

**The Father-Child Relationship  
in Voluntary Paternity Acknowledgment Cases**

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### INTRODUCTION

This report examines the effect of voluntarily acknowledged paternity on the relationship between fathers and their nonmarital children in the two to five years after the child's birth. Previous research has shown the benefits of paternity establishment for nonmarital children, particularly in the area of financial support during their childhoods. Given this, policy makers have tried to improve the paternity establishment process, in part by establishing in-hospital and other voluntary procedures. The question addressed by this paper is whether voluntary paternity establishment is associated with differences in the father-child relationship in the early years of the child's life.

### BACKGROUND AND DATA

Following increases in nonmarital childbearing during the 1970s and 1980s, research began to show the benefits of paternity establishment for nonmarital children, particularly in the area of financial support (Garfinkel, McLanahan, and Robins, 1994). Pearson and Thoennes (1996, p. 44) list a number of additional benefits:

Paternity determination establishes the legal basis for claiming a variety of rights for children born out of wedlock—the ability to realize inheritance, survivor benefits through Social Security; worker's compensation benefits, if the father is injured on the job; education and health care, if the father is a member of the armed forces; and dependent benefits for health insurance, if the father has such coverage through an employer.

Paternity determination also has recognized medical benefits. Knowledge about potential inherited disorders allows appropriate medical care, as well as the possibility of the father being a life-saving donor of bone marrow or an organ in a medical emergency.

Finally, paternity establishment has a number of potential emotional and psychological benefits, including the opportunity to know family roots, to explore cultural and religious ties, and to establish a parent-child relationship and have access to the paternal family.

Efforts to increase the rates of paternity establishment led to the development of voluntary acknowledgement procedures in the 1990s to promote paternity establishment in the early days or weeks

of a child's life (Holcomb, Seefeldt, and Sonenstein, 1992; McLanahan, Monson, and Brown, 1992; and Adams, Landsbergen, and Hecht, 1994). During the first days and weeks of the child's life, the parents are often still in contact with each other; at-birth, in-hospital programs take advantage of bonds formed between parents and their newborn child to promote legal paternity establishment. The voluntary acknowledgment procedures also have the advantage of avoiding the judicial system.

Wisconsin began a trial in-hospital voluntary paternity acknowledgment program in 1993, which was subsequently expanded statewide. This program is currently referred to as the PATH (Paternity Acknowledgment Through Hospitals) program, although the voluntary paternity establishment process can also be completed through settings other than the birth hospital. Voluntary paternity acknowledgment has become popular with many parents and, by 1998, was the method of paternity establishment for approximately 42 percent of nonmarital children nationally (Turner, 2000). By 2001, it was the method used for over 48 percent of Wisconsin nonmarital children (Brown, Cook, and Wimer, 2005).

This report builds on previous work by Brown, Cook, and Wimer (2005) that used Wisconsin administrative data to examine child support and child placement outcomes for nonmarital children, according to paternity establishment type. That work found that, when there was a child support order in place, voluntary paternity fathers were more likely than adjudicated paternity fathers to pay formal child support. It also found preliminary evidence of an association between voluntary paternity establishment and shared physical placement, perhaps indicating stronger father-child bonds in these types of cases. This is consistent with work from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, which found that in-hospital voluntary paternity fathers were more likely than other paternity fathers to have visits or other contact with the nonmarital child (Garfinkel, Mincy, and Nepomnyaschy, 2003).

The current report uses parent survey data from a telephone interview conducted with a sample of parents from the Wisconsin Court Record Database (CRD), one of the administrative data sources used in the Brown, Cook, and Wimer report. The survey sample was drawn from cases in the CRD that had entered the Wisconsin court system between July 2000 and June 2001 (referred to as "CRD Cohort 21").

The survey sample consisted of 150 voluntary paternity acknowledgement (hereafter referred to as VPA) cases, and a comparison group of 150 adjudicated paternity cases.

The adjudicated paternity cases from the CRD had come to court for paternity adjudication, at which time issues of child support and child placement were also usually addressed. The VPA cases that are in the CRD and survey samples are a special subset of all VPA cases in the state: they are VPA cases that entered the court system for purposes of a child support or a child placement order weeks or months after filing the VPA form. In these cases, there is no relationship between paternity establishment and the purpose for the court hearing. VPA families not included in this sample are those who never entered the court system, and who are undoubtedly very different in several respects from the cases selected into the CRD and survey samples used in this analysis.

The survey, referred to as Parent Survey 5 (PS5), was conducted in the summer of 2004 with parents of children under the age of 6. The cases in the survey sample were selected from those in CRD Cohort 21 for which the physical placement order resulting from the first court appearance was either sole-mother placement or shared placement. Interviews were done with both mothers and fathers in these cases, and all analyses are weighted to account for nonresponse bias. The contact and response rates for fathers, however, were generally too low for reliable analysis, despite the use of weights.<sup>1</sup> The analyses in this report are therefore based on the mothers' responses to the survey: 82 mothers of paternity adjudicated children, and 76 mothers of VPA children.

Table 1 shows characteristics of the cohort, survey, and response samples from administrative data. These samples represent cases with nonmarital children under the age of 6, as of June 1, 2004.<sup>2</sup>

Table 1 indicates substantial differences between the adjudicated paternity cases and the VPA cases. In

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<sup>1</sup>Nonresponse weights were based on administrative data that measured fathers' income levels and rates of child support payments. Response rates were less than 30 percent for fathers in either group (those with mother-sole and those with shared placements) (Krecker, 2005).

<sup>2</sup>This date was chosen as the cut-off date for purposes of the PS5 survey.

**Table 1**  
**Characteristics of CRD Cohort 21 Nonmarital Cases**  
**with Paternity Child under the Age 6 at Time of PS5 Survey, by Paternity Case Type**

	Adjudicated Paternity Cases				Voluntary Acknowledgment Cases			
	(1) Cohort 21	(2) Survey Sample	(3) Mother Respondents	(4) Father Respondents	(5) Cohort 21	(6) Survey Sample	(7) Mother Respondents	(8) Father Respondents
N cases	422	150	82	34	269	150	76	39
Father's age at child's birth:								
Under age 20	16.88%	9.55%	10.47%	4.33%	16.61%	17.96%	11.58%	13.38%
Age 20–24	33.93	36.63	35.39	27.85	46.38	41.54	42.77	47.61
Age 25–29	22.81	27.59	28.71	54.21	20.45	20.81	25.32	22.10
Age 30 or over	26.38	26.23	25.44	13.60	16.56	19.69	20.42	16.91
Mother's age at child's birth:								
Under age 20	29.40	25.56	25.47	5.14	27.14	27.94	28.35	34.87
Age 20–24	42.97	47.60	36.88	50.31	44.72	43.60	42.98	27.90
Age 25–29	16.07	13.32	17.37	19.77	15.31	15.19	13.00	18.38
Age 30 or over	11.56	13.51	20.27	24.78	12.83	13.27	15.67	18.85
Sex of nonmarital child:								
Girl	42.11	49.92	50.17	54.29	45.50	50.05	54.16	49.08
Boy	57.89	50.08	49.83	45.71	54.50	49.95	45.84	50.92
Age of child at petition to court: <sup>a</sup>								
Not yet born	7.59	8.69	6.69	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
0–6 months	45.75	40.92	36.37	41.91	56.16	49.12	58.69	26.91
7–18 months	31.82	36.35	39.37	37.83	27.66	31.69	27.63	53.92
Over 18 months	14.84	14.04	17.57	20.26	16.17	19.19	13.68	19.16

(table continues)

**Table 1, continued**

	Adjudicated Paternity Cases				Voluntary Acknowledgment Cases			
	(1) Cohort 21	(2) Survey Sample	(3) Mother Respondents	(4) Father Respondents	(5) Cohort 21	(6) Survey Sample	(7) Mother Respondents	(8) Father Respondents
Parents had other children <sup>b</sup>								
Together	7.79	12.11	9.05	4.86	14.48	20.41	16.85	12.12
Mother had other children	20.07	17.58	13.59	30.54	3.09	1.17	1.16	2.34
Father had other children	28.34	29.76	25.79	19.07	15.90	18.47	20.15	16.33
Rural/urban location:								
Rural (non-SMSA)	7.42	7.12	7.95	10.72	13.79	11.95	12.77	13.09
Other urban	25.64	25.19	17.90	19.05	69.86	72.40	73.42	72.58
Milwaukee	66.94	67.69	74.15	70.23	16.35	15.66	13.80	14.33
Father's annual income: <sup>c</sup>								
None reported	33.95	35.32	30.39	47.41	17.54	21.04	17.31	6.93
\$1–18,000	50.81	51.05	52.39	40.06	49.84	47.87	51.91	64.65
Over \$18,000	15.25	13.63	17.22	12.53	32.63	31.08	30.78	28.42
Mother's annual income: <sup>c</sup>								
None reported	18.47	19.78	19.17	17.19	16.80	19.81	15.90	20.77
\$1–18,000	74.50	76.48	76.41	81.44	72.61	69.96	71.07	72.34
Over \$18,000	7.03	3.75	4.42	1.37	10.59	10.23	13.03	6.89
W-2 mother <sup>d</sup>	49.30	56.72	44.89	59.06	24.46	23.37	27.09	13.76
Child support order	83.50	83.43	80.91	95.32	82.61	82.67	78.84	86.40
Child support paid, if an order	60.12	60.01	54.56	64.29	75.76	76.98	73.06	64.88

**Note:** Missing cases are dropped from the calculation of percentages.

<sup>a</sup>Cases in this sample all had children under the age of 6 as of June 1, 2004, for purposes of the PS5 survey.

<sup>b</sup>At the time of the petition to court. Percentages in this set do not add to 100 since parents could have children together and each parent could also have children with other individuals.

<sup>c</sup>Incomes are from UI wage records in the four quarters prior to the petition to court.

<sup>d</sup>Mother had been on W-2 at some point prior to petition to court.

comparing column 1 (CRD adjudicated paternity cases) with column 5 (CRD VPA cases), we see that fewer adjudicated paternity parents already had another child together prior to the birth of the paternity child in question (7.8 percent compared to 14.5 percent). Also, far more adjudicated paternity parents had had children with other partners (20 percent compared to 3 percent of VPA mothers, and 28 percent compared to 16 percent of VPA fathers). Rural/urban location is the factor that most distinguished adjudicated paternity cases from VPA cases: 67 percent of adjudicated paternities from the CRD sample of children under age 6 in 2004 were in Milwaukee County, whereas only 16 percent of VPA cases were in Milwaukee County. Other differences appear in income levels of the parents: 15 percent of adjudicated fathers reported having an annual income of more than \$18,000, compared to about 33 percent of VPA fathers. Forty-nine percent of adjudicated mothers were on W-2 at some point prior to entering the court system, compared to only 24 percent of VPA mothers. Child support orders were at about the same level in both types of cases (about 83 percent), but payments in these cases were made in only 60 percent of the adjudicated cases, compared to over 75 percent in the VPA cases. The results of the survey will be examined with these differences in case and family characteristics taken into account.

## RESULTS

The remainder of this report focuses on comparisons, drawn from survey responses, between cases in which paternity was voluntarily acknowledged and those in which paternity was adjudicated. Because the survey asked questions of a sample of cases, we use statistical tests to determine if the characteristics of those with voluntary adjudications were different enough from the characteristics of adjudicated cases to be likely to be more than coincidence.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Since our samples are small, we use a threshold of 10 percent ( $p < 0.10$ ) as the test to determine if the characteristics of the voluntary acknowledgement and adjudicated cases are different enough to be anything more than coincidental differences in sample selection.

### Type of Paternity Establishment

Before examining post-paternity establishment father-child relationships, we begin our analysis with the parents' relationship at or before the birth of the child, and the type of paternity establishment method chosen. Although the CRD court-based sample is not the best population to use for analyzing the type of paternity establishment, because an undetermined percentage of voluntary acknowledgment parents never enter the court system, we believe that the information we have for this sample may provide some insight into this process.

Since the parents' relationship at, or prior to, the birth of the child may well be related to the method of paternity establishment chosen, we asked the parents in the PS5 survey to give us retrospective reports on various aspects of their relationship prior to and around the time of the child's birth. Mothers were asked about their own relationship with the father in the six months before the birth of the child. They were asked whether or not the father had visited them in the hospital at the time of the birth, and whether they had given the child the father's surname, or a combination of both their own and the father's surname. They were also asked at the time of the child's birth how involved they had wanted the father to be in making decisions about the child's everyday life in the coming years. In addition, they were asked about the educational level achieved by both parents at the time of the child's birth. This demographic characteristic is not usually available in the CRD administrative data.

Mothers' responses to the above questions are reported on Table 2. The responses to these questions by mothers vary in several ways according to the subsequent method of paternity establishment. However, none of the differences reported in Table 2, except for whether the father visited the mother and the child in the hospital, are statistically significant. Thus, it may be that other differences shown between the groups are a matter of coincidence. Alternatively, our inability to discern differences may reflect the relatively small sample sizes. Given the lack of statistical significance, we note the differences so as to highlight factors that might be considered in future analyses and perhaps confirmed with larger sample sizes. Table 2 reports that VPA mothers indicated that they tended more often to be "just friends" or to

**Table 2**  
**Mothers' PS5 Survey Responses to Retrospective Questions**  
**on Events around the Time of the Child's Birth, by Paternity Case Type**

	Adjudicated Paternity Cases	Voluntary Acknowledgment Cases
N Cases	82	76
Relationship with father in the 6 months prior to child's birth:		
Hardly ever or not talking	20.50%	10.10%
Just friends or on/off	18.58	32.24
Romantically involved	20.34	20.54
Living together	40.58	37.12
Father visited mother and child in hospital at birth*	62.39	84.16
Child was given father's last name <sup>a</sup>	59.51	71.83
Mother's desired involvement of father in child's life:		
Not at all involved	5.03	10.01
Not very involved	1.47	2.42
Somewhat involved	12.93	16.06
Very involved	80.57	71.50
Father's education:		
High school or less	91.78	85.54
More than high school	8.22	14.46
Mother's education:		
High school or less	78.35	67.60
More than high school	21.65	32.40

\*Statistically significant difference ( $p < .10$ ).

**Note:** Percentages are weighted for sample and nonresponse bias.

<sup>a</sup>Father's last name includes mother and father hyphenated surnames.

have an “on-again, off-again” relationship prior to the birth of the child (32 percent), compared to adjudicated paternity mothers (under 19 percent); adjudicated paternity mothers more often reported a lack of ongoing relationship with the father than VPA mothers (20 percent compared to 10 percent who were “hardly ever or not talking”). Both groups of mothers reported being romantically involved (about 20 percent) or living with (37–40 percent) the father at about the same rates. More VPA fathers visited the mother and child at the hospital (84 percent), compared to men who were later adjudicated to be the father of the child (62 percent). More VPA children were given their father’s surname (72 percent), compared to children who later had paternity adjudicated (under 60 percent). On the other hand, mothers of children with adjudicated paternity more often reported that at the birth of their child they had wanted the father to be very involved in decision-making about the child’s everyday life in the coming years (81 percent), compared to VPA mothers (72 percent). In terms of education, mothers generally reported that they had more post-high-school education than did the fathers of their children. And VPA mothers reported that both they and their children’s fathers had more post-high-school education than adjudicated paternity mothers.

Table 3 shows the results of two logistic regression models estimating the likelihood of voluntary paternity acknowledgment of the child (as opposed to adjudicated paternity), controlling for a number of variables from the administrative data and mothers’ survey responses that may be related to the type of paternity process chosen. The first column shows estimates using only variables that we have available from the CRD administrative data. The second column adds mothers’ PS5 survey responses to questions about their relationship with the father prior to or at the time of the birth, and about the parents’ educational levels. All tests of statistical significance were at the threshold of 10 percent ( $p < 0.10$ ), and model results are weighted to account for sample selection and non-response bias.

Model 1 in Table 3 indicates that the only variable significantly associated with VPA paternity establishment is “other urban” location within Wisconsin, compared to Milwaukee County. In Model 2 of Table 3, additional variables are added from mothers’ survey responses. In this model, “other urban”

**Table 3**  
**Logistic Regression Estimates of VPA Paternity Establishment**

	Model 1 Administrative Data Only			Model 2 Administrative and PS5 Survey Data		
	Coefficient	S.E.	Pr>ChiSq	Coefficient	S.E.	Pr>ChiSq
Intercept	-1.0725	0.5974	0.0726	-2.4443	1.1548	0.0343
Father age 25 or over at child's birth	-0.2964	0.6649	0.6558	-0.1456	0.7554	0.8472
Mother age 25 or over at child's birth	-0.2074	0.7833	0.7912	-0.6328	0.9014	0.4826
Nonmarital child is a boy	-0.1328	0.5708	0.8160	-0.3614	0.6567	0.5821
Parents had other children together	0.8991	0.9077	0.3219	0.6749	1.0579	0.5235
Mother had other children	-1.5659	2.2407	0.4846	-0.6156	2.1781	0.7775
Father had other children	0.3652	0.7740	0.6370	0.5252	0.9585	0.5837
Rural/urban location:						
Rural (non-SMSA)	0.3286	0.5398	0.5427	0.0806	0.6347	0.8989
Other urban	1.4231	0.3988	0.0004*	1.6719	0.4837	0.0005*
Milwaukee (omitted category)						
Father's income: <sup>a</sup>						
None reported	-0.0030	0.5089	0.9953	0.1341	0.5857	0.8189
\$1-18,000	-0.2357	0.3956	0.5514	-0.1261	0.4452	0.7770
Over \$18,000 (omitted category)						
Mother's income: <sup>a</sup>						
None reported	-0.3315	0.5823	0.5691	-0.3713	0.6786	0.5843
\$1-18,000	-0.2633	0.4515	0.5599	-0.5004	0.5200	0.3359
Over \$18,000 (omitted category)						
W-2 mother <sup>b</sup>	-0.8868	0.6452	0.1693	-1.1236	0.7217	0.1195

(table continues)

**Table 3, continued**

	Model 1			Model 2		
	Administrative Data Only			Administrative and PS5 Survey Data		
	Coefficient	S.E.	Pr>ChiSq	Coefficient	S.E.	Pr>ChiSq
<b>From Mother's Survey Reports:</b>						
Relationship prior to birth of child:						
Hardly ever or not talking				-0.3880	0.8237	0.6376
Just friends, on/off relationship				1.0796	0.6095	0.0765*
Romantically involved				-0.2752	0.6898	0.6899
Living together (omitted category)						
Father visited child in hospital				2.0828	1.0281	0.0428*
Child was given father's last name				0.1651	0.8780	0.8509
Mother desired father's involvement <sup>c</sup>				-0.1923	1.0701	0.8573
Father's education more than high school				0.7315	0.9777	0.4544
Mother's education more than high school				0.4115	0.7623	0.5895

\*Statistically significant (p<0.10)

<sup>a</sup>Income is from UI wage record data in the 4 quarters prior to the petition to court.

<sup>b</sup>Mother had been on W-2 at some point prior to petition to court.

<sup>c</sup>Mother "very much" desired father's involvement.

location continues to be positively associated with VPA paternity establishment. Mothers' reports of fathers visiting the mother and child in the hospital at birth and the relationship between the parents prior to the child's birth that the mother characterized as "just friends" or "on-again, off-again" are also positively associated with VPA. That fathers who visit their child in the hospital are more likely to establish paternity through VPA makes sense if these fathers are more likely to receive information about the benefits of voluntary paternity acknowledgment and the forms necessary for signing and filing. The finding that mothers who had only a "just friends" relationship with the father were more likely to establish paternity through the VPA process seems odd. However, we must bear in mind that these are cases that ended up in the Wisconsin court system. Many of the VPA parents who were living together at the time of the child's birth may have continued to cohabit or to have married, and therefore have not entered the court system for child support or child placement orders. Mothers in our court-based sample who reported living with the father at the time of the child's birth may have expected to continue cohabiting with, or to marry, the father and therefore did not think the VPA process necessary at the time of the child's birth; these mothers may then be more likely to have paternity adjudicated through the court system. Mothers who were "just friends" may not have expected to cohabit or marry, and therefore may have been more interested in getting paternity established through the relatively "friendly" VPA process soon after the child's birth.

Since mothers' reports that the father visited the newborn child in the hospital appears associated with a VPA outcome, and since location was also an important factor in VPA outcomes, Table 4 presents information on hospital visits and recollection of PATH information provided by the hospital by location. None of the differences noted in Table 4 (or in Table 5, discussed below) are statistically significant. Thus, as in the discussion of Table 2, it may be that the differences shown between the groups are a matter of coincidence or, alternatively, a reflection of the relatively small sample sizes. Given the lack of statistical significance, we note the differences in Tables 4 and 5 so as to highlight factors that might be considered in future analyses and perhaps confirmed with larger sample sizes.

**Table 4**  
**Mothers' PS5 Survey Responses Concerning Hospital Experiences, by Location**

	Rural Counties	Urban Counties	Milwaukee County
N cases	40	84	34
Father visited mother and newborn child at the hospital			
No	39.13%	37.80%	32.70%
Yes	60.87	62.20	67.30
Parents given information on VPA at the hospital			
No	44.60	28.84	40.19
Yes	55.40	71.16	59.81

**Note:** Percentages are weighted for sample and nonresponse bias.

**Table 5**  
**Mothers' PS5 Survey Responses Concerning Cohabitation/Marriage History, Father's Time with the Child, and Informal Support, by Paternity Case Type**

	Mother Respondents	
	Adjudicated Paternity	Voluntary Acknowledgment
N Cases	82	76
Cohabitation/marriage history with child's father:		
1. At the birth of the child:		
Not cohabiting	59.42%	62.88%
Cohabiting	40.58	37.12
2. In years between child's birth and time of survey:		
Never cohabited	46.89	38.82
Cohabited, never married	49.47	50.61
Married	3.64	10.56
3. At the time of survey:		
Not cohabiting	90.21	77.25
Cohabiting, not married	6.25	13.78
Married	3.54	8.97
Mother's current cohabitation/marriage status:		
Never married and not cohabiting	60.20	46.71
Divorced/separated and not cohabiting	5.67	10.17
Cohabiting with someone else	17.95	14.06
Married to someone else	6.93	6.30
Cohabiting with child's father	6.25	13.78
Married to child's father	3.54	8.97
Time Father spent with the child in 2003:		
Spent no time with child in 2003	35.26	21.55
Spent 1–10 percent time with child	32.18	22.31
Spent 11–30 percent time with child	14.34	15.24
Spent more than 30 time with child	8.43	18.14
Lived with mother and child	9.79	22.75
Father provided informal child support in 2003	26.27	38.94

**Note:** Percentages are weighted for sample and nonresponse bias.

The mothers' reports in Table 4 indicate that fathers in Milwaukee County are slightly more likely to visit the mother and child at the birth hospital than fathers in other urban areas or in rural counties, at rates of 67.3, 62.2 and 60.9 percent, respectively. We asked mothers if they recalled that information on VPA was provided to them at the birth hospital. Mothers' recollection of hospital-provided VPA information is higher in the "other urban" hospitals: 71.2 percent, compared to 59.8 percent in Milwaukee County and 55.4 percent in rural counties. (Mothers' recollection of VPA information provided by hospital staff did not appear, however, associated with a VPA outcomes in alternative logistic regression models [not shown] in which an indicator for "recall of PATH information provided" was added to the list of independent variables.)

#### Subsequent Marriage or Cohabitation

Table 5 presents information from mothers' survey responses about the current situation of the parents and child and on the cohabitation and marriage history of the parents. The first panel shows information regarding the relationship between the child's mother and father at three time periods. At the birth of the child, over 40 percent of the later adjudicated parents were living together, and about 37 percent of the VPA parents were living together. Later, at some point between the time of the child's birth and the PS5 survey, about one-half of both sets of parents cohabited for some period of time. It was also during this time that all of these parents entered the court system for child support or child placement orders and, in the case of the adjudicated cases, for paternity establishment. The cohabitation period could have been before or after the court appearance. At some point after entering the court system, a little over 3 percent of the adjudicated parents married, and more than 10 percent of the VPA parents married. By the time of the PS5 survey, conducted in the summer and fall of 2004, about 10 percent of the adjudicated parents were living together or married. In contrast, almost 23 percent of the VPA parents were living together or were married.

The second panel in Table 5 shows information about the mothers' current cohabitation or marriage status, and includes marriage or cohabitation with someone other than the father of the

nonmarital child. More adjudicated mothers than VPA mothers indicated that they were never married and not cohabiting (60 percent, compared to 47 percent). And slightly more adjudicated mothers were living with or married to someone other than the father (about 25 percent), compared to VPA mothers (about 20 percent).

#### Father's Time Spent with the Nonmarital Child in 2003

Table 5 also presents mothers' responses to questions about how much time the father spent with the child in 2003, the year prior to the survey. The first category includes cases in which the mother indicated that the father had not seen the child in the previous year. The next three categories were based upon mothers' estimates of the number of overnights that the father spent with the child. Adjustments for "equivalent care" were made to this count if the mother indicated that the child spent few overnights with the father, but a substantial number of days.<sup>4</sup> The fourth category includes all levels of care that would be considered at the "shared placement" level of over 30 percent of the child's time, and also includes one case in which the father had sole physical placement of the child at the time of the survey. The final category includes all cases in which the mother and father lived together or were married at the time of the survey. The information presented in this table indicates that fathers in VPA cases spent more time (although the difference is not statistically significant) with their children than adjudicated fathers. For example, about 22 percent of VPA fathers had not seen their nonmarital child in 2003, compared to over 35 percent of the adjudicated fathers. However, since VPA and adjudicated cases differ in some other ways, it is possible that any differences suggested in this table are a result of other underlying factors.

Table 6 presents two models estimating mothers' reports of fathers spending more than 10 percent time with their nonmarital child. The first model includes all cases, and categorizes fathers who

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<sup>4</sup> The basic adjustment was to count the number of overnights spent with the father, or one-half the number of days, whichever was greater.

**Table 6**  
**Logistic Regression of Father Spending More than 10 Percent Time with Child in 2003, According to Mothers' PS5 Survey Reports**

	Model 1 Including Reconciled Cases (N=158)			Model 2 Excluding Reconciled Cases (N=136)		
	Coefficient	S.E.	Pr>ChiSq	Coefficient	S.E.	Pr>ChiSq
Intercept	-3.3003	0.9646	0.0006	-3.4619	1.2206	0.0046
Type of paternity establishment:						
VPA	0.444	0.6306	0.4813	-0.1497	1.2206	0.0046*
Adjudicated paternity (omitted category)						
Father age 30 or over	-0.2705	0.6041	0.6544	0.3052	0.7255	0.8366
Mother age 30 or over	-0.1356	0.6211	0.8272	-0.2093	0.7104	0.6675
Boy children <sup>a</sup>	0.9048	0.5094	0.0746*	1.0736	0.7218	0.7718
Father's 2003 UI income:						
None reported	-1.3072	0.3460	0.0002*	-1.2183	0.6231	0.0849*
\$1–18,000	-0.0957	0.3229	0.7669	-0.5943	0.4175	0.1546
Over \$18,000 (omitted category)						
Mother's 2003 UI income:						
None reported	-0.0216	0.4922	0.9650	-0.5109	0.6241	0.4130
\$1–18,000	0.2981	0.3610	0.4090	0.6114	0.4742	0.1973
Over \$18,000 (omitted category)						
<b>From Mother's Survey Reports:</b>						
Relationship prior to birth of child:						
Hardly ever or not talking	0.4244	0.7086	0.5492	-0.7571	0.9352	0.4182
Just friends, on/off relationship	-0.6466	0.5086	0.2036	0.0093	0.5819	0.9872
Romantically involved	0.9934	0.4805	0.0387*	1.2827	0.5875	0.0290*
Living together (omitted category)						

(table continues)

**Table 6, continued**

	Model 1 Including Reconciled Cases (N=158)			Model 2 Excluding Reconciled Cases (N=136)		
	Coefficient	S.E.	Pr>ChiSq	Coefficient	S.E.	Pr>ChiSq
Father visited child in hospital	2.0542	0.7550	0.0065*	2.1255	0.8729	0.0149*
Child was given father's last name	1.0172	0.6904	0.1407	0.9253	0.7734	0.2315
Mother desired father's involvement	0.0815	0.6454	0.8995	-0.4728	0.7971	0.5531
Father's education more than high school	-0.1609	0.5583	0.7731	-0.6261	0.6886	0.3632
Mothers education more than high school	0.6859	0.5833	0.2396	0.4406	0.6699	0.5107
Mother is married/cohabiting with another man				0.0295	0.6769	0.9652

\*Statistically significant (p<0.10)

<sup>a</sup>Nonmarital child or any full siblings are boys.

live with the mother and child as “over 10 percent of time.” In this model, controlling for other factors, the VPA status of the case does not appear significantly related to fathers spending more time. Factors which do appear positively related to fathers spending more time are boy children in the family (including the nonmarital child and any full siblings born as of the survey date), the parents being “romantically” involved prior to the birth of the child (as opposed to the mother having “lived with the father”), and the father having visited the mother and child in the hospital at the time of the child’s birth. Fathers’ incomes at the “none reported” level are negatively associated with spending time with the child. This association might be explained, in part, by fathers who have moved out of state, and therefore no longer live near their child, and whose wages are not reported in the Wisconsin UI wage record data. This could also include cases with incarcerated fathers who are not able to visit their children, and who have no wages to be reported.

The second model in Table 6 excludes cases in which the parents live together. One additional variable is included from the mothers’ survey reports: an indicator if her current living situation includes cohabiting with or married to someone else. In this model the association with boy children in the family goes away, but the other three significant relationships from the first model in Table 6 remain.

### Informal Child Support

In the PS5 survey the payment of informal child support was measured by asking questions about the father’s direct payment of expenses for clothing or shoes, educational supplies and activity fees, health insurance or medical fees. No questions were asked about his providing cash, money for rent or utilities, or groceries. Therefore the measure of informal support from the PS5 survey may be undercounting the cases in which informal support was provided. Based on the questions in the survey, about 26 percent of adjudicated mothers indicated that informal support was provided by the father, whereas 39 percent of VPA mothers indicated that informal support was provided.

Table 7 shows the results of the logistic regression estimates of father’s providing informal child support. When controlling for other factors, VPA cases do not show a significant relationship with

**Table 7**  
**Logistic Regression of Father Providing Informal Child Support in 2003,**  
**According to Mothers' PS5 Survey Reports (N=36)**

	Coefficient	S.E.	Pr>ChiSq
Intercept	-2.4847	1.1027	0.0242
Type of Paternity establishment:			
VPA	-0.0427	0.7815	0.9564
Adjudicated paternity (omitted category)			
Father spent more than 10 percent time with child	2.4932	0.6911	0.0003*
Father age 30 or over	-0.8316	0.7493	0.2671
Mother age 30 or over	-2.3236	0.8277	0.0050*
Boy children <sup>a</sup>	0.1347	0.6052	0.8239
Father's 2003 UI income:			
None reported	0.3587	0.3953	0.3642
\$1-18,000	-0.0666	0.4307	0.8771
Over \$18,000 (omitted category)			
Mother's 2003 UI income:			
None reported	-0.4086	0.5490	0.4568
\$1-18,000	-0.7735	0.4956	0.1186
Over \$18,000 (omitted category)			
<b>From Mother's Survey Reports:</b>			
Relationship prior to birth of child:			
Hardly ever or not talking	0.6028	0.7511	0.4223
Just friends, on/off relationship	0.5033	0.5474	0.3579
Romantically involved	0.3020	0.5602	0.5898
Living together (omitted category)			
Father visited child in hospital	0.9352	0.8781	0.2869
Child was given father's last name	-0.7244	0.7688	0.3461
Mother desired father's involvement	1.0816	0.8287	0.1918
Father's education more than high school	-0.0531	0.6765	0.9374
Mother's education more than high school	1.1426	0.6455	0.0767*
Mother is living with or married to someone else	-0.1150	0.6917	0.8679

\*Statistically significant (p.<0.10)

<sup>a</sup>Nonmarital child or any full siblings are boys.

provision of informal support. The clearest association is with fathers who are also spending more than 10 percent time with the child. Two variables relating to mothers' demographic characteristics indicate a significant association with informal support. More educated mothers are more likely to have informal support paid, and older mothers are less likely to have informal support paid by the fathers.

## SUMMARY

This is an exploratory study of some factors that might be associated with increased fathers' time with and attention to nonmarital children. Although the sample is small, and the VPA sample is court-based, the results show some interesting patterns of fathers' relationships with children in their early years of life. The VPA process is a friendlier approach to paternity establishment than adjudication. However, the VPA sample in this analysis was drawn from a subset of VPA parents who had subsequently appeared in court for child support or child placement orders. When controlling for other variables in this court-based VPA sample, VPA does not appear to be significantly and positively related to time spent with the child or the provision of informal child support.

One factor that does stand out in terms of positive association with time spent with the child was the father's visit to the mother and newborn child in the hospital. This was related both to a VPA outcome and to time spent with the child 2–5 years later. Another finding provides some indication that fathers spend more time with their sons than their daughters. Perhaps these factors all point to an opportunity for a positive impact on children's lives by increasing parenting education (reading material or parenting classes) around the time of the child's birth—particularly on the subjects of children's need (both boys and girls) for a father's time and attention, as well as financial support.

One of the few variables having a positive association with VPA outcomes was residence in "other urban" areas of Wisconsin (Table 3). Moreover, although these differences were not statistically significant, more mothers in "other urban" locations recalled receiving VPA information at the time of the birth. It may therefore be that PATH program enhancement in Milwaukee County hospitals and in hospitals serving the rural population could increase the rates and the benefits of voluntary paternity

acknowledgment throughout the state. Since fathers in the rest of the state appear to visit their newborn children no less than fathers in “other urban” locations, this may be a promising area of concentration for increasing voluntary paternity acknowledgment rates for children in Wisconsin.

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