

**Adolescents with Two Nonresident Biological Parents:  
Living Arrangements, Parental Involvement, and Well-Being**

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**Acknowledgments:** This research was supported by funding from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to Valarie King, principal investigator (R01 HD43384), and from core funding to the Population Research Institute, The Pennsylvania State University (R24 HD41025). This research uses data from Add Health, a program project designed by J. Richard Udry, Peter S. Bearman, and Kathleen Mullan Harris, and funded by a grant P01 HD31921 from NICHD, with cooperative funding from 17 other agencies. Special acknowledgment is due Ronald R. Rindfuss and Barbara Entwisle for assistance in the original design. Persons interested in obtaining data files from Add Health should contact Add Health, Carolina Population Center, 123 W. Franklin Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27516-2524 ([www.cpc.unc.edu/addhealth/contract.html](http://www.cpc.unc.edu/addhealth/contract.html)).

## Extended Abstract

Continued high rates of divorce and nonmarital childbearing have contributed to large numbers of American children growing up in households with only one biological parent present, usually the mother (Teachman, Tedrow, & Crowder, 2000). Concerns about the consequences of this trend for child well-being have prompted an increase in research focusing on nonresident biological fathers and their children, particularly over the past two decades (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). More recently, some limited attention has turned toward examining nonresident biological mothers as well (e.g., King, in press; Stewart, 1999). In most of these studies, the focus is on children who are residing with their other biological parent. As a consequence, we know little about children who have two living nonresident biological parents. Yet such children may be at particular risk of low levels of nonresident parent involvement (Harris & Ryan, 2004) and child well-being (Sun, 2003).

This study seeks to provide a better understanding of adolescents with two living nonresident biological parents who, from a research standpoint, remain largely invisible. Using nationally representative data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), we address several questions: (a) who do these adolescents live with? (b) how are these living arrangements associated with adolescents' relationships with each of their nonresident parents? (c) how are these living arrangements related to adolescent well-being?

To further shed light on adolescents who have two nonresident biological parents, we compare them to adolescents who have one nonresident biological parent and live with the other biological parent, distinguishing between those who live with their biological mother (and have a nonresident biological father) and those who live with their biological father (and have a

nonresident biological mother). We examine differences between these three family structures in terms of nonresident parent involvement (contact and parent-child closeness) and adolescent outcomes (internalizing and externalizing problems).

### *Data*

Data for this study come from the first wave of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). The full sample includes 20,745 high school and middle school students in 1995. When appropriate sample weights are used, these data are a nationally representative sample of adolescents in grades 7 through 12 in the United States. A parent or parent figure of each adolescent also was asked to complete a questionnaire ( $n = 17,670$ ; see Bearman, Jones, & Udry, 1997, for a detailed description of the data).

The analysis sample for this study was restricted to adolescents with valid sample weights who were 17 years old or younger and who reported either: (a) having both a living nonresident biological mother and nonresident biological father ( $n = 502$ ), or (b) living with their biological mother and having a nonresident biological father living elsewhere ( $n = 4029$ ), or (c) living with their biological father and having a nonresident biological mother living elsewhere ( $n = 717$ ). Missing data were rare (1% of the sample or less) for most of the variables in the analyses. The two exceptions were household income (24% missing) and the nonresident parent's education (13% missing). Missing cases were replaced with imputed values using the expectation maximization (EM) algorithm (Allison, 2001) in SPSS.

All analyses are conducted using the Wave 1 sample weight to correct for the differential probabilities of sample selection. The survey (SVY) procedures in Stata (Stata Corporation, 2005) are used to adjust the standard errors of the model estimates for the weighted, clustered, and stratified design of Add Health (Chantala & Tabor, 1999).

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