



MONEY OR LOVE?
FATHERS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO
CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT IN THE
EARLY YEARS

Natasha J. Cabrera, University of Maryland



POLICY/ SOCIAL CONTEXT

Include fathers in research (if not families)

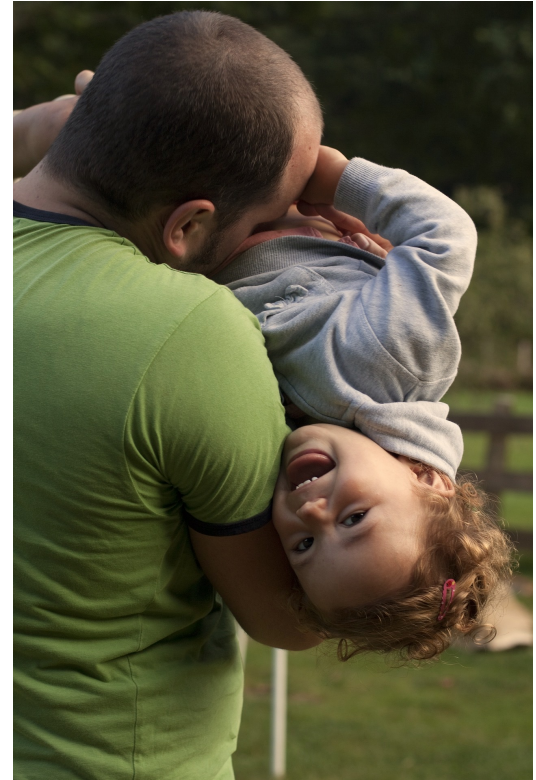
Dramatic Changes in Families

1990 “Fatherless” America

- Father absence/ dead beat dads
- “Missing men” problem
- White House Memo: Include fathers in research: Government, foundations partnership

2000s What do they do for their children?

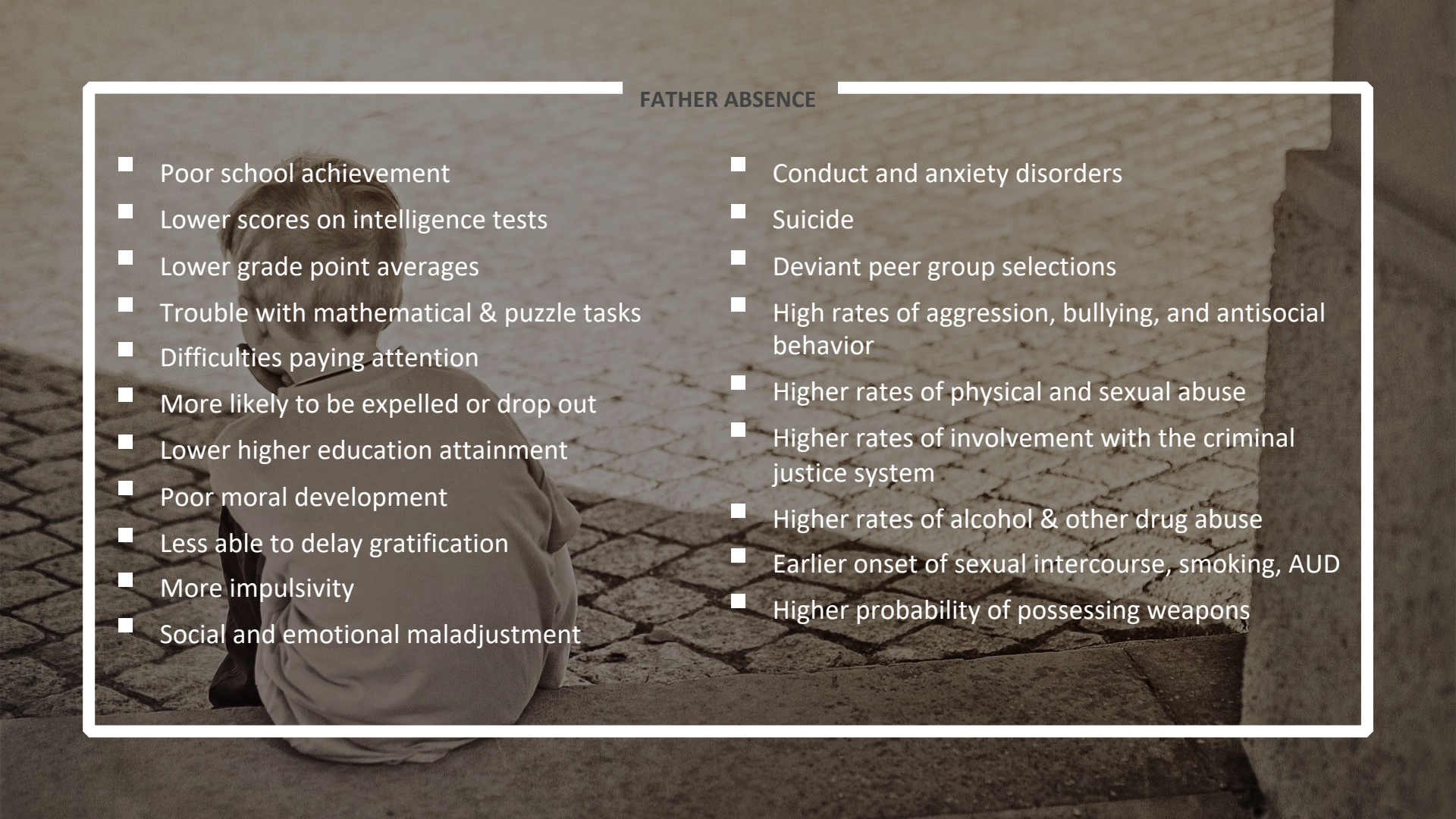
- Economic provision?
- Nurturing and emotional support?
- Both? One?





RESEARCH ON ***ABSENT*** FATHERS

Host of negative outcomes for children

A young child with light-colored hair is sitting on a cobblestone path, looking away from the camera. The child is wearing a light-colored shirt and dark pants. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a stone wall on the right.

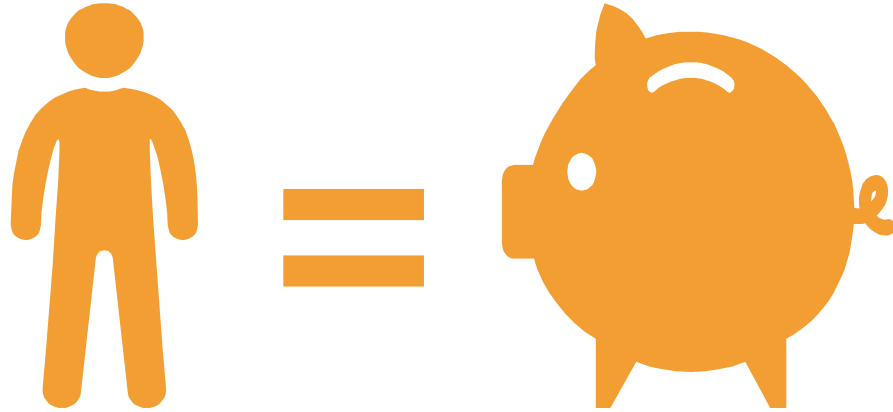
FATHER ABSENCE

- Poor school achievement
- Lower scores on intelligence tests
- Lower grade point averages
- Trouble with mathematical & puzzle tasks
- Difficulties paying attention
- More likely to be expelled or drop out
- Lower higher education attainment
- Poor moral development
- Less able to delay gratification
- More impulsivity
- Social and emotional maladjustment
- Conduct and anxiety disorders
- Suicide
- Deviant peer group selections
- High rates of aggression, bullying, and antisocial behavior
- Higher rates of physical and sexual abuse
- Higher rates of involvement with the criminal justice system
- Higher rates of alcohol & other drug abuse
- Earlier onset of sexual intercourse, smoking, AUD
- Higher probability of possessing weapons



RESEARCH ON ***PRESENT*** FATHERS

Father-child relationships and children's learning



Fathers' support is financial and emotional

- Policy & programs focus on the money story
- Less work on the relationship story



Building Blocks

Language &
communication skills

Emotion understanding
and regulation

Attachment and social
relationships

Learning about the world

Family Systems

Fathers are part of
families

Network of relationships

Fathers are independent

Transactional dynamic
interactions

Parenting is key

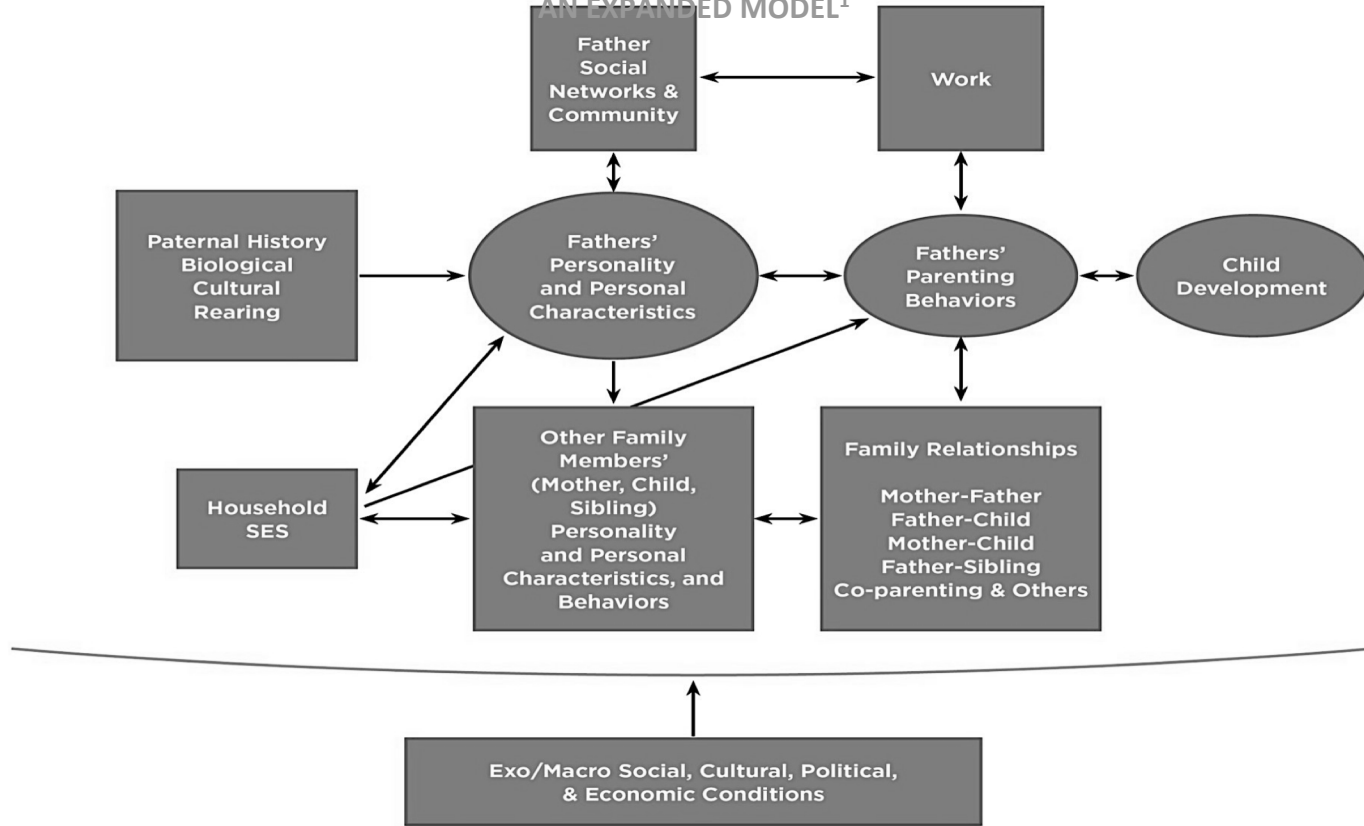
Sensitive and engaged
parents

- Provide support and care; safety
- Opportunities for learning and growing
- Teach to regulate and self-initiate social int
- Optimal emotional context for brain dev

RESEARCH ON FATHERS

- ◻ • Not a unified theory of fathering
- ◻ • Maternal template
- ◻ • Deficit perspective
- ◻ • What we knew about fathers came from mothers' reports
 - ◻ Fathers' own voices in research were missing
- ◻ • Lack observational studies of father-child interactions
- ◻ • Funding to study fathers – very difficult

THE ECOLOGY OF FATHER-CHILD
RELATIONSHIPS:
AN EXPANDED MODEL¹



DATA

- Small-scale studies
 - Observations mother- and father-child interactions
 - Theoretically grounded/measures
 - Not generalizable

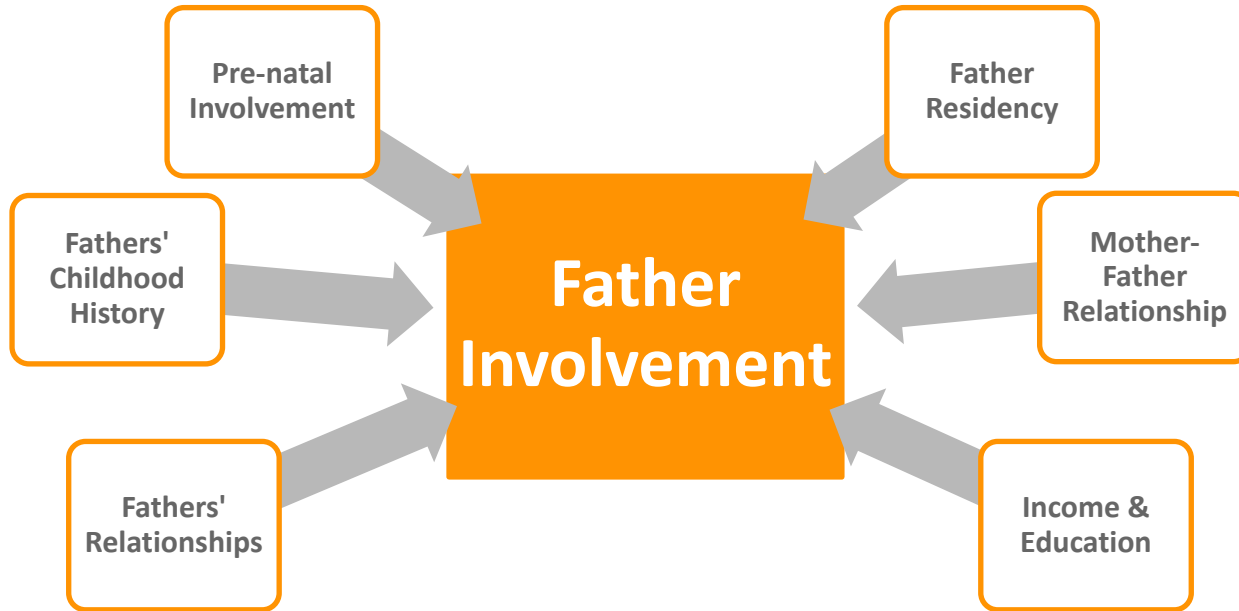
- National samples
 - ECLS-B, FFCW, EHS
Longitudinal
 - Scope vs breath
 - Not always theoretically motivated; measures



Why are some fathers more
involved than others?

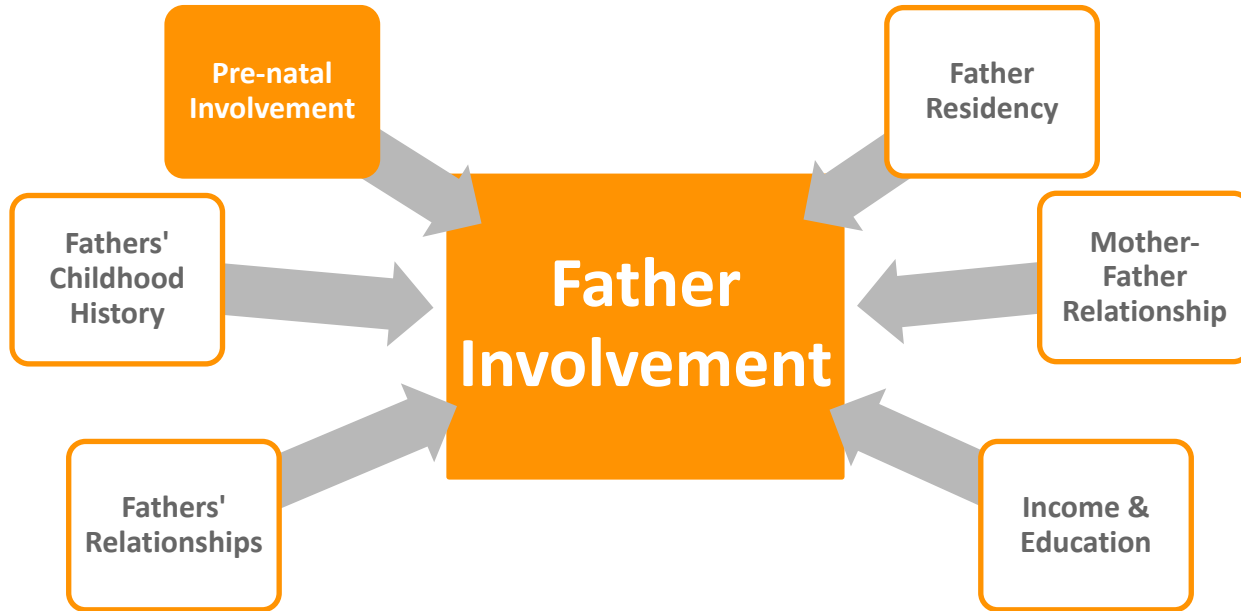


Influences *on* Father Involvement





Influences *on* Father Involvement



Begin at the beginning..... prenatally

Prenatal Involvement:

- ☐ Attend birth classes
- ☐ See sonogram/listen to heart beat/
touch mom's belly
- ☐ Start thinking that he'll become a
dad –
- ☐ Dad begins to imagine being a dad
What does that mean? Would s/he
look like me?

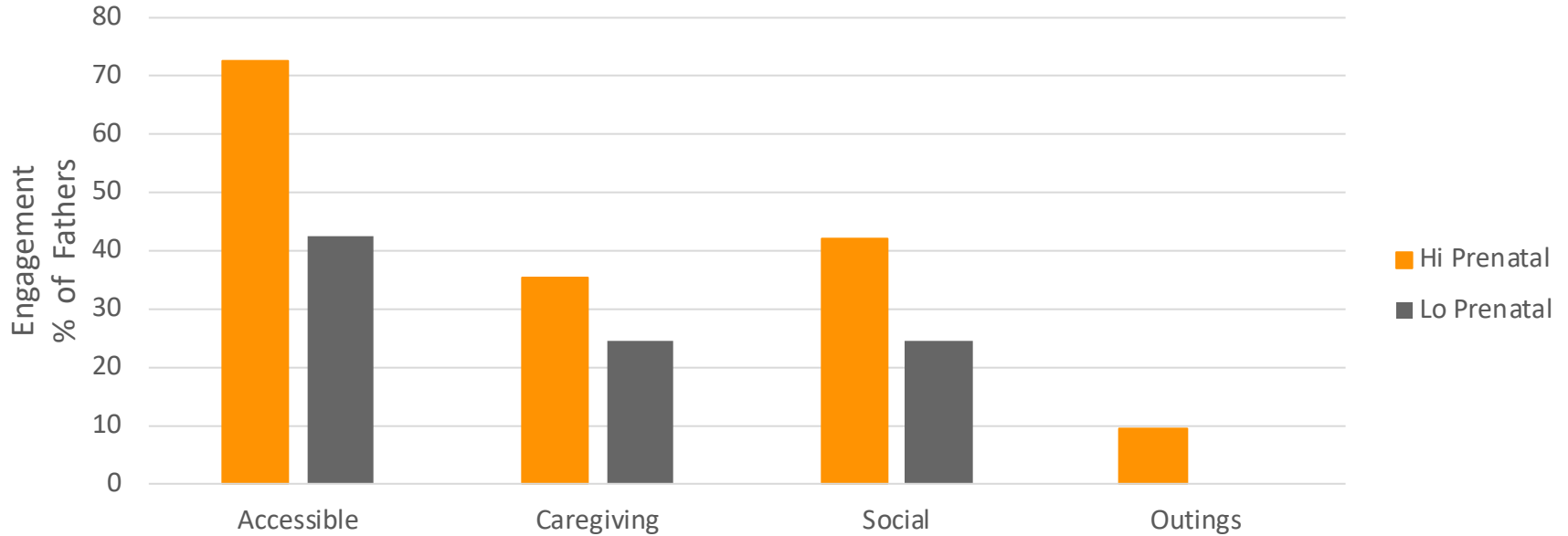
But, it varies by ethnicity

Prenatal involvement is more important
for African American dads than
residency at birth.³



FATHER-CHILD BOND BEGINS
PRENATALLY

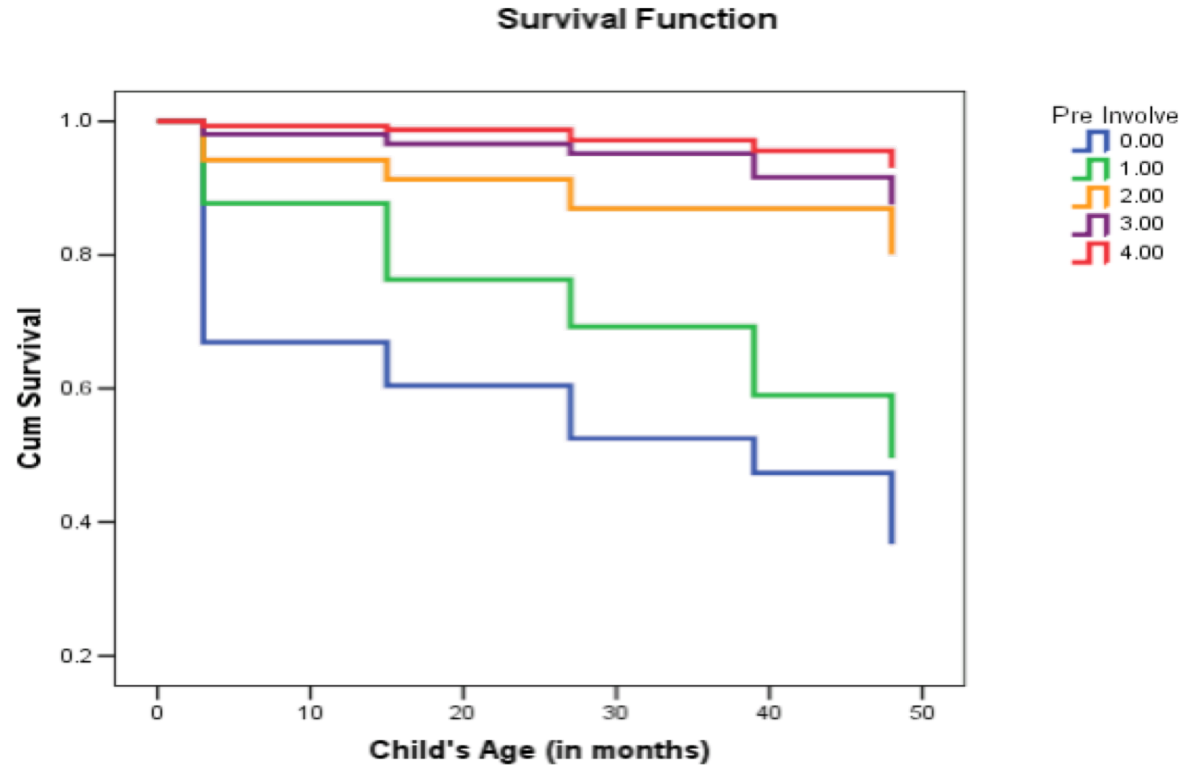
Fathers' Prenatal Scores & Involvement with 1-month olds¹¹



N=278, n=200 high involvement; n=78 low involvement based on distribution cut < 6

FATHER-CHILD BOND BEGINS
PRENATALLY

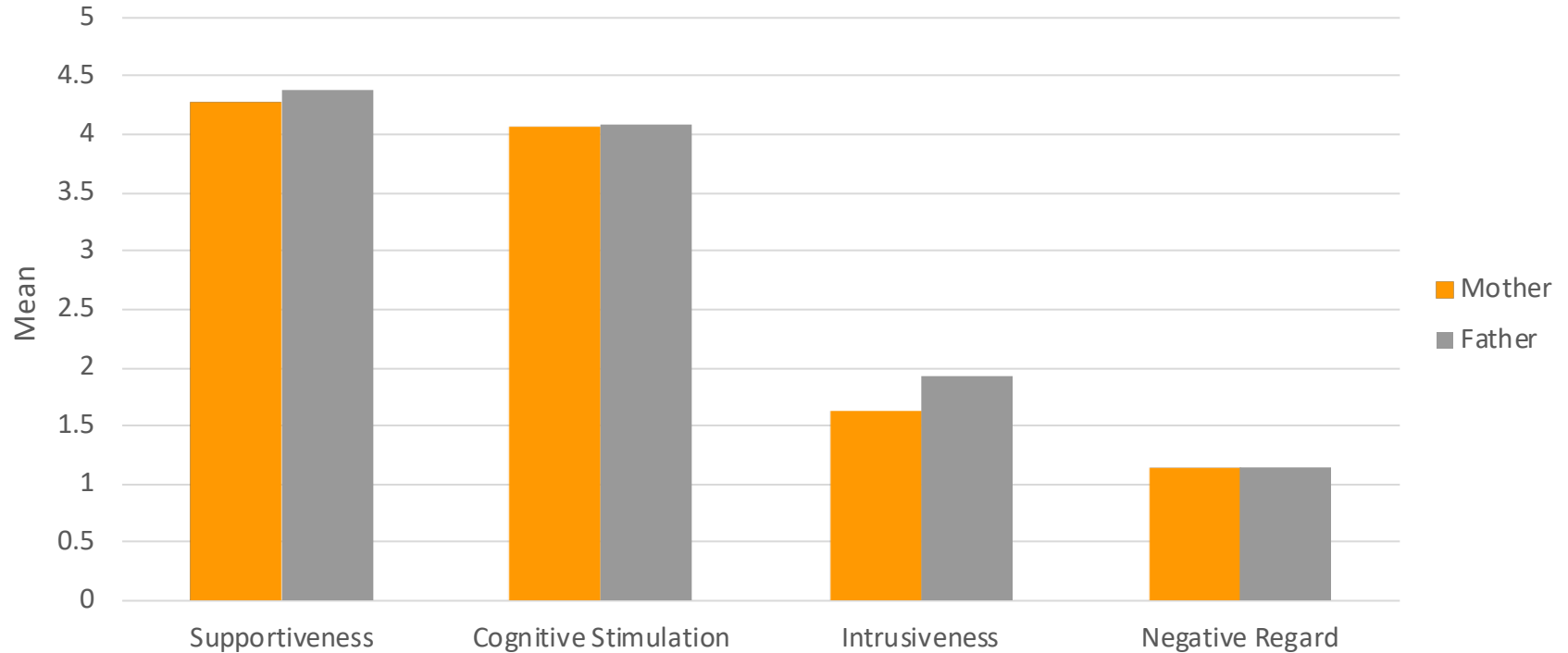
Fathers' Pre-natal/ Birth Involvement¹²





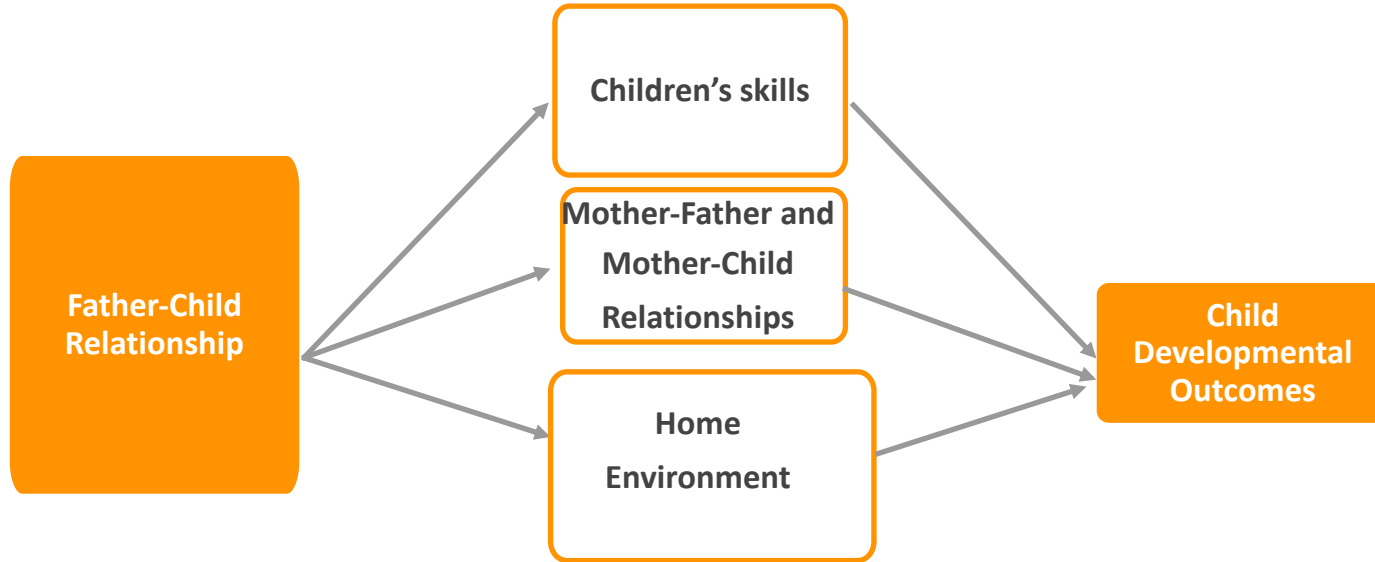
**FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS
ARE BUILDING BLOCKS OF
DEVELOPMENT**

Fathers are Sensitive and Supportive with their toddlers



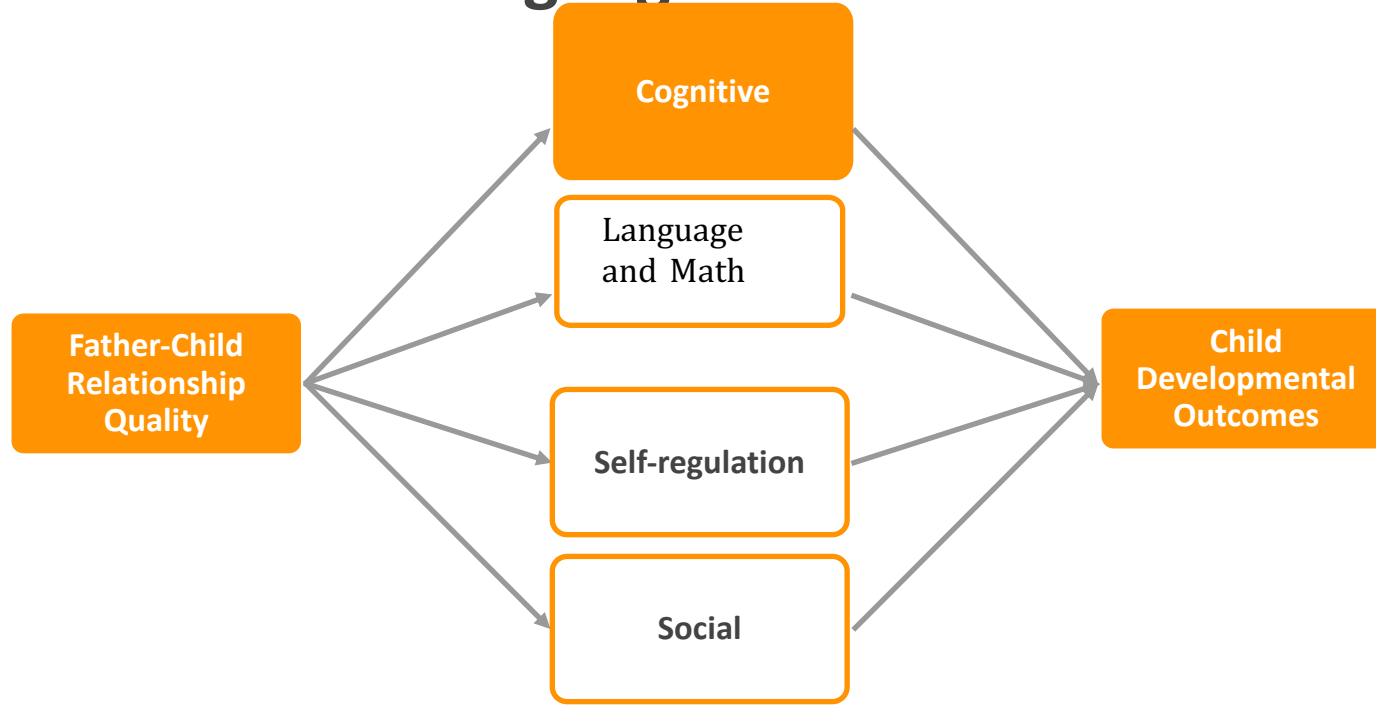


How do fathers matter? Key paths of influence

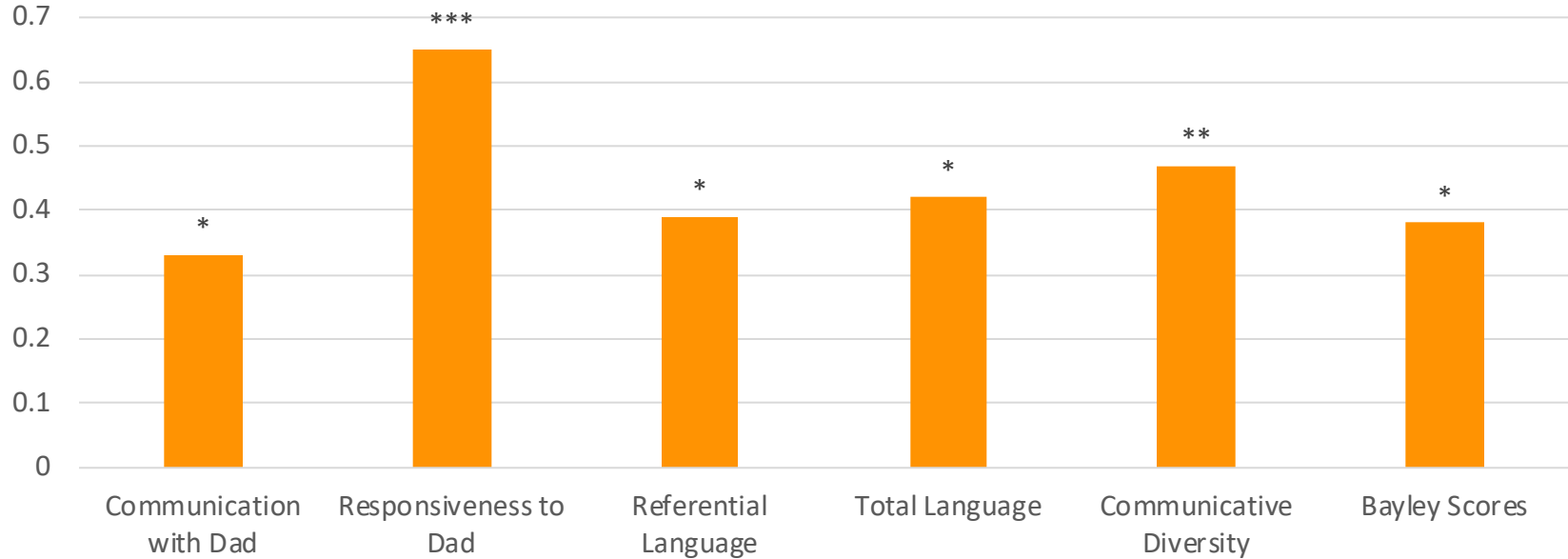




Influence via Language



Father sensitivity at 9 moths and toddlers' cognitive skills



All Influences Significant at $p < .05$, $.01$ or $.001$ levels. $N = 50$

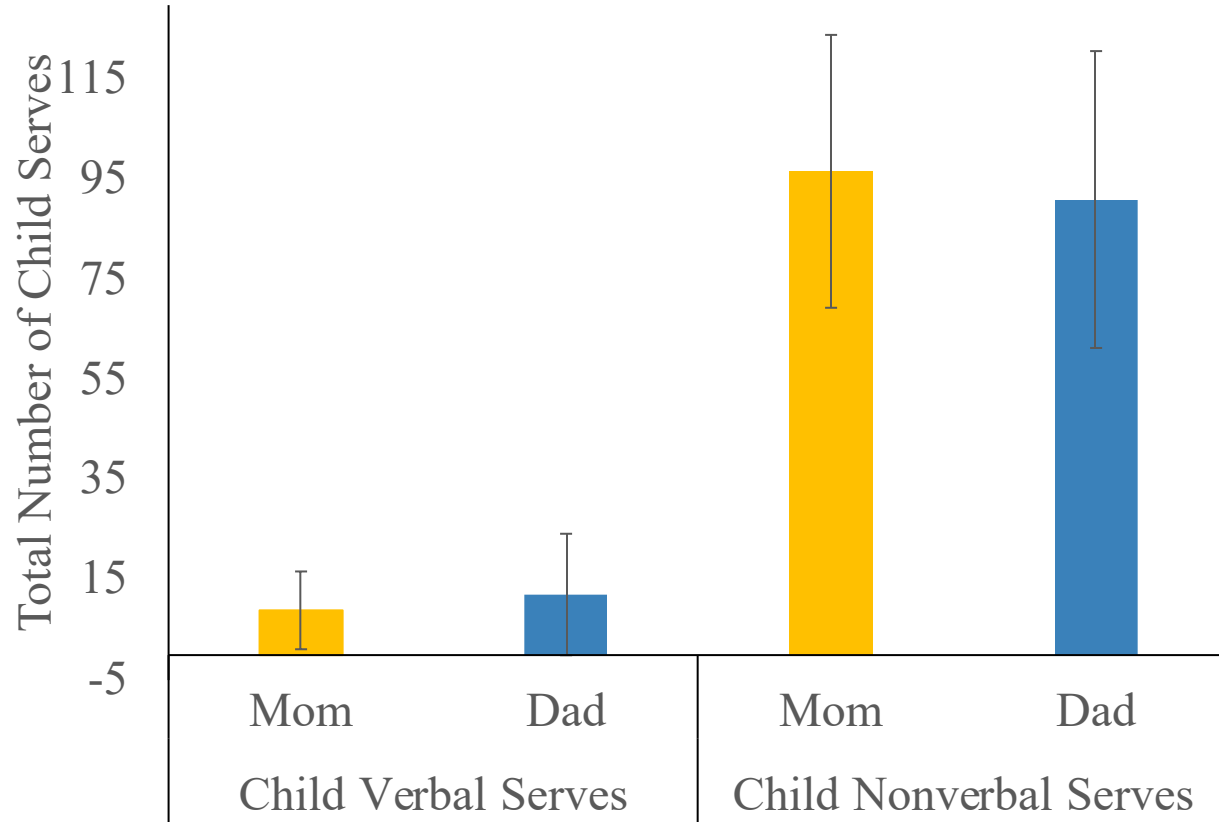
Responsive Interactions: “Serve and return” and infants’ cognitive skills

- Responsive interactions—also known as “serve and return” interactions—are predictive of language
- Input has to be **contiguous** (within 2 sec) and **contingent** or meaningful
- Preliminary results...



Chen, T. & Cabrera, N (in preparation). *Serve and return between mothers, fathers and their children.*

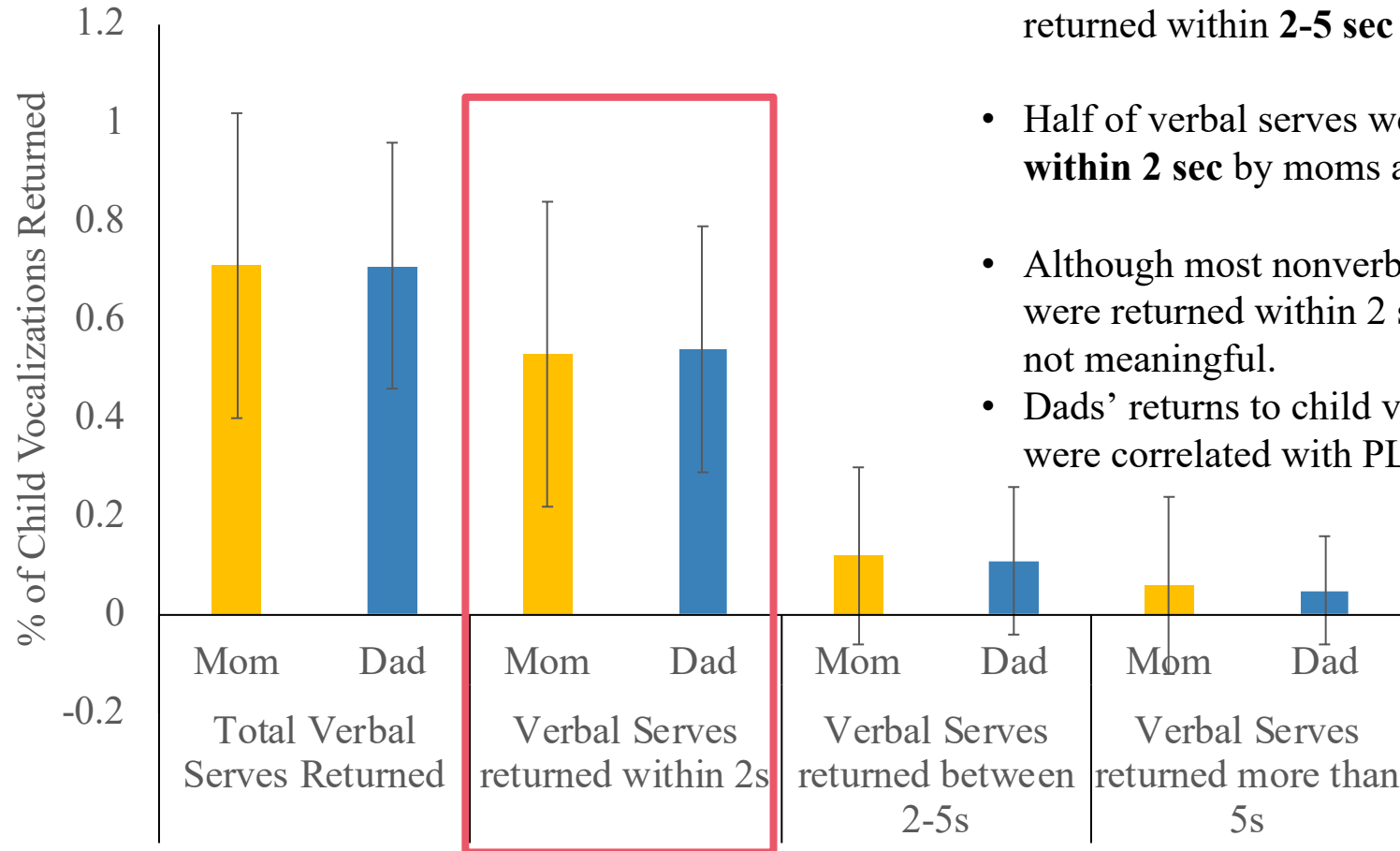
Serves and Returns between Infants and their Parents



N=76

- Fewer verbalizations than nonverbal
- Infants “served” similar amounts when playing with dads and moms.

Returns to Infant Verbal Serves



- Majority of verbal responses were returned within **2-5 sec**
- Half of verbal serves were “returned” **within 2 sec** by moms and dads
- Although most nonverbal “serves” were returned within 2 sec, they were not meaningful.
- Dads’ returns to child vocalizations were correlated with PLS total score.

The quality of fathers' language skills matters for toddlers' language skills.⁴

N= 78

Low on quantity, **high on quality**
language skills (*wh* Q); large
variation

Elicit verbal responses that are
likely to build vocabulary and
reasoning

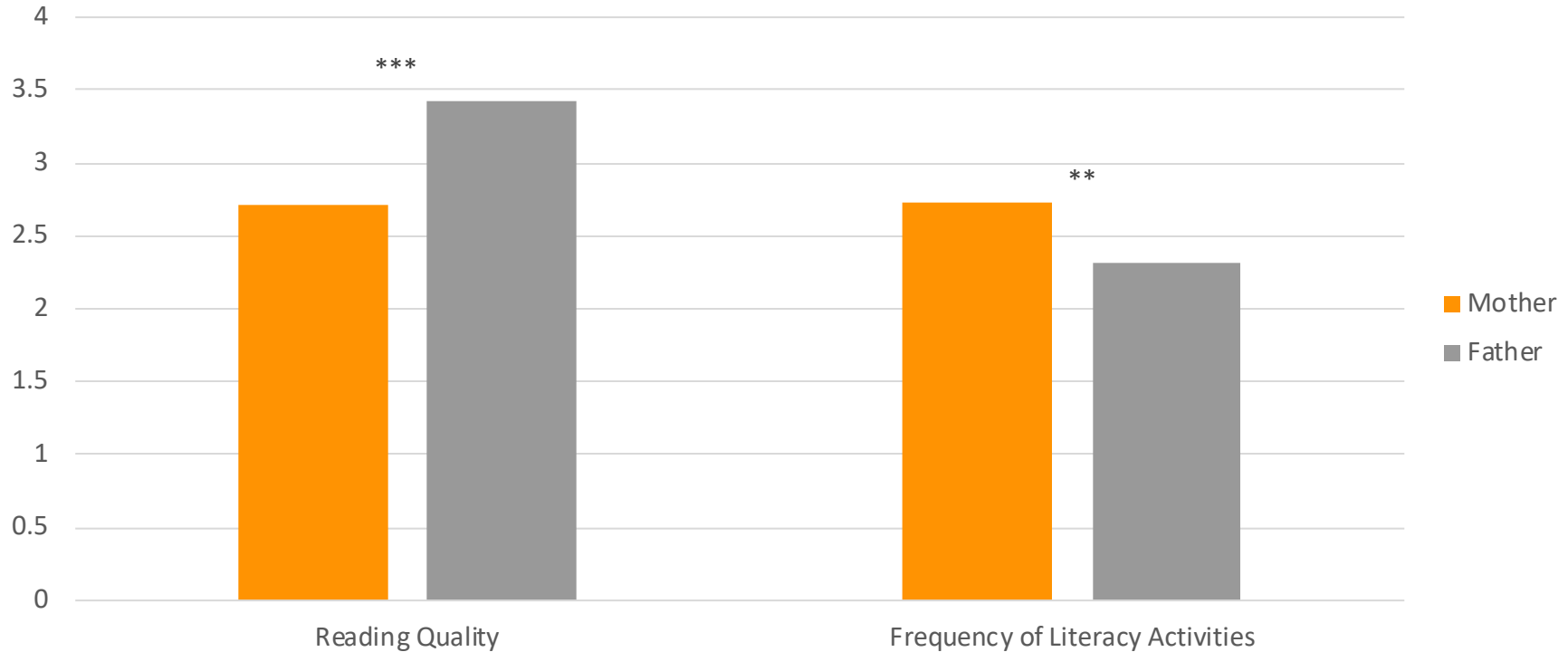
-Fathers' use of *Wh* Q predicts to
children's' vocabulary and verbal
reasoning at 36 months





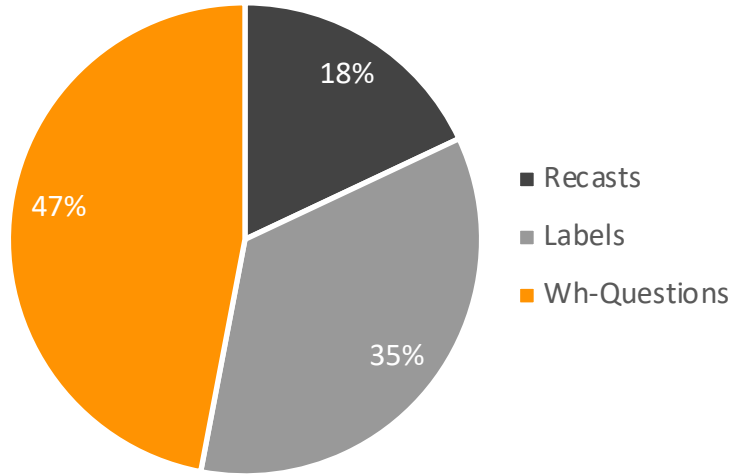
FATHER READING

How often do you read? But also....how well do you read?



The quality of fathers' reading is important for toddlers' vocabulary skills

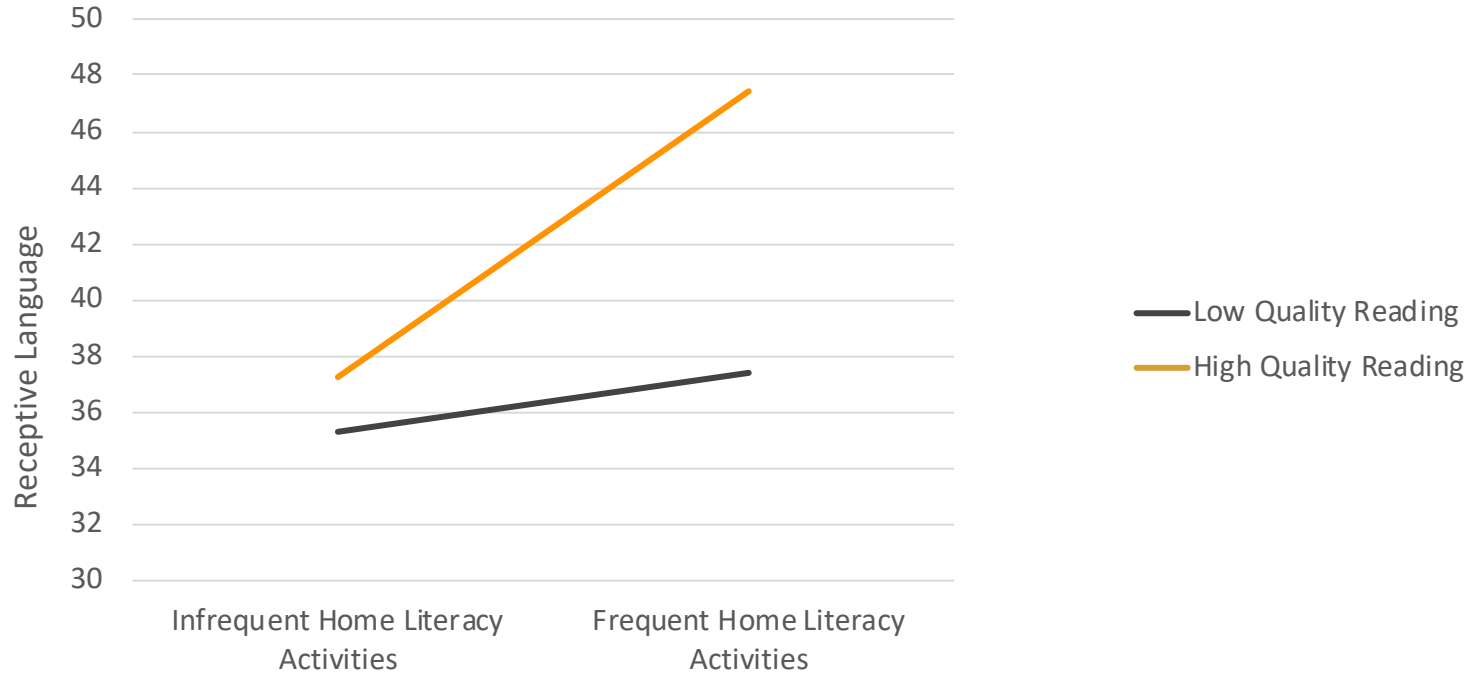
Fathers' Reading Quality



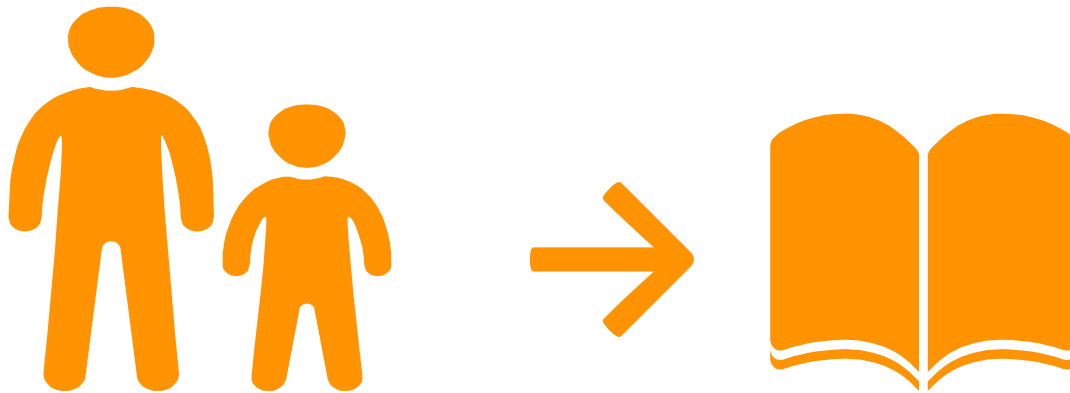
Both parents used high quality reading but fathers used more (N=61).



Fathers who read more have toddlers with better language skills but quality matters



Why does reading matter?



Fathers' Reading Quality

Child's Interest in
Reading

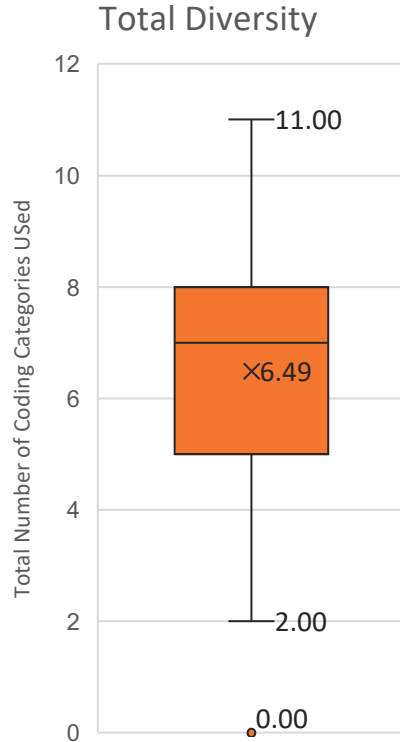
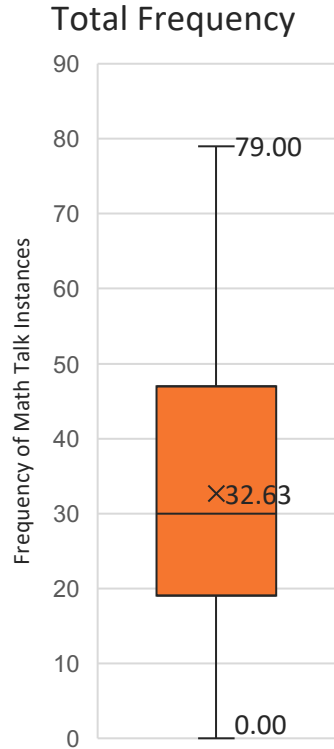
Receptive
Vocabulary at Pre-K

What about math?

- Research shows that parent math talk is related to children's math skills
- Just beginning to explore parent math talk in low-income families
- Preliminary results of parent math talk with infants...

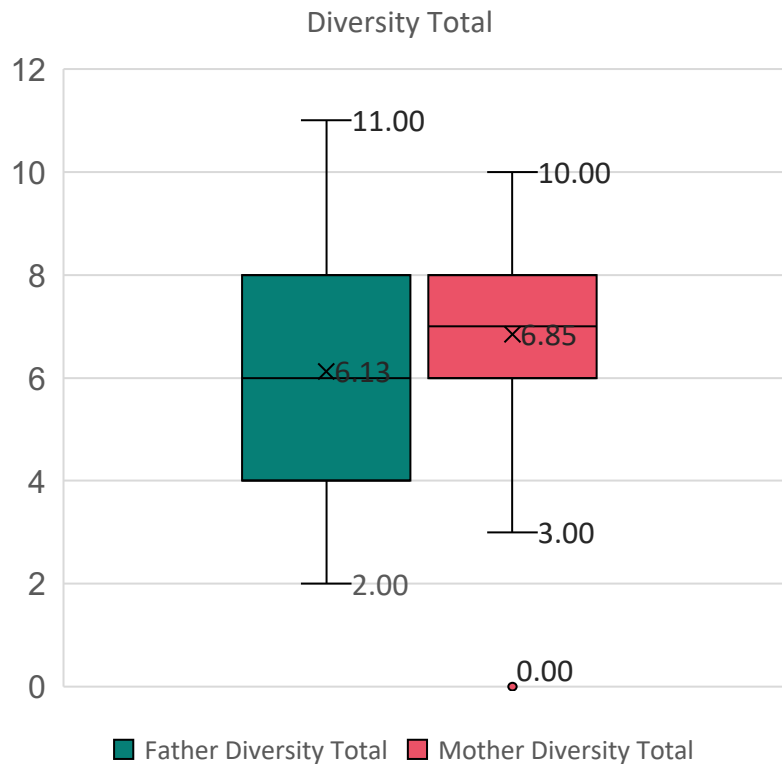
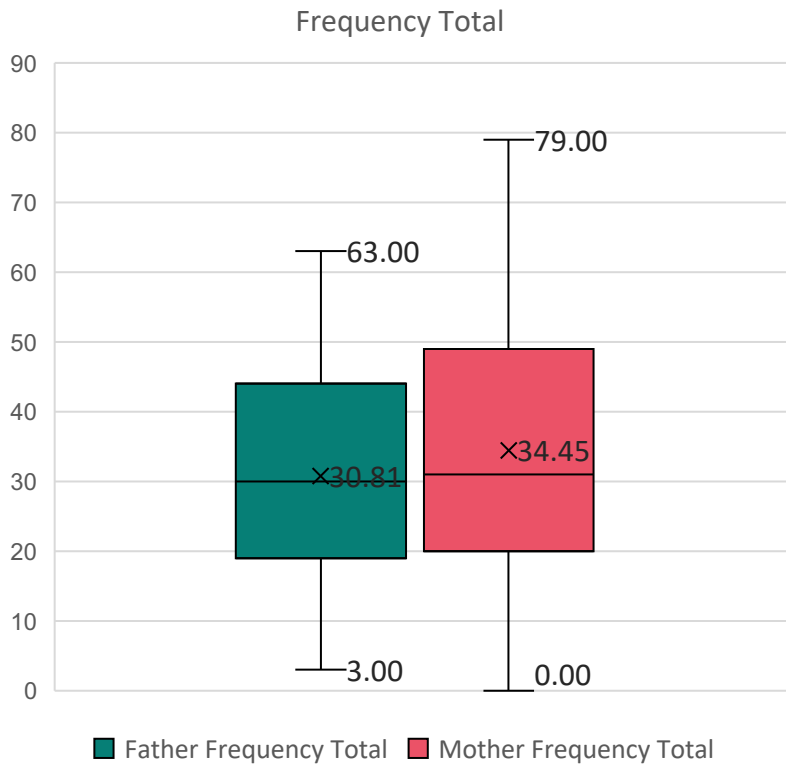
Hennigar, A., Cabrera, N., & Mix, K. (in preparation). *Spatial math talk among low-income mothers and fathers.*

Overall frequency and diversity of math talk



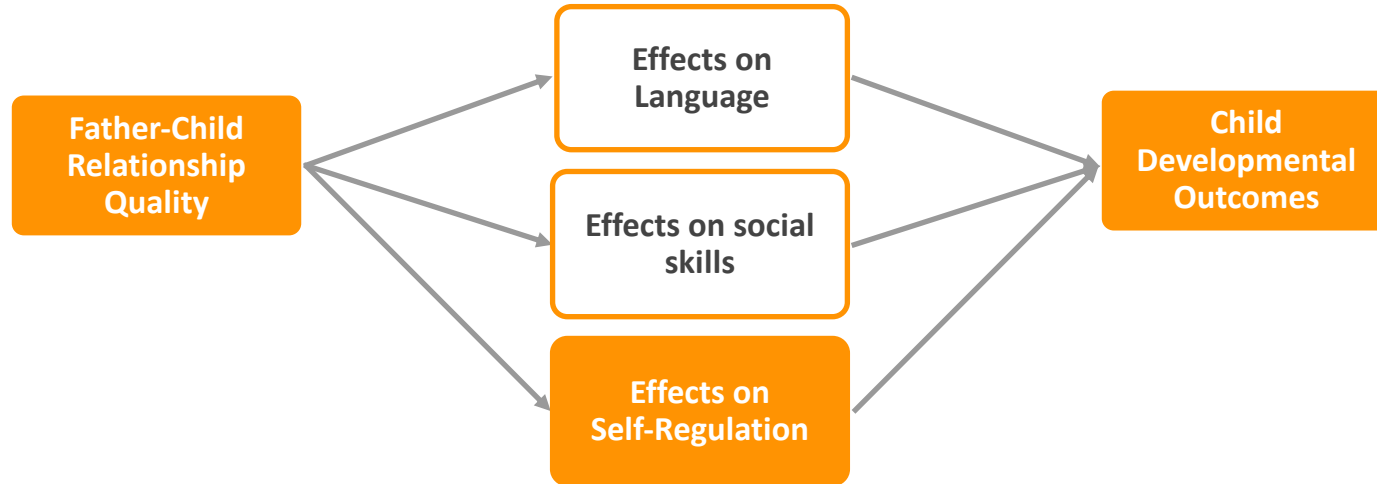
- N=94
- On average, parents had 32.63 instances of math talk during the 25 minutes of play
- On average, parents used 6.49 of the 12 coding categories during the 25 minutes of play

Frequency and Diversity by Mothers and Fathers





Influence via Self-Regulation⁹





Father-child play



How fathers play is important for toddlers' regulation⁶



- ❑ Poor dads also engage in pretend play!
- ❑ Fathers can be just as playful (e.g., creative, imaginative, funny, and curios) as mothers
- ❑ Quality of play (imaginative and creative) at 24months predicts to vocabulary at preK
- ❑ Accumulated advantage:
 - ❑ two parents are better than one

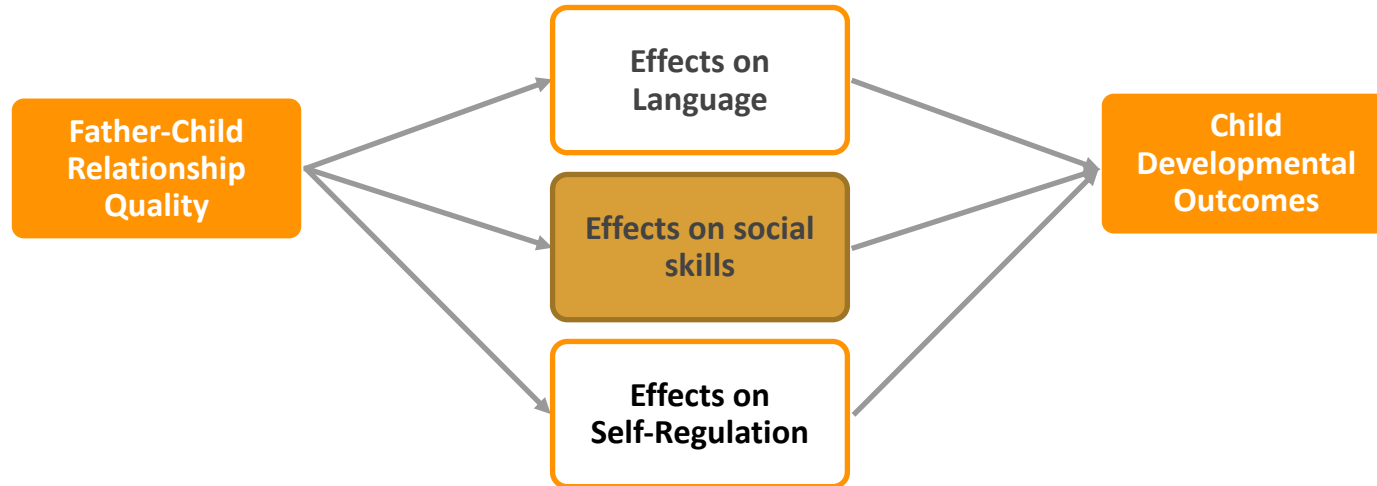
Early discipline: Fathers help their toddlers comply and self-regulate⁷



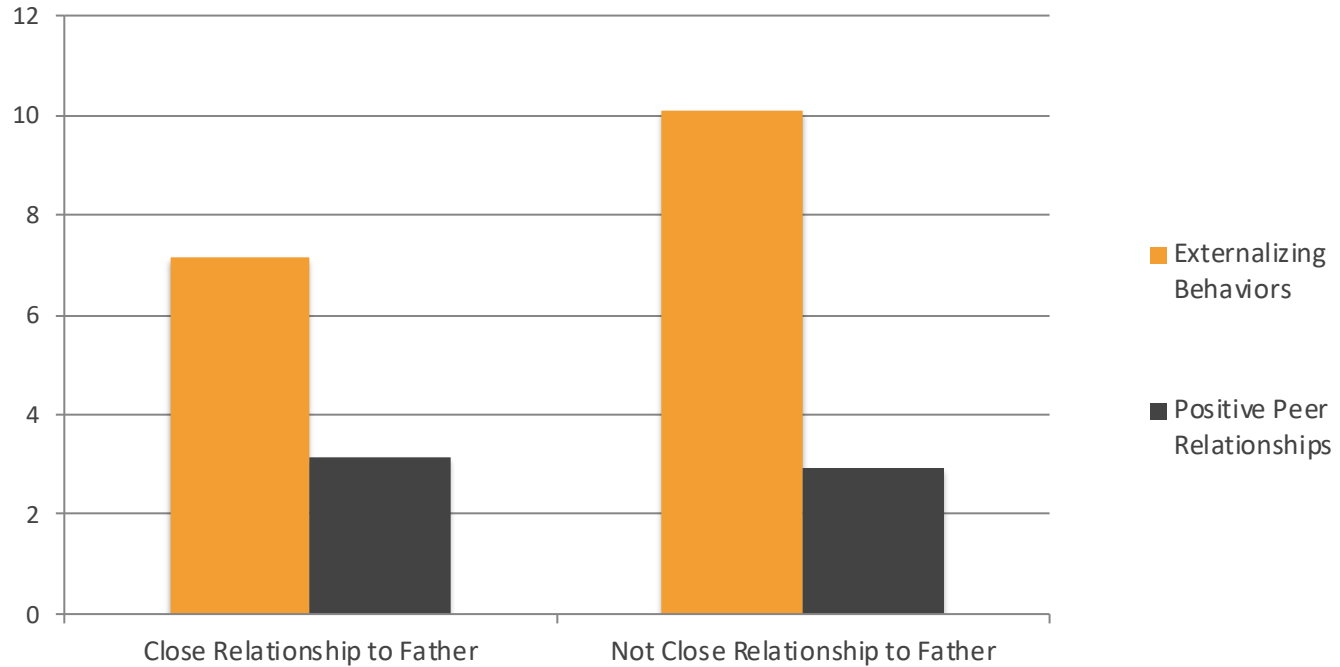
- Fathers used **regulatory language** (e.g., direct commands “stop that”) to promote compliance
- At 24 months, fathers used **regulatory language** with their boys, and **regulatory behavior** (e.g., physical discipline) with children with poor language skills
- Fathers’ **regulatory language** → child **emotion regulation**
- Fathers’ **regulatory behavior** → child **sustained attention** at preK



Influence via Social Skills⁹



Father-child relationships during toddlerhood matter for social adjustment in middle-school⁸



Study of N=509 children and their families: Father residency did not predict social adjustment, only father-child relationships mattered

MONEY or LOVE?

What's more important?

Money or Parental Involvement?

How do mother and father involvement and family income matter for children's development?

- • Fragile Family Child Well-Being Study; N=4,898

Measures:

- • Mother and Father involvement: frequency of activities (no measure of low or relationship quality)
- • Child aggression = CBCL (child is cruel, bullies)
- • Language = PPVT at ages 3, 5, and 9

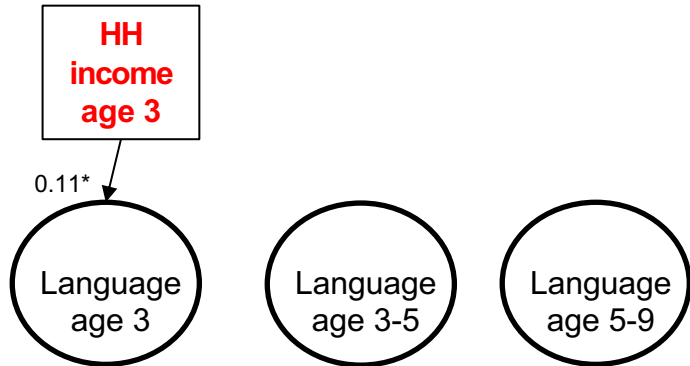
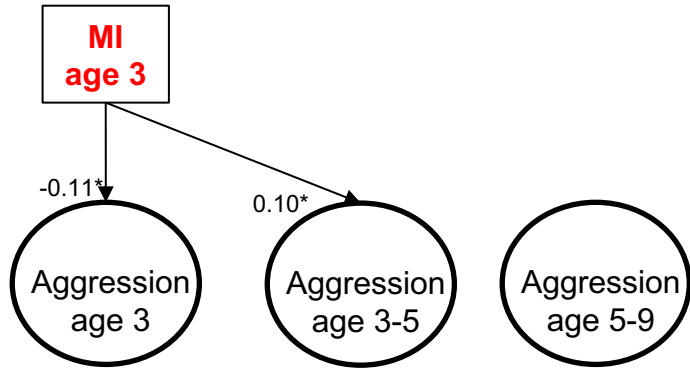
Moon,Uj & Cabrera,N. (in preparation). *Parental investments of time and money and children's development*

Money or Parental Involvement?

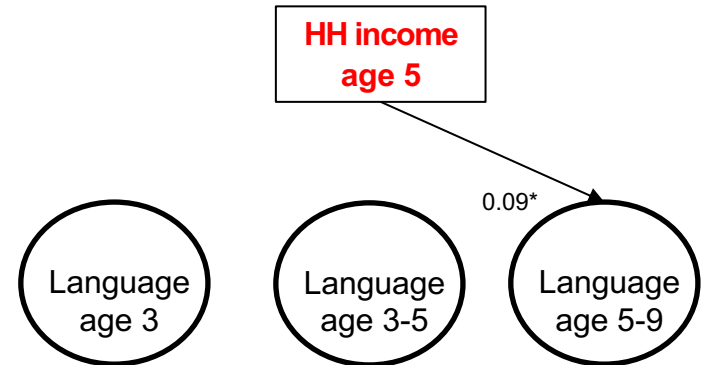
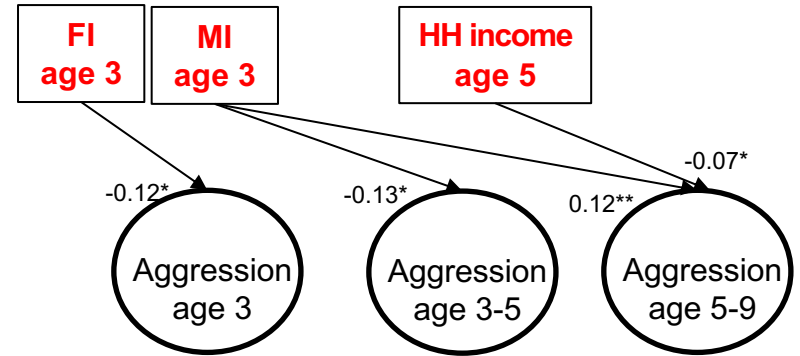
Analysis:

- We fitted children's aggressive and cognitive behaviors at years 3, 5, and 9 **into a latent difference score (LDS) model.**
- We modeled LDS at each measurement point, and then we modeled **development or change** in our outcome variables (i.e., 3-5 and 5-9) using latent growth parameters.

Resident families



Nonresident families



Money or Parent Involvement?

Resident families

For Aggression:

- **MI** at age 3 was neg related to aggression at age 3 as well as to the development of aggression (3-5)

For Language

- **HH income** at age 3 matters language skills at age 3

Nonresident families

For Aggression

- **FI** at age 3 was neg related to aggression at age 3
- **MI at age 3 and HH income at age 5** were related to the development of aggression (3-5, 5-9)

For Language

- Language skills at age 3 were related to none of our variables, but,
- The development in language was related to **HH income**

Money or Relationships?

- ❑ **Money or love?** Both seem important, but for diff outcomes
- ❑ Overall, **money and maternal and paternal investments (PI) of time** matter for children's social development and **money matters** more for cognitive development
- ❑ Father investments of time seem to be particularly important for children who don't live with their fathers whereas maternal investments matter for both type of families

Money or Parental Involvement?

- The **timing of investments is important**
 - The early years ages 3 to 5 are critical for children
- Effect sizes for both PI & money are small, slight larger for PI
- We found larger coefficients for some of our covariates such as temperament for aggression and child gender and fathers' education for cognition

Money or Parental Involvement?

Implications

- We need to
 - think of families, including nonresident families, as systems, where members influence each other in multiple ways – it's not just money
 - do this work with better measures of parent-child relationship quality
 - do better at promoting the investment of time (relationship quality) among non resident fathers not just their money



RESEARCH ON FATHERS→ INTERVENTION

Using Fatherhood Research to Promote Positive Parenting

BABY BOOKS 2

- A NIH-funded study to test an intervention led by Dr. Natasha Cabrera and Dr. Stephanie Reich.
- The Baby Books 2 (BB2) intervention
 - embeds anticipatory guidance (AG) into baby board books aimed at improving parenting and child development
 - encourages parents to read to young children while also providing information to parents
- Books are bilingual; designed for parents of children ages 9 to 30 months.
- BB2 uses a randomized controlled design with four groups.
 - Moms & Dads, Moms only, Dads only, & a control group



A photograph of a man with a beard, wearing a red hoodie, carrying a young child on his shoulders. The child is wearing a dark puffy jacket with yellow trim and black sneakers. They are on a sandy beach with the ocean and a forested hill in the background. The text "Fathers Matter" is overlaid in white.

Fathers Matter

Fathers, like mothers, make an **INDEPENDENT** contribution to children's development.

Father-child relationships are foundational

Fathers and mothers **are similar in some ways**, different in others, and complementary.

There's tremendous variability in the **quality of fathering** among low-income families.

Fathers' **impacts on children** are:

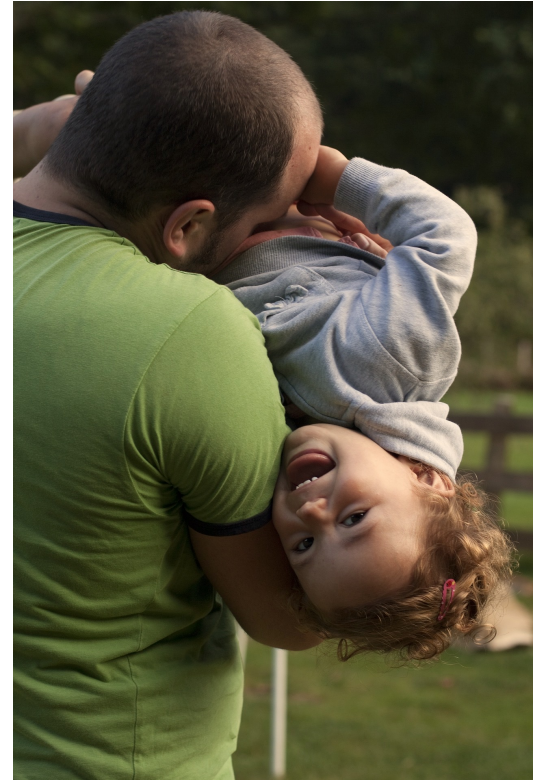
- Direct and indirect: multiple pathways affecting family system
- reciprocal/ transactional
- vary by developmental age
- important for a whole array of developmental skills
- based on the **quality** of the father-child interaction, not just quantity
- foster building blocks for achievement and social adjustment

Back to the beginning..... Social and policy context

We need to change the social narrative that poor fathers don't keep all their promises or can't be good parents

- ☐ We can apply a more structural analysis that poor men do less well because the system disenfranchise them
- ☐ Little support for them as parents

Funding: Need to make fathers a priority – can't just include them when "they are there"



THANK YOU

- ◻ Amazing families

- ◻ Funders
 - ◻ Ford Foundation
 - ◻ Kellogg Foundation
 - ◻ NSF and NIH
 - ◻ Russell Sage Foundation
 - ◻ Spencer Foundation

- ◻ Students and partners



@UMD_FamilyLab ncabrera@umd.edu

Graduate Students

Catherine Kuhns
Avery Hennigar
Kelsey Garcia

**Thanks to the Family Involvement Lab
research team!**

UMD BB2

Coordinators

Dilletta Mittone
Jenn Acosta

A photograph of a man with glasses holding a baby in front of a tall building. The man is on the left, looking up at the baby. The baby is in the center, smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a tall, multi-story building with many windows. The image has a warm, slightly desaturated color palette. The text "THANK YOU" is overlaid in the center in a white, sans-serif font.

THANK YOU

References

1. Cabrera, N., Fitzgerald, H. E., Bradley, R. & Roggman, L.. (2014), The ecology of father-child relationships: An expanded model. *Journal of Family Theory and Review*. 6, 336-354.
2. Cabrera, N. J., Fagan, J., Wight, V., & Schadler, C. (2011). Influence of mother, father, and child risk on parenting and children's cognitive and social behaviors. *Child Development*, 82(6), 1985-2005.
3. Shannon, J. D., Cabrera, N. J., Tamis-LeMonda, C., & Lamb, M. E. (2009). Who stays and who leaves? Father accessibility across children's first 5 years. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 9(1-2), 78-100.
4. Malin, J. L., Karberg, E., Cabrera, N. J., Rowe, M., Cristaforo, T., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. S. (2012). Father-toddler communication in low-income families: The role of paternal education and depressive symptoms. *Family Science*, 3(3-4), 155-163.
5. Rowe, M., Leech, K., & Cabrera, N. (2016). Going beyond input quantity: Wh-Questions matter. *Cognitive Science*, 1-18.
6. Cabrera, N. J., Karberg, E., Malin, J. L., & Aldoney, D. (2017). The magic of play: Low-income mothers' and fathers' playfulness and children's emotion regulation and vocabulary skills. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 38(6), 757-771.
7. Malin, J, Cabrera, N., Karberg, E., Aldoney, D., & Rowe, M. (in preparation). Low-income fathers' compliance-promoting strategies and children's regulatory skills.
8. Cabrera, N. J., Cook, G. A., McFadden, K. E., & Bradley, R. H. (2011). Father residence and father-child relationship quality: Peer relationships and externalizing behavioral problems. *Family Science*, 2(2), 109-119.

Credits

- Images: www.pixabay.com
- Presentation Template: SlidesCarnival