

COPARENTING AND FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN MARRIED AND UNMARRIED COUPLES

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ABSTRACT

Children benefit from involved fathers and cooperative parents. Family processes which encourage involved fathering are particularly important to understand in the growing population of children born to unmarried parents. This study compares married and unmarried coresident couples with a young child using the first two waves of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort (ECLS-B). It examines the association of coparenting, measured as parental discussion of the child, father's influence on decision-making, and the extent of difference between mother and father reports of these, with father engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. It finds that when fathers participate in decisions about the child's wellbeing, they are more involved. However, parent's discussion of the child appears to substitute for father's active engagement with the child. Fathers were also less involved when the two parents did not share views about how often they discussed their child. Unmarried cohabiting fathers were more involved than other fathers overall, and also more available when they had greater influence on decision-making, suggesting that parenting may be a particular focus in these couples. These results indicate that coparenting is multifaceted, and emphasize the role of both parents, particularly in their involvement in decision-making processes and in creating a shared understanding of their coparenting roles.