

## FATHERS' FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS ACROSS HOUSEHOLDS

PAA Abstract  
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Understanding the resources available to children is complex when biological parents are not sharing a household, or when the mother has had children with multiple fathers, some of whom may also have had children with other mothers. In previous research we have analyzed formal child support payments in the context of multiple-partner fertility. But lack of data has previously limited the discussion of the *informal* support that fathers might provide to their biological children and, especially, to children who live in the same household and have the same mother, but a different father.

As part of the third waves of the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families we asked mothers about the support and involvement of fathers.<sup>1</sup> More than half of all women with more than one child at baseline had children with more than one father. Rates of multiple-partner fertility grew over the period; about 1 in five mothers had a child with a new father between the baseline and the third wave of the survey.

Table 1 shows the share of fathers who provided material support, spent time with, or were involved in decisions regarding their biological children and other children of the mother.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>We also asked fathers about their level of support and involvement with their own children. We do not report their responses, as our focus is on the children in the mother's household, and we did not attempt to interview all of these fathers, but only the fathers of a focal child. In addition, the sample of completed interviews for fathers is small.

<sup>2</sup>We discuss fathers' contributions of formal and informal child support, time spent with children, and involvement with children. Formal child support is applicable only to biological children. We have somewhat different information on informal resource transfers for the different groups. Informal transfers to biological children were measured using 6 questions on the types of informal transfers: (a) During 2003, did father buy any shoes or clothes for children? (b) Did father give the children money for chores, spending money, or an allowance during 2003? (c) During 2003, did father give any birthday, holiday, or other gifts to children? (d) Did father give you food or groceries for children during 2003? (e)

The 709 mothers in our sample identified 1203 fathers of their children. Two hundred and thirty-eight mothers identified a single father, resulting in 238 fathers, with only their own biological children living with the mother (though the father may have had other children with another mother living in a different household). For the remaining 965 fathers, both their own biological children and children of another father were living in the mother's household. Table 1 shows support provided in three cases: resources shared with biological children by fathers with only biological children (column 1); resources shared with biological children by fathers with both biological and nonbiological children living with the mother (column 2); and resources shared with nonbiological children by fathers with both biological children and nonbiological children living with the mother (column 3).

The first panel shows mothers' reports of material resources shared by the father with the mothers' children. Three-quarters of fathers with only biological children provided either formal child support or informal transfers. In comparison, when there were nonbiological children in the home, fathers were somewhat less likely to provide support (61 percent). Transfers to nonbiological children were much lower, but even then, more than one-fifth of fathers provided resources for children who were not their biological offspring.

The second panel shows mother's reports of the time spent by fathers with the mothers' children. Among the fathers with only biological children, 61 percent spent time with their children and 29 percent did not. Another 8 percent were unlikely to spend time with their children

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Did father give you money for your rent or mortgage, or pay for it directly during 2003? (f) During 2003, did father give you money to spend on children? Informal transfers to nonbiological children were measured using one general question: (a) During 2003, did father provide anything for your other children? For example, did he give things like shoes or clothes, birthday or holiday gifts, pay for any expenses, or give you money for the children? Time spent with the father's biological children and with other children in the household was assessed using two similar questions: (a) During 2003 did the biological child's father spend time with his child, even one time? (b) Did he spend time with your other child/ren, even one time? Involvement with the father's biological children and with other children in the household was also assessed using two similar questions. (a) How involved was child's father in decisions about child's everyday life during 2003? (b) How involved was he in decisions about your other child/ren's life during 2003?

because they spent a substantial portion of 2003 incarcerated. Fathers with their own and another father's children living with the mother were somewhat less likely to spend time with their own children (53 percent) and substantially less likely to spend time with the mother's other children (33 percent). Nonetheless, a substantial minority of fathers spent time with the children of other fathers.

The third panel of Table 1 shows mothers' reports of fathers' involvement in decision-making about the children's lives. Forty-three percent of fathers were not at all involved with their biological children (whether or not children of another father lived in the mother's household), and 65 percent were not at all involved with the children of other fathers. At the other extreme, 29 percent of fathers with only biological children were very or extremely involved (a figure that includes all cohabiting fathers). Fathers' involvement with their biological children dropped to 25 percent when both their own and another father's children lived in the mother's household. It is nonetheless noteworthy that 13 percent of fathers were described as very or extremely involved with the children of other fathers.

There are a number of methodological challenges associated with measuring the effects of multiple partner fertility on the contributions of fathers to their children, and to children of other fathers co-residing with their biological children. Mothers and fathers who have multiple partners are likely to have different unobserved characteristics that also affect fathers' contributions (unobserved heterogeneity). In addition, mothers' subsequent fertility patterns may in part reflect expectations regarding previous partners' contributions (reverse causality). Using a difference-in-difference approach we control for time-invariant unobserved heterogeneity. We compare our estimates using this approach with estimates derived from cross sectional analysis, and with previous analysis that considers only contributions from biological or co-resident social fathers.

**Table 1**  
**Fathers' Relationships with Biological and Nonbiological Children**

**A. Father's Provision of Formal or Informal Transfers to Children**

	Transfers to Biological Children				Transfers to Nonbiological Children	
	Fathers with Bio Kids Only		Fathers with Bio & Nonbio		Fathers with Bio & Nonbio	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes*	178	74.8	586	60.7	216	22.4
No**	59	24.8	358	37.1	711	73.7
Missing	1	0.4	21	2.2	38	4.0
Total	238		965		965	

\* Includes coresidence.

\*\* Includes fathers in jail during previous 12 months (skipped in both informal transfer questions)

Note: Formal child support is applicable only to biological children. Informal transfers to biological children are measured using 6 questions on the types of informal transfers; informal transfers to nonbiological children are measured using one general question. See text for details

**B. Spent Time with Biological and Nonbiological Children**

	Spent Time with Biological Children				Spent Time with Nonbiological Children	
	Fathers with Bio Kids Only		Fathers with Bio & Nonbio		Fathers with Bio & Nonbio	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes*	146	61.3	514	53.3	319	33.1
No	69	29.0	343	35.5	524	54.3
In jail 10–12**	20	8.4	86	8.9	83	8.6
Missing	3	1.2	22	2.3	39	4.1
Total	238		965		965	

\* Includes coresidence.

\*\* Fathers in jail for 10–12 months are skipped in “spent time with biological kids,” whereas fathers in jail during 12 months are skipped in “spent time with nonbiological kids.”

**C. Father's Involvement with Biological and Nonbiological Children**

	Involvement with Biological Children				Involvement with Nonbiological Children	
	Fathers with Bio Kids Only		Fathers with Bio & Nonbio		Fathers with Bio & Nonbio	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Not at all involved*	103	43.3	413	42.8	626	64.9
A little involved	24	10.1	80	8.3	42	4.4
Somewhat involved	15	6.3	90	9.3	53	5.5
Very involved	19	8.0	63	6.5	33	3.4
Extremely involved**	49	20.5	159	16.5	90	9.3
In jail 10–12***	20	8.4	86	8.9	83	8.6
Missing	8	3.3	74	7.7	38	4.0
Total	238		965		965	

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\* Includes those with no contact.

\*\* Includes coresidence.

\*\*\* Fathers in jail for 10–12 months are skipped in “spent time with bio kids,” whereas fathers in jail during 12 months are skipped in “spent time with nonbio kids.”