The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study changed its name to The Future of Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS). Due to the issue date of this document, FFCWS will be referenced by its former name. Any further reference to FFCWS should kindly observe this name change.

THE INFLUENCE OF DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS ON FATHERS’ BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES

Center for Research on Child Wellbeing
Working Paper #01-10-FF

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The Influence of Depressive Symptoms on Fathers’ Behaviors and Attitudes

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Abstract

The present study examines the impact of young, poor, unwed fathers on their family by investigating the influence of depressive symptom frequency on fathers’ relationship with their children and partners. Couples from seven American cities with populations over 200,000 were recruited and interviewed about such areas of life as romantic and parental relationships, health, and employment at the hospital within 24 hours after the birth of their child. An Item Response Theory (IRT) within-group analysis of the 1,759 African-, Caucasian-, Hispanic-, Asian-, and Native American fathers in the study yielded a 3-class clustering of depressive symptoms. Class 1 fathers had the lowest frequency of depressive symptom expression; class 2 fathers had a low frequency; and class 3 fathers had low to medium rates of depressive symptoms. Multivariate statistics revealed that depressive class membership predicted domestic violence toward fathers’ partners but not affection toward their children. The importance of the parental behavior of teaching children about life, however, varied by class, with class 2 fathers most highly endorsing this behavior. Implications of young, unwed, poor fathers' behaviors and attitudes toward their children and romantic partners will be discussed in terms of men's contributions to family life.
The Influence of Depressive Symptoms on Fathers’ Behaviors and Attitudes

A current research trend in family studies involves investigation of men’s roles in family life. This expanding interest is partly fueled by societal concerns over increasing non-marital births, mother-only families, and welfare-dependent families. In addition, research is beginning to focus on men's increasing involvement in parenting, child rearing, and household maintenance tasks (Cazenave, 1979; Bowman, 1993; McAdoo, 1988). Although information exists about working- and middle-class fathers' depressive symptoms, involvement with their children, and familial role when unmarried, little information exists about young, unwed, and impoverished fathers. The overall paucity of research on young fathers certainly permeates this area of research, as it has only been recently that researchers have included young fathers as participants in research inquiry.

A variety of interpersonal relationships and institutional factors affect young fathers’ parental conduct. The ecological approach to understanding fathering behaviors highlights the importance of considering the larger social and interpersonal context within which a father’s relationship with his child is embedded. Typically, the most influential of these factors include the father-mother relationship, the involvement of the maternal and paternal grandparents of the child, peer pressures, and community or institutional supports or disincentives (Cervera, 1991; Christmon, 1990a; Lamb & Elster, 1986; Marsiglio, & Cohan, 1997; Roberts, 1998; Stier & Tienda, 1993). Each of these factors can exacerbate or minimize the stress felt by young fathers to negotiate parental obligations.

The connection between young fathers’ paternal behaviors and the quality of the mother-father relationship has been established through both qualitative and quantitative research. Allen and Doherty (1996) conducted in-depth interviews with young fathers regarding factors that influenced their paternal behaviors. A positive correlation was found between partner relationship
and father-child relationship. Fathers who reported amiable or sustained romantic relationships with the mother of their child reported the most substantial amount of participation in their child’s well-being and development. Quantitative research has supported this finding. In a study involving home observations of adolescent mothers, their partners (16-29 years of age), and their infants, Lamb and Elster (1985) found that the quality of the father-child interaction was significantly correlated with features assessing the quality of the mother-father, or partner, interaction. The same connection was not found between mother-child interaction and partner interaction.

In addition to societal and interpersonal factors, some individual factors, with varying degrees of relevance to broader societal and cultural level factors and subsequent paternal behaviors of young African American fathers, warrant mentioning. Among the factors found to be relevant to the extent of a father’s participation in his children’s lives are the father’s sense of self-esteem and his coping strategies when confronted with challenging circumstances. Extant research suggests a positive relationship between fathers’ self-esteem and paternal involvement. Christmon (1990a) conducted a study of 43 unmarried 15 to 21 year old African American to assess factors that influence the degree to which fathers are involved in their children’s lives. Findings revealed that self-image was significantly related to young fathers’ willingness to assume parental responsibility. A low sense of self-image often is exacerbated by young fathers’ fears of inadequacy and failure, as he recognizes that he cannot effectively care for his partner and child.

Strickland (1987) found that young unmarried expectant fathers reported a greater number of psychological and somatic symptoms of anxiety than did their older married counterparts. The psychological stresses that are present with premature transition into parenthood extend beyond those expected in a normative transition into this role. The adjustment of young males to fatherhood is a difficult process, and their premature role transition causes stresses and strains that compound pressures already present in adolescence and young adulthood. Stress may arise from
the physical demands of caring for a child, the emotional strain of assuming responsibility for the care and well-being of a child, the potentially strained relationships with one’s partner, and the limits placed on one’s social life and recreational activities (Belsky & Miller, 1986). In a study of young fathers ranging in age from 15 to 20 years, Miller (1994) found that a father’s relative level of stress had a negative impact on his paternal attitudes. Not surprisingly, some fathers find these stresses overwhelming, and accordingly, may react negatively by withdrawing from familial obligations. Ventura's (1986) comparison of the coping styles of mothers and fathers of 2 to 3 month old infants demonstrated that as a father’s anxiety and depression increases, he is less likely to seek social support and more likely not to assume responsibility for the pregnancy. Miller (1994) likewise concluded that heightened stress is associated with an increased belief that parenting is primarily a mother's responsibility. The stress of parenthood, additionally, may be related to a diminished sense of satisfaction with parenting activities (Minton & Pasley, 1996).

Effective coping strategies and cultural attributes are likely to contribute to a father’s resiliency and ability to sustain stresses while maintaining involvement with his family. At the individual level, paternal ego strength is associated with superior psychosocial adjustment and subsequent father involvement (Christmon, 1990a), and fathers are able to withstand threats to their ego through employing effective coping mechanisms. At the cultural level, adaptive cultural resources help to empower youth. Cultural strengths such as religiosity, family closeness, and para-kin friendships may encourage young fathers’ ability to persevere beyond great odds (Bowman, 1990, 1998). Accordingly, cultural values and resources that promote mastery of role barriers facilitate development and act as a psychological basis for coping with future strains (Bowman, 1998). Young fathers who are able to utilize strengths garnered from coping mechanisms at the individual level and employ resiliency nurtured through cultural resources may be better able to negotiate difficulties associated with major life roles.
The present study explores the impact of distress on father involvement by investigating the
effect of fathers’ depressive symptomatology on behaviors and attitudes toward their children
and partners. It is hypothesized that fathers in this population will have levels of depressive
symptoms similar to those of the national distribution (see Robins & Regier, 1991; Kessler,
McGonagle, Zhao, Nelson, Hughes, Eshleman, Wittchen, & Kendler, 1994; DSM-IV, 1994). The
symptoms will influence fathers such that higher frequency of depressive symptoms will foster less
positive fathering behaviors and attitudes and higher levels of domestic violence toward their
partners.

Method

Participants

Two thousand three hundred thirty-nine fathers (2,339) participated in the Fragile Families and
Child Well Being study of young, poor, unwed fathers in seven cities. Data were missing for 580 of
the fathers, and data from the remaining 1,759 fathers, thus, were used in the present study. Sixty-
three percent (63%) of the fathers are African American; 22% are Caucasian; 9% identify
themselves as other; 3% are Native American, and 2% are Asian American. The mean age of the
fathers is 27 years, and the ages range from 15 to 64 years. Ninety-two percent (92%) of the fathers
are under age 40. The mean education level of the fathers is completion of high school or a GED
program; 55% of the fathers attended high school, and 18% attended some college. The mean
annual income is $10,000-$15,000.

Measures

Depressive symptoms. The depressive symptom questionnaire was designed in accordance
with was derived from the depression interview of the Ecological Catchment Area Study (Robins &
Regier, 1991) and measures the number of days in the last week respondents experience depressive
feelings. For the present study, the responses were recoded into a four point scale as follows: 0 days = 0 None, 1-2 days = 1 Low, 3-5 days = 2 Medium, and 6-7 days = 3 High.

_Affection._ The level of affection fathers feel is important to show their children was obtained from the Fatherhood portion of the questionnaire. A continuous variable of affection was derived by conducting a principal components analysis of the question asking the importance of various parental behaviors. The behaviors in ascending order of affection are: providing regular financial support, serving as an authority figure and disciplinarian, providing direct care, protecting, teaching about life, and showing love and affection.

_Domestic violence._ Both parents were asked the frequency of their partner hitting or slapping them. The mothers’ report of violence and indication that violence was the reason she either did not currently or did not plan to live with or marry the father were used. The sample consisted of 2,339 mothers, and the responses were recoded dichotomously (yes or no).

**Procedure**

The Fragile Families and Child Well Being Project (McLanahan, Garfinkel, Brooks-Gunn, and Tienda, 1998) recruited couples from seven American cities with populations over 200,000—Baltimore, Maryland; Detroit, Michigan; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Newark, New Jersey; Oakland, California; Richmond, Virginia; and San Antonio, Texas—at the hospital within 24 hours after the birth of their child. The mothers and fathers were interviewed regarding their relationship with the co-parent, attitudes toward parenting, their health, education, and socioeconomic circumstances using the Survey of New Fathers.

Data obtained from the fathers was used in the present study. A cross-sectional examination of the self-report depressive symptom measure was conducted using the Windows-Mixed Item Response Analysis (WINMIRA) and the WINSTEPS Item Response Theory (IRT) statistical packages. In IRT, examinee trait parameters and item difficulties are on a common scale, and IRT
modeling, thus, facilitates a more item content-based interpretation of an examinee’s level of a latent trait. With respect to personality and attitude assessment, IRT-based psychometrics acknowledges the fact that personality tests perform differently for examinees of different trait levels (Embretson & Reise, 2000).

The Mixed Rasch Model was selected as the most appropriate method for classifying the sample into categories because it identifies latent classes, with distinct item difficulty parameters, that are required to fit the item response data. Using the Mixed Rasch Model, the WINMIRA statistical package searches for latent classes of respondents who are qualitatively different with respect to the latent trait, and estimates model parameters that classify the respondents (Embretson & Reise, 2000). The software was designed for categorical data analysis with the Latent Class Analysis and Mixed Rasch Models (Institute for Science Education, 1996). In WINMIRA, the Mixed Rasch Model is the integration of Latent Class Analysis (LCA) and the Rasch model, which is the one-parameter logistic model which estimates the probability of response based on trait level and item difficulty (Institute of Science Education, 1996; Embretson & Reise, 2000). The equation for the latent class structure is,

\[ P_{vi} = \sum \left[ \pi_g \exp(\tau_{vg} + \sigma_{ig}) / (1 + \exp(\tau_{vg} + \sigma_{ig})) \right], \]

where \( P \) is the response probability, \( \pi_g \) is the class size parameter, \( \tau_{vg} \) is a person’s ability, and \( \sigma_{ig} \) is the item easiness (Rost, 1990).

WINMIRA by Davier uses Conditional Maximum Likelihood (CML) estimation to estimate IRT item parameters. The CML only is applicable to Rasch models, and unknown trait levels are handled by expressing the response pattern probability without including the trait-level. To maximize the likelihood of the item response data, the Mixed Rasch Model parameters include class proportions and class specific item difficulties. The likelihood response pattern is reformulated to include the total score. The probability of a response pattern is a product of the probability of the
total score given the trait level and item parameters, and the probability of a response pattern given
the total score and item parameters. The formula is expressed as,

\[ P(X_s | \theta_s, \beta) = [P(r_s | \theta_s, \beta)] [P(X_s | r_s, \beta)], \]

where \( X_s \) is the response pattern, \( \theta_s \) is the trait level, \( \beta \) is
the item parameter vector, and \( r_s \) is the total score (Embretson & Reise, 2000).

Rasch analysis is a method for obtaining objective linear measures from ordered category
response observations. WINSTEPS is designed to construct Rasch measurement from a group of
persons’ responses to an item set. WINSTEPS provides a central estimate for each person measure,
item calibration, and rating scale category step calibration (Linacre, 2000).

The WINSTEPS program by Wright uses the Rating Scale Model (RSM) to place the trait levels
of the sample and the WAI item difficulties on the same scale. The RSM was selected because it is
appropriate for measures that use the same response format for all items. The RSM yields location
parameters for each item and assumes that a fixed set of rating points is used for the entire item
scale. The step difficulty, \( \delta_{ij} \), for each item is determined by the sum of the item location on the
latent scale, \( \lambda_i \), and the category intersection parameters, \( \delta_j \) (Embretson & Reise, 2000). The RSM
can be expressed as follows,

\[ P_s(\theta) = \frac{\exp \left\{ \sum_{j} \left[ \theta - \lambda_i + \delta_j \right] \right\}}{\sum \exp \left\{ \sum_{j} \left[ \theta - \lambda_i + \delta_j \right] \right\}}, \]

where \( \theta \) is the respondent’s trait level.

Results

WINSTEPS Analysis

The depressive symptom and feeling items fall within one standard deviation of the mean trait
level of depression, and many of the fathers are below the mean level of depression. Figure 1
illustrates these results. The majority of the sample responded consistently to the items, and items
that should have been endorsed strongly were.
Figure 1. Map of Fathers and Symptoms

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FATHERS MAP OF SYMPTOS

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2 + |

1 . + |

0 # +M |

-1 . + |

-2 . + |

-3 . +|

0 | S BOTHERED NO CONCENTRATE
1 | Q FEARFUL NO GOING
2 | M DEPRESSED SAD
3 | Q POOR APPETITE TALKED LESS

-1 | Q RESTLESS SLEEP

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The qualitative information provided at each point in an eight-point scale is less than that provided in a four-point scale. Recoding the responses into a four-point scale increases the amount of information between scale points, thereby increasing the meaningfulness of each point. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the increased information provided by the four-point scale. Figure 2 shows that the expected response choices for the four-point scale are more evenly spaced than are those for the eight-point scale. The proximity of responses 1 through 6 indicates that these choices do not distinguish well between the various frequencies of depressive feelings. The category response curves (CRC) presented in Figure 3 illustrate that the probabilities of responding to the choices in the four-point scale are more evenly dispersed than are the probabilities of responding to the choices 0-7. In the eight-point scale, only choices 0 and 7 have a high probability of response, while the probability of selecting 1-6 is virtually 0.

Figure 2. Expected Scores for Four- and Eight-Point Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPECTED SCORE: MEAN (&quot;.&quot; INDICATES HALF-SCORE POINT)</th>
<th>NUM SYMPTO</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 0 : 1 : 2 : 3 : 3</td>
<td>3 BLUES</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 0 : 1 : 2 : 3</td>
<td>3 LONELY</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 0 : 1 : 2 : 3</td>
<td>3 NO GOING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 0 : 1 : 2 : 3</td>
<td>3 FEARFUL</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 0 : 1 : 2 : 3</td>
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<td>0 0 : 1 : 2 : 3</td>
<td>3 SAD</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 0 : 1 : 2 : 3</td>
<td>3 POOR APPETITE</td>
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<td>0 0 : 1 : 2 : 3</td>
<td>3 TALKED LESS</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>0 0 : 1 : 2 : 3</td>
<td>3 BOTHERED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 0 : 1 : 2</td>
<td>3 NO CONCENTRATE</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 0 : 1 : 2 : 3</td>
<td>3 RESTLESS SLEEP</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 0 : 1 : 2</td>
<td>3 ALL WAS EFFORT</td>
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<td>7 TALKED LESS</td>
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<tr>
<td>0 0 : 1 : 2 : 3 : 7</td>
<td>7 NO CONCENTRATE</td>
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WINMIRA Analysis

The four-point scale data were fit to one, two, three, four, and five class models to determine the appropriate number of groups for the sample. The information criteria index (BIC) revealed that a
3-class model is the best fit for the data, and the class fit for the four-point scale improved upon the fit for the eight-point scale by an average of 23%. Table 1 represents the results of the class model fitting.

<table>
<thead>
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<td>-173404.96</td>
<td>37</td>
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<td>-16792.12</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>-16454.06</td>
<td>151</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>-16360.65</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Class 1 consisted of 1,259 (68%) of the fathers; 247 (16%) were in class 2, 253 (16%) of the fathers were in class 3. Negative tau location parameter values indicate that small raw total scores, and thus low depression, are more frequent for all classes of fathers. The fathers in class 1 have the lowest tau value, and class 3 fathers have the highest value. Raw scores also indicate that class 1 fathers report the lowest frequency of days experiencing depressive symptoms, ranging from 0 to 2 days. Class 2 fathers have low frequencies as well, experiencing between 1 and 2 days of depressive symptoms during a week. Class 3 fathers report low to medium—1 to 5 days—depressive symptom frequencies.

Sixteen percent of the fathers have the highest level of depressive symptoms, which is comparable to the prevalence of depression reported by various sources. The NIMH Epidemiologic Catchment Area (ECA) study (Robins & Regier, 1991) found that 6.4% of the population suffers from depression in their lifetime. The National Comorbidity Study (Kessler, et al., 1994) concluded that 17% of a civilian sample of United States persons ages 15 to 54 years had a history of major
depressive disorder in their lifetime, and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV, 1994) states that the lifetime risk for Major Depressive Disorder in male community samples is 5% to 12%.

In addition to actual class membership, WINMIRA also yields statistics on expected class membership, item discrimination, and ease of item endorsement. Expected class membership information is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Expected Class Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Expected Size</th>
<th>Actual Size</th>
<th>Mean Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Items with high discrimination are strong measures of the latent trait they are designed to measure, in that a respondent with a high value on the item tends to have a high level of the latent trait. Based on the three-class analysis, the most discriminating items for the sample pertain to feeling sad and feeling depressed, and the least discriminating items inquire about feeling fearful and that everything is an effort. Table 3 displays these results.

Table 3. Item Discrimination Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Label</th>
<th>Discrimination Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel sad?</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel depressed?</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel that you could not shake the blues even with the help of family or friends?</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel lonely?</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk less than usual?</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel you could not get going?</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Feel bothered by things that usually don’t bother you? | 0.23  
| Have trouble keeping your mind on what you are doing? | 0.15  
| Not feel like eating; your appetite was poor? | 0.13  
| Sleep restlessly? | 0.08  
| Feel that everything you did was an effort? | 0.06  
| Feel fearful? | 0.06  

The ease of item endorsement varies by class. The easiest item is the item that requires the lowest trait level of depressive feelings for endorsement, and thus, is the most frequently experienced. The most frequently experienced symptom for classes 1 and 2 is feeling that everything is an effort. The most frequently experienced symptom for the fathers in class 3 is sadness. The most difficult item is the item that requires the highest level of depressive feelings to endorse, and is experienced least often. The fathers in class 1 experience feeling depressed least often. An inability to get going is experienced least for class 2 fathers, and fathers in class 3 feel fearful least often.

Traditional statistical analyses provided additional information about the classes of fathers. The correlations between class, affection, domestic violence, and demographic characteristics are presented in Table 4. With respect to the demographics of the fathers, class membership predicts education and employment, but not race and income. Class 1 fathers had the highest level of education, and class 3 fathers had the highest report of current employment. The number of hours worked per week, however, did not vary by class. The fathers’ level of affection towards their children differed by education level, with the most affectionate fathers having the highest level of education and fathers who emphasize the importance of providing direct care to their children having the lowest education level. Table 5 presents the results.

Table 4. Correlations of Class membership, Affection, Domestic Violence, and Demographics
Class is a predictor of domestic violence, but the overall incidence of domestic violence in this sample is low. Four and one-half percent (4.5%) of the partners of class 2 and class 3 fathers reported domestic violence, and 2% of partners of class 1 fathers reported the violence. When considered as a single variable, class membership does not predict the level of affection the fathers show their children. The importance of the individual paternal behaviors, however, varied by class.

The importance of teaching children about life differed by class, and there is a trend toward the variation of financial support and love and affection by class. Class 2 fathers have the highest endorsement of the importance of teaching children about life, but only classes 1 and 3 differ significantly on this variable. Table 6 presents the regression analysis of domestic violence and affection, and Table 7 displays the ANOVA results of the individual paternal behaviors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>r²</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affection</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.004**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p< .05  ** p< .01  *** p< .001

Table 6. General Linear Model of Affection and Domestic Violence on Depression Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>r²</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular financial support</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>2.97*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Analysis of Variance of Class membership and Fathering Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>r²</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular financial support</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>2.97*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a 1= White, 2= Black, 3= Asian, 4= Native American, 5= Other
A paucity of information exists about young, poor, unwed fathers, and extant research compares these fathers to their older, middle class, and married counterparts. The intent of the present investigation was to explore within-group differences of young, poor, unwed fathers by classifying them into depressive symptom groups and determining the effect of the symptoms on their attitudes and behavior toward their children and partners. The results reveal that depression among the fathers is comparable to that found in the general population, and identifies three classes of depression: a very low symptom group that experiences symptoms 0 to 2 days per week, a low symptom group that experiences symptoms 1 to 2 days per week, and a low to medium symptom group that experiences symptoms 1 to 5 days per week.

In addition to the frequency with which they experienced depressive symptoms, the fathers also differed in terms of the symptoms themselves. Class 1 fathers felt burdened, but not sad. Fathers in class 2 felt burdened, but were not tired. Feeling sad was most definitive of class 3 fathers, and they experienced feeling fearful least often. Feeling burdened, or that all is an effort, did not distinguish class 1 and class 2, providing evidence of the symptom’s low discriminative ability. Feeling sad, conversely, differentiated class 3 fathers from the other fathers and class 1 fathers from class 2, indicating that sadness is an adequate measure of depression.

The fathers’ depressive feelings had some effect on their attitudes and behavior as a father and romantic partner. Class membership did not differentiate ethnicity and income, indicating that depression does not vary by race and income among this population of fathers. Education and
current employment, however, varied by class, suggesting that coping strategies may be more effective among more highly educated fathers. Class membership predicted domestic violence as well. Partners of class 3 fathers, or fathers with the highest frequency of depressive symptom expression, reported the greatest incidence of domestic violence, suggesting that depression is a risk for violence toward a romantic partner. Although class membership did not predict affection itself, class did predict particular parental attitudes. Class 2 fathers had the highest endorsement of the importance of teaching his child about life, which is one of the most affectionate behaviors assessed in the study. Class 3 fathers, conversely, had the lowest endorsement of the behavior. These findings suggest that experiencing some stress may help fathers recognize the importance of advising their children about life circumstances, but more severe depressive feelings may hinder fathers from engaging in affective interactions with their children.

Consistent with previous research, the results of the present study indicate that paternal distress negatively impacts fathers’ involvement in their families; yet, some degree of stress may be adaptive for fathers’ instruction of their children. Some limitations of the study, however, should be noted. Data were missing on 25% of the fathers, and skewness of the data contributed to small effect sizes. As the data were obtained from a national project, the father behaviors and domestic violence variables had to be derived from the extant questionnaire packet. While WINMIRA provides an informative analysis about class membership and item characteristics with respect to the latent trait of depression, some methodological limitations exist. A response of 0 on the depression scale indicates that the respondent did not experience a particular depressive symptom in the previous week. WINMIRA codes missing data as 0, possibly overestimating the number of fathers in the lowest depression class. Only 4% of the fathers, however, did not complete the depression questionnaire.
References


**Bowman, (1998).**

**Cazenave (1979).**


**Doherty, (1996).**


Miller, (1994).


Abstract

The present study examines the impact of young, poor, unwed fathers on their family by investigating the influence of depressive symptom level on the fathers’ relationship with their children and partners. The Fragile Families and Child Well Being Project (McLanahan, Garfinkel, Brooks-Gunn, and Tienda, 1998) recruited couples from seven American cities with populations over 200,000 at the hospital within 24 hours after the birth of their child. The current study is composed of the sample 1,759 African-, Caucasian-, Hispanic-, Asian-, and Native American fathers. The fathers have a mean age of 27 years, a mean education level of high school or a GED program, and a mean annual income is $25,000-$39,000. Depressive symptom, paternal behavior, and domestic violence variables were derived from the health, fatherhood, and relationship portions of the Survey of Young Fathers, respectively. Item Response Theory (IRT) was used to perform a within-group analysis of the fathers, and yielded a 3-class clustering of depressive symptoms. Class 1 fathers had the lowest levels of symptoms; class 2 fathers had low levels; and class 3 fathers had low to medium levels of depressive symptoms. Multivariate statistics revealed that depressive class membership predicted domestic violence toward their partners but not affection toward their children. The importance of the paternal behavior of teaching children about life, however, varied by class, with class 2 fathers most highly endorsing this behavior. Implications of young, unwed, poor fathers' behaviors and attitudes on involvement with their children and relationship with their partners will be discussed in terms of men's contributions to family life.