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Review of Child-Custody Standards and its Effects on Children of Cohabiting and Non-Cohabiting Fathers

Jermaine Rahsaan Jackson
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Walden University

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Jermaine Jackson

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Review of Child-Custody Standards and its Effects on Children of Cohabiting and

Non-Cohabiting Fathers

by

Jermaine R. Jackson

MS, American Military University, 2012

BS, National American University, 2009

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

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Abstract

The involvement of fathers in the daily activities of their children has proven to be a substantial factor in nurturing children's speech and language development, fine motor skills development, gross motor skills development, social and emotional development, and cognitive development. The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children. Guided by Rawls's social contract theory, the research question sought to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the living arrangements (cohabitating and non-cohabitating) of fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children. The researcher utilized secondary data obtained from the Centers for Disease Control National Survey of Family Growth from 2011-2015, which utilizes a national probability sample of men ($N = 9,321$) aged 14-44 years living in the United States. To analyze each response, the researcher conducted z tests to determine the proportions of fathers who responded with each level of frequency for each interaction with the child by living arrangement (cohabitating with their child or not cohabitating with their child). Results for the differences in proportions of each response to this question were all significant ($p < .001$). The implications of this study are that the findings have the potential to influence legislators to enact rebuttable presumption child custody legislative language. If adopted, rebuttable presumption child custody statutory language would dictate spending equal time with each parent as long as both were deemed "fit and loving" parents.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate my work to my daughter, Kennedy Annalise Jackson, and to my son, Isaiah Jermaine Jackson. You two provide me with the daily motivation to do my part in improving the world.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

In most divorce cases, the court grants the custody of the child to one parent and extends visitation rights to the other parent (Braver, Ellman, Vortruba, & Fabricius, 2011). In many cases, parents resolve child visitation disputes with assistance from a mediator, such as an attorney, or by mutual agreement (Bow, Gottlieb, & Gould-Saltman, 2011; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015). If the parents fail to come to an agreement, however, they take recourse via the courts (Ackerman & Pritzl, 2012; Adams, 2016; Flood, 2012). Courts intervene primarily to ensure the best interests of the child (Artis, 2004; Bow et al., 2011; Ellman, Kurtz, & Weithorn, 2011; Laufer-Ukeles, 2014).

Courts may order different custodial arrangements (Brown, 2012). The type of court order depends on the nature of the custody case and the situations surrounding the parties involved (Gresk, 2013; Valastro, 2012). There are three primary forms of custody: joint custody, physical custody, and split custody (Brown, 2012). Joint custody is a framework in which parents exercise equal legal custody of the child. This means that parents partake equally in choices regarding the child's upbringing and welfare. The parent who the court determines should have physical custody will be the parent that provides care for the child on a daily basis. In split custody, each parent has physical custody of at least one child at all times. A divide exists in scholarly opinion concerning the advantages and disadvantages of these forms of custody (Adams, 2016; Margaret, & Kristy, 2015). Ultimately, the court verdict should serve the best interest of the child (Flood, 2012; Gresk, 2013; Valastro, 2012).

Child visitation laws in the United States have evolved from Europe's absolute paternal power concept to the principle that grants mothers custody (Artis, 2004; Braver et al., 2011; Laufer-Ukeles, 2014). A model of awarding absolute paternal power to mothers has flaws; therefore, the United States operates on the current standard (Ackerman & Pritzl, 2012; Valastro, 2012) that ensures the child's best interests (Bow et al., 2011; Brown, 2012; Scott & Emery, 2014). Some states determine the child's best interests based on certain criteria, whereas other states leave the best-interests decision entirely to the courts (Artis, 2004). The courts determine individual cases regardless of the state considerations; therefore, judgment is at the discretion of the judge (Bow et al., 2011; Scott & Emery, 2014). A limited selection of scholars have indicated improved adjustments in adulthood after awarding custody based on the child's best interests (Ackerman & Pritzl, 2012; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015; Valastro, 2012).

Recent researchers have made efforts to determine ruling patterns concerning the best interest principle (Artis, 2004; Ellman et al., 2011; Valastro, 2012). The factors that scholars have considered while assessing parental ability for granting a child's custody include: (a) mental stability; (b) judgment and maturity; (c) moral character; (d) sense of accountability for the child; (e) financial adequacy; (f) ability to ensure continuous participation in the community; and (g) provision of school accessibility (Adams, 2016; Bow et al., 2011; Braver et al., 2011; Laufer-Ukeles, 2014; Saunders, Tolman, & Faller, 2013; Tobin, Seals & Vincent, 2011).

There is an increasing consensus within the research community that when family violence is not a key factor, the children's interests and needs are best served by conserving the meaningful relationships that children have with both of their parents

(Brown, 2012; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015; Kruk, 2012; Scott & Emery, 2014; Valastro, 2012). Children want and need both parents in their lives, beyond the constraints of visitation relationships and other arrangements, such as primary caregivers (Adams, 2016; Bow et al., 2011; Braver et al., 2011; Tobin et al., 2011).

Problem Statement

Researchers have indicated that the time a father spends with his children offers distinctive educational experiences compared to mother–child interactions (Grossmann, Grossmann, Kindler, & Zimmermann, 2008). Fathers have a tendency to act as playmates to their children, in contrast to the mothers’ role as nurturers. Paternal interactions lean towards more physical and their games are more energetic and random, while maternal interaction includes added visual stimulus and anticipated undertakings (Lamb, 2004). Children that experience significant contact with both parents, particularly with parents who contrast in their nurturing styles, are open to a broader variety of stimulus. Children with two caring parents score higher than their peers on cognitive development tasks (Ryan, Martin, & Brooks-Gunn, 2006).

The role of involved fathers post-separation and post-marriage is a primary concern of pro-father groups. Pro-father groups typically advocate for equal or increased visitation time between children and their fathers (Holt, 2016; Mason, 2011). Scholars estimated that in 2010, approximately 22 million children in the United States were living with a single parent while the other parent lived in some other location (Gresk, 2013; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015). The general problem is that while family courts decide approximately 13.7 million child visitation and visitation cases on a yearly basis, fathers only represent 17 percent of the parents awarded primary custody and equal visitation

rights (Scott & Emery, 2014). The specific problem is that a number of fathers are not involved in the daily activities of their children, such as reading to the children, after school activities, bathing or clothing, or eating dinner together (Adams, 2016; Brown, 2012; Holt, 2016; Mason, 2011; Valastro, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to discover the correlation between cohabitating and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children (e.g., reading to the children, after school activities, bathing or clothing, or eating dinner together). This study was significant in that the researcher searched for a statistically significant relationship between cohabitating and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children.

Research Question

In this quantitative study, the researcher studied child visitation and paternal engagement using one central research question and two associated hypotheses:

RQ1: Is there a statistically significant relationship between cohabitating fathers and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children?

H1: There is no statistically significant relationship between cohabitating fathers and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children.

H2: There is a statistically significant relationship between cohabitating and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided this quantitative study was social contract theory. Social contract theory is of the view that one's moral duties are reliant upon a convention or arrangement to form the society in which they live. Rawls's (1999) vision of social contract theory evolved from a Kantian understanding of societies and their capacities. Rawls argued that the moral and political point of view is discovered via impartiality.

Utilizing the impartiality of social contract theory provided the framework for reviewing the child custody and child visitation determine factors, as outlined in the best interest of the child standards. These factors outlined by the best interested of the child standard are key mitigating factors in determining the amount of time a child spends with a non-cohabitating father. These factors led to this investigating the statistically significant relationship between cohabitating and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children

Nature of the Study

In this study, the researcher employed the quantitative method of inquiry. Quantitative researchers emphasize the processes and methods that are used to gather and examine data. Through an epistemological approach, the researcher focused on understanding the nature of knowledge, the rationality of belief, and justification. Yen (2014) endorsed utilizing quantitative case studies in many situations as a research method to contribute to our knowledge of the individual, group, organization, society, polity, and related phenomena.

Significance of the Study

Decisions pertaining to child visitation and care tend to be emotional issues, especially during a divorce (Horvath & Ryznar, 2015). In child visitation cases, the law has numerous ambiguous dynamics, which require courts to use the available evidence to grant child visitation considering a child's best interests (Scott & Emery, 2014). Several scholars (Adam & Brady, 2013; Artis, 2004; Kruk, 2011) have revealed that child visitation issues are common. Researchers have also indicated that the time that a father spends with his children offers distinctive educational experiences compared to mother-child interactions (Grossmann et al., 2008). Through the current study, the researcher attempted to pinpoint the correlation between child visitation, cohabitating fathers and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children.

Assumptions and Limitations

Limitations

First, the research did not cover international custody concerns, such as the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction (Horvath & Ryznar, 2015). Such laws oblige the safe return of children who are wrongfully detained or abducted by a parent and taken from one country to another. Second, it was easy to discover and gather secondary data, nevertheless, as a researcher, one must be conscious of the limits the data may have and the complications that could arise if these limitations are disregarded.

Assumptions

Secondary data can be wide-ranging and ambiguous. The information and data may not be exact; consequently, the researcher examined the source of the data along with the period the data gathering took place.

Organization of Chapters

In Chapter 2, the researcher reviews the literature related to custody standards in visitation cases, best interests of the child, and changes in family laws in the United States from the 19th century onward. In Chapter 3, the researcher provides a review and discussion of the research approach, data collection, data management process, data analysis process, and themes that emerged from the participants' experiences. In Chapter 4, the researcher presents a narrative of the secondary data collected and the findings of the study. In Chapter 5, the researcher synthesizes the findings, implications, meanings, and conclusions from the findings. The final chapter also includes recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction and Background of the Problem

Family law courts consider numerous factors while making decisions in child-custody cases (Braver et al., 2011; Scott & Emery, 2014). The perceptions, policies, and standards that courts use to make these decisions remain disputable because of the uniqueness of state legislations (Bow et al., 2011; Brown, 2012; Holt, 2016; Valastro, 2012). Some states consider the capabilities of parents, whereas others consider the needs of the children (Bow et al., 2011; Braver et al., 2011; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015). In an attempt to understand the main factors, judges must take into account and define the extent to which the best interests of the child standard doctrine influence judicial decisions in child-custody cases. Courts draw from both the sociological perspective and visitation arrangements while ruling child-custody cases in family courts.

In this chapter, the researcher provides a literature review of the best interests of the child standard in visitation cases. Through this review, the researcher provides insights into the standards while determining visitation rights. In this chapter, the researcher also examines existing custodial arrangements, factors considered while making child-custody decisions, and gaps in literature. The researcher then provides examples of shared custody and visitation cases along with the rulings made in these cases based on the best interests of the child. Finally, the researcher examines the relevant theory applied in the study to analyze the statistically significant relationship between cohabitating and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children.

Search Strategy and Key Terms

For the literature review, the researcher found articles through Walden University's Thoreau Multi-Database, CQ Researcher, Political Science Complete, and Google Scholar, in addition to a number of other databases related to child-custody standards, including peer reviewed journal articles. The researcher explored other dissertations, theses, prospectuses, and proposals related to this study in an effort to guarantee originality and determine the variables already researched in the field of child-custody standards. Key words such as *custodial arrangement standards*, *tender year's doctrine*, *best interests of the child principle*, *rulings on joint visitation cases*, and *best custody standard in shared custody*, *approximation rule*, and *equal custody decisions in child-custody visitations* helped the researcher to locate appropriate sources for this literature review.

Theoretical Framework

Social Contract Theory

American political philosopher Rawls (1999) believed that social contract theory provided the foundation for rational agreement in a culture where sharp divisions could potentially lead to conflict. Rawls's philosophy of justice as equality includes identical civil rights for all. Rawls posited that individuals possess the ability to reason from a general point of view, which indicates they have the moral aptitude for mediating values from an unbiased perspective. This theorist maintained viewing all ethical and political positions through the lens of fairness. Rawls reasoned that all human beings reach moral conclusions from a progression he referred to as reflective equilibrium; a state of steadiness or rationality between a set of principles arrived at by a sequence of purposeful

mutual adjustment between general values and specific decisions. Rawls purported that human beings frequently have firm beliefs; when those beliefs are met by an opposing belief, human beings search for a way to resolve this contradiction.

Rawls (1999) alleged that people have a moral intuition, an internal belief regarding right or wrong, or a reflective equilibrium. Reflective equilibrium is how opposing principles such as the rule of law versus civil protest, and other values that staunchly oppose each other exist. Rawls believed posited that people reconcile the contradiction between right and wrong with considered judgments. As they internalize new information, their moral beliefs change.

Although prior social contract theorists used the state of nature, a hypothetical condition of life prior to the existence of societies, as a preliminary starting point for their argument, Rawls (1999) rejected state of nature assumption research for a method he called the *veil of ignorance*. The veil of ignorance is influential in that common beliefs concerning what is just and unjust are learned by personal experiences. Behind this veil, a person does not recognize their ethnic group, gender, one's natural abilities, or one's place in society.

During this veil of ignorance, no preconceived social notions exist. Furthermore, from a public policy perspective, the veil of ignorance presents decision-making opportunities that are targeted and advantages to the most vulnerable populations, typically, as one never knows who is vulnerable and who is not. Theoretically, the ensuing culture would be an impartial one (Rawls, 1999).

Social contract theory indicates everyone's ethical and/or political compulsions are reliant on a pact or covenant in the midst of themselves to form the society in which

they live. Different scholars have put forward varying suggestions regarding the applicability of the theory (Hobbes, 1651/1985; Locke, 1689/2003; Rousseau, 1762/1987). For instance, Socrates used this theory to support the death penalty and imprisonment. Authors such as John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau have proposed the use of social contract theory in distinct environments. They developed theories to provide insights into modern political and moral lives. Nonetheless, other authors criticized this theory arguing it could lead to the subjugation of people by class (Hampton, 1986).

Thomas Hobbes (1651/1985) was a social contract theorist from the mid-17th century. He asserted the social contract theory postulates that all humans are born equal. Individuals had to make some agreements among themselves, which led to the formation of societies (Hobbes, 1651/1985). Society serves the existential role of providing protection from risks inherent in nature. Human beings are naturally in constant conflict with their neighbors because they pursue their own self-interest. In the process, they become enemies of one another. In the company of others, according to (Hobbes, 1651/1985), humans found only grief. The harsh conditions became intolerable to those who desired to live in peace; therefore, all humans had to enter into a type of social contract that ensured security and certainty to property and life. Through mutual consensus, humans surrender their natural rights to some authority figures for proper governance (Hobbes, 1651/1985).

From the human nature premises, Hobbes (1651/1985) strongly argued parents must submit to judicial authority in child-custody cases. Hobbes justified civic obligations by declaring that human beings are selfish by nature, and they would

rationality submit to a sovereign power to live in societies that promote their interests. Given the resource constraints and the nature of humans to pursue self-interest, authorities need not force them to cooperate. In their natural state, each person fears losing power to the other person. People lack the ability to guarantee long-term satisfaction for their desires; therefore, long-term cooperation was rarely possible (Hobbes, 1651/1985). This implies the best custody standard in shared custody cases may not take into account all the interests of the children. An authoritative body was required, according to Hobbes, to ensure the preservation of life.

According to Locke (1689/2003), initially, humans naturally enjoyed ideal liberties devoid of regulations and rules. There was always peace, mutual assistance, preservation, and goodwill in society; however, no law or justice system existed to provide directions when this peace was disturbed. When vicious and corrupt individuals disturbed the peaceful state, therefore, others were forced to live in constant fear. To escape from such dangers and to guarantee security, people entered into contracts, which transformed the society into a civil society. By entering into social contracts, individuals surrendered some power and rights to the state, and in turn, the state guarantees protection and preservation of the individual. Locke postulated that governmental control originated from social contracts; the establishment of governments and the selection of rulers responsible for eliminating dangers led to the formation of contracts with the government (Locke, 1689/2003).

Locke (1689/2003) argued that parents needed to agree on conditions so children's interests take precedence. Such societies operate through voluntary agreements indicating the moral responsibility of collectively caring for all the children. Individuals

living in families therefore need to reach collaborative agreements geared toward punishing transgressors by handing their executive powers to government authorities. By submitting to government authority, citizens of a state submit to the decisions made by majority will. Agreeing to government control means that people need judges for law adjudication and law enforcement. According to the social contract theory, people must cooperate to share responsibility and preserve lives (Locke, 1689/2003).

Contrary to John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau provided a third perspective regarding social contract theory. According to Rousseau (1762/1987), humans initially lived in tranquility, happiness, and primitive simplicity. In this state, they were content, healthy, good, fearless, independent, and self-sufficient. They were free from vices and remained united out of sympathy and basic instinct. Humans enjoyed a simple, pure, and innocent life with equality and perfect freedom. However, this condition could not last for very long. When the population started to increase, idyllic happiness, simplicity, and freedom vanished. The establishment of families and the emergence of property institutions ended human equality. According to Rousseau (1762/1987), these developments made people selfish; losing this initial state of happiness and fairness gave rise to conflicts, wars, murders, and chaos. Civil society was formed as a solution to these vices (Rousseau, 1762/1987). A social contract therefore guaranteed freedom and created a civil society, which promoted collective unity. Based on Rousseau's argument, an individual completely surrenders to the body that he or she identifies with. The body, known as the general will, represents the collective wellness and differs from the private interests of individual members (Rousseau, 1762/1987).

Social contract theory aims to address the way people can live together freely (Rousseau, 1762/1987). People need to live together without being subjected to coercion and force from others. This was possible by surrendering to the general or collective will, which was formulated through common consensus with other equal and free persons. Given that all humans are equal by nature, Rousseau proposed that one person should not govern others naturally without common consensus. The authorities, therefore, are created through covenants or agreements (Rousseau, 1762/1987). Moreover, social organizations must guarantee and assure equality, liberty, and peoples' rights. Based on this argument, decisions on visitation and shared custody cases must take the collective will into account.

Social contract theory does not account for prohibitions on abortion, establishment of religions, anti-sodomy laws, and paternalistic laws (Locke, 1689/2003). Paternalism involves forcing others to act or prohibit them from acting keeping in view their best interests. Social contracts are driven by self-interests (Hobbes, 1651/1985). If people engage in harmful behaviors, they will still be part of the social contract (Rousseau, 1762/1987). By using the paternalistic viewpoint, it was not possible to justify the enforcement of laws against prostitution, gambling, and substance abuse based on mere suspicion. Consequently, such provisions limit the judicial decisions concerning child custody.

Based on the perspectives provided in the social contract theory, certain key elements are applicable for analyzing the best custody standard in shared custody (Hobbes, 1651/1985; Locke, 1689/2003; Rousseau, 1762/1987). While parents construct their roles and responsibilities as they interact, they may not have any idea about the roles

the judicial systems plan for them (Holt, 2016; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015; Mason, 2011). During the interaction process, parents negotiate according to their understanding of the best custody standards based on the situation in which they find themselves (Scott & Emery, 2014). Moreover, they rely on the interpretations of lawyers to completely understand their environment and do what is best for the children in shared custody arrangements (Bow et al., 2011; Braver et al., 2011; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015).

The social contract theory was appropriate for the current study because of the nature of entities involved in shared custody and visitation cases. Contracts are used for employment, marriage, and citizenship (Rosen, Dragiewicz, & Gibbs, 2009). In a contract, two or more parties come to an agreement. The contract becomes invalid if one party violates any of the terms and conditions of the contract. Governments are the basis for discussing the social contract because governments control societies. The proponents of the social contract theory state individuals benefit by living collectively under governmental oversight (Hobbes, 1651/1985; Locke, 1689/2003; Rousseau, 1762/1987). Rules and legislations are essential to live in any society. Social contracts serve as the models indicating the way governments and people interact. People living within social structures that safeguard their rights must, in turn, give up some freedoms, and help make the society happy, healthy, and stable. Such tendencies involve adherence to the best standards in social contracts.

Factors Considered in Visitation Decisions

Child visitation decisions are extremely difficult to make (Rosen et al., 2009; Simon & Stahl, 2014). Unless the attorney reviews the case properly, the court could make mistakes that could affect children for their entire lives (DiPrizito, 2016). It is often

emotionally challenging children to understand the details of custody arrangements. In cases where parents are unmarried, the choice is less difficult (Gresk, 2013). In all cases, parents must ensure the protection of their rights and the best interests of the child (Simon & Stahl, 2014; Valastro, 2012).

While making custody decisions, courts in different states take into account diverse factors (DiPrizito, 2016). The best interest of the child principle is the overriding factor; however, the child's interest may not be the deciding factor in some circumstances (Fuhrmann & Zibbell, 2012). Usually, the wishes of the primary caretaker are the deciding factor (O'Donohue, Benuto, & Bennett, 2016). In cases involving older children, courts consider their preferences when making custody rulings.

The standards that courts use for measuring the child's interests differ from one state to another (Rosen et al., 2009). Nonetheless, there are common factors that are considered by most states (DiPrizito, 2016; Fuhrmann & Zibbell, 2012; O'Donohue et al., 2016; Simon & Stahl, 2014). Some of these factors include:

1. Parent's physical and mental health;
2. Children's wishes, if they are old enough to decide;
3. Interrelationships and interactions with other household members;
4. Cultural and religious considerations;
5. Parental lifestyles;
6. Any history of domestic violence;
7. The ability of the parent to agree and communicate key concerns of the child;
8. Willingness of the parent to accept parenting responsibilities and to allow parenting time to the visiting parent;

9. Personal values of parents;
10. Guarantee of continuous stability in the home setting;
11. Gender, age, and health status of the child;
12. Support and opportunities to interact with extended family members belonging to either parent;
13. Financial or employment status;
14. Moral fitness of the parent;
15. Child's needs;
16. Emotional ties between the child and the parent;
17. The parent with superior parenting skills;
18. Capacity and readiness to provide primary care to the child;
19. Evidence demonstrating parental substance abuse, alcohol consumption, or sexual abuse;
20. Adjustment to the community or school; and
21. Emotional abuse or use of extreme discipline measures by parents.

The above factors are only general guidelines; a child's custody may be determined based on various other factors (Graycar, 2012). Judges have instructions to assess the relative merits of parents under the above factors; however, although one parent may win on most factors, he or she might not eventually be given custody of the child (Rosen et al., 2009). In addition, the decisions made by judges include other considerations, such as witness credibility, the weight of witness testimony, and evidence provided (Fuhrmann & Zibbell, 2012). If, for instance, an objection is raised on the

grounds that one parent was violent, the non-violent parent is granted custody (Saunders et al., 2013).

Family courts in different states use additional factors to determine the primary caretaker (Graycar, 2012; Kruk, 2012; Tobin et al., 2011). Judges often prefer the parent who is able to demonstrate having been the primary caretaker in the marriage (Bow et al., 2011). The primary caretaker factor is significant in custody cases. Psychologists have emphasized the significance of the bonding of the child with the primary caretaker (Bow et al., 2011; Braver et al., 2011; Graycar, 2012; Kruk, 2011, 2012; Tobin et al., 2011). This emotional bond, according to Tobin et al., is significant in ensuring that the child develops into a mature adult. In order to maintain the stability of the child's psyche, psychologists have recommended the maintenance of a continued relationship between the child and the primary caregiver following divorce (Braver et al., 2011).

To provide evidence that a particular parent has been the primary caregiver during the marriage, courts take into account responsibilities pertaining to childcare. These include: (a) preparation and planning for meals; (b) bathing, cleaning, and dressing; (c) encouraging engagement in extra-curricular activities; (d) teaching skills (writing, reading, mathematics, etc.); (e) healthcare arrangements; and (f) laundry responsibilities.

While determining the status of the primary caretaker, other factors are also considered by the state (Fuhrmann & Zibbell, 2012). Ability to provide for the child's education and exposure to secondary smoke are factors judges have considered in the past when determining which parent would serve as the primary caretaker. Previously, courts preferred mothers as primary caretakers (Braver et al., 2011). Now that men are increasingly sharing parental responsibilities with women, however, courts no longer

prefer or favor the mother (Gresek, 2013). Courts most often take into account the best interests of the child standard if parents are found to share all responsibilities (Fuhrmann & Zibbell, 2012).

In the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2016) publication *Determining the Best Interest of the Child*, the authors outlined the principles and factors family law courts considered in determining child custody and visitation cases. All states, as well as the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, have implemented statutes that require the child's best interests to be considered when making specific decisions regarding a child's custody, placement, or other critical life issues (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016). Figures one and two display some of the more common principles and guidelines utilized in the United States.

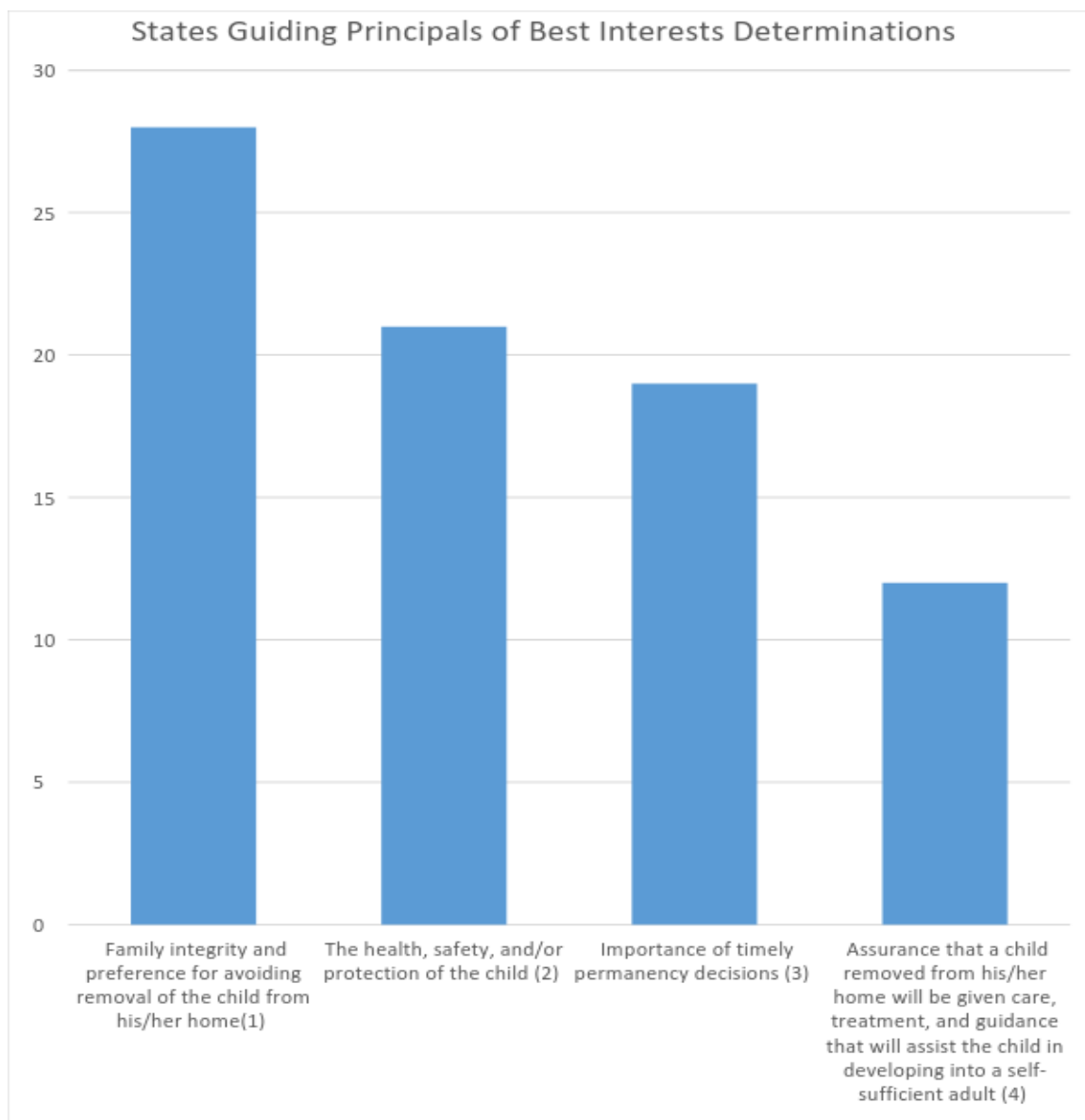


Figure 1. States' guiding principles of best interest determinations.

(1) Alabama, Alaska, California, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

(2) Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Utah, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

(3) Alabama, Alaska, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia.

(4) Alabama, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and West Virginia.

SOURCE: Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016

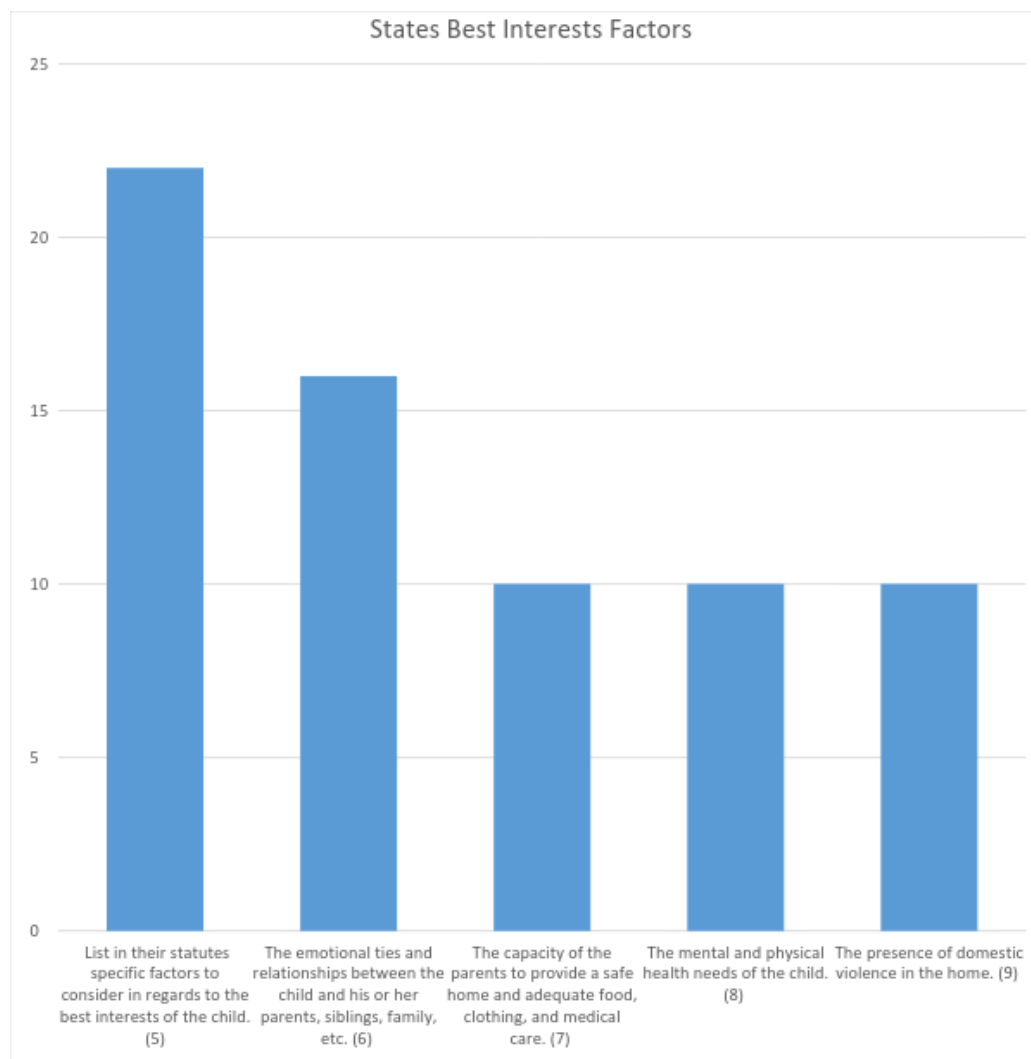


Figure 2. States' best interest factors.

(5) Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

(6) Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Tennessee, Vermont, and Virginia.

(7) Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, North Dakota, Texas, Vermont, and Wisconsin.

(8) Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Nevada, and Virginia.

(9) Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, North Dakota, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

SOURCE: Child Welfare Information Gateway 2016

Once the legal standard, the tender year's doctrine has long been legislatively removed from legal consideration. Some judges, however, may continue to believe that younger children ought to live with their mothers, particularly when the mother is the principal caregiver. While the factors utilized vary from state to state, the best interest of the child standard is utilized in disputed custody cases. With each state considering different factors, the best interest of the child is a rather vague standard; one that provides family law courts subjective interpretations regarding what is best for children (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016).

Prior to a final child visitation decision, 28 states' child visitation and visitation guiding principles, consider family integrity and preference for avoiding the removal of the child from their home. Most judges consider whether the present living situation is in the best interest of the child and which parent will most likely foster a positive relationship with the other parent (DiPrizito, 2016; Gresk, 2013). The next most common guiding principal in determining a child visitation case is the health, safety, and/or protection of the child (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016).

Custodial Arrangements

Sole custody is the first custodial arrangement that courts most often order (Williams & Haas, 2014). The parent, who has custody of the child lives with the child, cares for them and raises the child. The custodial parent is responsible for making major decisions affecting the child's welfare (e.g., the child's recreational activities, education,

and medical choices). The parent also makes minor decisions and is not compelled by the law to seek consent from the non-custodial parent (Raub, Carson, Cook, Wyshak, & Hauser, 2013).

The second custodial arrangement is physical custody (Tornello et al., 2013). The child spends the most time with the parent who was given the physical custody (Gresk, 2013). One parent serves as the primary caregiver, and the other parent provides support in making key decisions concerning the child's welfare (Williams & Haas, 2014). Nonetheless, both custodial and non-custodial parents share the child's joint legal custody (DiPrizito, 2016). Joint legal custody in this context means making joint decisions regarding the child's religion, education, medical care, and welfare, and other significant issues (Tornello et al., 2013).

Some parents prefer joint custody, which is a third custodial arrangement (Gresk, 2013). With joint custody, parents make necessary arrangements on how the child can spend approximate equal time with the two parents (Williams & Haas, 2014). The law obliges both parents to share information concerning the child and discuss with one another while making significant decisions. Both parents must discuss medical care, psychological care, discipline, extra-curricular activities, and religious activities (Raub et al., 2013). Researchers recommending joint custody have argued that this arrangement helps the child not to feel lost during the divorce period (Tornello et al., 2013); however, the opponents of this arrangement have argued that a child needs one home, not two (i.e., the best interests of the child). This is only possible if custody is given to one parent and the non-custodial parent is given liberal visitation rights. Joint custody is possible only if parents are willing to cooperate; therefore, most judges rule against it (DiPrizito, 2016;

Williams & Haas, 2014). When courts order joint custody, both parents must sign an agreement demonstrating their commitment to cooperate and make joint decisions serving the best interests of the child (Raub et al., 2013).

The fourth option for custodial arrangement is split custody. This form of child visitation is less favored and rarely occurs (Gresk, 2013). One parent may take custody of one or more children, and the other spouse takes custody of the other children. Thus, siblings are separated (Flood, 2012). When delivering court orders, courts frequently prefer not to separate siblings (Williams & Haas, 2014). Nonetheless, compelling or unusual situations may justify the decision to separate the siblings (Raub et al., 2013; Tornello et al., 2013).

Another custodial arrangement awards custody to a third party (Raub et al., 2013; Williams & Haas, 2014). If the courts prove the custodians or natural parents are unfit to be entrusted with the child's care, or if there is a possibility that they may later neglect the child or fail to provide education, security, and maintenance, then a third party will be awarded custody (Tornello et al., 2013). Other cases include the lack of a legal agency or a guardian to exercise custody. Fitness standards apply to such custodial arrangements (Raub et al., 2013).

Outside of the five alternatives proposed, courts also provide guidance to unmarried parents (Williams & Haas, 2014). In some states, the statutes propose awarding physical custody to mothers, lest the father takes the initiative of seeking custody (Tornello et al., 2013). An irresponsible father, in most cases, cannot win the child's custody if the mother is the responsible party (Raub et al., 2013). Nonetheless, the

father can retake custody over foster parents, potential adoptive parents, or other relatives.

Changes in United States Family Law

Child visitation is a contentious issue in divorce proceedings, particularly when both parents are fit and both make a custody claim (Horvath & Ryznar, 2015). With the evolution of once conventional parental roles throughout the marriage and after divorce, the process for deciding child visitation in the United States changed (Flood, 2012). In addition, each state has its family laws to guide child-custody decisions for families within its territory (Symons, 2012). Nevertheless, two primary changes are acknowledged in the current United States custody law (Horvath & Ryznar, 2015). The first was a shift from gender-based standards to gender-neutral custody standards, and the second was a shift from individual custodial arrangements to joint custody (Flood, 2012).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was an increased scholarly focus on family court proceedings and the need to prioritize the best interests of the children involved in custody disputes (Brown, 2012; Gresk, 2013; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015). Family structures in the United States have changed in recent decades, with an increase in divorce rates and the number of out-of-wedlock children. This has led to modifications in the standards that courts use to determine the best interests of the child (Adams, 2016; Flood, 2012; Mason, 2011), including the encouragement of gender neutrality while ruling in child-custody cases (Brown, 2012; Margaret, & Kristy, 2015). This shift was facilitated by several factors, including: (a) the dependence on expert witnesses who carried out individual assessments for every divorce case; (b) the findings of social science research, which revealed problems associated with sole custody arrangements

where mothers were prioritized; and (c) the push for therapeutic court systems instead of adversarial court systems (Gresk, 2013).

In the 1960s, a cultural shift erupted in the United States court system (Horvath & Ryznar, 2015; Laufer-Ukeles, 2014). Between 1963 and 1981, the divorce rate tripled (Adam & Brady, 2013), resulting in a dramatic increase of child-custody and visitation cases (Artis, 2004; Brown, 2012). During this period, state legislation began to move away from the tender year's doctrine for preferring maternal child visitation to the best interests of the child standard, which was more egalitarian (Artis, 2004; Brown, 2012; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015).

Numerous families in the United States do not remain intact; parents routinely separate or divorce (Brown, 2012). The divorce rate of 2.5 per 1,000 in 1963 escalated at a steady rate and reached 5.3 per 1,000 in 1981; settling at 3.6 per 1,000 in 2013 (Adam & Brady, 2013). Child-custody cases are filed when parents fail to agree who ought to make choices for their children regarding medical care, religion, or schooling, as well as how much time each parent should spend with the child. The disagreement of the parents was often over what was historically known as the "custody" of the child (Flood, 2012). Current legal standards dictate that the focus of a child-custody trial is to determine which living situation suits the "best interests" of the child (Brown, 2012; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015; Tobin et al., 2011).

As of 2013, courts in all 50 states used specific measures to assess the best interests of the child when deciding which parent will get the child's custody (Gresk, 2013). The best interest of the child principle obliges the courts to take into account major factors, such as the relationship between the caregiver and the child. The courts

also need to determine which parent was more responsible and suited to cater to the child's welfare and which was the best home setting that provides more stability to the child (Brown, 2012; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015; Mason, 2011). Currently, the most common custodial arrangement is joint custody with shared parenting responsibilities. In addition, some states prohibit using gender to grant parents the primary custody (Flood, 2012; Gresk, 2013).

By shifting from the tender year's doctrine to the best interests of the child standard for custody and visitation, the courts hoped to provide a balanced set of legal guidelines concerning child-custody cases (Artis, 2004; Brown, 2012). A growing number of fathers' groups, however, disagreed with the effect of the best interests of the child standard. Many parent activists have challenged the continual legal maternal presumption, which favors mothers in child-custody and visitation cases (Rosin, 2012). Furthermore, parent rights organizations posit that the legal standard of the best interests of the child still results in the denial of paternal visitation and a perceived bias against fathers in child-custody and visitation rights cases.

Best Interests of the Child Principle

Through this literature review, the current researcher concluded that maternal custody preference, also called the tender year's doctrine, was heavily intertwined with the best interests of the child standard (Gresk, 2013; Rosen et al., 2009). In the entire history of family law, courts have primarily operated under the guidance of the doctrine, and a majority of the courts has been unwilling to abandon the doctrine while giving rulings on child visitation (Braver et al, 2011; Graycar, 2012; Rosen et al., 2009).

In the 19th century, family law courts commonly used the tender year's doctrine (Graycar, 2012; Gresk, 2013). A healthy childhood was understood to be important for healthy social development. This doctrine was founded upon the belief that because children required continuous nursing care, mothers were the appropriate gender for providing such care (Rosen et al., 2009). It was frequently accepted that emotional support and primary caregiving were intrinsic elements in motherly attitudes and roles. Historically, there has been high support for the suitability of mothers in caring for children after a divorce (Gresk, 2013). Children, for the most part, remained in the mother's custody following separation or divorce (Braver et al., 2011; Holt, 2016; Rosen, Dragiewicz & Gibbs, 2009).

The tender year's doctrine still plays a major role in the decisions made by family courts regarding child visitation. Statistics indicate that courts commonly favor mothers in child-custody cases (Braver et al., 2011; Gresk, 2013). Even after determining both parents are equally suitable for providing care to the child, some states still award custody to the mother based on the belief that mothers are intrinsically endowed with qualities needed to raise children (Rosen et al., 2009). When courts award joint custody in family court proceedings, fathers are often left with limited visitation rights; this is a violation of the joint custodial arrangements (Holt, 2016). In the United States, shared parenting arrangements allow the fathers to visit on alternate weekends (Gresk, 2013).

Fathers and paternal advocates have begun to push for reforms against gender disparity apparent in joint-custody parenting arrangements. Since the 1960s, the public has increasingly supported the fathers' rights movement (Braver et al., 2011; Rosen et al., 2009). The growth of this movement resulted from changes in social ties and attitudes. In

particular, the changes included growth in anti-feminist activism in the 1990s, an increase in movements supporting fathers' activism, and an increase in divorce reform movements since the 1960s (Gresk, 2013). It is difficult to determine the exact motive behind these movements; however, most scholars have postulated that the leaders of these movements sought to counteract the authority or power men usually lose to the women in contemporary societies (Braver et al., 2011). In addition, scholars such as Rosen et al. (2009), who advocated for the fathers' movement, have suggested that modern society is a "Fatherless America." The goal, therefore, is to address absentee or deadbeat fathers, which is an increasing concern in the United States. Such a move provided a stable environment for children to grow and develop strong emotional relationships with their fathers.

Scholars advocating for fathers' rights have proposed different agendas (Braver et al., 2011; Rosen et al., 2009), ranging from child visitation rights, reforms in payments for supporting children, and joint custody legislation (Gresk, 2013). The primary guiding principle is that the children are served best if they know both their parents and develop meaningful relationships with both of them (Holt, 2016). This principle is undermined, however, when decisions are made about child visitation and parental rights (Rosen et al., 2009). Instead of determining methods to ensure children have access to both parents, most discussions concentrate on the father (Braver et al., 2011), who is frequently denied the benefit of the doubt by the current justice system (Gresk, 2013).

Best Interests and Equal Custody

While making equal custody arrangements, key decisions include: (a) the children's religion, health, and education; (b) the place where the children will reside and

the time spent with each parent; and (c) the strategies to settle future parental concerns (Fuhrmann & Zibbell, 2012; Graycar, 2012; O'Donohue et al., 2016). According to Gresk (2013), significant decisions may be made in parallel (i.e., one parent makes some decisions and the other parent makes other decisions). Parents could also make joint decisions (i.e., both parents consult and decide) or sole decisions (i.e., each parent makes his or her own decision).

The court decides equal custody arrangements by taking into account the child's best interest (Adams, 2016; Brown, 2012; Mason, 2011; Valastro, 2012). Each state has a separate law concerning child visitation; therefore, there is no common definition of best interests (Holt, 2016; Rosen et al., 2009). Nonetheless, by general agreement, child-custody arrangements require that the parents must ensure measures to facilitate the child's success, happiness, and development (Fuhrmann & Zibbell, 2012). Generally, equal custody awards require courts to consider family violence, mental health concerns, parenting abilities, possible special needs, care arrangements, substance abuse, and parent-child relationship (Brown, 2012; Flood, 2012; Gresk, 2013; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015; Saunders et al., 2013).

In equal custody, parental schedule and child visitation are key factors in making court awards (Mason, 2011; Valastro, 2012). Parenting schedules specify visitation times, such as weekends, special occasions (e.g., Father's Day and Mother's Day), and holidays (Gresk, 2013). Given these factors, courts must be practical while making shared custody arrangements (Adams, 2016). Key points of consideration include parental work or commitments and form(s) of transportation. The focus, however, must not be on parental conveniences, but rather on the child's best interests (Gresk, 2013). In general, equal

custody works best when both parents have flexible parenting schedules and are able to cooperate well. They need to respect each other's abilities and live in close proximity (Valastro, 2012).

Strategies to settle future parental concerns are vital in making decisions and determining the best custody standard in equal custody (Gresk, 2013). Courts account for the processes that parents adhere to while solving parental conflicts. Reaching a common consensus without further court intervention serves as the child's best interest (Valastro, 2012). A system that ensures the immediate resolution of conflict guarantees care for the child in equal custody arrangements (Bow et al., 2011). Primary considerations include family and child benefits and child support criteria. Family courts at the state level must consider federal guidelines on child support. Moreover, court orders should not contradict provisions about family and child benefits (Braver et al., 2011).

A majority of judgments necessitate reconstruction of previous evidence of incriminatory circumstances, such as mental problems or negligence, before the allocating parental responsibilities (Hobbes, 1651/1985; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015; Locke, 1689/2003; Rousseau, 1762/1987). The courts use evidence to determine the custodial arrangements that will be most beneficial to the child in the future (Scott & Emery, 2014). While previous events may predict the relationship a parent may have with a child, these events cannot precisely guarantee the future occurrence of similar relationships (Gresk, 2013; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015; Tobin et al., 2011). For instance, using the indicator of financial stability to award sole custody may later cause problems if that parent loses their income (Saunders et al., 2013). In other incidents, children may not be comfortable with the environment of the parent that the court prefers. Thus, courts must

exercise caution in using previous evidence to apply the best custody standard, which might not always work in favor of the child (Braver et al., 2011).

In summary, taking into account the best interests of the child principle, custody determination by the judiciary involves predicting the ways that children and parents will change; this prediction requires legal interpretation and reconstruction of previous events (Artis, 2004; Brown, 2012; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015; Tobin et al., 2011). Regrettably, psychologists and judges are presented with scant evidence for making future predictions (Bow et al., 2011). The existing data have provided models for the best types of parenting arrangements in equal custody; however, these data are not adequate for the creation of accurate predictions for each specific child (Braver et al., 2011; DiPrizito, 2016; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015).

Best Interests and Approximation Rule

The primary caregiver is awarded sole custody of the child assuming that this parent spends the most time caring for the child (O'Connell, 2007). This method has been criticized for favoring the caregiver (Mnookin, 2014; Williams & Haas, 2014). Some researchers have suggested a fairer method whereby courts allocate time between both parties based on how the parents allocated their time before the involvement of courts; this was called shared custody (Lorandos & Bone, 2016; Warshak, 2015). It is impossible, however, for courts to determine precisely the time that each parent spent with the child (Singer, 2014). Proponents of the idea have posited that courts need to prioritize standards closer to the pre-divorce apportionment. The pre-divorce apportionment is called the approximation rule (Warshak, 2015). The primary aim in developing the approximation rule was to help decide child-custody cases by sustaining

the approximate time and routines previously performed with the children before separation (Warshak, 2015). In shared child-custody arrangements, courts take the best interests of the child into account (Gresk, 2013) in order to minimize disruptions to the child's daily routines (Warshak, 2015).

The approximation rule was often considered an improvement on the presumption previously used to favor primary caregivers; it was assumed this rule apportions child visitation to the parents more justly (Singer, 2014; Warshak, 2015). The rule assigns parental responsibilities to both parents proportionate to the time allocated before separation rather than giving one parent sole custody for performing 51 percent of the primary caregiving and zero percent to the other parent with 49 percent contribution (Mnookin, 2014). According to Clisham and Wilson (2008), the approximation approach is fair to both parents compared to the primary caregiver rule and the presumptive sole custody rubrics that favored mothers (Gresk, 2013). The approximation approach is a win-win situation for both parents (Singer, 2014; Warshak, 2015).

According to some authors (Lorandos & Bone, 2016; Singer, 2014; Williams & Haas, 2014), the approximation rule promotes the child's best interests by providing the parents additional incentives for spending time with the children (Warshak, 2015). Some critics, however, have pointed out the weaknesses in the approximation rule, which are similar to the weaknesses in the primary caretaker assumption. Pruett and DiFonzo (2014) presented evidence asserting that the approximation rule does not improve upon the best interests of the child principle.

Critics of the approximation rule have argued it has numerous drawbacks (Warshak, 2015). Gender bias is evident in defining the determinants of childcare and the

time awarded for visitation (Williams & Haas, 2014). Legislators, lawyers, and judges commonly consider tasks conventionally performed by women while omitting the tasks conventionally performed by men (Lorandos & Bone, 2016). Even when efforts are made to apply quantitative measures for allocating visitation time, the question remains whether it makes sense to allocate time based on caregiving patterns evident at infancy. Children's needs change over time, and the capacity of their parents to meet their needs also varies (Artis, 2004; Braver et al., 2011; DiPrizito, 2016; Ellman et al., 2011). From the standpoint of the child's development, therefore, it makes little sense to decide the time that a teenage boy needs to spend with the father based on the time the mother spent with the boy during infancy (Singer, 2014).

The circumstances surrounding parents after separation are different from the circumstances before separation (DiPrizito, 2016; Gresk, 2013; Lorandos & Bone, 2016). Divorce itself changes the allotment of primary responsibilities (Mnookin, 2014). It is unfair, therefore, to limit parents to abide to arrangements that were agreed upon under different circumstances (Williams & Haas, 2014). Clisham and Wilson (2008) argued that similar to the primary caretaker assumption, the approximation rule ascribes more significance to *quantity* of caregiving rather than *quality* of caregiving; it overlooks the significance of the attachment that parents have for the child. The approximation rule encourages one parent to spend more time with the child as compared with the other (Mnookin, 2014), which limits and interferes with the ability of the other parent to spend time with the child (Lorandos & Bone, 2016). This concern is critical, particularly for cases where the parents are not married (Ackerman & Pritzl, 2012; Adams, 2016; Flood, 2012). Most state laws grant mothers automatic custody, forcing fathers to acquire court

orders granting visitation permission before spending time with their children (Singer, 2014). In this scenario, the unmarried mother has absolute power to deny the father any visitation rights (Ackerman & Pritzl, 2012; Adams, 2016; Flood, 2012) because she alone exercises exclusive custody. The mother can legally thwart any attempt by the father to spend time with the child (Williams & Haas, 2014).

If a parent spends time with the children in order to weaken their love and respect for the other parent, this behavior may counterbalance the benefits of spending more time with the parent (Bow et al., 2011; Brown, 2012; Valastro, 2012). Nevertheless, more time with the parent who was the target of ill intentions may help children resist the efforts to turn them against the other parent (Flood, 2012; Lorandos & Bone, 2016; Singer, 2014; Warshak, 2015; Williams & Haas, 2014). Such provisions require that the approximation rule have the same assumption as the primary caregiver standard used in previous decades (Lorandos & Bone, 2016).

Case Studies: Custody Evaluations

There are several child-custody cases that reveal support for or against the best interests of the child standard, especially the shared custody arrangements. In this study, three cases are relevant: *Elliott v. Elliott* (2003), *Bartosz v. Jones* (2008), and *Brownson v. Allen* (2000).

***Elliott v. Elliott* (2003)**

This case demonstrated an incident where the court granted shared custody to both parents. In the divided visitation time allotted, the mother was given three days every week with an additional 24 weekends whereas the father was given two days on a weekly basis and 28 weekends. The Court of Appeals of Mississippi cited irreconcilable

differences as the underlying reason for the divorce. The court, after modifying the initial divorce judgment, awarded physical and joint legal custody of Amie and Justin (the children) to both parents.

While filing the petition for appeal, Catharine, the mother, stated change in financial circumstances after moving to Arizona. The ex-husband, George, filed a complaint to counter Catharine's move. The court was convinced the changes in Catharine's financial circumstances (i.e., material change of circumstances) were sound enough for awarding joint custody. The Mississippi Court of Appeals considers employment and home stability when determining custody. The judge stated the following, "In light of the prior rulings regarding the selfish behavior of Catharine and the most recent conduct; the court finds it was in the best interests of the children they be placed in the primary physical and joint custody of both parents" (Elliott v. Elliott, 2003).

Bartosz v. Jones (2008)

In this case, the Supreme Court of Idaho observed, "In Idaho, the child's best interest was of paramount importance in child visitation decisions" (Bartosz v. Jones, 2008). The Bartosz case further stated the best interest standard was set forth in Idaho Code § 32-717, which states that a court may, before and after judgment, give such direction for the custody, care and education of the children as may seem necessary or proper in the best interests of the children. The Idaho Supreme Court underscored the fact the statute gives trial courts wide discretion in making custody determinations, but it requires them to consider all relevant factors when evaluating the best interest of the child; however, the Idaho Supreme Court noted the list of best interest factors in I.C. § 32-717(1) (a)-(g) was not exhaustive or mandatory, and courts are free to consider other

factors that may be relevant. Essentially, Idaho Code § 32-717 provides a framework for the trial court in determining the best interests of the children in making a custody decision.

Brownson v. Allen (2000)

In this case, it was clear that the best interest of the child was met only in a limited manner. The standard generated high enforcement costs, invited litigation and imposed substantial burdens on courts and parties. Moreover, the standard exacerbated the psychological cost and encouraged parents to produce evidence of each other's failings. This approach intensified the hostility between them and undermined their inclination to cooperate in future matters concerning their child. The typical custody statute directs the courts to consider a wide range of proxies for best interests, thereby implicitly assuming a mix of relevant factors and the weight afforded to each will vary across families (Brownson v. Allen, 2000).

The Role of a Father

The link to the amount of paternal connection with one's child adolescent development has both optimistic and pessimistic views. Scholars have supported that more optimistic child development is the outcome of regular father-child time together and both parent's reassuring actions (Schindlaler, 2010). Researchers have positively correlated children's verbal communications skills growth and their attitude toward education with discussions with their fathers (Bretherton, 2010).

The restricted involvement between fathers and children potentially create a harmful effect on a child's emotional growth. Additional research advises insufficient father-child time together can limit child-father attachment. Bretherton (2010) inferred

that restricted child-father attachments adversely influences educational results.

Furthermore, researchers have concluded that children's school enthusiasm is intensely connected to their fathers' supportiveness (Martin, Ryan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010).

While parental involvement inquiries are more explicit to parents in general, an increasing number of scholars have concentrated on the involvement of fathers connected with the child's emotional requirements. Pattnaik and Sriram (2010) emphasized paternal participation in empirical research, initiated in the 1960s, and determined paternal participation previously studied fatherhood as a progressing sociocultural phenomenon from such viewpoints as "policy framework, and programs related to male involvement in children's lives." Hence, scholars have frequently debated a father's role in the structure of families.

In international paternal involvement studies including European and Australian fathers, in comparison to American fathers, researchers have, discussed father involvement strategies and techniques connected to household matters (O'Brien & Moss, 2010; Parkinson, 2010). The collective place of work guidelines in the United States and around the world embrace father's flexible office schedules and paid leave post childbirth and adoption (Claessens, 2012). Numerous researchers studying paternal involvement have found that paternal role of the father is significant in the growth of children. Other scholars have placed the emphasis on co-parenting or single parent homes (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Pleck and Masciadrelli distinguished that paternal participation is connected to positive child rearing results when combined with positive reinforcement from the mother.

Synthesis of Literature

Ackerman and Pritzl (2012) conducted a continuation case study on child visitation evaluation to extend previously studies conducted by Ackerman and Ackerman (1997) and Keilin and Bloom (1986). After surveying 213 cases, the authors compared the differences and similarities in assessment practices used in child-custody decisions for 20 years. The researchers reviewed ethical issues in child-custody evaluations, current practices, placement schedules, and risk management. Ackerman and Pritzl (2012) evaluated data from 20 years of case studies in child-custody and visitation cases to reveal the judgment patterns in child-custody cases.

Adam and Brady (2013) investigated major changes in family law. These researchers focused on impactful changes such as an increase in never-married parents, the fatherhood movement, the role of federal law in family issues, parenting-time philosophy, changes in custody philosophy, alternative forms of resolving conflicts, contributions of self-represented litigants, and change from fault divorce to no fault divorce. The authors recommended the issues that judges needed to address while determining custody, spousal maintenance, and child support. This included issues such as (a) domestic violence, mental health, and substance abuse issues in the family and (b) the financial standing of the parents. Adam and Brady also outlined the 50-year creation and evolution of family law and the family court system, revealing key considerations that judges should take into account before making rulings on child visitation.

There has been ample scholarly research on custody dispute resolution and gender roles (Artis, 2004). Many have concluded that the statutes on child visitation are gender neutral. Artis evaluated the role of gender and child visitation using cases recently

adjudicated by judges. This researcher used socio-legal and feminist-legal research based on judicial perceptions and viewpoints. Artis collected data from interviews with 25 trial court judges and evaluated various competing explanations, including affiliation with political parties, age, gender, and attitudes of judges toward gender roles. Using nine previously contested rulings, the author revealed consistency between the accounts that judges provided and the real custody decisions they gave. Artis provided insight into the change from the tender year's doctrine to the best interests of the child principle. This author also provided data on the role that gender continue to play in deciding child-custody cases.

Bow et al. (2011) interviewed 192 family law attorneys about their opinions and beliefs concerning child-custody assessments, specifically those assessments conducted by private or independent practitioners. The findings indicated that most participants preferred psychologists with a PhD in making child-custody assessments after the court orders (Bow et al., 2011). In addition, Bow et al. discovered that attorneys strongly favored court-ordered assessments that are implemented by impartial, doctoral-level psychologists. The findings of this study were relevant for examining and revealing suggestions on custody time, parenting time, and satisfaction using custody evaluations.

Braver et al. (2011) conducted two studies simultaneously. The findings of the first study indicated that if participants were given a chance to judge cases, the participants would make rulings that guaranteed shared custody plans. The participants' preference changed, however, when it came to dividing the care for pre-divorced children disproportionately; in this case, more participants favored the parent that had previously offered care, which was in line with the approximation rule of the American Law

Institute. In addition, having taken into account the contemporary legal and court environments, the participants preferred awarding fathers less time for parenting (Braver et al., 2011). Through the second study, the authors revealed that participants preferred the maintenance of equal shared custody, even when the parental conflict levels were very high.

By investigating child-custody judgments made in two cases, Braver et al. (2011) provided reliable results for determining preferred choices. These researchers successfully addressed public preference for shared custody. They also reviewed literature in order to explain the increased tendency of awarding less parenting time to fathers by the modern court systems, which shows the how the court system frequently favors mothers. Braver et al. presented a quantitative case study that determined the public was more accepting than the judiciary of joint custody and equal visitation time. The findings of this study provide further insight into public judgments made in child-custody cases following a divorce. These researchers, however, did not address the best custody benchmark, the approximation rule, equal custody rights, and the best interests of the child principle. They failed to show how the judges made decisions about child visitation. The current researcher aimed to fill this gap by determining the extent to which the best interests of the child standard, equal custody rights, and the approximation rule can influence judicial decisions in modern child-custody cases.

Charlow (1987) provided an explanation of the best interest's benchmarks and investigated the key problems resulting from the flaws (or vagueness) in the benchmarks. He also analyzed the efforts made to make simpler decisions during child-custody cases to favor mothers. The concepts of shared custody, psychological parenting, or primary

caregiving were also critiqued. In the findings, Charlow revealed that while awarding custody, it was vital to consider minimizing continued contact with parental and familial conflicts. Charlow outlined the flaws in the best interests of the child standard. The author labeled the best interests of the child standard as more of a vague platitude than a legal or scientific standard. Moreover, the author proposed neutral methods for awarding child custody and reducing parental conflicts.

Kruk (2011) proposed a framework of shared parental responsibility when child-custody cases are surrounded with conflicts. In his framework, he called the rebuttable a legal presumption of equal parental responsibility. Kruk proposed a situation in which the child spent equal time with both parents following a divorce. The framework combines the shared custody presumption with the approximation standard and is thus able to address core issues present in each presumption. It also acts as a blueprint for policy makers and legislators interested in creating equal parental statutes in family laws. The framework eliminates family therapy recommendations after divorce, pointing out the key limitations associated with such therapies. Kruk focused on how courts legally resolve disputed cases of child guardianship after parents separated and divorced. He argued that there are evident limitations in the current statutes providing jurisdictions for equal custody while prioritizing based on the best interests of the child. Kruk recommended more research to address the shortfalls in statutes prioritizing the best interests of the child.

The current systems that courts use to solve child-custody disputes barely consider child-custody outcomes and children's viewpoints. This calls for strong empirical research on the best interests of the child and the child's viewpoint.

Accordingly, Kruk (2012) provided key arguments supporting shared parental responsibility in child-custody disputes. This researcher argued that equal parental responsibility does the following:

1. It preserves the relationships children have with their parents;
2. It preserves the relationships parents have with their children;
3. It reflects the views and preferences concerning the child's best interests and needs;
4. It reduces parental conflict, thus preventing family violence;
5. It reflects the views and preferences of parents concerning the best interests and needs of their children;
6. It improves parent-child relationships;
7. It reflects the caregiving arrangements before the divorce;
8. It reduces litigation because parents focus less on arguing about custody time;
9. It provides consistent guidelines for the decision-making process in courts;
10. It motivates mediation and negotiation between parents;
11. It reduces parental alienation problems;
12. It encourages enforcement of some parental order; and
13. It addresses the issues of social justice concerning equality, independence, parental authority, and responsibilities.

Pickar and Kahn (2011) sought to provide a hybrid model as an alternative to the existing methods used in solving child-custody disputes. They examined an evaluation method called settlement-focused parenting plan consultation (SFPPC) in which a parent plan consultant with expertise on child visitation performs the evaluative mediation.

According to the authors, SFPPC is more convenient and significantly less expensive when compared with child-custody evaluation (Pickar & Kahn, 2011). The study was significant because the researchers focused on finding alternative approaches to settling child-custody cases while avoiding court battles. The authors successfully described the fundamental theory guiding SFPPC and defined parent plan consultant methods, procedures, and role requirements to address ethical and legal concerns in child-custody cases (Pickar & Kahn, 2011).

Tobin et al. (2011) improved upon previous versions of the Parent–Child Relationship Inventory (PCRI) by incorporating positive parenting. Positive parenting indicates the parent achieved a high score on the PCRI and indicates the parent displays positive parenting characteristics. The researchers compared the child-custody views of 64 students from a university. The university students used in the investigation were parents with children ranging in the age of 3 to 15 years. The results showed custody evaluation affected PCRI scores in the desired direction of positive parenting characteristics (Tobin et al., 2011). Nevertheless, the social desirability factor was also taken into account, which helped realize efforts to ensure positive parenting. These researchers assessed the differences between the replicated custody setting and the research setting in the reply patterns of parents on the PCRI.

In previous eras, fathers were regarded as the all-powerful head of the family who exercised massive influence over their families (Knibiehler, 1995), and remnants of these philosophies persisted until relatively recently. According to Pleck and Pleck (1997), fathers were regarded principally as moral standard-bearers in the course of the colonial period of American history. By popular consent, fathers were in control of safeguarding

that their children were raised with an appropriate understanding of morals, developed predominantly from an education of the Bible and other theological writings. During industrialization, the primary emphasis shifted from moral guidance to breadwinning and financial upkeep of the family. Then, possibly because of the Great Depression, which reduced many men's status as breadwinners, social scientists articulated apprehension about the disappointments of numerous men to model "manly" conduct for their sons. During the course of the 20th century, fathers became more involved in the daily activities of raising children (Griswold, 1993), and subsequently, women's rights became more pronounced, leading to nurturing father, who enjoyed playing an active part in his child's life.

Prevalent and academic debates of fatherhood have long dwelled on the significance of involvement—previously defined by the level of success as the breadwinner—and the fright of insufficient fathering (Griswold, 1993). As opposed to the previous understanding of a fathers' role, which often fixated reasonably narrowly on breadwinning, scholars, and philosophers, no longer cohere to the basic belief that fathers undertake a one-dimensional role in their families and their children's lives. As an alternative, they identify that fathers play some significant roles, whose relative significance differs across all sub-cultural groups (Griswold, 1993).

Gaps in Literature

Previous scholars have illustrated that child-custody evaluators and courts face numerous problems when settling custody disputes during divorce cases (Artis, 2004; Bow et al., 2011; Braver et al., 2011; Laufer-Ukeles, 2014; Scott & Emery, 2014). The main problem facing courts in these cases is differences in the understanding of the best

interests of the child (DiPrizito, 2016). There have been legislative efforts to ensure that children continue to maintain strong relationships with both parents, while protecting them from possible psychological and emotional harm in the future (Bow et al., 2011; Gresek, 2013). Others have provided evidence indicating infeasible cooperation between the parents because of poor visitation arrangements (Braver et al., 2011; Brown, 2012; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015; Rosin, 2012; Scott & Emery, 2014); therefore, courts prefer granting father's liberal time with their children or awarding joint custody. Most opponents of joint custody, however, disagree with this move. An increase in parental conflict is unhealthy for both children and parents (Bow et al. 2011; Brown, 2012; Simon & Stahl, 2014; Valastro, 2012).

State laws that consider the primary caregiver and other factors for the child's protection are frequently undermined when courts award one parent liberal visitation rights as compensation for awarding the child's custody to the other parent (Bow et al., 2011; Braver et al., 2011). Child-custody evaluators and courts often use friendly parent and parental alienation factors to undermine the state laws that protect children. They view these state laws as hostile toward one parent and his/her relationship with the child. Evaluators fail to consider the best interests of the child (Brown, 2012; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015; Rosin, 2012; Scott & Emery, 2014).

Disputes surrounding child-custody cases are complex to solve; especially if unsubstantiated allegations arise (Braver et al., 2011; Rosen et al., 2009). The evaluation of disputes on family-custody cases requires sufficient knowledge of important factors, such as parenting styles, the relationships children have with their parents, the indicators of future risks, and the psychological wellbeing of parents and children (Bow et al., 2011;

Brown, 2012; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015; Rosen et al., 2009; Scott & Emery, 2014; Simon & Stahl, 2014; Valastro, 2012). Scholars have proposed that courts need to make decisions considering the best interests of the child based upon supporting evidence (Gresk, 2013).

Conclusion

Based on the scholarly articles that the researcher reviewed in this chapter, the following conclusions were obtained. Public policies encouraging children's involvement with both parents following a divorce corroborate scientific literature alongside the predominant public sentiments on shared custody arrangements (Rosen et al., 2009; Scott & Emery, 2014; Valastro, 2012). State legislation must define the best interests of children by including parenting plans that maximize parenting time (based on the approximation rule), when practicable, and when circumstances will not likely endanger the safety, health, and well-being of the children and/or a parent. Safety can be endangered by violence, gross negligence, abuse, brutality, compromised parenting (resulting from extreme mental illness), substance abuse, or tremendously poor and harmful behavior toward the children (DiPrizito, 2016; Gresk, 2013; Lorandos & Bone, 2016; Singer, 2014; Warshak, 2015).

There is increasing evidence to support the premise that equal distribution of visitation time is related to better outcomes for both parents and children (Adam & Brady, 2013; Artis, 2004; DiPrizito, 2016). An exact equal-time assumption is likely to bring similar accountabilities as presumptions previously used to overrate a sole factor, such as parents' gender, child's preferences, or past caretaking (Lorandos & Bone, 2016; Saunders et al., 2013; Warshak, 2015). The use of longitudinal study statistics were

previously utilized in conjunction with quantitative research on father involvement. Aquilino (2006), Carlson (2006), and King (2006) highlighted the statistical results of longitudinal studies focused on child-father interactions amongst noncustodial fathers. Aquilino (2006) established an association between the fathers' responsibility and participation in parenting choices throughout a child's youth and father-child relationships for the duration of early adulthood. Similarly, Goncy and van Dulmen (2010) utilized the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to evaluate paternal-child participation in connection to emotional closeness, shared communication and shared activities. These researchers discovered that fathers that establish shared communication and emotional closeness with their children also establish an optimistic influence concerning lower youth substance abuse and associated difficulties. Carlson (2006) concluded that the father-child bond is most advantageous when the father and child live in the same household. In contrast, King's (2006) suggested the benefits of a nonresident father-children relationship, noting that a significant bond exists between nonresident fathers and their young children.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher describes the research design employed to answer the main research question. The researcher explains the reasons for selecting the quantitative method, describes the research sample used, details the process used to collect the secondary data, identifies the instruments and source of data used to answer the research question, and explains the data analysis procedures.

Quantitative Method

The researcher utilized a quantitative technique to obtain statistical data analysis in support of this study. Using the quantitative method, the researcher collected secondary data to corroborate or contest the existing theories (Neuman, 2004). Quantitative researchers utilize unbiased data and perform statistical examination of data collected through interviews, questionnaires, and surveys, or by analyzing secondary data.

Research Design

In this quantitative study, the researcher explored secondary data regarding the correlation between child visitation of cohabitating fathers and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children (e.g., reading to the children, after school activities, bathing or clothing, or eating dinner together). Yin (2014) defined a quantitative study as a technique used by researchers to obtain an in-depth understanding of events or entities in a specified time. Quantitative studies depend on the diversity of sources, observations, interviews, focus groups, and videotapes

(Neuman, 2004). Quantitative studies help researchers perform detailed examinations of individuals, organizations, events, school institutions, standards, and departments. In an effort to understand the participant's experience, researchers are increasingly using case studies (Neuman, 2004). Quantitative studies enable scholars to understand the primary characteristics of real-life events, including managerial and organizational decisions and processes (Yin, 2014).

In a quantitative study, the researcher examines specific situations and factors, such as health conditions, while providing explanations for the primary concerns (Scott & Emery, 2014). The design of the current study allowed the researcher to build upon social contract theory and evaluate major factors considered in child-custody cases (Horvath & Ryznar, 2015; Mason, 2011).

Data Sources

In this quantitative research study, the researcher utilized secondary data on the statistically significant relationship between cohabitating and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children (e.g., reading to the children, after school activities, bathing or clothing, or eating dinner together). Secondary data are data previously collected by a researcher other than the user. Shared sources of secondary data for social science include censuses; information collected by government departments, organizational records, and previously collected data collected for other research purposes. The current researcher utilized secondary data collected by the United States Census Bureau (2017).

Data Collection Procedure

According to Neuman (2004), quantitative researchers can successfully collect data for comprehensive analysis if they follow suitable procedures. The Walden University IRB approved the following steps to collect secondary data:

1. Find and obtain secondary data;
2. Become familiar with data sources related to the research questions;
3. Discover sources of secondary data by reading literature related to the topic;
4. Initiate contact with archives;
5. Complete a request for data;
6. Secure the requested data points;
7. Evaluate the quality of the data source, sample size, and handle/secure secondary data;
8. Ascertain the credentials of the source/authors;
9. Verify that date of collection/publication and sample size were complete; and
10. Analyze the data.

Data Analysis

Secondary data analysis encompasses the use of existing data, composed for the purposes of a previous study, in order to study a research interest that was different from that of the original work. A chief benefit of utilizing secondary data is the scope of existing data. The United States government sponsors abundant studies on a large, national scale that most researchers would have a challenging time assembling. Many of these data sets are also longitudinal, meaning the data were collected from an identical

sample over numerous interval stages. Longitudinal data allow researchers to study trends and changes of phenomena over time. In this study, the researcher utilized a chi-square test of association to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between variables.

Ethical Concerns

While carrying out any investigation with human subjects, the researcher must know how the research may affect the participants (Maxwell, 2013). It is important to adhere to ethical standards during all stages of data collection and analysis (Frost, 2011). According to Kumar (2005), it is unethical to accumulate information without the participants' knowledge and informed consent. Prior to utilizing secondary data, the researcher reviewed the original data sources' informed consent, thus ensuring anonymity, informed consent, and confidentiality.

Informed Consent

Even after anonymizing the information for secondary analysis, there was an associated danger that contributors could become identifiable. The secondary data analyses that the researcher used for this study did not encompass protected data or personal identifiable information of the contributors who partook in the original study, therefore there was not a requirement to obtain informed consent. Moreover, Walden University's Institutional Review Board approved all of the secondary data sources that the researcher utilized for this study.

Confidentiality

Although the researcher utilized secondary data for this study, to ensure the confidentiality of the participants, the researcher stored the collected data in a locked

computer protected by a password. The researcher also stored hard copies, such as spreadsheets and tables, in a secure and private location.

Conclusion

In Chapter 3, the researcher disclosed the methods that the researcher undertook to collect secondary data for non-parametric testing. The researcher outlined the research design, data sources, data collection methods and procedures, sample population, data analysis, and ethical concerns. In the next chapter, the researcher presents the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This chapter presents results of the analyses to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between cohabitating and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children. Previous scholars have advocated that the paternal guidance of a father has a positive effect on the social, emotional, and academic development of children (Johnson, Li, Kendell, Strazdins & Jacoby, 2013; Noel, Stark & Redford, 2013; Snowman, McCown & Biehler, 2012). The following chapter outlines the statistical findings obtained from non-parametric testing between multiple variables

Settings

The proceedings that govern family laws encompass a wide range of subjects, including the obtaining and maintaining of custody, child support, visitation, relocation, and the termination of parental rights (Simon & Stahl, 2014). Furthermore, family law standards vary from state to state. Family law judges reach a range of conclusions that may have an emotional impact on children; including visitation rights, the physical custody of the child, and measures that terminate parental rights. When family law judges' rule on the decisions as mentioned above, they determine whether the decision is in the "best interests" of the child (Determining the Best Interest of the Child, 2017).

Demographics

The researcher collected data from the CDC National Survey of Family Growth from 2011 to 2015. The sampling represents the 12,614,000 total fathers who cohabited with their child and 2,208,000 total fathers who did not cohabite with their child. Of these, not all responded to each question, and the total number of fathers in each group changed slightly depending on the question analyzed. These fluctuations are reflected in each analysis as the total number of respondents for either sample. The 2011-2015 CDC National Survey of Family Growth included 9,321 interviews with men conducted from September 2011 through September 2015. The survey is designed to be nationally representative of men age 15-44.

Statistical Analysis

This dissertation sought to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between cohabitating and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children. The researcher conducted statistical analyses via a nonparametric test of multiple variables. Nonparametric statistics refer to a statistical method in which the data is not required to fit a normal distribution. The researcher utilized the z test of proportion. The z test of proportion is an appropriate statistical method to compare two independent proportions.

Data Collection

The Walden University IRB approved this study on August 28, 2017. The Walden University Approval number is 08-28-17-0475569. The researcher adhered to all research protocols, including the ethical procedures required by Walden University.

Transferability

Transferability provides readers with confirmation that the results could be applicable to other circumstances, times, and populations. The researcher completely understood the initial research context and the assumptions essential to the original research. The researcher assumed responsibility for making the judgment that the data was sensible to transfer as secondary data.

Analysis

RQ1: Is there a statistically significant relationship between cohabitating fathers and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children?

H1: There is no statistically significant relationship between cohabitating fathers and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children.

H2: There is a statistically significant relationship between cohabitating and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children.

Results

The z test is a method of comparing two proportions. In each test, the two proportions represent the number of cohabitating or non-cohabiting fathers who

responded to each question. The z score was then determined by finding the difference between the value in the sample and the mean, divided by the standard deviation. As a nonparametric analysis, this test did not require any restrictive assumptions be met, and there was no requirement to test normality or variances within either group to ensure the test's validity.

Fed or ate meals with child. A total of 12,602,000 cohabitating fathers and 2,207,000 non-cohabitating fathers responded to the question regarding the frequency with which they fed or ate meals with their child in the last four weeks. Results for the frequency with which a father ate meals with their children in the last four weeks were all significant ($p < .001$). As shown in Table 1, a much greater proportion of the non-cohabitating fathers (42.82%) responded that they did not feed or eat meals with their child at all in the past four weeks when compared to that of cohabitating fathers (0.80%). Conversely, a majority of cohabitating fathers (71.87%) said that they ate meals with their child every day, in comparison to the 7.88 percent of non-cohabiting fathers who ate meals with their child every day in the past three weeks.

Table 1

z Tests of Proportion for Frequency of Fed or Ate Meals with Child

Fed or ate meals with their children in the last 4 weeks	Cohabiting <i>n</i> (%)	Non-cohabiting <i>n</i> (%)	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Not at all	101,000 (0.80)	945,000 (42.82)	-2247.42	< .001
Once a week or less	404,000 (3.21)	601,000 (27.23)	-1309.10	< .001
Several times a week	3,040,000(24.12)	487,000 (22.07)	66.18	< .001
Every day	9,057,000(71.87)	174,000 (7.88)	1809.68	< .001
Total	12,602,000	2,207,000	-	-

Bathed or dressed child. A total of 12,614,000 cohabitating fathers and 2,206,000 non-cohabitating fathers responded to the question regarding the frequency with which they bathed or dressed their child in the last four weeks. Results for the differences in proportions of each response to this question were all significant ($p < .001$). As seen in Table 2, a much greater proportion of the non-cohabitating fathers (47.4%) responded they did not bathe or dress their child at all in the past four weeks than the cohabitating fathers, of whom 4.0 percent did not bathe or dress their child in the past four weeks. Conversely, a majority of cohabitating fathers (57.60%) reported bathing or dressing their child every day, in comparison to 8.3 percent of non-cohabitating fathers.

Table 2

z Tests of Proportion for Frequency of Bathed or Dressed Child

Bathed or dressed their children in the last 4 weeks	Cohabiting <i>n</i> (%)	Non-cohabiting <i>n</i> (%)	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Not at all	505,000 (4.00)	1,047,000 (47.46)	-1944.80	< .001
Once a week or less	807,000 (6.40)	473,000 (21.44)	-733.84	< .001
Several times a week	4,036,000 (32.00)	503,000 (22.80)	273.33	< .001
Every day	7,266,000 (57.60)	183,000 (8.30)	1351.30	< .001
Total	12,614,000	2,206,000	-	-

Played with child. A total of 12,613,000 cohabitating fathers and 2,208,000 non-cohabitating fathers responded to the question regarding the frequency with which they played with their child in the prior weeks. Results for the differences in proportions of each response to this question were all significant (i.e., $p < .001$). As seen in Table 3, a much greater proportion of the non-cohabitating fathers (37%) responded they did not play with their child at all in the past four weeks, compared to that of the 0.40 percent of cohabitating fathers. Conversely, a majority of cohabitating fathers said they played with their child everyday (80.70%), in comparison to a much smaller- 10.42 percent -of non-cohabitating fathers who played with their child every day in the prior three weeks.

Table 3

z Tests of Proportion for Frequency of Played with Child

Played with their children in the last 4 weeks	Cohabiting <i>n</i> (%)	Non-cohabitating <i>n</i> (%)	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Not at all	50,000 (0.40)	817,000 (37.00)	-2138.13	< .001
Once a week or less	164,000 (1.30)	532,000 (24.09)	-1476.96	< .001
Several times a week	2,220,000 (17.60)	629,000 (28.49)	-378.71	< .001
Every day	10,179,000(80.70)	230,000 (10.42)	2107.14	< .001
Total	12,613,000	2,208,000	-	-

Read to child. A total of 12,612,000 cohabitating fathers and 2,208,000 non-cohabitating fathers responded to the question regarding the frequency with which they read to their child in the last four weeks. Results for the differences in proportions of each response to this question were all significant (i.e., $p < .001$). As seen in Table 4, a much greater proportion of the non-cohabitating fathers (51.99%) responded they did not read to their child at all in the prior four weeks, as compared to the 15.70 percent of cohabitating fathers. Conversely, a larger proportion of cohabitating fathers (28.90%) said that they read to their child every day, compared to the 4.89 percent of non-cohabitating fathers.

Table 4

z Tests of Proportion for Frequency of Read to Child

Read to their children in the last 4 weeks	Cohabiting <i>n</i> (%)	Non-cohabitating <i>n</i> (%)	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Not at All	1,980,000 (15.70)	1,148,000 (51.99)	-1219.17	< .001
Once a week or less	3,090,000 (24.50)	563,000 (25.50)	-31.73	< .001
Several times week	3,897,000 (30.90)	389,000 (17.62)	401.55	< .001
Every day	3,645,000 (28.90)	108,000 (4.89)	756.83	< .001
Total	12,612,000	2,208,000	-	-

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher reported the results of the data analyses.

Statistically significant relationships between cohabitating fathers and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children were noted for each analyses. Via the above analyses, this dissertation revealed a statistically significant relationship between the level of involvement of cohabitating fathers and non-cohabitating fathers.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate the relationship between cohabitating fathers and non-cohabitating fathers and the time spent involved in the daily activities of their children. There is an increased consensus within the research community that when family violence is not a key factor, children's interests and needs are best served by conserving the meaningful relationships children have with both their parents (Brown, 2012; Horvath & Ryznar, 2015; Kruk, 2012; Scott & Emery, 2014; Valastro, 2012). Children want and need both parents in their lives, beyond the constraints of visitation relationships and other arrangements, such as primary caregivers (Adams, 2016; Bow et al., 2011; Braver et al., 2011; Tobin et al., 2011).

Through the literature review for the study, the researcher reviewed a significant number of peer-reviewed articles detailing the various aspects of the Best Interest of the Child Doctrine. The Best Interest of the Child Doctrine is not the focus of this study; however, the outcome of child visitation cases are heavily influenced by this doctrine and it may ultimately play a key role in the amount of time a non-cohabitating father spends with his child.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this study, the researcher found a statistically significant difference between cohabitating fathers and non-cohabitating fathers and the level of father involvement. When they are in the same household, fathers spend a significant amount of time conducting daily activities with their children (Giallo, Treyvaud, Cooklin, & Wade, 2013;

Jones & Mosher, 2013). Habit-forming activities such as eating a meal together, bathing, dressing, or teaching skills (e.g., writing, reading, math calculations, etc.) are essential for fathers to foster a continuous relationship with their children post-separation or divorce (Giallo et al., 2013). In other words, it is not merely the overall amount of time the child spends with the father that benefits them the most; it is the amount of time that a father and his child spend bonding and engaging in a wide-ranging list of everyday events that encourages the best interests of the child (Kruk, 2012).

Children receive the maximum benefit when their fathers are involved in their upbringing across a broad range of daily activities. Furthermore, regulating fathering time is not effective for the parental bonding with a child, as the types of undertakings that shapes resilient parent-child ties and stimulated influential parent-child relationships are less likely to occur (Nielsen, 2011). Previous researchers have agreed that shared parenting provides better results for children of all ages across an extensive collection of emotional, behavioral, and physical health measures (Nielsen, 2014).

The involvement of fathers in the daily activities of their children is proven to be a substantial factor in nurturing a child's speech and language development, fine motor skills development, gross motor skills development, social and emotional development, and cognitive development (Scott & Hunt, 2011; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). Lamb (2010) concluded that one of the benefits of a father's communication with his child includes the stimulation of the child's language growth. Additionally, greater participation of fathers, including emotional support and parental compassion, is related to improved educational results for the child (Fatherhood Institute, 2010; Jones & Mosher, 2013).

Limitations of the Study

Secondary data analysis has grown into a progressively widespread process of improving the general efficiency of research. Nevertheless, secondary data analysis is contingent upon both public and private researchers, as well as agencies sharing previously collected data with readily available research databases (Cheng & Phillips, 2014). Official statistics, like those provided by the U.S. Census Bureau, often offer the only means of studying the past.

Another limitation of secondary data analysis is that the secondary researchers were not a part of the initial data collection. The researcher may not be informed of study-specific anomalies in the data collection, resulting in the misinterpretation of individual variables involved in the dataset. Finally, the researcher did not address specific demographic variables. The researcher only focused on heterosexual parents, and did not consider participants' race, education, income, sexual identity, or religious beliefs.

Recommendations

The decisions made in child visitation cases have short and long-term effects on both the children and their parents. The best interest standard is the guiding force to decide post-divorce child custody cases. In part, conclusions that determine what was best for a child essentially mirror social norms. Future research should continue to question and study the long-term effects and benefits of presumption child custody legislative language.

This recommendation could provide greater insight into the benefits of rebuttable presumption child custody legislative language between otherwise equally qualified

parents. This statutory language may also serve as a starting point for parents conducting child custody mediation.

Implications

The findings of this study have the potential to influence positive social change at the individual, family, and societal level. Numerous researchers have highlighted the benefits of active parental involvement of both parents in their children's lives after separation and divorce (Giallo et al., 2013; Jones & Mosher, 2013; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). The implications of the current study have the potential to influence legislators to enact rebuttable presumption child custody legislative language. If adopted, the rebuttable presumption child custody statutory language would dictate spending equal time with each parent as long as both are deemed "fit and loving" parents.

Conclusion

This dissertation concentrated on cohabitating and non-cohabitating fathers, and their participation in the daily activities of their children. The results of this study indicated that fathers who lived in the same household, as their children were more active participants in their children's lives as compared to fathers who lived separately from their children. Previous researchers have supported the idea that a father's active participation in his child's daily life increases the academic success of the child, while decreasing the likelihood of future misbehavior and substance abuse (Cabrera, Fitzgerald, Bradley & Roggman, 2014).

The commitment of fathers' participation in the daily activities of their children is one indicator of accountable fatherhood. For that reason, it is incumbent on the public to help facilitate the significance of father's participation in the daily progress of children.

The researcher designed this study to increase the awareness that fathers play a very important role in the development of their children. The findings of the current study, as well as those of previous publications, support the thought process that the time a father spends with his children is directly related to a father's involvement in the daily activities of the child. In this regard, the researcher recommends that whenever possible, child visitation cases should result in equal parenting time between parents.

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Appendix

Table A1

Fathers between 15–44 with children under the age of 18 by cohabitation status, by selected characteristics: United States, 2011–2015

Characteristic	Total number of men (in thousands)	Lives with one or more children		Lives apart from one or more children	
		Number (in thousands) and percentage (SE)	Number (in thousands) and percentage (SE)	Number (in thousands) and percentage (SE)	Number (in thousands) and percentage (SE)
Total ¹	62,128	23,546	37.9 (0.95)	7,505	12.1 (0.60)
Age in years					
15–24	21,210	1,473	6.9 (0.75)	701	3.3 (0.42)
25–34	19,986	8,691	43.5 (1.31)	2,798	14.0 (1.09)
35–44	20,931	13,383	63.9 (1.41)	4,006	19.1 (1.14)
Marital or cohabiting status					
Currently married	23,357	17,596	75.3 (1.54)	2,838	12.2 (0.97)
Currently cohabiting	7,554	4,053	53.6 (2.61)	1,532	20.3 (1.97)
Not currently married or cohabiting. . .	31,217	1,898	6.1 (0.53)	3,135	10.0 (0.62)
Education ²					
High school diploma or GED or less	21,072	11,334	53.8 (1.46)	4,887	23.2 (1.24)
Some college or more education	25,987	11,711	45.1 (1.71)	2,269	8.7 (0.74)
Hispanic origin and race					
Hispanic or Latino	11,847	5,154	43.5 (1.68)	2,170	18.3 (1.28)
Not Hispanic or Latino White, single race	37,283	13,674	36.7 (1.28)	3,059	8.2 (0.69)
Black or African American, single race .	7,341	2,453	33.4 (1.77)	1,749	23.8 (1.78)

¹Includes men of other or multiple-race and origin groups, not shown separately. Men who live with their children also may have children they do not live with currently; they are included in both categories.

²Limited to men aged 22–44 at time of interview. GED is General Educational Development high school equivalency diploma.

NOTES: SE is standard error. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2011–2015.

Table A2

Fathers aged between 15–44 with children under the age of 5 years, characterized by how often they fed or ate meals with their children in the last 4 weeks: United States, 2011–2015

Characteristic	Number (in thousands)	Percent distribution (standard error)			
		Total	Not at all	Once a week or less	Several times a week
Lives with one or more children					
Total ¹	12,614	100.00.8 (0.24)	3.2 (0.63)	24.1 (1.54)	71.8 (1.55)
Age in years					
15–24	1,353	100.03.2 (1.73)	4.1 (1.78)	24.2 (4.20)	68.5 (4.45)
25–34	6,314	100.00.9 (0.32)	2.7 (0.66)	24.9 (1.96)	71.6 (2.04)
35–44	4,947	100.0 *	* 3.8 (1.21)	23.0 (2.32)	73.0 (2.37)
Marital or cohabiting status					
Currently married	9,577	100.00.6 (0.17)	3.2 (0.77)	23.6 (1.74)	72.6 (1.84)
Currently cohabiting.	2,394	100.02.0 (1.18)	4.1 (1.34)	24.0 (3.15)	69.9 (3.55)
Not currently married or cohabiting	644	100.0 *	**	* 31.8 (6.10)	66.9 (6.06)
Education²					
High school diploma or GED or less education	5,620	100.01.4 (0.54)	3.8 (0.96)	24.5 (2.28)	70.3 (2.38)
Some college or more education.	6,536	100.00.2 (0.08)	2.6 (0.80)	23.8 (2.32)	73.3 (2.48)
Hispanic origin and race					
Hispanic or Latino	2,948	100.01.4 (0.59)	6.3 (1.45)	28.4 (3.81)	63.9 (3.46)
Not Hispanic or Latino					
White, single race	7,237	100.00.3 (0.14)	1.8 (0.73)	24.0 (2.14)	73.9 (2.15)
Black or African American, single race	1,358	100.0 *	* 5.7 (1.94)	14.4 (2.72)	78.2 (3.45)
Does not live with one or more of his children					
Total ¹	2,208	100.042.8 (3.94)	27.2 (3.71)	22.1 (2.63)	7.9 (1.96)
Age in years					
15–24	589	100.024.7 (6.31)	29.0 (6.34)	33.7 (6.12)	12.5 (4.41)
25–34	1,094	100.044.1 (5.12)	35.3 (5.66)	16.6 (3.41)	4.0 (1.66)
35–44	525	100.060.4 (7.91)	8.2 (2.84)	20.4 (6.19)	11.0 (5.62)
Marital or cohabiting status					
Currently married	511	100.0 *	**	* *	* * *
Currently cohabiting.	384	100.0 *	**	* *	* * *
Not currently married or cohabiting	1,313	100.031.2 (4.43)	29.5 (4.85)	30.3 (3.63)	8.9 (2.74)
Education²					
High school diploma or GED or less education	1,378	100.054.0 (5.34)	23.5 (4.86)	16.1 (2.90)	6.4 (2.48)
Some college or more education.	481	100.032.9 (6.79)	37.4 (8.36)	22.2 (6.23)	7.4 (3.64)
Hispanic origin and race					
Hispanic or Latino	760	100.058.0 (6.41)	14.6 (3.53)	18.7 (4.77)	8.6 (4.15)
Not Hispanic or Latino					
White, single race	723	100.035.2 (7.08)	40.9 (7.80)	20.0 (4.08)	* *
Black or African American, single race	622	100.031.0 (4.97)	26.5 (5.44)	29.8 (4.51)	12.6 (3.37)

¹Includes fathers of other or multiple-race and origin groups, not shown separately. Fathers who live with children also may have children they do not live with currently; they are included in both categories.

²Limited to fathers aged 22–44 at time of interview. GED is General Educational Development high school equivalency diploma.

SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2011–2015.

Table A3

Fathers aged between 15–44 with children under the age of 5 years, characterized by how often they bathed, or dressed their children by cohabitation status: United States, 2011–2015

Characteristic	Number (in thousands)	Percent distribution (standard error)			
		Total	Not at all	Once a week or less	Several times a week
Lives with one or more children					
Total ¹	12,614	100.04.0 (0.75)	6.4 (0.77)	32.0 (1.68)	57.6 (2.00)
Age in years					
15–24	1,353	100.06.0 (2.39)	4.6 (1.43)	28.3 (4.46)	61.1 (4.90)
25–34	6,314	100.03.4 (0.69)	6.9 (0.99)	30.7 (1.94)	59.1 (2.17)
35–44	4,947	100.04.3 (1.46)	6.3 (1.46)	34.7 (3.04)	54.7 (3.32)
Marital or cohabiting status					
Currently married	9,577	100.03.6 (0.83)	6.3 (0.91)	32.8 (2.00)	57.3 (2.39)
Currently cohabiting	2,394	100.06.3 (1.87)	7.9 (1.53)	25.7 (2.89)	60.1 (3.59)
Not currently married or cohabiting	644	100.01.7 (0.91)	1.9 (0.83)	43.8 (6.30)	52.6 (6.19)
Education ²					
High school diploma or GED or less education	5,620	100.05.4 (1.06)	8.3 (1.37)	32.7 (2.18)	53.6 (2.37)
Some college or more education	6,536	100.02.9 (1.05)	4.8 (1.08)	31.8 (2.63)	60.5 (3.00)
Hispanic origin and race					
Hispanic or Latino	2,948	100.07.6 (1.59)	12.7 (2.03)	34.7 (2.76)	45.0 (3.35)
Not Hispanic or Latino					
White, single race	7,237	100.02.1 (0.86)	4.2 (0.99)	33.6 (2.37)	60.0 (2.74)
Black or African American, single race	1,358	100.06.5 (2.60)	5.9 (2.04)	17.1 (2.79)	70.4 (3.58)
Does not live with one or more of his children					
Total ¹	2,208	100.047.4 (4.03)	21.4 (3.50)	22.8 (2.93)	8.3 (2.01)
Age in years					
15–24	589	100.031.4 (6.54)	20.1 (5.39)	33.1 (6.20)	15.3 (5.12)
25–34	1,094	100.046.1 (5.45)	29.4 (5.77)	21.2 (4.40)	3.2 (1.47)
35–44	525	100.068.1 (6.97)	6.2 (2.91)	14.7 (3.91)	10.9 (5.62)
Marital or cohabiting status					
Currently married	511	100.0	*	*	*
Currently cohabiting	384	100.0	*	*	*
Not currently married or cohabiting	1,313	100.036.6 (4.59)	22.6 (4.44)	30.6 (4.19)	10.2 (2.85)
Education ²					
High school diploma or GED or less education	1,378	100.060.2 (5.29)	17.4 (4.16)	16.6 (3.53)	5.8 (2.34)
Some college or more education	481	100.033.2 (6.43)	34.9 (8.48)	24.6 (6.52)	7.3 (3.64)
Hispanic origin and race					
Hispanic or Latino	760	100.065.7 (5.94)	11.3 (3.41)	15.7 (3.85)	7.3 (3.94)
Not Hispanic or Latino					
White, single race	723	100.038.6 (7.34)	27.5 (7.51)	27.3 (6.48)	6.6 (3.10)
Black or African American, single race	622	100.034.2 (4.53)	24.4 (5.30)	28.7 (4.39)	12.7 (3.31)

¹Includes fathers of other or multiple-race and origin groups, not shown separately. Fathers who live with children also may have children they do not live with currently; they are included in both categories.

²Limited to fathers aged 22–44 at time of interview. GED is General Educational Development high school equivalency diploma.

SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2011–2015.

Table A5

Fathers aged between 15–44 with children under the age of 5 years, characterized by how often they played with their children in the last 4 weeks, by cohabitation status: United States, 2011–2015

Characteristic	Number (in thousands)	Percent distribution (standard error)				
		Total	Not at all	Once a week or less	Several times a week	Every day
Lives with one or more children						
Total ¹	12,614	100.0	0.4 (0.18)	1.3 (0.30)	17.6 (1.28)	80.7 (1.32)
Age in years						
15–24	1,353	100.0	*	**	* 14.9 (3.08)	81.1 (3.32)
25–34	6,314	100.0	0.3 (0.11)	1.7 (0.47)	16.1 (1.53)	82.0 (1.63)
35–44	4,947	100.0	*	*0.6 (0.34)	20.4 (2.41)	79.0 (2.45)
Marital or cohabiting status						
Currently married	9,577	100.0	*	*0.9 (0.33)	17.4 (1.39)	81.6 (1.46)
Currently cohabiting	2,394	100.0	1.3 (0.88)	2.7 (1.11)	15.4 (2.71)	80.7 (2.72)
Not currently married or cohabiting	644	100.0	*	*1.6 (0.85)	29.8 (6.27)	68.3 (6.22)
Education ²						
High school diploma or GED or less education	5,620	100.0	0.7 (0.39)	1.7 (0.53)	17.9 (1.70)	79.7 (1.70)
Some college or more education	6,536	100.0	*	*1.0 (0.44)	17.6 (2.13)	81.4 (2.20)
Hispanic origin and race						
Hispanic or Latino	2,948	100.0	0.5 (0.26)	2.7 (0.92)	22.6 (2.40)	74.1 (2.38)
Not Hispanic or Latino						
White, single race	7,237	100.0	*	*0.6 (0.28)	16.6 (1.81)	82.7 (1.86)
Black or African American, single race	1,358	100.0	*	**	* 13.9 (2.64)	82.2 (3.64)
Does not live with one or more of his children						
Total ¹	2,208	100.0	37.0 (3.96)	24.1 (3.09)	28.5 (3.20)	10.4 (2.14)
Age in years						
15–24	589	100.0	22.4 (6.49)	24.5 (5.61)	34.5 (6.11)	18.7 (5.35)
25–34	1,094	100.0	40.4 (5.09)	25.5 (4.38)	28.7 (4.91)	5.4 (1.80)
35–44	525	100.0	46.5 (7.85)	20.6 (7.59)	21.4 (6.20)	11.5 (5.63)
Marital or cohabiting status						
Currently married	511	100.0	*	**	*	* * *
Currently cohabiting	384	100.0	*	**	*	* * *
Not currently married or cohabiting	1,313	100.0	25.2 (4.42)	24.1 (3.74)	37.9 (4.09)	12.8 (3.06)
Education ²						
High school diploma or GED or less education	1,378	100.0	47.3 (5.59)	20.8 (3.99)	24.4 (4.21)	7.5 (2.55)
Some college or more education	481	100.0	26.4 (6.11)	38.6 (8.51)	27.0 (6.82)	8.1 (3.66)
Hispanic origin and race						
Hispanic or Latino	760	100.0	52.3 (7.64)	17.6 (5.03)	20.1 (4.97)	10.0 (4.17)
Not Hispanic or Latino						
White, single race	723	100.0	29.7 (6.68)	28.0 (7.02)	35.8 (7.06)	6.6 (3.12)
Black or African American, single race	622	100.0	24.8 (4.64)	26.1 (5.56)	32.7 (4.68)	16.5 (3.60)

¹Includes fathers of other or multiple-race and origin groups, not shown separately. Fathers who live with children also may have children they do not live with currently; they are included in both categories.

²Limited to fathers aged 22–44 at time of interview. GED is General Educational Development high school equivalency diploma. NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2011–2015.

Table A6

Fathers aged between 15–44 with children under the age of 5 years, characterized by how often they read to their children in the last 4 weeks, by cohabitation status: United States, 2011–2015

Characteristic	Number (in thousands)	Total	Percent distribution (standard error)			
			Not at all	Once a week or less	Several times a week	Every day
Lives with one or more children						
Total ¹	12,611	100.0	15.7 (1.39)	24.5 (1.46)	30.9 (1.42)	28.9 (1.62)
Age in years						
15–24	1,353	100.0	23.5 (4.11)	27.2 (4.74)	28.8 (4.68)	20.4 (4.65)
25–34	6,312	100.0	15.9 (1.64)	26.0 (1.86)	30.9 (1.67)	27.2 (2.05)
35–44	4,946	100.0	13.3 (2.40)	21.9 (2.69)	31.3 (3.00)	33.5 (2.99)
Marital or cohabiting status						
Currently married	9,575	100.0	12.3 (1.44)	24.1 (1.76)	32.8 (1.62)	30.8 (1.83)
Currently cohabiting	2,394	100.0	29.5 (3.11)	27.2 (3.34)	20.0 (3.08)	23.3 (2.94)
Not currently married or cohabiting	642	100.0	14.4 (5.78)	20.0 (4.75)	43.2 (6.84)	22.5 (4.91)
Education²						
High school diploma or GED or less education	5,617	100.0	23.7 (2.10)	27.7 (1.95)	24.3 (2.11)	24.3 (2.00)
Some college or more education	6,536	100.0	8.4 (1.48)	20.9 (2.12)	37.4 (2.43)	33.3 (2.42)
Hispanic origin and race						
Hispanic or Latino	2,945	100.0	31.8 (2.74)	28.4 (2.91)	17.9 (2.17)	21.9 (3.97)
Not Hispanic or Latino						
White, single race	7,237	100.0	8.4 (1.25)	24.9 (1.99)	36.5 (1.94)	30.2 (2.13)
Black or African American, single race	1,358	100.0	18.5 (3.13)	17.4 (2.88)	29.2 (4.49)	34.9 (4.78)
Does not live with one or more of his children						
Total ¹	2,208	100.0	52.0 (3.95)	25.5 (3.63)	17.6 (3.07)	4.9 (1.72)
Age in years						
15–24	589	100.0	48.3 (6.11)	28.6 (6.01)	18.4 (5.67)	4.7 (2.91)
25–34	1,094	100.0	50.7 (5.56)	28.0 (5.28)	19.4 (4.33)	1.8 (0.91)
35–44	525	100.0	59.0 (8.09)	16.6 (6.28)	12.9 (5.04)	11.5 (5.63)
Marital or cohabiting status						
Currently married	511	100.0	* * *	* * *	* * *	* * *
Currently cohabiting	384	100.0	* * *	* * *	* * *	* * *
Not currently married or cohabiting	1,313	100.0	45.9 (4.98)	26.1 (4.33)	20.9 (4.03)	7.2 (2.77)
Education²						
High school diploma or GED or less education	1,378	100.0	60.3 (5.26)	20.4 (3.93)	15.4 (3.58)	3.9 (2.10)
Some college or more education	481	100.0	34.5 (6.45)	40.7 (8.27)	17.3 (5.79)	7.4 (3.64)
Hispanic origin and race						
Hispanic or Latino	760	100.0	70.0 (5.83)	11.0 (2.59)	14.6 (4.35)	* *
Not Hispanic or Latino						
White, single race	723	100.0	36.1 (7.21)	34.5 (7.81)	26.2 (7.10)	3.2 (1.88)
Black or African American, single race	622	100.0	47.4 (6.40)	31.2 (6.03)	13.5 (4.09)	7.8 (2.83)

¹Includes fathers of other or multiple-race and origin groups, not shown separately. Fathers who live with children also may have children they do not live with currently; they are included in both categories.
SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2011–2015.

Table A7

Fathers aged between 15–44 with children between the ages of 5–18 years, by how often they ate meals with their children in the last 4 weeks, by cohabitation status: United States, 2011–2015

Characteristic	Number (in thousands)	Total	Percent distribution (standard error)			
			Not at all	Once a week or less	Several times a week	Every day
Lives with one or more children						
Total ¹	16,980	100.0	1.4 (0.42)	5.7 (0.64)	27.5 (1.56)	65.5 (1.63)
Age in years						
15–24	275	100.0	* **	*	*	* * *
25–34	5,115	100.0	2.5 (0.80)	3.8 (0.81)	24.5 (2.09)	69.2 (2.41)
35–44	11,591	100.0	0.9 (0.35)	6.5 (0.91)	28.9 (1.94)	63.7 (2.05)
Marital or cohabiting status						
Currently married	12,997	100.0	0.9 (0.32)	4.7 (0.71)	26.5 (1.80)	67.9 (1.90)
Currently cohabiting	2,540	100.0	2.0 (0.99)	7.7 (1.84)	26.3 (3.46)	63.9 (3.37)
Not currently married or cohabiting	1,444	100.0	* * 10.7 (2.98)		38.5 (5.32)	46.5 (4.88)
Education ²						
High school diploma or GED or less education	8,496	100.0	1.1 (0.51)	6.9 (0.98)	23.7 (2.18)	68.3 (2.33)
Some college or more education	8,423	100.0	1.6 (0.67)	4.5 (0.83)	31.1 (2.28)	62.8 (2.44)
Hispanic origin and race						
Hispanic or Latino	3,697	100.0	1.2 (0.64)	6.1 (1.09)	21.6 (2.61)	71.1 (2.27)
Not Hispanic or Latino						
White, single race	9,790	100.0	1.0 (0.48)	4.4 (0.81)	30.3 (2.19)	64.2 (2.23)
Black or African American, single race	1,797	100.0	* * 10.5 (2.09)		25.6 (3.75)	61.7 (4.67)
Does not live with one or more of his children						
Total ¹	6,280	100.0	5.2 (2.57)	31.5 (2.33)	13.0 (1.48)	2.9 (0.82)
Age in years						
15–24	141	100.0	* **	*	*	* * *
25–34	2,329	100.0	5.3 (4.19)	30.4 (4.11)	13.6 (2.20)	3.0 (1.27)
35–44	3,809	100.0	5.1 (3.34)	32.0 (3.09)	13.1 (1.89)	3.0 (1.22)
Marital or cohabiting status						
Currently married	2,685	100.0	6.7 (4.41)	29.2 (4.03)	8.2 (2.28)	1.9 (1.21)
Currently cohabiting	1,304	100.0	6.1 (3.50)	25.0 (4.31)	9.6 (2.77)	4.1 (2.66)
Not currently married or cohabiting	2,290	100.0	3.8 (3.47)	37.9 (3.51)	20.6 (3.58)	3.5 (1.28)
Education ²						
High school diploma or GED or less education	4,278	100.0	5.4 (3.05)	30.3 (2.63)	12.3 (1.86)	2.6 (0.98)
Some college or more education	2,002	100.0	4.7 (4.86)	34.1 (4.57)	14.5 (3.35)	3.7 (1.62)
Hispanic origin and race						
Hispanic or Latino	1,769	100.0	7.1 (3.72)	15.0 (2.76)	11.3 (3.13)	1.9 (0.70)
Not Hispanic or Latino						
White, single race	2,702	100.0	4.3 (4.71)	38.0 (4.50)	14.5 (2.34)	4.2 (1.84)
Black or African American, single race	1,336	100.0	4.5 (3.43)	40.7 (3.17)	11.3 (2.06)	2.1 (0.98)

¹Includes fathers of other or multiple-race and origin groups, not shown separately. Fathers who live with children also may have children they do not live with currently; they are included in both categories.

²Limited to fathers aged 22–44 at time of interview. GED is General Educational Development high school equivalency diploma. NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2011–2015.

Table A8

Fathers aged between 15–44 with children between the ages of 5–18, by how often they took their children to or from activities in the last 4 weeks, by cohabitation status: United States, 2011–2015

Characteristic	Number (in thousands)	Total	Percent distribution (standard error)			
			Not at all	Once a week or less	Several times a week	Every day
Lives with one or more children						
Total ¹	16,976	100.0	14.5 (1.16)	31.0 (1.59)	34.0 (1.64)	20.5 (1.14)
Age in years						
15–24	275	100.0	*	*	*	*
25–34	5,110	100.0	18.0 (1.78)	27.5 (2.09)	31.7 (2.34)	22.8 (2.30)
35–44	11,591	100.0	12.7 (1.55)	32.8 (2.16)	35.1 (2.17)	19.3 (1.46)
Marital or cohabiting status						
Currently married	12,992	100.0	12.8 (1.18)	32.7 (2.00)	33.3 (1.94)	21.2 (1.49)
Currently cohabiting	2,540	100.0	21.3 (2.49)	25.9 (2.84)	37.6 (3.76)	15.3 (1.93)
Not currently married or cohabiting	1,444	100.0	17.8 (4.04)	25.2 (4.39)	34.1 (4.70)	22.9 (3.41)
Education²						
High school diploma or GED or less education	8,491	100.0	20.8 (1.70)	30.1 (1.94)	30.5 (1.96)	18.6 (1.42)
Some college or more education	8,423	100.0	8.2 (1.41)	32.0 (2.21)	37.5 (2.52)	22.2 (1.90)
Hispanic or Latino	3,697	100.0	18.2 (1.85)	28.5 (2.22)	30.5 (1.89)	22.8 (2.44)
Not Hispanic or Latino						
White, single race	9,785	100.0	13.1 (1.60)	30.6 (2.29)	36.8 (2.39)	19.5 (1.56)
Black or African American, single race	1,797	100.0	14.8 (3.17)	28.8 (2.75)	29.4 (2.81)	27.1 (3.08)
Does not live with one or more of his children						
Total ¹	6,280	100.0	71.4 (2.11)	17.4 (1.72)	7.3 (1.15)	3.9 (1.07)
Age in years						
15–24	141	100.0	*	*	*	*
25–34	2,329	100.0	69.2 (3.59)	19.9 (3.07)	7.5 (1.58)	3.5 (1.46)
35–44	3,809	100.0	72.7 (2.51)	15.6 (1.97)	7.4 (1.68)	4.3 (1.32)
Marital or cohabiting status						
Currently married	2,685	100.0	76.7 (3.58)	14.1 (2.59)	6.6 (2.26)	2.5 (1.38)
Currently cohabiting	1,304	100.0	76.2 (4.66)	13.8 (3.65)	4.3 (1.37)	5.7 (2.86)
Not currently married or cohabiting	2,290	100.0	62.5 (3.76)	23.4 (2.83)	9.7 (1.92)	4.5 (1.42)
Education²						
High school diploma or GED or less education	4,278	100.0	75.1 (2.38)	16.2 (1.96)	5.8 (1.00)	2.9 (1.04)
Some college or more education	2,002	100.0	63.6 (4.30)	20.0 (3.03)	10.4 (2.99)	6.0 (2.09)
Hispanic or Latino	1,769	100.0	82.8 (2.86)	8.0 (1.93)	7.1 (1.67)	2.0 (0.82)
Not Hispanic or Latino						
White, single race	2,702	100.0	70.0 (3.93)	17.9 (2.90)	7.2 (2.29)	5.0 (2.28)
Black or African American, single race	1,336	100.0	58.2 (3.96)	27.8 (3.70)	8.9 (2.09)	5.1 (1.69)

SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2011–2015.

Table A9

Fathers aged between 15–44 with children between the ages of 15–44, by how often they talked with their children about things that happened during the day in the last 4 weeks, by cohabitation status: United States, 2011–2015

Characteristic	Number (in thousands)	Total	Percent distribution (standard error)			
			Not at all	Once a week or less	Several times a week	Every day
Lives with one or more children						
Total ¹	16,980	100.01.1 (0.38)	6.3 (0.86)	27.2 (1.47)	65.3 (1.52)	
Age in years						
15–24	275	100.0	* * *	* *	* * *	
25–34	5,115	100.01.6 (0.58)	6.8 (1.28)	23.9 (2.57)	67.7 (2.57)	
35–44	11,591	100.00.9 (0.49)	6.0 (0.97)	28.7 (1.77)	64.3 (1.87)	
Marital or cohabiting status						
Currently married	12,997	100.00.8 (0.43)	5.5 (1.03)	27.6 (1.88)	66.1 (1.86)	
Currently cohabiting.	2,540	100.03.3 (1.21)	10.2 (2.38)	28.5 (2.91)	57.9 (3.31)	
Not currently married or cohabiting	1,444	100.0	* * 7.3 (2.68)	21.5 (3.38)	70.9 (4.19)	
Education ²						
High school diploma or GED or less education	8,496	100.01.0 (0.33)	8.2 (1.29)	26.7 (2.23)	64.1 (2.20)	
Some college or more education.	8,423	100.01.3 (0.68)	4.5 (1.07)	27.6 (2.01)	66.7 (2.24)	
Hispanic origin and race						
Hispanic or Latino	3,697	100.00.6 (0.28)	9.5 (2.35)	26.5 (2.65)	63.4 (2.98)	
Not Hispanic or Latino						
White, single race	9,790	100.00.8 (0.54)	3.9 (0.87)	28.3 (2.14)	67.0 (2.13)	
Black or African American, single race	1,797	100.03.2 (1.44)	8.6 (2.11)	20.8 (2.74)	67.4 (3.42)	
Does not live with one or more of his children						
Total ¹	6,280	100.037.3 (2.76)	27.0 (2.77)	20.1 (1.95)	15.5 (2.04)	
Age in years						
15–24	141	100.0	* * *	* *	* * *	
25–34	2,329	100.037.8 (4.12)	19.5 (2.81)	25.4 (3.57)	17.2 (3.11)	
35–44	3,809	100.036.5 (3.24)	31.1 (3.57)	17.4 (2.12)	15.0 (2.55)	
Marital or cohabiting status						
Currently married	2,685	100.046.7 (4.44)	29.0 (3.80)	16.3 (2.69)	8.0 (1.90)	
Currently cohabiting.	1,304	100.043.0 (5.21)	18.7 (4.05)	15.8 (3.99)	22.6 (4.94)	
Not currently married or cohabiting	2,290	100.023.0 (2.72)	29.5 (3.48)	27.1 (3.04)	20.4 (3.72)	
Education ²						
High school diploma or GED or less education	4,278	100.040.7 (3.30)	25.7 (2.94)	20.5 (2.23)	13.1 (2.22)	
Some college or more education.	2,002	100.030.0 (4.10)	30.0 (5.44)	19.3 (3.19)	20.8 (4.02)	
Hispanic origin and race						
Hispanic or Latino	1,769	100.062.9 (4.47)	12.8 (2.74)	12.5 (3.14)	11.8 (2.58)	
Not Hispanic or Latino						
White, single race	2,702	100.029.4 (3.94)	36.4 (5.18)	18.1 (3.14)	16.1 (3.41)	
Black or African American, single race	1,336	100.020.7 (2.59)	27.4 (3.53)	34.1 (3.93)	17.8 (2.79)	

¹Includes fathers of other or multiple-race and origin groups, not shown separately. Fathers who live with children also may have children they do not live with currently; they are included in both categories.

²Limited to fathers aged 22–44 at time of interview. GED is General Educational Development high school equivalency diploma. NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, National Survey of Family Growth, 2011–2015.