

Fatherhood after union breakup in Uruguay: A transitory or a life-long commitment?

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Background

- One of the most important consequences of parental separation is the weakening effect it has on father-child contact and on fathers' involvement in childrearing. Increasing rates of parental separation have led to concerns about the negative impact of father's absence from the household on children's wellbeing.
- Father-child contact and financial transfers after marital separation are widely researched topics in the More Developed Countries since the 1980s – particularly in the United States–, but there is very little research on the relationships between non-resident parents and children in Latin America. This is highly problematic, as the proportion of families headed by women is remarkably high in the region.

Latin American context

- Children born outside marriage currently outnumber those within marriage in Latin America. Though the majority of nonmarital births are born to cohabiting parents, the proportion of children born to women with no coresident partner has increased to 15% in the region (*Laplante et al. 2015*).
- The historically high prevalence of cohabitation and its more recent rise have contributed to increasing union disruption. As a result, the proportion of families headed by women has become even more widespread over the past decade, and an increasing proportion of children are growing up in father-absent households, which are disproportionately poor.

Uruguayan context

- Major changes in family dynamics over the past two decades**
 - Large increase in cohabitation among young couples.
 - Large proportion of out-of-wedlock births: 70% in 2010.
- High level of union dissolution**
 - Uruguay: First Latin American country to pass a divorce law (1907).
 - Union breakups have increased markedly among married and cohabiting couples since the 1990s (*Cabella 2009*).
 - One-third of marriages end in divorce and 36% of children aged 0 to 18 live with only one parent (*Cabella, Fernández and Prieto 2015*).
- Men's limited attachment to the paternal role after separation**
 - Around 56% of non-resident fathers do not comply with child-support payments (*Bucheli and Vigorito 2017*).
 - Nearly one-third of children under age 4 do not maintain any contact with their fathers.

General objectives

- To explore the association between pre-separation and post-separation father's involvement with their child(ren).
- To examine patterns and factors influencing father-child relationships after union break-up.

Research question

- Does the nonresident father's contact and involvement with the child differ according to his pre-separation fathering practices?**
 - Hypothesis:** Fathers who were more engaged in childcare before separation will be also more engaged in their children's upbringing after separation.

Data

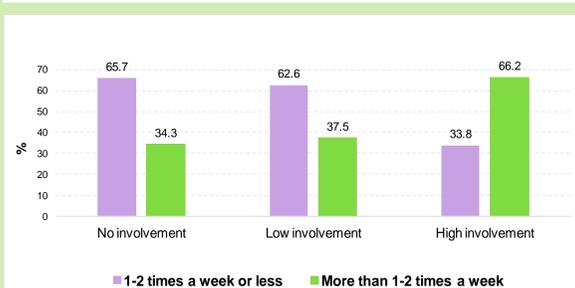
- ENDIS** (National Survey of Early Childhood Health, Nutrition and Development) is an ongoing longitudinal study on early childhood in Uruguay.
 - Wave 1 was collected in 2013 (N = 3,077 children aged 0 to 3).
 - Wave 2 was collected in 2016 (N = 2,455 children aged 3 to 6).
- ENDIS database allows us to measure fathers' involvement in childrearing both in the pre- and post-separation period.
 - Wave 1: Information on the amount of time fathers spend on child care tasks while married/cohabiting.
 - Wave 2: Information on 3 key dimensions of father-child relationships after separation: visiting patterns, financial contributions to child support, and participation in childrearing decisions in several domains (education, health, habits and discipline).
- Analytical sample** of separated father-child dyads: 177 children under age 6 who ceased to leave with their fathers between Wave 1 and Wave 2 due to separation /divorce.

Methods

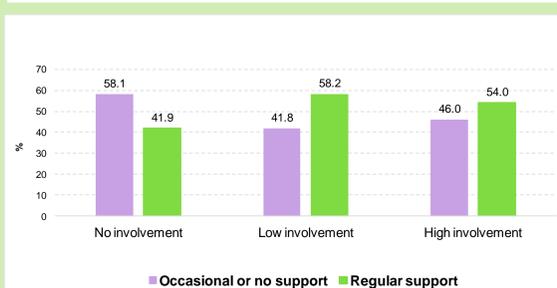
- Descriptive analysis: association between pre-separation and post-separation father's involvement in childrearing.
- Multivariate analysis: Logit models.
 - Dependent variables (post-separation): father-child contact > 1-2 times a week, father's regular economic support, father's participation in decisions about child's education, health, habits and discipline.
 - Main independent variable: pre-separation father's involvement: none (0 hours of care work), low (1-39 hours per week), high (40+ hours per week).
 - Control variables: father's educational level, father's formal/informal occupation, child's sex, child's age.

Results

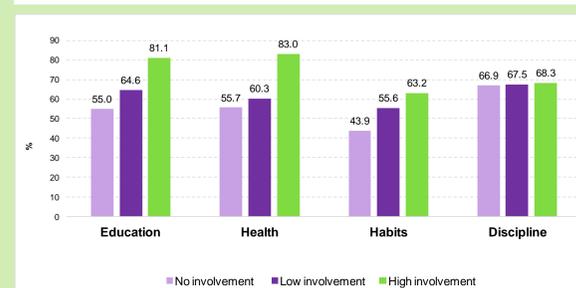
Pre-separation father's involvement and post-separation father-child contact



Pre-separation father's involvement and post-separation economic support



Pre-separation father's involvement and post-separation participation in childrearing decisions



Odds ratios from logit models on several dimensions of father-child relationships after separation

	Frequent contact	Financial support	Decisions: education	Decisions: health	Decisions: habits	Decisions: discipline
Pre-separation involvement						
No involvement	1	1	1	1	1	1
Low involvement	1.20	1.43	1.20	0.88	1.45	0.76
High involvement	3.90 ***	1.17	2.45	2.65	1.64	0.87
Father's education level						
9 years or less	1	1	1	1	1	1
> 9 years	1.32	2.39 ***	2.31	2.59 **	2.72 **	4.17 ***
Father's job						
Informal	1	1	1	1	1	1
Formal	0.85	2.25	1.94	2.48 *	1.35	0.47
Child's sex						
Female	1	1	1	1	1	1
Male	1.12	0.78	2.78 ***	3.70 ***	2.06 *	1.27
Child's age						
< 4 years	1	1	1	1	1	1
4+ years	0.97	0.82	0.69	0.51	1.39	1.10

Descriptive results: There is a strong association between the level of father's active engagement in parenting before separation and the frequency of father-child contact and child support payment after separation. Fathers with greater involvement before separation also participate to a greater extent in the decisions of children's education, health and daily habits after separation.

Multivariate results: Fathers that were highly involved in childrearing before separation are more likely to have frequent contact with their child after separation. The provision of regular child support, however, is linked to non-resident father's educational level (or type of employment, on an alternative specification). Participation in childrearing decisions and cooperative co-parenting after separation is more common when the father has a high educational level and the child is male.

- Our findings confirm that father's early involvement in childcare affects his post-separation parenting behavior.
- Father-child contact after separation is strongly associated with father's engagement in childcare before separation, whereas financial support is mainly affected by father's education and type of employment.
- Children's loss of contact with their father is more common in disadvantaged strata. Existing differentials by social strata in the rate of family disruption and in the level of nonresident fathers' involvement in childrearing tend to exacerbate gender and social inequalities.

Conclusions



- Our research highlights the relevance of supporting early father-infant bonding in the current context of increasing conjugal instability. Efforts to support the involvement of fathers in caregiving early in the child's life –for instance, through paternity leave policies– are likely to have positive payoffs in terms of contact, economic support and involvement in childrearing decisions over time, even in the event of parental separation.