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Location: Imperial Ballroom (Grand Hyatt/2nd Floor)

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Category/Theme: Etiology

Father and Mother Relationship and Father Involvement

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The dimensions of fathering are multifaceted and dependent on context (e.g., marital and residency status, age of father, and age of child). In addition, our understanding of fatherhood has evolved based on cultural shifts over time. Although there is general consensus regarding the importance of father involvement for child development, we know relatively little about variations in father involvement or factors related to variation in type and level of involvement. This is particularly true for minority men living in poor urban neighborhoods, where stereotypes often drive beliefs and policy because of the limited data available. This set of analyses begins to address this gap by examining the relations between father involvement, the mother-father relationship, and attitudes toward fatherhood among a sample of inner-city minority men.

The data are drawn from the Chicago Youth Development Study (CYDS), a longitudinal study of African-American and Latino men that began in 1991 when the young men were 10-12 years old. The present study, CYDS-Fathering, examines the experiences of these men as young adults. The complete sample includes 225 men (78% of the eligible sample from the original CYDS). Data from 149 men who report being fathers and their 290 children form the basis of the present analyses. As part of the interview, fathers were asked about their relationship with the mother(s) of their child(ren), the family and friends of the mother(s), and their current attitudes about fathering.

Controlling for father residency status, ethnicity, age of father, and age of child, analyses suggest the mother-father relationship is correlated with the amount of contact the father reports with the child and the degree of responsibility for taking care of the child and his/her needs (e.g., attending school events, arranging for childcare, taking the child to the doctor). Specifically, having a good relationship with the child's mother is related to greater involvement. Additionally, we found that the father's relationship with the child's mother interacted with his attitudes about being a father. Positive attitudes about being a father attenuated the negative effects of a poor relationship with the mother.

Additional analyses will examine other dimensions of father involvement and their relation to other aspects of the mother-father relationship. Implications for research and prevention science will be discussed.

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