



Introduction

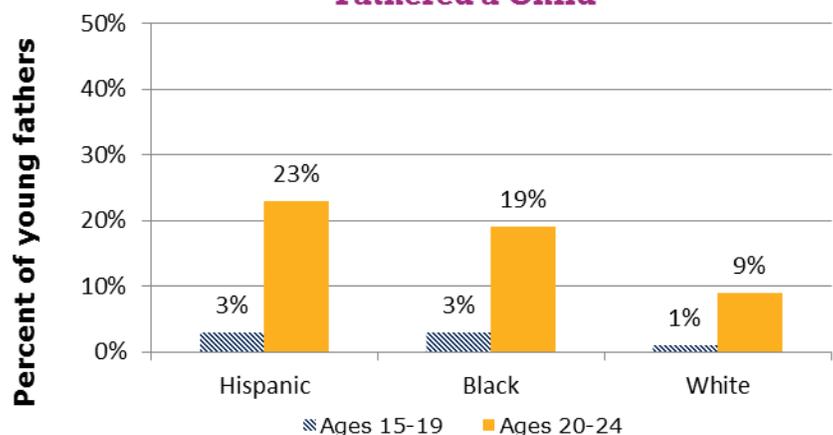
More and more programs that serve families are working to target and engage young fathers. This guide serves as a “cheat sheet” to help practitioners understand what current research says about fathers in their teens and early twenties (young fathers). This information can be used to identify fathers most in need of services, update statistics presented in program curricula, and inform policy decisions about gaps in services.

Important Things to Know About Young Fathers

Men are more likely to become fathers between the ages of 20 and 24 than in their teens.

- About 2% of male teens (age 15-19) have fathered a child, compared to 14% of young men in their early twenties (age 20-24).¹
- Hispanic and black teens are more than twice as likely to be fathers compared to their white peers (Figure 1). About 25% of Hispanic men and 20% of black men between the ages of 20 and 24 are fathers, compared to roughly 10% of their white counterparts (Figure 1).¹

Figure 1. Percent of Young Men who Have Fathered a Child



Source: National Survey of Family Growth, 2011-2013

The majority of young fathers were in a relationship with the mother of their child for at least a year and a half before becoming a father.

- On average, pregnancies involving young fathers are the result of relationships of approximately 20 months. This appears to be the case across different geographic and racial/ethnic contexts, as study findings have been consistent with young, low-income African American males in Baltimore, Maryland, and young, low-income white males in the Pacific Northwest.^{2,3}



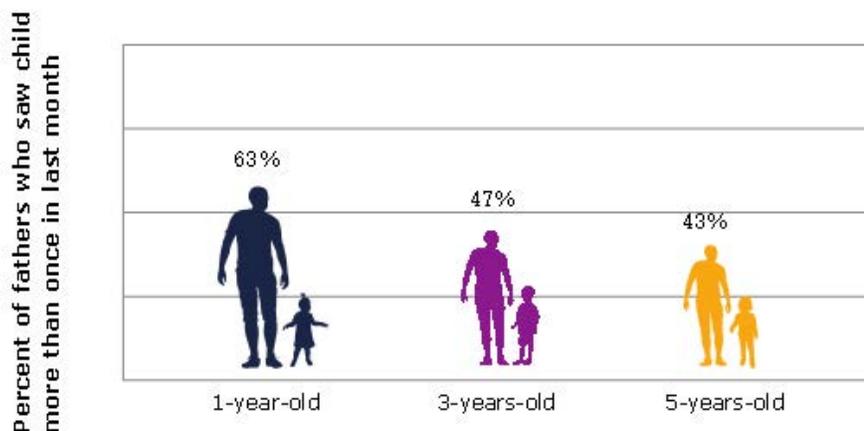
While the majority of young fathers are romantically involved with the mother of their child around the time of the birth, many of those relationships will end by the child's first birthday.

- Half of the couples who are dating when their child is born are no longer romantically involved one year later.⁴
- Fathers who are still romantically involved with their child's mother are also typically more involved in caring for their child than those no longer romantically involved with their child's mother.⁴

Many young fathers are involved with their child, especially during their first year of life in a number of ways, including contact, visitation, and financial support.

- However, involvement tends to decline over time (Figure 2), especially when fathers and mothers are no longer romantically linked.⁵
- Younger fathers tend to be less involved than older fathers of similar backgrounds and have a more dramatic drop in involvement over time than older fathers.⁵

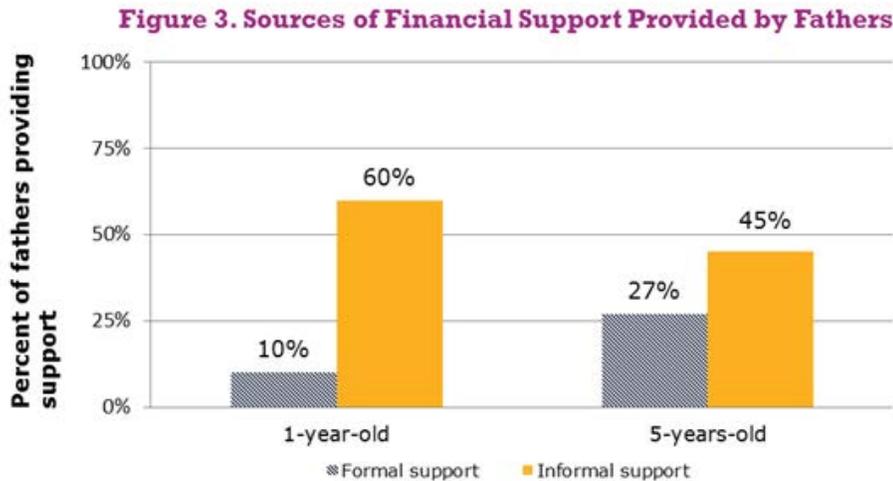
Figure 2. Father Involvement with Child Over Time



Source: Carlson et al. 2008; Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study

Young fathers more often provide informal financial support than formal financial support.

- A study based on a group of urban fathers found that 1 in 10 fathers who live apart from their child make formal child support payments by their child's first birthday, but nearly 6 out of 10 provide informal financial support such as buying items for the child or providing the mother with cash or transportation (Figure 3).⁶



Source: Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel 2007; Fragile Families and Child Well-Being

How Young Fathers Can Make a Difference

Father involvement is linked to mothers' health behaviors during pregnancy.

- When fathers are involved during pregnancy, teen mothers are more likely to receive adequate prenatal care, especially during the critical first trimester.^{7,8}
- Teen mothers with partners involved during pregnancy are less likely to smoke than those with uninvolved partners.⁸
- Over half (56%) of mothers with involved partners receive adequate prenatal care compared to just over a third (35%) with uninvolved partners.⁷

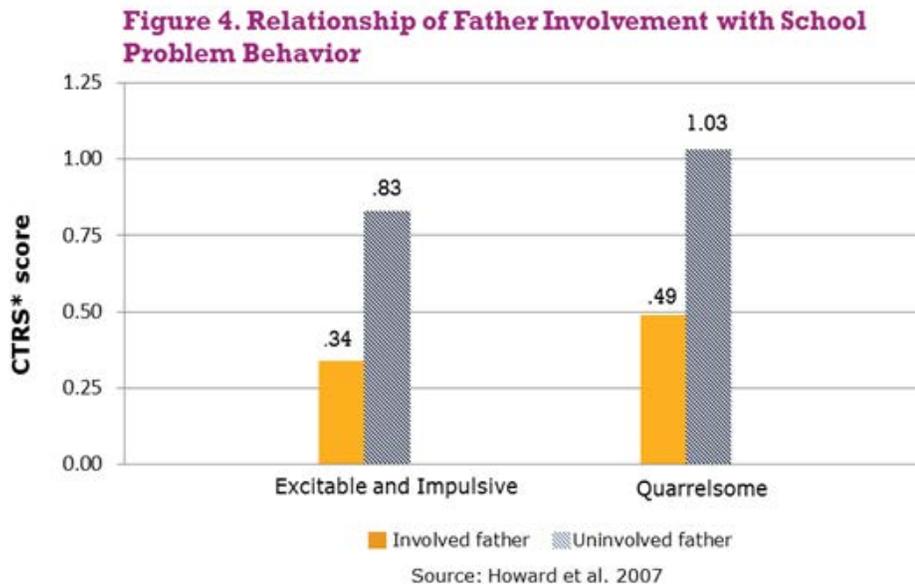


Young mothers who feel supported by their partners also do better after the birth of their child.

- Consistently high levels of father involvement are associated with lower parenting stress for high risk teen mothers.⁹
- Young mothers report fewer depressive symptoms when they are satisfied with the young father's level of involvement.¹⁰

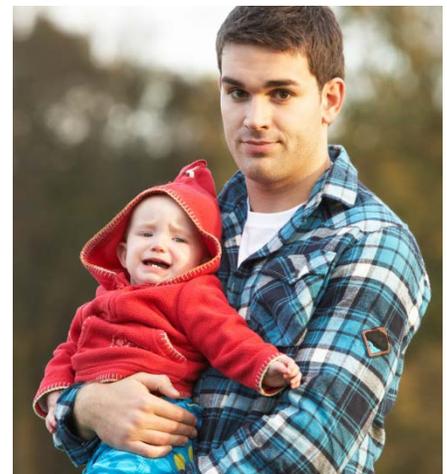
Fathers' positive involvement matters for kids' social and academic development.

- For boys of teen mothers, father involvement throughout the first 8 years of life is associated with higher reading and math scores by age 10.¹¹
- Children with highly involved fathers and high-risk mothers (including those with emotional or behavioral problems) have fewer behavioral problems* than their peers with high-risk mothers and less involved fathers (Figure 4).¹¹



Fatherhood can create more challenges for young fathers but can also serve as motivation to avoid risky behaviors.^{12,13}

- Becoming a father at an early age is associated with problems in school and less financial stability.¹⁴
- Among current or former gang members who mostly became fathers when they were teens, the vast majority say that fatherhood served as a positive turning point in their lives and motivated them to change their own behavior to become a role model for their child.¹⁵
- Low-income, young, urban fathers of diverse ethnic backgrounds report that they feel good about themselves when they are actively involved in caring for their young child.¹⁶



* Behavioral problems were measured with the Conners Teacher Rating Scale (CTRS), which is a widely used measure that identifies problem behavior in children and youth such as hyperactivity and defiance.

Resources

This factsheet is part of an OAH technical assistance series on working with young fathers that includes the products listed below. To access the resources in this series, visit OAH's "Serving and Engaging Young Males and Fathers" training topic: http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/paf_rc/training/young-fathers.html

- Recruiting Young Fathers: Five Things to Know
- Retaining Young Fathers: Five Things to Know
- Serving Young Fathers: A Workbook of Program Activities
- Serving Young Fathers: An Assessment and Checklist for Organizations

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