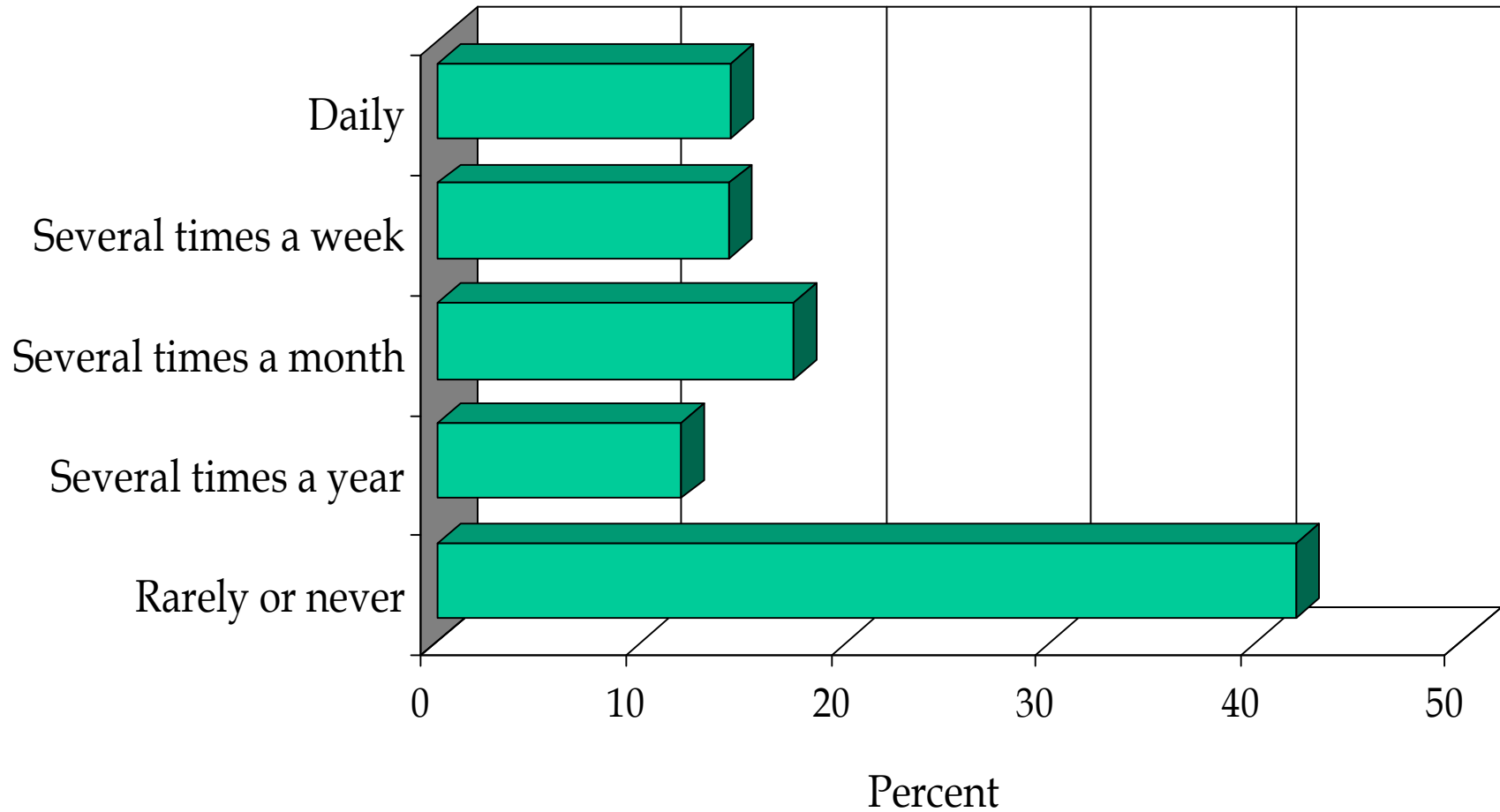
1.6% were in the military

8.0% were in jail

45.1% contribute to their child's financial support

55.0% live within an hour drive of their child

Primary Caregiver Reports of How Often Children See Their Non-Household Fathers



Findings on Non-household Fathers and Families Risk for Exposure to Violence

Primary caregivers from households where fathers are not present are significantly more likely than those in households with fathers to report:

having seen non-violent and violent crimes in their neighborhood

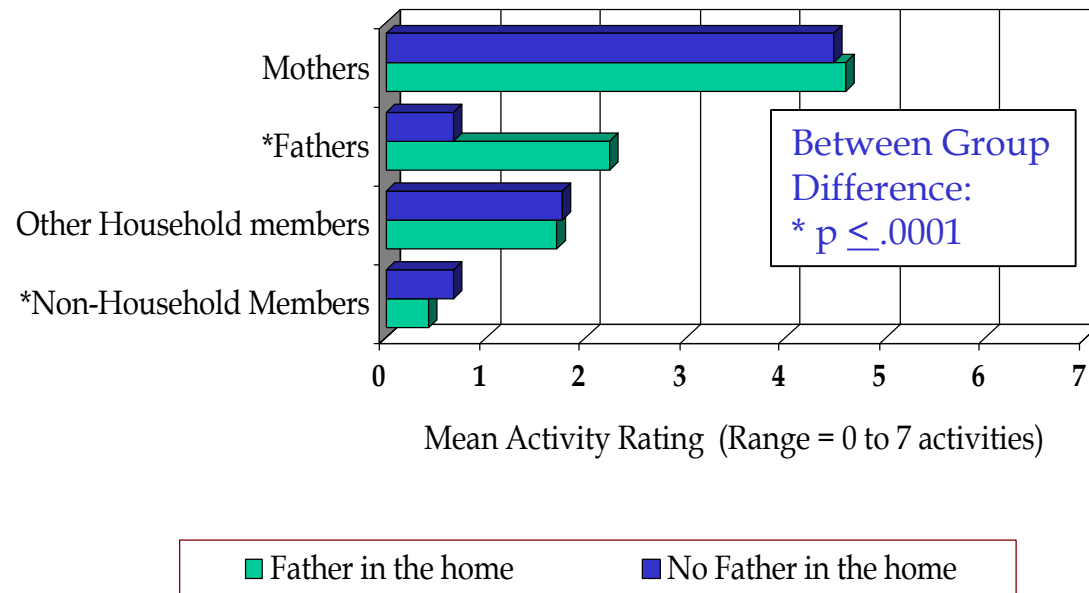
having been a victim of violent crime in the home

Among all the children in the study sample:

Of those who were witness to a violent crime or domestic violence (n=518; 17.4%), 72.8% did not have their father living in their home

Of those who were victim of a violent crime or domestic violence (n=87; 2.9%), 81.6% did not have their father living in their home

Effect of Fathers Presence in the Household on Reported Family Members Weekly Activities with the Child



Past Week Activities:

Telling a story; Teaching letters, words, or numbers; Teaching songs or music; Arts and crafts; Playing games (indoors or outdoors); Household chores; Doing errands

Fathers present in the household engage in more weekly activities with the child than non-household fathers

Non-household family members engage in more weekly activities with the child when fathers are not present in the household

In families where the fathers engaged in more day to day activities with the child (weekly activity rating), **mothers** also engaged in more activity with the child (weekly activity rating).

Correlation between fathers and mothers activity when father is present in the household: $r = .15, p = .0001$

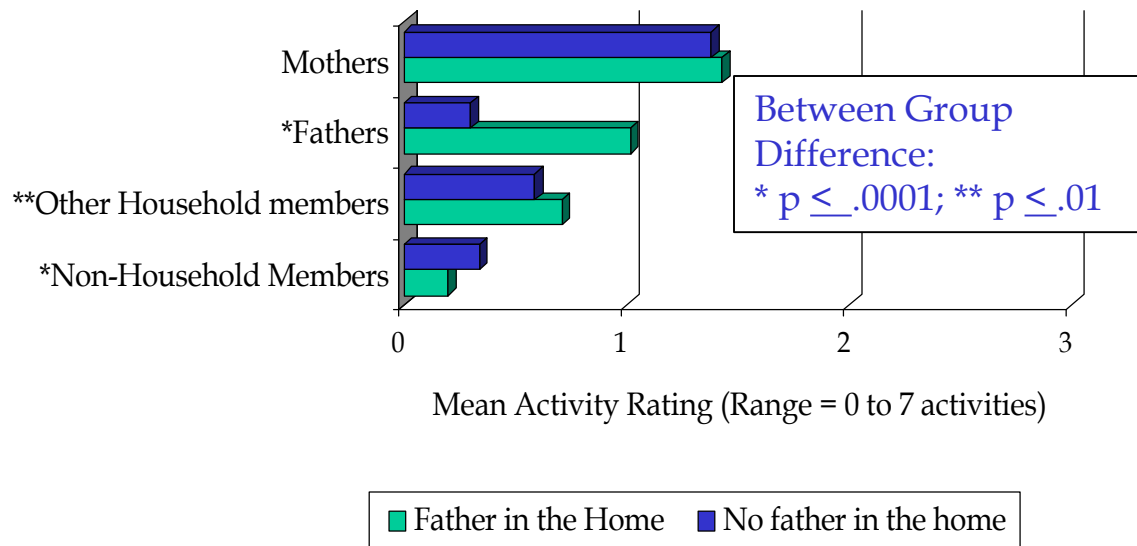
Correlation between fathers and mothers activity when father is not present in the household: $r = .20, p = .0001$

In families where the fathers engaged in more day to day activities with the child (weekly activity rating), **non-household members** also engaged in more activity with the child (weekly activity rating).

Correlation between fathers and non-household members activity when father is present in the household: $r = .09, p = .0009$

Correlation between fathers and non-household members activity when father is not in the household: $r = .09, p = .0001$

Effect of Fathers Presence in the Household on Reported Family Members Monthly Activities with the Child



Past Month Activities

Visiting a library; Going to a live show; Going to an art gallery or museum;
Discussing family heritage;
Visiting a zoo or aquarium;
Attending a community, ethnic, or religious event;
Attending a sporting event

Fathers present in the household engage in more monthly activities with the child than non-household fathers

Non-household family members engage in more monthly activities with the child when fathers are not present in the household

Other household members engage in more monthly activities with the child when fathers are present in the household

In families where fathers engaged in more monthly activities (monthly activity rating) with the child, **mothers, other household members, and non-household family members** also engaged in more monthly activity (monthly activity rating) with the child.

Correlation of fathers' monthly activities when fathers are present in the household

with mothers: $r = .15, p = .0001$

with other household members: $r = .45, p = .0001$

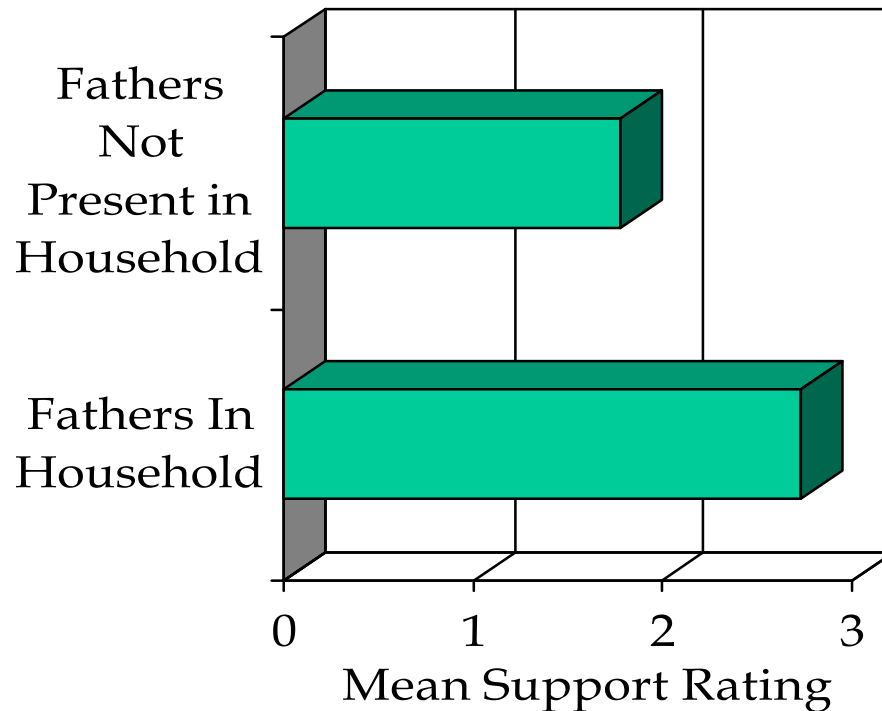
with non-household members: $r = .13, p = .0001$

Correlation of fathers' monthly activities, when fathers are not in the household

with mothers: $r = .31, p = .0001$

with other household members: $r = .17, p = .0001$

The Impact of Fathers Presence in the Household on Their Ratings by Mothers As a Source of Social Support for Raising Their Children



Rating system:

- 1 - Not Very Helpful
- 2 - Somewhat Helpful
- 3 - Very Helpful

Between Group Difference:
 $t = -35.6, p = .0001$

Relationship of Father s Level of Social Support for the Mother in Raising the Child with Child Behavior Ratings

Fathers who were reported by mothers to be more supportive in raising their children were more likely to have children with higher positive social behavior ratings and lower problem behavior ratings than fathers who were reported to be less supportive.

| | Positive Social Behavior | Behavior Problem Index | Aggressive Behavior Subscale | Hyperactive Behavior Subscale |
|--|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Level Of Support from a Father Present In The Home | r= .06 p= .0194 n= 1306 | r= -.08 p= .0028 n= 1303 | r= -.06 p= .0361 n= 1316 | r= -.07 p= .0157 n= 1316 |
| Level Of Support from a Father Not Present In The Home | r= .07 p= .0039 n= 1587 | r= -.08 p= .0016 n= 1587 | r= -.11 p= .0001 n= 1600 | r= -.08 p= .0019 n= 1599 |

Relationship of the Father s Level of Child Oriented Activity with Child Behavior Ratings

Fathers, who were present in the household and were reported by primary caregivers to engage in more activities with their children were more likely to have children with higher positive social behavior ratings and lower problem behavior ratings than fathers who were reported to engage in fewer activities. This finding did not hold for fathers not present in the household.

| | Positive Social Behavior | Behavior Problem Index | Aggressive Behavior Subscale | Hyperactive Behavior Subscale |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Household Father s Weekly Activity Rating | r= .06 p= .02 n= 1307 | r= -.11 p= .0001 n= 1307 | r= -.11 p= .0001 n= 1307 | r= -.10 p= .0003 n= 1307 |
| Household Father s Total Activity Rating | r= .09 p= .0001 n= 1307 | r= -.11 p= .0001 n= 1307 | r= -.12 p= .0001 n= 1307 | r= -.10 p= .0004 n= 1307 |

Summary

In this national sample of Head Start families, fathers appear to play an important, positive role in the lives of their children. A father's presence in the home or level of involvement is related to the frequency or types of activities the child engages in with family members, the social behavior of the child, and the level of exposure to violence both the child and the primary caregiver experience.

The frequency of a father's involvement with his child generally reflects the level of involvement others in the family have with the child. It is still unclear if these relationships are due to characteristics of the fathers or if they are reflective of the general family styles (more active fathers merely part of more active families). While correlations between the activity ratings of fathers and those of other family members are not always strong (or significant), they are almost uniformly positive, indicating the possibility that the activity ratings may be due to the family style. The evidence does suggest that the more involvement fathers have with their children, the more likely the children are to display positive social behaviors and the less likely the children are to exhibit aggressive and/or hyperactive behavior.

When the father is not present in the home, there is a reduction in the resources available to the family, both socially and financially. Families where fathers are not present in the household have less income, are more likely to have primary caregivers report that they have been exposed to crime and domestic violence, and to have children who were witnesses to or victims of violent crime or domestic violence.

These findings have implications for the training and technical activities for Head Start. Local Head Start efforts can be directed towards developing programs that engage fathers, and other family members, in specific activities with their children. Many programs already make some effort to engage the child with the entire family, either through home visits or special family activities. In addition, growing numbers of Head Start programs have initiated specialized programs for involving fathers in program activities and assisting them in seeing the importance of the role they play in the development of their children.

Further analysis of these data may help Head Start's ability to target program efforts in working with fathers by identifying some key areas in which fathers may be able to assist their children. On our part, future analyses will entail linking the level and type of activities fathers engage in with specific child outcomes and teacher ratings of the children. We will also be looking at how engagement with the child varies within the two groups of fathers (present or not present in the household), and see how this variability may impact the home environment and child development.