

**Father Involvement Following Union Dissolution  
for Low Income Children in Urban South Africa**

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## Abstract

African fathers in post-*Apartheid* South Africa face enormous challenges remaining involved in their children's lives as a result of very high levels of unemployment and union instability. This is particularly difficult in the period following union dissolution when fathers normally do not reside with their children. In this analysis, we use data from the Birth to Twenty Cohort study in the greater Johannesburg area of South Africa to accomplish two objectives. The first is to describe the trajectories of father involvement over the course of childhood among children whose parents have experienced a union dissolution using sequence analysis. Second, we use multinomial logistic models to examine the influence of age of child at time of parental union dissolution and mother's entry into new union on trajectories of non-residential contact with father at two time periods following union dissolution. We find that 1) older age of child at parental union dissolution significantly decreases the odds of having intermittent contact compared to full contact in the first five years after dissolution but has the opposite effect in the subsequent five years even after controlling for contact in the first five year period ; 2) mother's entry into a new union increases the odds of having no contact in both time periods and increases the odds of having intermittent contact only in the later period; and 3) the presence of a non-parental breadwinner increases the odds of having both intermittent and no contact in both time periods.

African fathers in post-*Apartheid* South Africa face enormous challenges remaining involved in their children's lives as a result of very high levels of unemployment and union instability. This is particularly difficult in the period following union dissolution when fathers do not normally reside with their children. In this analysis, we use data from the Birth to Twenty Cohort study in the greater Johannesburg area of South Africa to accomplish two objectives. The first is to describe trajectories of biological father involvement in the lives of children who have experienced a parental union dissolution using sequence analysis. Involvement, in this analysis, refers to physical contact with child and unions include both formal marriage and non-marital cohabiting and non-cohabiting relationships. Second, we use multinomial logistic models to examine the influence of 1) age of child at time of parental union dissolution and 2) mother's entry into new union on trajectories of non-residential contact at two time periods following union dissolution. These analyses contribute to the growing scholarship on father involvement in South Africa by viewing father involvement as a series of transitional processes that entail greater and lesser involvement, rather than as discreet categories of involved or not involved fatherhood. Moreover, it is one of the only analyses that we are aware of in the South African context that examines how factors associated with union dissolution affect father involvement. This work can help inform the development of policies to strengthen the role of fathers in their children's lives by identifying critical time periods in children's and fathers' lives in which fathers are more likely to disengage.

### **The South African Context**

There is a rich descriptive literature on factors that have shaped African men's parenting behaviors, in particular, labor migration and unemployment (Madhavan et al. 2008; Morrell and Richter 2006; Swartz and Bhana 2009). Whereas overall unemployment stood at 25.5% in 2012, Black African unemployment was at 29% (Stats SA 2012). Labor migration, institutionalized under *Apartheid* but still a defining feature of Black South African life, has resulted in households functioning as 'stretched' residential units, with family members 'dispersed' between different households for reasons of work, care, support, education and housing (Murray 1980). High rates of residential separation are particularly notable for fathers and their children. Moreover, poor employment prospects limit men's ability to pay bride price and afford a marriage, without which there are cultural restrictions on a couple living together. The lack of job prospects for men also serves as a disincentive for Black women to enter into and/or remain in formal unions (Hunter 2009). The choice of some women to remain unmarried or disengaged from the fathers of their children is likely to have a profound effect on fathers' ability to maintain a consistent relationship with their children (Wilson 2006). Moreover, as in most societies in the world, South African mothers tend to gain custody of children following union dissolution (Khunou 2006), which makes it even harder for men to maintain close relationships with their children particularly if they do not pay any maintenance. Finally, the role of extended kin, particularly, on the mother's side where children remain until marriage and often times, after a dissolution, is likely to influence how fathers interact with their children (Swartz and Bhana 2009). Despite all these challenges, fathering remains a critical component of men's identity and family life in Black communities.

The value of this analysis is underscored by the current interest in South Africa to develop policies to strengthen the role of fathers in their children's lives in low income communities particularly in light of declining marriage rates. Yet, fatherhood research, particularly quantitative, is still in early stages hampered, in part, by the limitations of existing datasets (Hosegood and Madhavan 2012). According to the 2010 General Household Survey, 34% of all children live with both parents; 39% live with mothers only and 3.3% live with fathers only (Stats SA 2011). In one of the only studies on paternal investment in children, Anderson and colleagues, using data from the Cape Area Panel Study, showed that men invest more in genetic offspring and the children of their current partner than in children of former partners (1999). In earlier work using the Birth to Twenty dataset, we showed that children face the highest risk of experiencing a disruption in contact with and receipt of financial support from fathers in the first five years of life (Madhavan et al. 2012). However, none of the available South African research has

addressed two key questions: 1) what is the trajectory of father involvement over the course of childhood for children who experience parental union dissolution and 2) what are factors that may explain variation in these trajectories in the immediate and longer term periods following a parental union dissolution. Both these questions are addressed in this paper.

## Conceptual Background

Much of what we know about father involvement following dissolution comes from literature based in the US. Early scholarship on family structure and father involvement showed that fathers disengaged from children following a divorce (Furstenburg and Harris 1992; Mott 1990; Seltzer 1991). One reason for this is a shift in their identities as fathers, particularly in relation to their roles and responsibilities to their children, which makes it difficult to maintain a meaningful relationship with their non-resident children (Cherlin et al. 1991; Ihinger-Tallman, Pasley and Buhler 1993). Moreover, union dissolution usually results in fathers physically moving away from their children making it difficult to maintain consistent contact (Amato 1998; Furstenburg, Morgan and Allison 1987). Research has shown that most unmarried and non-resident fathers do not maintain consistent contact with their children (Argys et al. 2007; Argys and Peters 2001) though post-divorce fathers have been found to have higher levels of involvement than post-cohabitation fathers (Laughlin, Farrie and Fagan 2009).

A limited amount of scholarship has paid attention to determinants of father involvement in the post-dissolution period. Most of this work has highlighted the positive effects of an amicable and cooperative relationship between the biological parents on paternal involvement (Ahrons 1983; Carlson, McLanahan and Brooks-Gunn 2008). It has also been shown that new romantic relationships formed by biological mothers and fathers following union dissolution inhibit father involvement (Carlson 2006; Carlson et al. 2008; Manning and Smock 1999; Tach, Mincy and Edin 2010). Very little work has examined the effect of age of child at parental union dissolution on subsequent paternal involvement. One study by Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1986) found that non-residential fathers are more involved with their adolescent children compared to younger children but we cannot tell whether there is an independent effect of the age of child at the time of dissolution. Another study by Bruce and Fox (1999) confirms this finding though the authors also note that non-residential fathers who place more value on the father role tend to be more involved with their adolescent children.

No work that we are aware of has examined immediate and longer term *trajectories* of father involvement post-dissolution and the factors associated with variation in these trajectories. We use the term, trajectory, to cover periods of involvement and non-involvement over a child's life course. This is particularly important in the South African context where the volatility of the labor market for Black men and women and high levels of union instability result in ebbs and flows in father involvement. Whereas some children may experience a complete break with their fathers in the aftermath of a dissolution, others may experience intermittent engagement or no change in involvement at all. Moreover, it may take some time before fathers establish a new pattern of engagement with their children which means that the type of trajectory may vary by time since dissolution.

Our approach to this issue is oriented broadly by a life course perspective which places emphasis on the interconnectedness of individual lives as they transition into new states in response to macro and micro level forces (Elder 1985; Hareven 1977). We draw specifically on recent work on transitions *within* fatherhood across the life course by Palkovitz and Palm (2009) who draw attention to the meaning of transition and the triggers for transitions within fathering. They rely heavily on Cowan (1991) who, in an attempt to develop an analytically meaningful concept, defined transition as having both internal (how individual understands himself and the world) and external (role arrangements, relationships with others) components. He also emphasized the time needed to reset equilibrium in relationships following points of disequilibria and the eventual attainment of higher functioning which will depend on a number of factors. First are the changing needs of children as they move through various development stages (Galinsky

1987). Second, is the nature of family crises (e.g. divorce, job loss) and the varying effects on fathers' ability to remain involved with their children. Third, is individual level change – mental and emotional – that fathers experience, both positive and negative, that influences their fathering. Fourth, are counter-transitional changes, or changes in fathering in response to transitions in mothers' lives such as remarriage. Finally, there are secular shifts such as labor market and major societal changes that influence fathering norms.

In this analysis, we focus on two of these factors: the role of child development needs operationalized by age of the child when the parental union dissolves and counter-transitional triggers, which refers to mothers' entry into a new union. Involvement by stepfathers in the lives of their stepchildren can indirectly strengthen their relationship with the child's mother (Anderson et al. 1999). This, in turn, is likely to affect the involvement of biological fathers in their children's lives. In order to examine the processual nature of re-establishing equilibria, we examine three types of father involvement – uninterrupted, intermittent and none – in two time periods following dissolution: immediate 5 years and subsequent 5 years. This is critical because fathers' ability to re-establish equilibria in their relationships with their children following disruptions such as union dissolution is unlikely to be a smooth, uninterrupted process. Taken together, this perspective on transitions within fathering enables us to posit the following hypotheses about father involvement post union dissolution:

- 1) Later age of child at parental union dissolution will increase the odds of children having uninterrupted father contact in both the immediate and subsequent time periods fathers may perceive their roles to be more critical in the lives of older children and because older children assume some responsibility and initiative to maintain their fathers' involvement;
- 2) Mother's entry into a new relationship will increase the odds of children having no contact with fathers in the immediate 5-year period as a form of counter-transitional change by fathers, but it will increase the odds of children having intermittent contact in the subsequent 5 year period after a period of adjustment during which biological fathers re-establish an equilibria in their relationship to their children;

Additionally, little quantitative research has examined the role of extended kin in influencing father involvement (see Hofferth 1984 as one exception) despite the knowledge that kin play an important role in child rearing in the African (Mkhize 2006; Nsamenang 2010) as well as the African-American context (Richardson 2009) and in supporting fathering in both (Madhavan and Roy 2012). However, kin can inhibit the involvement of biological fathers if the parental union was never formalized through the payment of bridewealth and/or because fathers are seen as a drain on resources. To address this gap, we examine a third hypothesis:

- 3) The involvement of extended kin will increase the odds of children having intermittent father contact in the immediate aftermath of a dissolution as a form of counter transitional change by fathers who scale back their involvement but may not matter for longer term involvement

## **Data and Analysis**

**Data Description:** Birth to Twenty (Bt20) is a long-term birth cohort study in the greater Johannesburg-Soweto municipality. The majority of families live in socioeconomically disadvantaged circumstances. Bt20 was initiated as an observational, ecological study of human development, health and well-being, from before birth and has continued into young adulthood (Bt20). Prospective data collection began in the ante-natal period and continued with yearly and some twice-yearly follow ups until age 20. Data collection has covered a broad range of topics including, amongst others, anthropometric measures,

nutrition, family composition, socio-economic circumstances, childcare, cognitive development, and social experiences at home, school, and in the community. Children born between April and June 1990 and resident for at least 6 months in the Soweto-Johannesburg municipality were enrolled into the study (n=3273). The cohort includes Black, White, Indian and Colored children but we limit this analysis to only the Black children who comprise the largest proportion of the cohort. Even though data have been collected through age 20, this analysis uses age 18 as the end point.

Both prospective and retrospective data on fathering has been collected in Bt20. Most of the prospective

data come from mothers, particularly in the early years as they are children's primary caregivers. A retrospective questionnaire specifically focusing on father involvement over the child's life course was administered at year 18 to fill in missing prospective data. Questionnaires were administered to the: 1) biological mother if she was the main caregiver 2) the biological father if mother was not available and 3) the child's primary caregiver if neither. The questionnaires include detailed information on union histories of mothers and fathers, fathers' co-residence with the child, extent of contact if not co-resident, provision of financial support, and other forms of interaction with the child over the life course. We privilege prospective data wherever possible and supplement with retrospective data only where the prospective data are missing.

There are two drawbacks that need to be acknowledged. One, most of the data on fathers comes from mothers or other caregivers. Research from the US context has highlighted the potential biases in mothers' reports which consistently show underreporting of father involvement (Coley and Morris, 2002). It is difficult to establish the extent of such bias in the Bt20 data but comparison of mothers' reports of father contact over the life course and fathers' reports of their own involvement suggest potential underreporting. Two, the use of retrospective data introduces problems associated with memory recall the farther back in time that data are sought. However, when we compared retrospective reports of father presence in the 0-2 year period with prospective data for the same time period, we found that 85% of reports matched.

**Analytical Sample:** Attrition over the course of the BT20 study has been about 30%, mostly occurring during infancy and early childhood when women moved back to their rural homes after giving birth (Norris, Richter and Fleetwood 2007). A small number of children were lost to follow-up as a result of death. There have been very few withdrawals from the study. After removing non-Black African children, the sample is 1942 girls and boys followed up from birth to age 18, out of which, 1563 were also administered the retrospective questionnaire. As our focus in this analysis is father involvement post union dissolution, our final analytical sample is 778 children who experienced a parental union dissolution at some point in their lives. Table 1 shows selected characteristics of the sample at time of birth.

Insert Table 1

The distributions of all variables are very similar to those of the full cohort of Black children partially allaying concerns about selectivity. A little more than 40% of the sample is comprised of first births and the mean age of mothers at birth of the index child is 25. Almost 30% of the mothers were married or living together with their partners at the time of birth. However, the "single" category includes women who were in non-cohabiting relationships. The majority of mothers have had at least some secondary school education. We find a similar distribution for fathers on educational attainment though there is a sizeable missing proportion. The household wealth index is computed as quintile rankings based on home ownership, access to regular electricity and ownership of car, TV, fridge and phone. It ranges from 1 (very poor) to 5 (relatively wealthy) and shows highest proportions in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> quintile. Finally, we find that the majority of households are classified as having an extended family structure.

**Analysis:** We focus on residential and non-residential contact with child as our measure of father involvement for the sequence analysis and only non-residential contact for the regressions. We chose this indicator for two reasons: 1) it has the best data quality; and 2) it is highly correlated with the provision of financial support (not shown), another commonly used measure of father involvement. The contact variable is based on household rosters that established father co-residence and responses to the question, “was biological father in contact with child at x year?” that was asked in selected round of the prospective data and supplemented with responses to the same question on the retrospective questionnaire.

Our analysis proceeds in two steps. First, we use sequence analysis to describe, compare and group trajectories of children’s contact with their fathers (residential and non-residential) for children who experienced a parental union dissolution. The idea is to represent the trajectory of father involvement in the course of childhood for each child (0-18) as a string of 0/1 characters for every year from birth to year 18. We then group “similar” sequences of father involvement according to the sequencing of periods of involvement and non-involvement by fathers in the lives of children. Second, we use multinomial logistic regression models to analyze the influence of two factors on father involvement patterns in two time periods following union dissolution: immediate 5 years and subsequent 5 years. The sample for the second time period is smaller because it includes only children who experienced a parental union dissolution at least 10 years before the end of the study whereas the time constraint for dissolution in the first time period is a minimum of 5 years before the end of the study. In order to ensure adequate sample size, we collapse the contact sequences into a parsimonious categorization of three involvement types for the dependent variables: 1) full contact; 2) intermittent contact and 3) no contact and treat full contact as the reference category. The first model examines the influence of age of child at parental union dissolution (treated as a 4 category ordinal variable for age group) on father involvement in the two time periods following the dissolution. The second model examines the effect of mother’s entry into a new union (0/1 dichotomous variable) on father involvement in the two time periods following union dissolution. We were unable to examine father’s entry into new union because mothers could not provide accurate information on their former partner’s current relationship status. Table 2 shows the distribution of our key variables of interest.

Insert Table 2

We control for individual attributes of child (sex and birth order coded as 0 for first child and 1 for later births), father and mother characteristics (age at birth of child, level of schooling at birth of child), household wealth status at time of birth, and kin involvement proxied by the presence of a non-parental breadwinners at time of dissolution. Non-parental breadwinner includes grandparents, aunt, uncles and other adults who are reported as providing most of the financial support to the household. In addition, we control for contact in first time period for the models predicting involvement in the subsequent time period. We distribute the father involvement categories of those children whose fathers died after dissolution according to their involvement type before the time of death. Children whose mothers or fathers died before dissolution are not included in the analysis. Six children experienced a maternal death after dissolution.

*Survival bias:* In our quest for maximizing sample size by integrating retrospective data with the prospective data, the analytic sample is comprised of only those children who “survived” in the study until year 18. It is possible that those children who were lost to follow up might had weaker links to their fathers which would, in turn, contribute to an overestimation of father involvement in our analysis. We examined this issue by comparing the means of duration of father contact for children who dropped out and those who did not by age of attrition. With the exception of two attrition periods: 6 months – 2 years and 12-13 years, none of the differences are significant, suggesting that our estimates of father contact in this analysis are not seriously affected by survivor bias.

## Results

The sequence analysis produced about twenty different strings or trajectories for children's contact, residential and non-residential, over the course of childhood. Each string type recorded only changes in the contact sequence (as opposed to the number of years spent in the state). Figure 1 shows the “tapis” graph of these father contact sequences for all children who experienced a parental union dissolution at some point in their lives.

Insert Figure 1

The most striking feature of this graph is the relatively large number of children with uninterrupted or intermittent contact with their fathers despite having experienced a parental union dissolution at some point in their lives. We see that 20.4% of children experience uninterrupted contact throughout the 18 years, shown here in gray. Twenty three percent of children experience a sequence that starts with contact followed by a period of no contact (black) followed by at least another period of contact. Interestingly, we also find 5.5% of children who experience a sequence that begins with no contact but is followed at some point by at least one period of contact. Another 22% of children follow a sequence that starts with contact followed by no contact until age 18. The percentage of children who have never had contact with their fathers is 2.8%. Almost 26% of children experience a paternal death at some point in early childhood (shown in white).

At this descriptive level, we find that most children who have experienced a parental union dissolution have contact with their fathers, either uninterrupted or intermittent, throughout their lives. We know that parental union status is one of the largest contributors to explaining variation in father involvement patterns over the life course (Madhavan et al. 2012). Furthermore, we also know that that, in the South African context, children whose parents dissolve their cohabiting union will experience immediate change in father involvement through a change in living arrangements with fathers moving out of the household. However, there is likely to be variation in the trajectories of father involvement in the years following the dissolution. In order to examine some of the reasons why children might experience different types of father involvement trajectories in the immediate and later time periods following union dissolution, we turn to findings from the regression models.

### *Child's Age at Parental Union Dissolution and Father Involvement Post Dissolution*

Our first analysis was intended to test the hypothesis that the older the child is at union dissolution of biological parents the higher the odds of having uninterrupted contact with fathers in both time periods. Table 3 shows the results of multinomial logistic models predicting the odds of experiencing three types of contact in the immediate five years and subsequent five years after dissolution by age of child at time of dissolution. The sample sizes reflect the loss of cases because of father's death around the time of marital dissolution.

Insert Table 3 here

As age of child at time of union dissolution increases, the odds of being in intermittent contact with father decreases by 50% compared to having full contact in the immediate 5 year period but marginally increases by about 56% in the later period. No significant differences are found for the odds of having no contact in either time period. While it appears that the hypothesis holds true for the immediate time period following a dissolution, it does not hold for the subsequent time period where we find the direction of effects changing. We also find that the presence of a non-parental breadwinner at the time of dissolution significantly increases the odds of children having no contact with their fathers in both time periods but does not affect the odds of having intermittent contact in either time period. Predictably,



having had contact in the first 5 year period decreases the odds of having no or intermittent contact (compared to full) in the second 5 year period. However, the age effect exists even after controlling for the conditions in the previous time period. Figure 3 shows predicted probabilities of father contact for both time periods holding all other covariates at the mean.

Insert Figure 3 here

The graph clearly shows two distinct patterns in the two time periods. While the probabilities of intermittent contact decrease across age of child at time of dissolution in the immediate 5 year period, they increase in the second time period. It appears that a father's ability to maintain uninterrupted contact with his older children in the immediate aftermath of a dissolution is tested as time passes. The result may be a more uncertain relationship with children manifested in intermittent contact. It also suggests that the process of readjusting one's relationship with a child post dissolution may be a protracted one influenced by other life transitions such as entry into new unions.

#### *Mother's Entry into New Union and Father Involvement Post Dissolution*

If age of child at time of parental union dissolution produces ambiguity for paternal involvement at least in the medium run time period, mother's entry into a new union appears to have consistent and strong effects across both time periods as seen in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 here

Mother's entry into a new union doubles and triples the odds of having no contact with biological fathers compared to having full contact in both time periods, respectively, but increases the odds of having intermittent contact only in the later time period. We also find a marginal positive effect of mother's age at birth of child on the odds of children having no contact and intermittent contact compared to having full contact. Once again, we find a strong positive effect of the presence of a non-parental breadwinner on the odds of having no or uninterrupted contact with father in both time periods. These results hold even after controlling for contact in the first 5 year period which decreases the odds of having no or intermittent contact (compared to full) in the second period. Figure 4 shows predicted probabilities of father contact at both time periods holding all other covariates at the mean.

Insert Figure 4 here

The strikingly higher probabilities of having no contact with fathers for children whose mothers enter a new union underscores the importance of parental relationships in influencing children's contact with their fathers. What is more intriguing is the difference in the intermittent probabilities in the second time period. It appears that fathers of children whose mothers enter a new union may be more ambivalent about their relationship with their children as time passes reflected in periods of contact and non contact.

## **Discussion**

In this analysis, we set out to examine two understudied processes related to father involvement in the lives of children who have experienced parental union dissolution. One, we described trajectories of father involvement over childhood paying particular attention to periods of contact and no contact. Two, we examined how specific issues related to parental union dynamics influences these trajectories in the immediate and subsequent five-year periods following parental union dissolution. We highlight our key findings. One, most children in our sample who experience a parental union dissolution have uninterrupted or intermittent contact with their fathers for most of their lives. Two, older age of child at

parental union dissolution decreases the odds of experiencing intermittent contact (compared to full contact) in the immediate aftermath of a dissolution but increases it in the subsequent period. Three, mother's entry into a new union increases the odds of having no contact with fathers in both time periods and increases the odds of having intermittent contact in the later time period. We also found that the presence of a non-parental breadwinner increases the odds of having no contact with fathers in both time periods following dissolution.

How do we make sense of these results using Palkovitz and Palm's (2009) framework for understanding transitions within fathering? On a descriptive level, our tapis graph shows that a large number of children transition in and out of contact with their fathers, not particularly surprising for Black men in the context of urban South Africa where they face a long list of challenges in remaining engaged with their children. However, it is an important finding because, in conjunction with the sizeable number who have uninterrupted contact with their fathers, it challenges conventional impressions that children have little contact with their fathers particularly those who have experienced a union dissolution in their lives. Our analysis underscores the importance of capturing the dynamism of father involvement rather than basing involvement on a measure at one point in time. One of the biggest challenges for fathers in maintaining involvement with their children is maintaining union stability with biological mothers. When the union with biological mother breaks down, fathers almost always change their relationship with their children after the event but their involvement trajectories vary and do so over time. Children who are older at the time of their parents' union dissolution are more likely to enjoy uninterrupted contact with their fathers in the short run period following a dissolution because 1) fathers may perceive their roles to be more critical in the lives of older children which in, itself, is a function of longer term emotional and practical investment that they have made (before the dissolution) and 2) older children may be more able to keep their fathers engaged. The fact that this does not hold up in the subsequent time period when children are more likely to have intermittent contact suggests that other life transitions, specifically, new unions and children, result in a more unsettled relationship with their children from former partners and possibly children. Conversely, children who were younger at the time of dissolution face higher odds of experiencing intermittent contact compared to full contact. This suggests ambivalence in terms of paternal identity but also a greater role for maternal gatekeeping. On one hand, fathers are not willing to fully disengage possibly because of perceived vulnerability of young children but they do not stay in contact continuously either. This may reflect the struggle that fathers face in re-establishing equilibria with children whom they stopped residing with when the children were young. It is also indicative of mothers' dominant role in the lives of young children.

The situation is made even more complicated when biological mothers enter a new union which, based on our results, makes it far less likely that fathers will have any type of contact with their children in either the immediate or subsequent 5 years post dissolution. As disheartening as these results may be, they lend support for the "package deal" model (Tach, Mincy and Edin 2010; Townsend 2002) in which fathers' relationship with their children is dependent on their relationship with the mothers of their children. Our results suggest that in such a deal, fathers may enact a counter-transitional strategy of disengagement with their children in response to their former partner's new romantic relationship. In all this, the involvement of extended kin, who are most likely related to the mother, as breadwinners, greatly inhibits children's contact with fathers in either time period. On one hand, this finding may reflect the indirect effect of fathers' inability to play the provider role which, in turn, is likely to increase "kin gatekeeping" power. In this sense, our results are in line with some of Swartz and Bhana's (2009) findings that kin actively discourage contact between young fathers and their children. On the other hand, however, our results are not consistent with the idea of kinwork supporting fathering in low income communities (Madhavan and Roy 2012) suggesting that cultural norms legitimizing unions, such as the payment of bridewealth, continue to be critical factors in influencing fathers' involvement in their children's lives. Either way, it appears to be part of a complex process through which biological fathers attempt to recalibrate their relationship with their children following a union dissolution with biological

mothers. Moreover, the inconsistency of findings across methodologies and contexts underscores the need for more research in this area.

In assessing these results, it is important to note several limitations of data and analysis. First, our measure of contact does not capture quality of contact nor intensity of contact both of which, we know, matter for children's outcomes (Amato and Gilbreth 1999). Second, our measure of men's labor market potential is not ideal given that we use a proxy – educational attainment – and treat it as time constant by using the measure at the time of birth of child. This is particularly important in a context in which sustained access to the labor market is so tenuous. Finally, we do not have a particularly robust measure of parental relationship following dissolution when we know from the literature (Carlson and McLanahan 2004) that this is a critical factor in supporting father involvement. Despite these limitations, however, we believe that these analyses make an important contribution to the growing scholarship on fathers and fathering in the South African context. Much of the research on father involvement in post-divorce contexts has been driven by a concern for child and adolescent outcomes in the areas of education, sexual behavior and psycho-social well-being. In contrast, far less attention has been paid to the ways in which men adjust their reconfigured fathering roles after the dissolution of a relationship with mothers. This is not only important in its own right but is an important part of understanding the effects on children's well-being. Whereas we did not examine the effects of fathering on child outcomes in this paper, our focus on trajectories of fathering over the life course and the ways in which fathers respond to other types of transitions should spur a needed discussion about the pathways of effects. Moreover, this paper has brought to light the complicated role of kin in influencing father involvement in a context in which structural constraints, namely, unemployment, greatly limit what fathers can do for their children and where cultural factors continue to define the obligations and limitations of various family members in child rearing. To this extent, the findings from this analysis are relevant to consider similar questions in low income populations in other contexts including the U.S. where social inequality and cultural norms condition how fathers relate to their children and ultimately, the effects on children's well-being.

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Table 1. Selected characteristics of Analytical Sample at Time of Birth (N=778)

Sex of Child		Paternal Education	
Male	50.0%	No Schooling	.4%
Female	50.0%	Some primary	1.5%
Parity		Completed primary	3.9%
1	41.4%	Some secondary	20.8%
2	28.4%	Completed matric	30.5%
3	15.6%	Post-School	10.9%
4+	14.7%	Missing	32.0%
Maternal Age (mean)	25.3	Household Wealth Index	
Mother's Marital Status		1	14.7%
Married	24.3%	2	17.9%
Living Together	4.0%	3	32.4%
Divorced/widowed	1.3%	4	18.8%
Single	70.2%	5	8.9%
Missing	.3%	Missing	7.5%
Maternal Education		Household Structure	
No Schooling	.9%	Nuclear Family	20.5%
Some primary	4.8%	Extended Family	65.9%
Completed primary	6.0%	Missing	17.1%
Some secondary	41.9%		
Completed matric	32.4%		
Post-School	7.6%		
Missing	6.4%		
N	778	N	778

Table 2. Distribution of Key Variables of Interest

Age of Child at Time of Union Dissolution of Biological Parents	N (%)
0-2	187 (24.0)
3-5	287 (36.9)
6-11	178 (22.9)
12-18	126 (16.2)
N	778
Mother Entered New Union	
Yes	448 (59.4)
No	306 (40.6)
N	754



**Figure 1: Father Contact Patterns for Children who Experienced a Parental Union Dissolution**

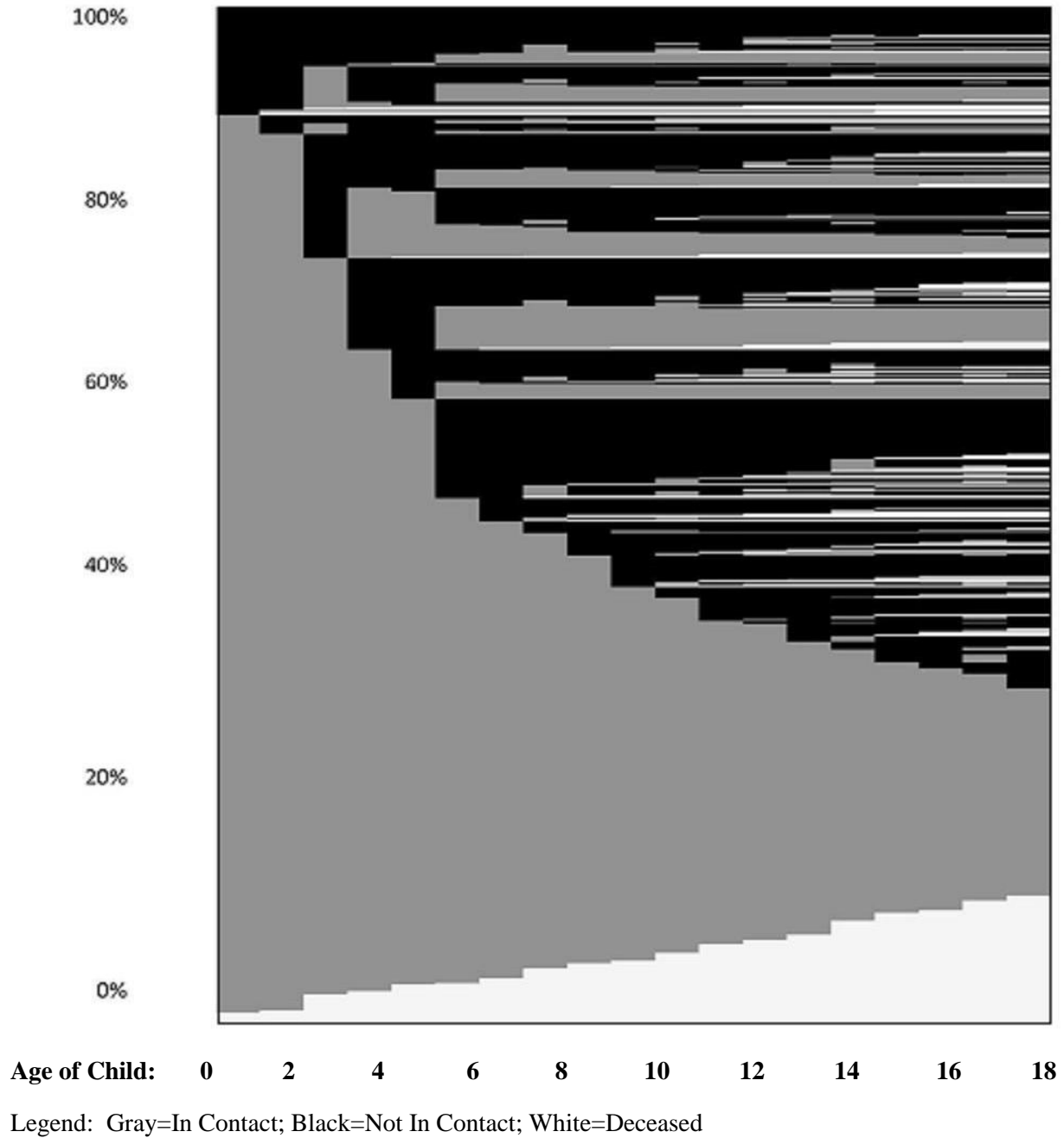


Table 3: Effect of age of child at parental union dissolution on type of father contact post-union dissolution (odds ratios and standard errors)

	Immediate Period		Later Period	
	No Contact vs. Full Contact	Intermittent Contact vs. Full Contact	No Contact vs. Full Contact	Intermittent Contact vs. Full Contact
<b>Age of child at parental union dissolution (1-4)</b>	.828 (.122)	.519 (.131)***	.809 (.195)	1.568 (.199)*
Male child	.687 (.215)	.672 (.221)	.874 (.268)	.771 (.284)
Birth order of child (1/0)	.987 (.283)	.865 (.292)	.775 (.373)	1.214 (.384)
Father's age at birth of child	.969 (.027)	.980 (.027)	.981 (.034)	.989 (.034)
Father's educational attainment at birth of child (1/0)	.822 (.230)	.737 (.236)	.750 (.285)	.761 (.300)
Mother's age at birth of child	1.058 (.031)	1.061(.031)	1.086 (.041)*	.999 (.042)
Mother's educational attainment at birth of child (1/0)	.998 (.233)	1.037 (.239)	1.333 (.289)	1.174 (.305)
Household wealth index at birth of child (1-5)	1.121 (.094)	1.064 (.097)	.878 (.117)	.911 (.123)
Presence of non-parental breadwinner (1/0)	3.878 (.274)***	1.685 (.291)	3.474 (.345) ***	2.246 (.367)*
Contact in previous period	xxxxx	xxxxx	.010 (.493)***	.034 (.503)***
Log-Likelihood (Full model vs. intercept only)	1186.174***	1186.74***	1025.227***	1025.227***
N	587	587	488	488

\*\*\* significant at the .001 level; \*\*significant at the .01 level; \*significant at the .05 level

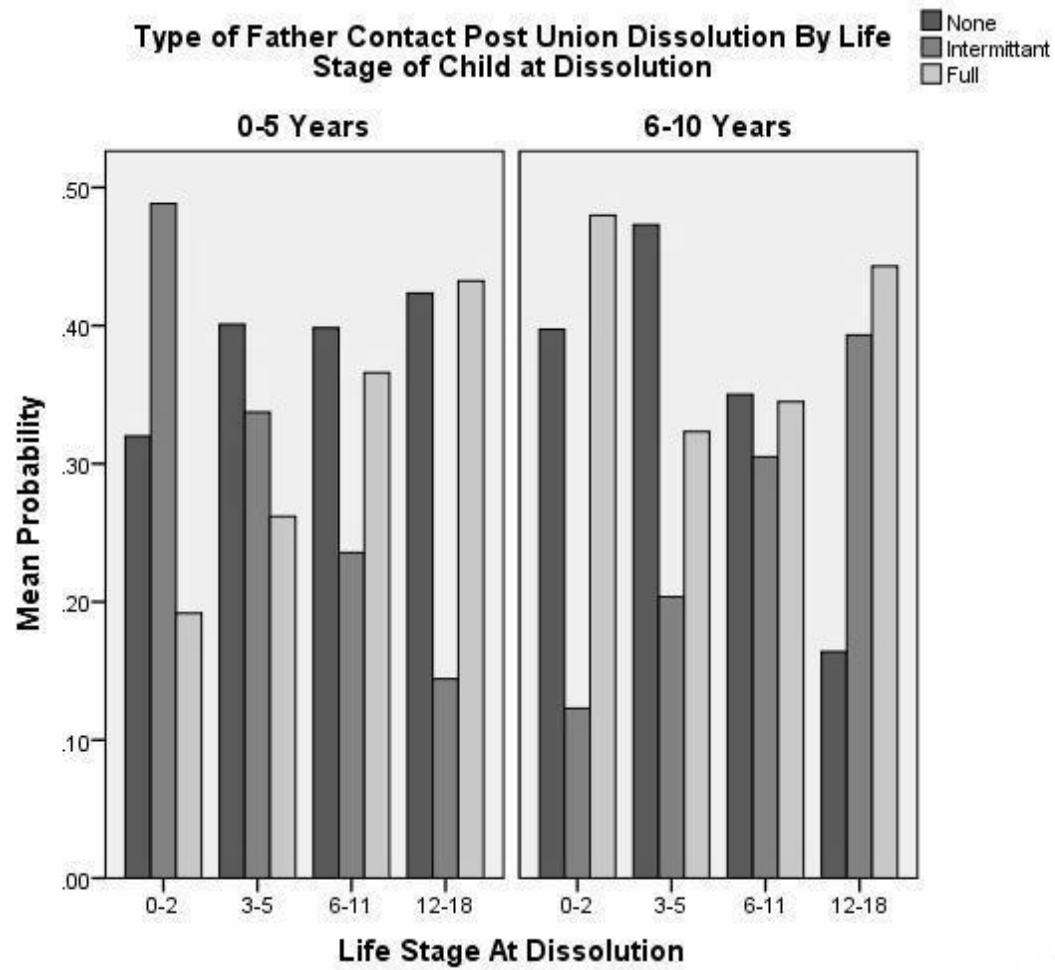


Table 4: Effect of mother's entry into new union on father contact post-union dissolution (odds ratios and standard errors)

	Immediate Period		Later Period	
	None vs. Full	Intermittent vs. Full	None vs. Full	Intermittent vs. Full
<b>Mother's entry into new union</b>	2.487 (.249)***	1.605(.249)	3.663(.324)***	3.511(.358)***
Male child	.798(.221)	.716(.225)	.899(.280)	.721(.306)
Birth order of child (1/0)	.909(.291)	.738(.295)	.861(.386)	1.546(.412)
Father's age at birth of child	.968(.027)	.966(.028)	.985(.035)	.991(.037)
Father's educational attainment at birth of child (1/0)	.938(.232)	.807(.238)	.789(.294)	.722(.320)
Mother's age at birth of child	1.078(.032)*	1.105(.033)**	1.115(.042)*	1.021(.046)
Mother's educational attainment at birth of child (1/0)	.857(.239)	1.085(.244)	1.148(.304)	1.194(.329)
Household wealth index at birth of child (1-5)	1.132(.097)	1.066(.099)	.941(.123)	.954(.133)
Presence of non-parental breadwinner	3.157(.295)***	2.744(.306)***	3.414(.356)***	1.947(.388)***
Contact in previous period	xxxxx	xxxxx	.012(.491)***	.026(.511)***
Log-Likelihood (Full model vs. intercept only)	1140.695***	1140.695***	713.801***	713.801***
N	565	565	473	473

\*\*\* significant at the .001 level; \*\*significant at the .01 level; \*significant at the .05 level

