

# SUPPORT AND ADVICE FROM MARRIED AND DIVORCED FATHERS

## LINKAGES TO ADOLESCENT ADJUSTMENT\*

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*This study examined whether aspects of the father-adolescent relationship accounted for differences in adjustment between 748 adolescents from two-parent families and 109 from divorced families and considered variability in postdivorce fathering and adjustment. Late adolescents in divorced families were more depressed than those in married families, but did not differ in self-esteem. Divorced-family adolescents received less advice from fathers and were less satisfied with paternal support, accounting for their greater depression. In divorced families, adolescents with frequent paternal visitation received the most advice and support and were least depressed.*

Parental separation and divorce have become common experiences for children in the United States. For the last three decades, there have been increasing numbers of divorced parent households, and at current rates, 50% to 60% of all children born in the early 1980s will live with only one parent for at least a year before reaching the age of 18 years (Furstenberg, Nord, Peterson, & Zill, 1983; Glick, 1984; Martin & Bumpass, 1989). There has been a great deal of variability reported in the experiences of adolescents after parental divorce. For a substantial minority of children in divorced families, adolescence is a period of less than optimal growth characterized by increases in substance abuse, truancy, depression, anxiety, and aggressive behavior, and a decline in academic performance (see Amato & Keith, 1991; for a meta-analysis). However, for many others, it is a time of enhanced responsibility, mature self-reliance, and identification with positive goals and values (Barber & Eccles, 1992). What characteristics of divorced families are associated with adjustment during adolescence? Despite the profusion of literature on divorce, the focus on the features of the family environment that lead to maladaptive outcomes or successful adjustment for adolescents is relatively recent.

Early studies of divorce used a social address approach (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983), assuming that any adjustment differences were due to family structure. Currently, increasing attention is being placed on using process-focused approaches to explain adjustment differences between family types. In the past decade, processes such as interparental conflict, parent-adolescent relationships, family decision making, and parental monitoring and control have received increasing attention as mediators of divorce effects on adolescent adjust-

ment (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1992; Dornbusch et al., 1985; Forgatch, Patterson, & Skinner, 1988; Forehand, McCombs, Long, Brody, & Fauber, 1988; Hetherington et al., 1992; Peterson & Zill, 1986; Steinberg, 1987; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991).

Most of this process-oriented research has examined the parenting behaviors of the custodial parent. Although frequency of father visitation and its relation to adjustment has been examined (e.g., Amato, 1986; Furstenberg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987), the quality and content of paternal contact, in addition to the processes associated with that contact, have rarely been assessed. In particular, developmentally relevant domains of father-adolescent relationships, such as discussions about future plans, merit attention in the search for family processes that are predictive of postdivorce adjustment. A further gap in divorce research is that within-group variability of divorced families is seldom considered. This study sought not only to examine whether differences in father-adolescent relationships between two-parent and divorced families accounted for differences in adolescent adjustment, but also to describe within-group variability in postdivorce fathering and in adolescent adjustment.

### *Divorce and Adolescent Adjustment*

Divorce has been implicated in several areas of child and adolescent maladjustment, including social, emotional, behavioral, and scholastic problems (Amato & Keith, 1991). The negative effects of divorce are most common around the period of the divorce, and many children and families recover from the initial distress and resume normal functioning within a few years (Hether-

ington, Cox, & Cox, 1982). However, a substantial number of adolescents in divorced-mother families remain at a disadvantage even 4 to 6 years after the divorce when compared to their peers in two-parent families, particularly in the areas of self-processes and internalizing problems (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989; Hetherington et al., 1992). These two domains are briefly examined below.

*Self-processes.* A great deal of research has focused on self-evaluation (competency beliefs) and personal adjustment (self-esteem). In some studies, parental divorce and fathers' inaccessibility have been associated with lower self-esteem and feelings of competence in children and adolescents, especially in the short term (Brody, 1986; Long, Forehand, Fauber, & Brody, 1987; Smith, 1990), but these differences often decline over time (Parish & Wigle, 1985). Many studies, however, fail to find such differences for either children (Kinard & Reinherz, 1984), adolescents (Clark & Barber, 1994), college students (Kalter, Riemer, Brickman, & Chen, 1985), or adults (Amato, 1988). Thus, the differences in self-esteem between

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children in divorced and married families are not consistent, and when there are differences, they decrease over time.

*Internalizing problems.* Increased depression is found in adolescents in divorced families (Hodges & Bloom, 1984; Peterson & Zill, 1986; Siegel & Griffin, 1984; Zaslow, 1989). Parental conflict, a frequent accompaniment to divorce, has been found to be related to internalizing problems such as anxiety disorders (Emery, 1988). Other explanations for internalizing problems have included feeling caught between parents (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991), diminished parent functioning and parenting skills, and poor quality parent-adolescent relationships (Forehand, Thomas, Wierson, Brody, & Fauber, 1990; Forehand, et al., 1991; Thomas & Forehand, 1993). Unlike aggressive behavior, which seems to be more common in boys after divorce, internalizing problems are more common for daughters in mother-headed families (Bronstein, Clauson, Stoll, & Abrams, 1993; Emery, 1988). Thus, those areas in which boys and girls differ (independent of parental divorce) are also the areas in which they experience more pronounced divorce effects (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989). Because of these gender differences in the impact of divorce, it is important to examine the potential interaction of gender with family structure when looking at adjustment outcomes.

Despite the presence of mean differences in adjustment favoring adolescents in married families, there is great variability in adolescents' response to changes in family structure (Emery, 1988; Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991; Hetherington et al., 1992). While some exhibit disruptions in development, others adapt with competence. Between-group differences can provide a starting point from which to consider the explanatory mechanisms operating to produce those differences. Focusing on these possible mediating family processes is imperative for understanding adjustment. Further, within-group comparisons of parent-adolescent relationships and adolescent adjustment in different typologies of divorced families could provide useful information about processes to target in interventions to facilitate adjustment to family transitions.

### *Father-Adolescent Relationships After Divorce*

Many researchers have looked for negative changes in the relationships between children and their parents following divorce. Some studies find less posi-

tive parent-child relationships in divorced families (Warshak & Santrock, 1983). Declines in the quality of parent-adolescent relationships after divorce seem to be particularly characteristic of father-child relationships (Aquilino, 1994; Fine, Moreland, & Schwebel, 1983; Smollar & Youniss, 1985; Youniss & Ketterlinus, 1987). Because it is generally the father who is the noncustodial parent, and children experience a decrease in his involvement and influence in their lives subsequent to the divorce (Amato, 1987; Furstenberg et al., 1983; Furstenberg, Spanier, & Rothschild, 1982; Seltzer, 1991), it is not surprising that the quality of relationships with fathers declines over time. A decline in paternal involvement may be especially likely in late adolescence, as the children engage in more nonfamily activities, such as working or spending time with friends (Dudley, 1991). In addition, late adolescents might have more choice about reducing contact with fathers if they do not have a close relationship (Cooney, 1994).

*Relation of parent-child relationships to adolescent adjustment.* Do these differences in father involvement account for the lower adjustment of adolescents in divorced families? The literature on effects of contact with the noncustodial parent is mixed, with some studies finding that paternal contact and involvement are related to better adjustment in children (e.g., Amato, 1986; Hetherington et al., 1982; Kurdek, 1988). Quality of nonresidential fathers' parenting has also been shown to be related to adolescent outcomes (Simons, Whitbeck, Beaman, & Conger, 1994). However, other studies demonstrate a lack of any relationship between noncustodial fathers' contact, closeness, or interest and adolescent adjustment (Clark & Barber, 1994; Furstenberg et al., 1987). To further explore these complex relationships, this study focuses on paternal relationship characteristics that are expected to be important during late adolescence.

In middle and late adolescence, there is an ongoing redefinition of parent-adolescent relationships (Smollar & Youniss, 1989). One key task of the adolescent period is identity formation and consolidation. During the senior year of high school, individuals must begin to make commitments to specific goals and pathways. With decisions to be made about future work and educational plans, adolescents frequently turn to their parents for advice. In two-parent families, the level of discussion with parents about academic and vocational plans is substantial (Hunter, 1985). How-

ever, noncustodial fathers are less likely than married fathers to be the primary target for discussions about school, careers, or feelings (Smollar & Youniss, 1985). Whether decreased opportunities for discussion are related to adjustment during late adolescence, and whether male or female adolescents are differentially affected by these differences, have not been explored.

This study considers two features of the father-adolescent relationship that are potentially important for late adolescent adjustment: (a) discussions with fathers about work, education, family plans, and personal problems; and (b) adolescents' satisfaction with the social support received from the father. The indicators of adjustment included in this study are self-assessments of self-esteem and depression. Research on these adjustment areas across family types has yielded conflicting results, leading researchers to focus on process issues in divorced families, as it is the differences between married and divorced families in parenting that are viewed as more valid predictors of adjustment than the family structure itself.

Based on previous research, it was predicted that the late adolescents in divorced families would report more depressed mood than those in two-parent families. Because few parental divorces for this sample were recent, and self-esteem differences, when found, have been shown to decrease over time, no differences were expected in self-esteem. Second, father-adolescent advice and support were expected to be lower in divorced families, and that difference was expected to mediate the relationship between divorce and depression. Finally, within the divorced group, it was predicted that patterns of visitation frequency would be related to adolescent adjustment and paternal relationships, with frequent-visit fathers providing more advice and support, and their adolescents reporting the best adjustment.

## METHOD

### *Sample*

The sample for this study was drawn from the 12th-grade data (Wave 6) in the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions (MSALT)—a six-wave, 7-year study designed to study the influence of normative and nonnormative transitions during adolescence. The MSALT began in 1983, when the participants were making the transition from sixth to seventh grade. The students were from communities in southeastern Michigan and represented a range of so-



cioeconomic and educational characteristics. This sample is representative of families in those communities with adolescents enrolled in 12th grade, and allows for the assessment of family structure differences in a nonclinical sample. In 1990, Wave 6 data were gathered from 1,145 students in the month prior to graduation from high school.

Of the students responding at the sixth wave, 28% indicated that their parents did not live together. Of that percentage, only those residing with their divorced, nonremarried mothers were included in the present analyses (there was a limited number of custodial single fathers). The final sample of 895 participants includes 784 children living with their married parents and 111 living with divorced single mothers. Of those with divorced mothers, 5 had experienced the divorce in the previous year, 25 had experienced divorce between 1 and 5 years earlier, and 77 had lived with a divorced single mother for more than 5 years. Data were incomplete for the remaining 4 students.

### Procedure

The student questionnaire was administered in a group setting in each of the eight high schools in May 1990. Twelfth-grade students in each school were excused from their regular classes and gathered in a cafeteria or auditorium. Based on pilot testing, the students were given up to 90 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Questionnaires and postage-paid return envelopes were sent to adolescents who had participated during previous waves of data collection but were absent on the day of the survey or had dropped out of school.

### Measures

Family structure was determined by responses to four items. The married group consisted of adolescents who reported that their parents were "married and living together" and that this has been their marital status for more than 15 years. The divorced group consisted of participants who reported that their parents were divorced, that they lived with their mothers, and that their mothers had not remarried.

Frequency of visitation was measured with the question "How often do you see the parent you do not live with?" Participants responded by selecting the category that came the closest to their situation: 1 = *frequently (3 to 4 days a week)*; 2 = *couple of days a week (or alternate weekends and once a week)*; 3 = *once a week*; 4 = *twice a month*; 5 = *only on holidays and vaca-*

*tions and for a week or two in the summer*; 6 = *about once a month*; 7 = *2 to 10 times a year*; 8 = *less than twice a year*; 9 = *never*. Where analyses are broken by frequency of visitation, *frequent* visitation was defined as twice or more per month ( $n = 48$ ), *infrequent* visitation was less than twice per month but more than never ( $n = 44$ ), and *never* ( $n = 19$ ). (None of the adolescents in the *never* group had parents who had divorced in the past year.) When compared to the visitation reported in 10th grade, visitation in 12th grade was quite stable (two thirds of variance in 12th grade visitation was explained by 10th grade visitation).

Student perceptions of their family and self-evaluations were assessed using 7-point Likert items. Scales were constructed based on theoretically driven factor analysis. For each scale, a mean was computed when a student had nonmissing data on two thirds or more of the individual items in the scale. All scales have a minimum value of one and a maximum value of seven.

*Self-processes.* The Self-Esteem scale consisted of the following three Likert-type items: "How often do you feel sure of who you are," "How often do you feel satisfied with yourself the way you are," and "How often do you feel good about yourself." The scale ranged from 1 = *never* to 7 = *daily*. Higher scores indicate greater self-satisfaction. Cronbach's alpha for Self-Esteem is .80.

*Internalizing problems.* The Depression scale consisted of four 7-point items about depressed mood, feelings of loneliness, loss or increase in appetite, and feelings that difficulties are too great to overcome ( $\alpha = .75$ ). Higher scores reflect more depressed mood.

*Advice.* Frequency of talking with fathers about (a) work and educational plans, (b) future family plans, and (c) personal problems were assessed with a scale ranging from 1 = *never* to 7 = *a lot*.

In addition, adolescents rated the extent to which the talks with fathers helped in making plans for education, job, and family and in solving personal problems from 1 = *never* to 7 = *a lot*. Factor analysis yielded a one-factor solution for paternal advice, combining frequency of talks with helpfulness of those talks. Generally, 12th graders who talk to their fathers about any of these topics talk to them about the others as well, and find those talks helpful. The alpha for this scale was .91.

*Satisfaction with support.* One 7-point item was used to measure the adolescents' satisfaction with the social support received from the father: "How satisfied are you with how supportive your father is?" Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction.

## RESULTS

The results are presented in three sections. The first section examines the direct relationship between family structure and adolescent adjustment, paternal advice, and support. After this examination of between-group differences, the second section focuses on whether differences in the family process variables (paternal advice and support) mediate the relationship between family structure and adjustment. The final section examines, in the subsample of adolescents from divorced families, individual differences in visitation with the noncustodial father and describes the nature of adjustment and paternal advice and support in three types of visitation patterns.

### Relation of Family Structure to Adjustment, Parental Advice, and Support

To control for the shared variance in the two adjustment measures (self-esteem and depression), a two-factor (family structure X adolescent gender) between-subjects multivariate analysis of

Table 1  
Means and Standard Deviations on Measures for Married and Divorced Families by Gender

Measures	Married		Divorced	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Depression				
Girls	3.71	1.11	4.02	1.26
Boys	3.11	1.10	3.56	1.29
Self-Esteem				
Girls	4.72	1.25	4.73	1.36
Boys	5.01	1.18	4.73	1.29
Father's Advice				
Girls	3.43	1.39	2.68	1.58
Boys	3.65	1.37	2.46	1.24
Satisfaction with Support				
Girls	4.99	1.88	3.48	2.27
Boys	5.01	1.78	3.17	2.12

variance (MANOVA) was used to test the first prediction. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations on these measures for girls and boys in married and divorced families. The MANOVA indicated a significant multivariate main effect for family structure (Wilkes criterion = .99),  $F(2, 856) = 5.39, p < .01$ . The main effect for gender was also significant (Wilkes criterion = .98),  $F(2, 856) = 10.65, p < .001$ . The family structure X gender interaction was not significant. The two self-ratings of adjustment were then analyzed in separate 2 X 2 (marital status X child gender) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to identify the source of the multivariate effects.

**Depression.** For Depression, there was a main effect for family structure,  $F(1, 853) = 9.96, p < .01$ , such that adolescents in divorced families reported feeling more depressed than those in married families. Girls also reported feeling more depressed than boys,  $F(1, 853) = 56.94, p < .001$ .

**Self-Esteem.** For Self-Esteem, there was a main effect for gender,  $F(1, 853) = 8.77, p < .01$ , with boys feeling better about themselves than girls. No significant difference in Self-Esteem was found between adolescents in divorced and married families.

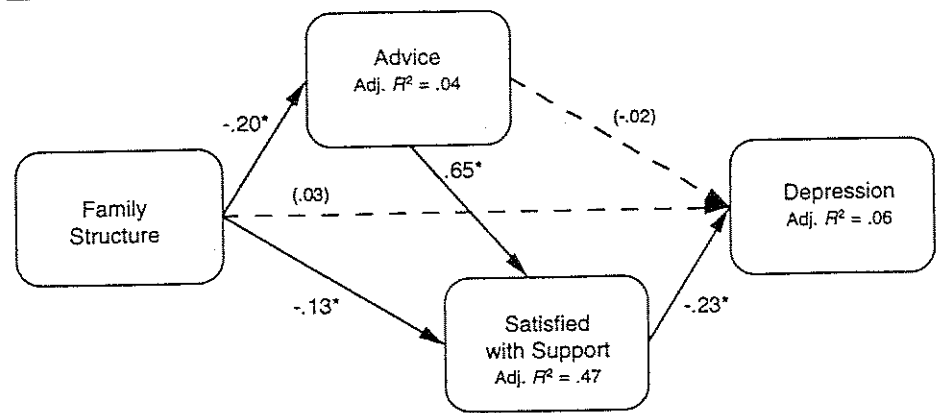
**Advice from father.** The next 2 X 2 ANOVAs examined whether there were differences in adolescent ratings of paternal practices between family types and between boys and girls. For Paternal Advice, there was a significant main effect for marital status,  $F(1, 752) = 29.09, p < .001$ . According to the adolescent reports, noncustodial fathers gave less advice than residential still-married fathers. There was no significant difference in the amount of advice reported by boys and girls, and no significant gender X family structure interaction.

**Satisfaction with father's support.** Adolescents in divorced-mother families reported less satisfaction with support received from their fathers than those in married families,  $F(1, 752) = 53.11, p < .001$ . No significant main effect for gender was found, and there was no interaction of gender X family structure.

### Advice and Support as Mediators of the Relationship Between Divorce and Adjustment

As expected, family structure was significantly related to depression and to two aspects of father-adolescent relationships. To test the hypothesis that differences in paternal advice and the adolescent's satisfaction with father's support mediated the differences in depres-

Figure 1. Predicting depression from adolescent reports of satisfaction with support from father, paternal advice, and family structure.



\* $p < .05$ .

sion between adolescents in divorced and married families, a regression analysis was conducted. To test for mediation, the following three steps suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) were followed: first, the mediator was regressed on the independent variable; second, the dependent variable was regressed on the independent variable; and third, the dependent variable was regressed on both the independent variable and the mediator. The results are presented in Figure 1. Significant paths are represented by solid lines, and paths that are not significant are indicated by dashed lines.

As indicated in the ANOVA results presented earlier, adolescents in divorced families had significantly higher scores on Depression than those in married families. This difference indicates a significant direct effect of family structure prior to the addition of mediating variables to the regression. Figure 1 shows the mediating role of father's advice and the adolescent's satisfaction with the support received from the father. The direct family structure effect on depression no longer remained statistically significant when advice and support were included in the regression. In other words, divorced fathers gave less advice about educational, occupational, and family plans; their adolescents were less satisfied with the support they received from their fathers; and these two parenting variables together accounted for the relationship between family structure and the adolescents' higher depression scores.

### Relation of Visitation Frequency to Adolescent Adjustment, Paternal Advice, and Support

The previous analyses examined whether differences between divorced and married father advice and support

account for the between-group differences in adolescent adjustment. A final set of analyses focused on the variability in divorced families and compared three divorced-family groups with the married group. ANOVAs were used to test for differences in adjustment and parenting across the four types of families (married, divorced-frequent visit, infrequent visit, never visit). Boys and girls were pooled to maintain acceptable cell sizes. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 2. When the omnibus test was significant, follow-up tests examined six pairs of comparisons: Married/Frequent, Married/Infrequent, Married/Never, Frequent/Infrequent, Frequent/Never, and Infrequent/Never. Those pairwise comparisons significant at the .05 level or lower are reported.

For self-esteem, there were no significant differences between the four groups. There was a significant difference between groups for depression,  $F(3, 857) = 7.55, p < .001$ , and pairwise comparisons showed that adolescents who never experienced father visits reported higher levels of depressed mood than those in married and frequent-visit families. Those who had infrequent contact with their fathers were also more depressed than those in frequent-visit and married families. There were no significant adjustment differences between adolescents from married families and those whose fathers visited frequently.

As expected, father visitation frequency was predictive of paternal advice,  $F(3, 755) = 19.50, p < .0001$ , and support,  $F(3, 757) = 27.92, p < .0001$ . Pairwise comparisons revealed that fathers who visited frequently, in addition to married fathers, were more involved in discussions about education, work, and family issues with their adolescents than those who never visited, or who visited infrequently. Frequent-visit fa-

Table 2  
Means and Standard Deviations on Measures By Frequency of Father Visitation

Measure	Frequency of Father Visitation							
	Never		Infrequent		Frequent		Married	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Depression	4.26	1.28	4.11	1.31	3.49	1.18	3.44	1.14
Self-Esteem	4.44	1.17	4.78	1.36	4.81	1.37	4.85	1.22
Father's Advice	1.00	0.00	1.98	1.06	3.32	1.47	3.53	1.38
Satisfaction with Support	1.17	0.41	2.48	2.00	4.36	2.03	4.98	1.83

thers did not differ significantly from married fathers in amount of advice, although adolescents were less satisfied with social support from frequent-visit fathers than from married fathers. Infrequent and never-visit fathers gave significantly less advice and had significantly less satisfied adolescents than married and frequent-visit fathers.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the differences between divorced and married families in late adolescent adjustment and paternal communication and support and to examine the extent to which any adjustment differences are attributable to mediating family processes. Differences in family structure were related to one of the two adolescent adjustment measures. Family structure was linked to depression, but not to self-esteem, for both boys and girls, with divorce predicting higher levels of depression.

The lack of difference between adolescents in married and divorced families in self-esteem may indicate that self-processes are less vulnerable to family structure effects than other measures of adjustment. In a divorced family, higher levels of depressed mood may reflect an accurate perception of difficult life circumstances. However, it is probable that adolescents can feel good about themselves while acknowledging the difficulty of the context in which they live. It should be noted that the level of distress reported by the adolescents in divorced families does not seem to reflect a clinically significant level of depression, as they score in the midpoint of the range on this measure.

The results also demonstrate that the communication and support of noncustodial fathers differs from that of residential married fathers. After divorce, fathers were giving less advice, it was less helpful, and their adolescents were less satisfied with the support they received. It should be noted that because no data were available from fathers, paternal involvement was reported only by the adolescents, as were the adjustment in-

dicators, potentially leading to concerns about shared method variance. However, the results are consistent with the existing body of evidence that contact with fathers after divorce declines (e.g., Furstenberg et al., 1983), and that adolescents have less positive relationships with noncustodial fathers (e.g., Smollar & Youniss, 1985). A unique contribution of this study is the focus on differences between family types in father-adolescent discussions about issues central to life plans in late adolescence, just prior to the transition out of high school.

When between-group differences are established, it is important not to be satisfied with only a social address explanation. The next step is to explore possible explanatory mechanisms. A central purpose of this study was to examine whether family processes can explain differences that would otherwise be attributed to family structure. Thus, after assessing main effects, two mediators were considered: paternal advice and adolescent satisfaction with the support they receive from their fathers. In combination, these two family process variables were found to be significant mediators of divorce-related differences in depression. Lower rates of talking with one's father and perception of less support were shown by path analyses to account for the higher depression of adolescents in divorced families. Following divorce, a father may have fewer opportunities to discuss important issues with his adolescent. This may be particularly true for fathers who visit with the adolescent infrequently.

Another key family process variable that emerged from this study was paternal visitation. As indicated in the analyses examining visitation patterns, those noncustodial fathers who maintain stable, frequent visitation, relative to those who do not visit frequently, provide more advice, and their adolescents are more satisfied with their support. Thus, noncustodial fathers can be supportive and remain involved in discussions about issues important to adolescents, and when fathers are, adolescents report lower levels of depression. Of course, always-married fathers do not uniformly

provide high quality parenting. Further research is needed to examine whether within-group variations in fathering affect adolescent adjustment similarly in divorced and married families (Clark & Barber, 1994).

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILY PRACTITIONERS

One of the implications of these findings is that intervention efforts with non-custodial fathers will be difficult, because of their limited involvement in the lives of their late adolescents. Perhaps fathers who live some distance from their adolescents could be encouraged to maintain regular phone contact, enabling them to provide advice and support more often. This involvement may reduce the depression reported by their adolescents. Efforts to improve the father-adolescent relationship after divorce could also focus on working with the adolescents, encouraging them to maintain contact with their fathers (particularly when there was not a negative relationship prior to the divorce). This approach may be most appropriate with older adolescents, who should have more power to decide how to spend their time and with whom, as well as more autonomy in transporting themselves between households. Of course, late adolescents may have limited time to invest in maintaining the relationships with their fathers, as they become more involved in peer-group activities, school, and/or employment (Dudley, 1991).

Taken together, the results from the path analyses and the descriptive information on visitation patterns suggest that the noncustodial father-adolescent relationship is related to postdivorce adjustment. Clearly, there is a group of fathers who have maintained a positive relationship with their adolescents, and when that is the case, their adolescents do not differ in levels of depression from those in continuously married families. These results indicate that practitioners should not assume that relationships with noncustodial fathers are unimportant. Late adolescents may have established greater autonomy and self-reliance in divorced households, but a positive connection to their father is a resource that could facilitate adjustment for some youth.

Practitioners who design prevention programs for children of divorce need to consider the relationship with the noncustodial parent. Wolchik and her colleagues include an emphasis on increasing contact with noncustodial fathers as

a presumed mediator of postdivorce adjustment in their Children of Divorce Intervention Program (Wolchik et al., 1993). The sessions for custodial mothers include information to increase awareness of the importance of the father-child relationship and present ways to reduce obstacles to the father maintaining contact. The results presented here support the inclusion of this type of material in programs for adolescents and their mothers as well as for younger children.

It is important to note that increased visitation per se is not necessarily recommended. Some adolescents may have negative views of their noncustodial father (e.g., Fine, Worley, & Schwebel, 1986). In addition, because the fathers in this study who visited frequently chose to do so, those families may differ in other important ways not examined here that would lead to positive adolescent adjustment. Subsequent research should assess whether increases in visitation frequency brought about by intervention efforts result in changes in adjustment. Program implementation and evaluation efforts that target such mediating processes will provide an important test of the mechanisms identified in survey-based divorce research.

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