

# Father Involvement in Early Head Start Programs

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This study examined fathers' participation in Early Head Start programs using quantitative and qualitative data from 326 Early Head Start fathers when children were 36 months of age. About half (49%) of the fathers were involved in *at least one* program activity. A quarter (26%) of the fathers participated at a *higher level*, in two or more types of program activities. Fathers participated in parent education programs (17%), group socializations (15%), father-only activities (6%), policy councils and program committees (9%), home visits (32% ever, 17% monthly), and in dropping children off at the Early Head Start center (24% ever, 12% nine times or more). In multivariate analyses, *at least one level* of involvement was predicted by maternal engagement in the program and maturity of the father involvement program. *Higher level* involvement in the program was predicted by the father being African American/ Black or Hispanic, maternal engagement in the program, and maturity of the father involvement program.

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Bivariate analyses showed that fathers in predominantly home-based programs who participated in frequent home visits were more often married, non-English speaking, and in families where both mothers and fathers had lower than typical levels of education. Fathers in predominantly center-based programs who frequently dropped off the Early Head Start child at the center were more often men of color, fathers of girls, and partnered with an employed mother or a mother rated as engaged in the Early Head Start program. Qualitative analyses underscore the potential for father program participation in mature programs and among policy-relevant groups.

**Keywords:** fathers, Head Start, fathers in early childhood programs, fathers in Early Head Start

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Early Head Start is a relatively new program providing intensive child and family services that can begin in pregnancy and continue until the child is age 3. The current paper examines father participation in the Early Head Start program. Paralleling the ecological framework of father involvement in Head Start programs serving children three to five years of age (Fagan, 1999), we explore characteristics of fathers, mothers, children, and programs as predictors of father participation in Early Head Start, supplementing quantitative data with qualitative reports in fathers' own voices. The paper presents the first (known) study of predictors of father involvement in a multi-site infant-toddler comprehensive intervention program. The results have implications for father involvement efforts in infant-toddler programs.

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY HEAD START

There are a number of reasons why it is important to study father involvement in infant/toddler intervention programs such as Early Head Start. First, fathers as well as mothers make contributions to infant/toddler development (Yogman, Kindlon, & Earls, 1995; Radin, 1994; Youngblade & Belsky, 1992), contributing to attachment security (Grossman, Grossman, Fremmer-Bombik, Kindler, Scheuerer-Englisch & Zimmermann, 2002), emotional regulation (Cassidy, Parke, Butkovsky, & Braungart, 1992; Parke, MacDonald, Beitel & Bhavnagri, 1988; Roggman, Boyce, Cook, Christiansen, & Jones, 2004), social competence (Pettit, Brown, Mize & Lindsey, 1998; Roberts, 1998), and cognitive development (Black, Dubowitz, & Starr, 1999; Nugent, 1991; Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, London, & Cabrera, 2002; Wachs, Uzgiris, & Hunt, 1971; Yogman et al., 1995). Second, father program involvement has been associated with positive outcomes for children in interventions with older children (Grolnick & Slowiasczek, 1994; Nord, Brinhall, & West, 1997; Stevenson & Baker, 1987; Fagan & Iglesias, 1999). Hence, it is reasonable to think father program involvement could contribute to even earlier outcomes. Third, there is now evidence that fathers are more often present in the lives of low-income children than previously supposed (Carlson & McLanahan, 2002; Cabrera et al., 2004). Moreover, fathers are more likely to be involved in the lives of their children during infancy than any other time (Carlson & McLanahan, 2002). These findings, taken together, suggest that involving fathers in an infant/toddler program such as Early Head Start could have important benefits. Nevertheless, programs vary in how well they involve fathers and could benefit from greater understanding of the factors that predict father involvement.

## EXAMINING FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY HEAD START AND HEAD START PROGRAMS

The Early Head Start program serves over 63,000 children in more than 700 communities with comprehensive services designed to promote optimal early development of children and thereby mitigate the well-known association between poverty and child outcomes (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). An evaluation in 17 of those sites, using a rigorous experimental-design study, demonstrated modest but wide-ranging positive impacts for children and primary caregivers when children were age three (ACF, 2002). In addition, fathers of Early Head Start children spanked less than control group fathers and were observed to be less intrusive during play with their children. Positive effects on fathers are consistent with findings from the special education literature (Mahoney, Wiggers, & Lash, 1996; Myers, 1982; Pfannenstiel & Honig, 1995). However, it is not known whether the effects on Early Head Start fathers were due to fathers' direct involvement in the program or if the effects came through the mothers. A first step would be to document the level of involvement of fathers in program services.

How much father involvement would be expected in Early Head Start programs? A Ford Foundation-funded Web/mail survey of father involvement in 261

Early Head Start programs funded from 1995-1999 reported that most programs attempted to involve fathers; 99% of program representatives surveyed said they included resident biological fathers; 95% included resident nonbiological fathers; and 77% reported offering program services to nonresident biological fathers (Raikes, Boller, van Kammen, & Summers, 2002). Consistent with earlier qualitative findings (Summers et al., 1999), this study of program-level data found that the rate of father participation in most programs was low with “a few” fathers attending typical program events. About a quarter of fathers were considered “highly involved” by participating in many events or often. Most programs were self-rated as in the “early stages” of father involvement; however, 21% rated themselves as “midstage” and 7% as “mature.” By definition, mature programs involved fathers in many program activities, had high attendance rates by fathers, and had devoted a great deal of attention to father involvement in the program. We describe mature programs in greater detail later.

We might expect father involvement in Early Head Start to parallel father involvement in Head Start programs for three-to-five-year-olds. Fagan (1999) reported that about half (52%) of 134 Head Start study fathers participated in the program at all and about 16% were highly involved (22 hours or more). In another study the authors’ reported effects on children were only found at the higher level of participation (Fagan & Iglesias, 1999). If higher father involvement has effects on children, then, it is important to know what factors influence fathers to be more involved.

#### FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAMS

What influences father participation in programs? While there is a generally acknowledged paucity of theory to guide father involvement (Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002), an ecological model hypothesizing many levels of influence is a reasonable starting place (Fagan, 1999). To identify factors that would predict father involvement in Head Start, Fagan (1999) used an ecological model with factors at multiple levels: child, father, mother, and program. We draw upon that model for the current study to examine whether the predictors of involvement in Early Head Start are similar to those within Head Start. Thus, to provide insights of use to Early Head Start programs, we examine characteristics at multiple ecological levels to predict fathers’ program involvement.

*Child Characteristics.* There is considerable evidence that characteristics of the child affect fathering behaviors and could influence whether fathers become involved in programs. Fathers are generally more involved with sons than daughters (Pleck, 1997); similarly, fathers of sons were more involved in Head Start than fathers of daughters (Fagan, 1999). Our prediction that Early Head Start fathers of sons will be more involved is consistent with comments made by Early Head Start father involvement coordinators during focus groups (Summers, 2001). Fagan (1999) hypothesized that fathers would be motivated to be involved in a program if they believed the program would benefit a child with problems (e.g., behavioral problems). However, we are less certain that fathers of toddlers would be aware of behavioral problems or whether they would view the program as compensatory for children that young.

*Father Characteristics.* Characteristics of the fathers themselves may contribute to father program participation. In a small study of Early Head Start fathers, fathers were rated as more involved, both with their infants and with the program, when they were better educated, less depressed, and more likely to use social support (Roggman, Boyce, Cook, & Cook, 2002). These characteristics suggest that higher-functioning fathers may be more likely to participate in the program. Similarly, Fagan (1999) found in a study of mostly African American/Black and Hispanic families that fathers who were more skilled in parenting had higher levels of engagement in the Head Start program. However, Fagan did not find relations between father involvement in Head Start and other characteristics such as education, unemployment, and residency. Because Early Head Start programs have made many changes in program services to accommodate the schedules of both working mothers and fathers (ACF, 2003), father employment is not expected to deter program involvement in the current study. It is reasonable to expect resident fathers to be more involved than nonresident fathers, given their greater proximity to the child, and for married fathers to be more involved than nonmarried fathers, because of the nature of their commitment to the child's mother. Non-English-speaking fathers may wish to take advantage of program services or, alternatively, if they ascribe to traditional views, could be put off by program activities, which are often led by women. Finally, fathers who have less traditional views about father roles may be more inclined to participate in the program.

*Family Characteristics.* Family factors, including maternal factors that are related to greater father involvement with their children, could also predict father involvement in the program (Roggman et al., 2002). For example, fathers may be *more* likely to participate if mothers are employed, given findings showing that fathers in the United States are more involved with their children when married to an employed mother (Brayfield, 1995). Mothers who are more highly educated (in a relatively low-education population) might be better at encouraging the father to get involved in program services. Mothers who are highly responsive as parents themselves may also be more encouraging of father involvement. Mothers' parenting may reflect the functioning of the family more generally. In high-functioning families, more positive parenting would be expected to be linked to more positive involvement in programs and other resources offering services to the family.

*Program Characteristics.* Fagan (1999) found fathers were more involved in programs with strong father involvement components, consistent with the Ford Foundation Study of Early Head Start father involvement referred to earlier (Raikes et al., 2002). Having a strong father involvement component particularly distinguished programs involving nonresident and nonbiological fathers (who represent "fragile families" in the population). It is also expected that fathers will be more likely to participate if mothers are actively involved in the program (Fagan, 1999). An involved mother may bring the father to program activities or encourage him to go on his own. The Ford study showed that Early Head Start fathers have fairly comparable opportunities for father involvement across program models, although some specific activities may vary (Raikes et al., 2002). Nonetheless, program model could

RAIKES et al.

also affect father involvement although we do not expect significant associations except for obvious participation in home visits and drop-offs at centers that would be specific to whether program services were delivered primarily during visits to the family or at childcare centers.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS

Altogether, the current study offers an initial investigation of father involvement in a comprehensive infant-toddler intervention program combining father-level quantitative and qualitative data. We will investigate predictors of father involvement at any level and at higher levels and factors that relate to involvement in core home-based and center-based activities. Where appropriate, we will also explore qualitative narratives from participating and nonparticipating fathers to enhance the understanding of participation.

Specific research questions are, first, what were the patterns of father participation in Early Head Start programs? How involved were the fathers and in what kinds of activities? Second, what factors predicted which fathers participated and which fathers never participated? Third, what factors predicted participation at higher levels? Fourth, what factors were associated with higher levels of participation in core program activities—home visits, predominantly in home-based programs, and child drop-off, predominantly in center-based programs?

#### METHODS

The Early Head Start Research and Evaluation project enrolled low-income children under a year of age and their primary caregivers into an experimental design study. Twice as many qualified families as could be served by the programs were randomly assigned to program and control groups. The study was conducted in 17 diverse communities in the first two cohorts of Early Head Start programs funded during 1995 and 1996. Additional research on fathers was conducted in 12 of the 17 sites.<sup>1</sup> Programs participating in father studies were more often home-based or center-based than mixed-approach programs (offering both home-based and center-based options to families). They were also less likely to serve African American parents although many African American fathers participated in the fathers' study, as can be seen in Table 1.

When the children were 24 months old and again when they were 36 months old, their mothers were asked to identify the child's biological father.<sup>2</sup> If the child's father did not live with the child, she was asked if there was a "father figure," someone else who was "like a father" to the child.<sup>3</sup> More than 750 fathers of 2,083 children in 12 sites (of 17) were identified in this way<sup>4</sup> and subsequently interviewed. Fathers who completed interviews were more likely to be married or cohabiting, employed, White, older, and more educated than fathers who were identified by mothers but did not participate (Cabrera et al., 2004). Numerous assessments, including interviews, child assessments, and observations of parent-child interactions, were completed at various times during the study, but the data used here are only from parent interviews when children were 36 months of age.

## THE SAMPLE

The sample used for the current paper specifically included 326 fathers whose families had been randomly assigned to the Early Head Start program in 11 sites.<sup>5</sup> When their children were 36 months of age, these fathers completed interviews about their experiences in the program. At the time of the Early Head Start child's birth, these fathers had ranged from 19 to 51 years of age and mothers from 14 to 43. Of the fathers, 26% were Hispanic, 22% were African American/Black, 46% were White, and 5% were from other racial groups. Mothers who were partnered with the fathers were 24% Hispanic, 16% African American/Black, 53% White, and 7% from other racial groups. Almost all the fathers reported that they were employed at the time of the interview (94%; 55% of mothers were employed), and mean monthly income was \$1,653 ( $SD = \$1,093$ ). Sixty-three percent of fathers in the sample were high school graduates at the time of the 36-month interview (as were 64% of mothers). About two-thirds (68%) of the fathers were resident biological fathers, 16% were nonresident biological fathers, and 16% were cohabiting nonbiological fathers. In all, 57% of the fathers were married. About half of the children were firstborn, and about half were boys. We further discuss characteristics of the fathers according to subgroups in the results section. Sample  $n$ 's for fathers in the program group across the sites were 18, 13, 28, 30, 50, 19, 57, 19, 19, 44, and 29. Pooled or in subgroups, the sample represents fathers of Early Head Start children across different types of low-income families from a diversity of communities.

## FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY HEAD START

It is important to characterize the opportunities fathers had to become involved in Early Head Start programs. While Early Head Start specifies program activities for parents (typically mothers) and children through the Head Start Performance Standards (U.S. DHHS, 1996), program offerings for fathers are not specified. However, as noted, the Ford Foundation study (Raikes et al., 2002) showed that nearly all Early Head Start programs reached out to fathers. The programs in the current study were fairly typical of all sites, determined by examining responses of the 11 study sites within the overall Ford-survey sample. Nearly all (98%) of the current study sites reported that they invited resident biological fathers to program activities, and most (77%) invited nonresident fathers to program activities. See also Appendix for the array of activities programs offered to fathers.

The Ford study reported more father program activity in sites characterized as mature. Thus, it is worthwhile to more closely examine opportunities available for fathers in mature programs. Programs self-rated their level of father involvement as Stage 1 (pre-stage in father involvement), Stage 2 (early stage father involvement), Stage 3 (midstage), Stage 4 (mature), or Stage 5 (very mature) (Raikes et al., 2002).<sup>6</sup> By definition, Stage 4 (mature) programs

made many program changes to make the program father friendly. Father involvement coordinator now focuses on integrating fathers into and applying all program activities to fathers. Many resident

RAIKES et al.

and some nonresident fathers are now involved in the program.  
(Raikes et al, 2002; p. 8)

Stage 5 (very mature) programs were rare but reported even more extensive father involvement activities. Combining the top two categories, Ford-study analyses confirmed that these mature programs also had father involvement coordinators (generally male), provided training for the father involvement coordinator, made an agency-wide commitment to attract and involve fathers, had a wide array of program efforts to include fathers, were seen as leaders in their communities for father involvement, and perceived their programs as much for fathers as mothers. Midstage programs had most of these features but did not offer as many father activities as mature programs and did not report that the program was perceived as being as much for fathers as for mothers (Raikes et al., 2002). Being mature did not mean that the programs followed a single curriculum or protocol for involvement; in Early Head Start father involvement was tailored to the program model and community. However, most of the mature Early Head Start programs had completed common training in father involvement from the National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership. We provide more information in the measures section about how the research programs were identified as mature in the current study.

Early Head Start programs can be center-based, home-based, or mixed-approach combining center-based and home-based options (ACF, 2003). The opportunities for father involvement necessarily vary by program model. However, every program model offers core components in child development services (either home visits or center-based services or both), parenting education (in parenting education classes and/or group socializations), and family support. All sites invite parents, including fathers, to serve on the Policy Council, to attend parent committees, and to attend the core program activities. Even core child development activities are somewhat available across the models. For example, all program models offered home visits (ranging from a minimum of two per year to monthly in some center-based sites and to once per week in home-based sites), and either or both parents could be involved in home visits. Opportunities for child drop-off at a center were greater in center-based sites where all children could attend an Early Head Start center on a full- or part-time basis, but even in home-based sites, a third of all children attended at least 10 hours of center-based care at 36 months of age (ACF, 2004). Not all sites formed father-only groups; the Ford Foundation study showed that these were more prevalent in programs serving African American fathers than for other population groups (Raikes et al., 2002).

#### MEASURES

*Quantitative Measures.* *Father program involvement* measures were derived from interview questions about fathers' involvement in Early Head Start program activities. At 36 months, fathers were asked about involvement in known *types* of program activities for the past year—whether the father had attended the activity and how many times he had attended. Types of activities were the core activities offered by Early



Head Start programs including parenting education, parent-child socializations, father support group, parent policy council, home visits, drop-off and pick-up from an Early Head Start center, and others. Involvement items were next summed for a total score of 0 to 7 (types of involvement possible) to determine whether fathers had any involvement (participated in any of the activities queried) or participated at higher levels of involvement (in two or more types of activities). Defining higher level as the sum of types of involvement is consistent with at least one other major study of father program involvement (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997) though it is somewhat different from Fagan's definition of high involvement based on hours of participation (Fagan, 1999). An advantage of the current approach is that quantification of *any* and *higher* father involvement allows for study of father involvement across Early Head Start program models. Two other variables for the current study were selected as the types of variables closest to the core services offered by Early Head Start in home-based programs (home visits) and center-based programs (dropping off the child at the center with the potential to interact regularly with program staff). Thus, we also examined whether fathers frequently participated in home visits (at least monthly) and frequently dropped off their children at an Early Head Start center (at least nine times).

*Child variables* hypothesized to affect father involvement included gender and father rating of aggressive behavior problems. Fathers rated their children's behavior at 36 months using the *Childhood Behavior Checklist: Aggressive Behavior Subscale*, from which a standardized continuous score for aggressive behavior was derived, ranging from 0 (behavior problems are "never" observed by the parent) to 38 (if all of the behavior problems are "often" observed) (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). The subscale measures the incidence of 19 child behavior problems that tend to occur together and constitute aggressive behavior problems. Mean number of reported aggressive behavior problems was 10.67 (range 0-34), and reliability using Cronbach's coefficient alpha formula was .85.

*Fathering variables* hypothesized to affect father participation included the *Dysfunctional Interaction subscale of the Parenting Stress Index* (Abidin, 1995), which was scored by asking the father to indicate the extent to which he agreed or disagreed with 12 statements about his relationship with the child. Item responses were coded from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree), and scores could range from 12 to 60 (study sample range was 11 to 36; mean = 14.20; Cronbach alpha = .81). Items are coded so a higher score indicates greater dysfunctional interaction. Second, the *Parental Modernity Scale* (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1981) is designed to assess the extent to which parental views follow traditional roles. Fathers were asked five questions using a four-point response scale. Overall complete scores could range from 5 to 20 (sample study range was 5 to 20; mean = 15.23; Cronbach alpha = .68) with higher scores representing more traditional views. Third, the *HOME Teaching Scale*, a subset of *Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment* (Bradley & Caldwell, 1979), is a four-item scale measuring intentional teaching of specific academic skills. The father was asked whether he helped his child learn numbers, the alphabet, colors, and shapes and sizes, and he responded "yes" or "no" for each. "Yes" responses were scored 1 and "no" as 0 with a score of 4 possible. Sample fathers averaged 3.41 on this scale (range 0 to 4; Cronbach alpha = .72).

Several other father-level variables included father age, race/ethnicity, whether the father spoke English as his primary language, employment status, education (high school degree/GED completed or not), and whether he was a resident biological, nonresident biological, or resident other father. Employment assessed whether fathers were employed during the month of the interview and did not distinguish between part- and full-time employment. For regression analyses, race/ethnicity was dummy coded African American/Black, Hispanic, missing, and other race, versus White as the omitted reference group. Residency/biological relatedness was dummy-coded resident biological and nonresident biological versus other resident as the omitted reference group.

*Family variables* included mother employment status, mother education (high school degree/GED completed or not), whether the mother and father were married, and a subset of items from the *Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment* (HOME; Bradley & Caldwell, 1979) that assessed maternal warmth (range 0 to 3; mean 2.7; Cronbach alpha = .72). Mothers' employment and education status were assessed during the service interviews conducted 28 months after enrollment.

*Program-related variables* included father involvement program maturity, program model, and maternal engagement in the program. For the maturity variable, programs were ranked using definitions of program maturity developed for a previously reported study (Raikes et al., 2002). For the current study, because there were only a few mature programs, we formed a group of six programs that were characterized as either midstage or mature. This group of six included four mostly home-based and two center-based sites. Two served mostly White families, two mostly African American/Black families, one mostly Hispanic families, and one a mixture of African American/Black and White. A second factor related to program maturity was overall program implementation, formally rated by site visitors according to the Head Start Program Performance Standards (described in detail in ACF, 2003), following three rounds of site visits. Both overall program implementation and father involvement maturity were deemed critical to whether a program delivered father involvement services. For example, a program could claim to have a mature father involvement component, but unless the overall program was implemented with a degree of consistency, it was possible that not all groups of fathers actually had access to the father involvement component that would be offered in conjunction with other services. Using these two criteria, three father involvement programs were grouped as "mature" father involvement programs for purposes of the current study. These included one center-based site and two sites that were mostly home-based. One site served mostly Hispanic families and many African/American families; the other two served many, but not exclusively, White families. Three additional sites that served many African Americans/Blacks rated themselves as active in father involvement but were not fully implemented overall and thus only met one of our criteria for maturity. Fathers in mature and less mature sites, as we defined maturity in this study, were equally likely to be employed (96% and 94%, respectively). However, fathers in mature sites had more education on average than fathers in other sites (13 years versus 11 years). One site in the less mature group included 41 mostly non-English-speaking fathers who averaged eight years of education. Altogether, 104 of the fathers in the study were from mature sites, and 222 were from less mature sites.

*Program model* was defined as either center-based (four) or mostly home-based (seven, including four exclusively home-based and three mixed-approach but mostly home-based). We did not expect program model to be a predictor of father program participation given that fathers in all program types had opportunities to participate. However, we did expect that intensive participation in the two selected core areas (home visits and child drop-off at the Early Head Start center) would necessarily be associated with program model. Finally, program staff completed a program engagement rating for all mothers near the time of the exit; engagement ratings were coded from 4 (always highly engaged) to 1 (never engaged), and maternal engagement in the program is included as a final program-related variable.

*Qualitative study.* For both the 24-month and 36-month interviews, the protocol (Patton, 2001) contained questions asking about (a) the roles and responsibilities of a “good father”; (b) the impact of becoming a father on him; (c) his experiences with his own father; and (d) his support needs and resources, including Early Head Start. The qualitative study coordinator trained interviewers in all sites in administration of the qualitative interviews, including how to probe for in-depth responses. This study used a mixed-design approach combining the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms while maintaining the integrity of both paradigms (Creswell, Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003; Morse, 2003). With this approach, one paradigm may dominate, and for the current study the quantitative analyses provided the basis for the qualitative analyses.<sup>7</sup>

## RESULTS

### ANALYSIS STRATEGY

We first completed analyses to describe participation within and across types of involvement. Then bivariate analyses (chi square analyses for categorical and ANOVAs for continuous variables) examined characteristics that were associated with participation (any, higher, monthly home visits, and frequent drop-offs). Next, multivariate logistic regression analyses explored predictors of any and higher involvement. Unless otherwise indicated, to simplify the models and to maximize sample size, we included in the multivariate analyses only the independent variables that were significant (or approached significance) in the bivariate analyses. Finally, qualitative analyses, using interviews selected at random and purposively (Patton, 2001) from lists of all fathers in specific categories corresponding with significant quantitative results, elucidate the experiences of involved or uninvolved fathers where relevant. Additionally, in selected cases, descriptive analyses further explicate multivariate findings.

### DESCRIPTION OF FATHER PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAMS

Table 1 shows father participation by level and in specific types of father program participation. For each, we describe the sample overall and highlight the experiences of fathers in mature and less mature sites.

Table 1  
*Percent of Fathers Participating in Program Activities at Child Age 36 Months (N = 326)*

	All (11)	Mature (3)	Not Mature (8)	Center (4)	Home (7)
Fathers in Program Activities					
0 Activities	51.5 (168)	37.5 (39)	58.1 (129)	46.8 (44)	53.4 (124)
1 Activities	22.7 (74)	28.8 (30)	19.8 (44)	23.4 (22)	22.4 (52)
2 Activities	11.3 (37)	11.5 (12)	11.3 (25)	8.5 (8)	12.5 (29)
3 Activities	6.7 (22)	9.6 (10)	5.4 (12)	10.6 (10)	5.2 (12)
4 Activities	4.3 (14)	5.8 (6)	3.6 (8)	3.2 (3)	4.7 (11)
5 Activities	1.8 (6)	3.8 (4)	0.9 (2)	3.2 (3)	1.3 (3)
6 Activities	0.9 (3)	1.9 (2)	0.1 (1)	2.1 (2)	.4 (1)
7 Activities	0.6 (2)	1.0 (1)	0.1 (1)	2.1 (2)	—
Any Program Activity	48.5 (158)	62.5 (65)	41.9 (93)	53.2 (50)	46.6 (108)
Two or More Activities	25.7 (84)	33.7 (35)	22.1 (48)	29.8 (28)	24.1 (56)
One or More Home Visits	31.6 (86)	47.5 (47)	27.0 (50)	22.2 (20)	36.8 (84)
Monthly Home Visits	17.3 (47)	17.2 (15)	17.3 (32)	2.8 (2)	22.5 (45)
Drop Off Child Once	23.7 (71)	29.2 (28)	21.2 (43)	45.7 (43)	13.4 (29)
Drop Off > 9 Times	12.0 (36)	14.6 (14)	10.8 (22)	29.3 (24)	5.5 (12)
Group Socializations	14.9 (47)	21.0 (21)	12.1 (26)	12.8 (12)	15.5 (35)
Parent Education	16.5 (53)	20.4 (21)	14.6 (32)	12.8 (12)	17.1 (41)
Father Activity	5.9 (19)	9.8 (10)	4.1 (9)	10.6 (10)	3.9 (9)
Policy Council	9.0 (3)	11.1 (2)	2.0 (4)	7.1 (1)	11.1 (9)

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses in column headings denote sites in each category. Column numbers in parentheses denote the number of fathers participating.

At any level, very similar to participation in Head Start (Fagan & Iglesias, 1999), about half (49%) of Early Head Start fathers participated in at least one of the program activities the previous year. The 158 involved fathers were found in all of the programs; seven sites had more than 10 fathers involved. In *mature programs*, about two-thirds (63%) of fathers participated in any activity versus about two-fifths (42%) for less mature sites. Notably, there was no difference between center- and home-based sites in percent of fathers who participated in any level.

In what activities did fathers participate? About a fifth (17%, range 1-24 meetings) participated in parenting education. Fewer participated in group socializations (group meetings for parents and children; 15%, range 1-40 meetings); activities just for fathers (6%, range 1-24 times); and Policy Council/committee meetings (9%, range 1-12 meetings). A quarter of fathers (24%) dropped a child off at center-based care at least once, but some did so frequently (range 1-40 times), and about a tenth (12%) at least nine times or more. A third of the fathers (32%) participated in at least one home visit, and nearly a fifth (17%) participated at least monthly. Substantially more fathers were involved in each of the activities at mature than less mature sites with the exception of home visits.

About a quarter (26%) of the fathers participated at a level designated as *higher involvement* by virtue of participation in two or more *types* of program involvement (Table 1). Many of these involved fathers also experienced some intensity *within* activities. For example, about a third of more highly involved fathers frequently dropped off (> 9 times) their child at the Early Head Start center; 40% participated in home visits at least monthly; 33% attended group socializations or parenting education at least twice; and 10% participated in father-support events at least twice. The 84 highly involved fathers in the sample were found in all the sites (range from two to 15 highly involved fathers per site). However, in mature sites about a third of fathers (34%) were involved at a higher level versus about a fifth (22%) in other sites. Notably, there was no difference between percent of fathers highly involved at center- and home-based sites.

#### QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSES OF ANY PROGRAM INVOLVEMENT

Bivariate analyses (Tables 2 and 3) contrasting involved and uninvolved fathers showed that resident biological fathers (55% versus 41% for nonresident biological fathers) and those in mature programs, as noted, were the most likely to have any involvement. When fathers were involved in the programs, mothers had higher mean warmth scores (2.8 versus 2.6 for uninvolved fathers) and program engagement scores (3.4 versus 3.0 for uninvolved fathers). There was a surprising trend for fathers of girls to be involved more often than fathers of boys (53% versus 45%). A number of characteristics might have been expected to associate with father program participation but did not (e.g., marital status, paternal or maternal employment, program model). Logistic regression analyses (Table 4) showed that the odds a father would participate in a mature program were 2.8 to 1 over less mature programs. For every increment in rating of maternal engagement on the four-point rating scale, the odds of father involvement increased two times.<sup>8</sup>

Did mature programs affect residential fathers only, or did nonresident biological fathers also participate in mature programs? This is important because involving nonresident fathers in Early Head Start, in part, represents the potential of the program for serving fathers in fragile families. Figure 1 shows that mature programs did have moderate success in engaging nonresident as well as resident fathers and father figures.

A review of the qualitative interviews lends further support to the finding of higher levels of involvement (for both resident and nonresident fathers) in the mature programs. In the qualitative interviews, fathers were asked who or what helped them in their role as a father.

Interviews with *uninvolved* fathers (whether resident or nonresident) in the *less* mature sites were conspicuous by their absence of any discussion or reference to Early Head Start at all. It was as if their child's participation in that program had not registered as a potential "support" for themselves or their family. When asked directly about the Early Head Start program, a typical response from uninvolved fathers in less mature programs was a brusque "No, they don't help me." These fathers tended to be reluctant to talk about supports in general and often expressed strong values of self-reliance and privacy (for more discussion of this issue, see

Table 2  
Means and F Statistics Comparing Levels of Involvement

	Any Involve (N = 291-326)			High Involve (n = 291-326)			Monthly Home Visit (n = 187-268)			> 9 Drop Off (n = 208-295)		
	Yes 48.5%	No 51.5%	F	Yes 25.7%	No 74.3%	F	Yes 17.3%	No 82.7%	F	Yes 12.0%	No 88.0%	F
Aggression	10.6 (5.7)	10.8 (6.0)	.12	10.2 (5.6)	10.9 (5.0)	.94	11.1 (6.1)	10.5 (5.7)	.43	9.1 (5.1)	10.9 (5.9)	2.78+
Dysfunctional interaction	13.9 (3.5)	14.5 (4.4)	2.32	13.7 (3.5)	14.5 (4.1)	1.94	14.2 (3.1)	14.2 (4.3)	.00	12.7 (2.1)	14.5 (4.3)	6.21*
Traditional father	15.0 (3.6)	15.5 (3.3)	1.76	15.2 (3.4)	15.2 (3.5)	.00	15.4 (3.6)	15.2 (3.4)	.23	16.0 (3.3)	15.1 (3.5)	1.98
Home teach	3.4 (1.1)	3.4 (1.0)	.01	3.6 (.9)	3.4 (1.1)	4.07*	3.3 (1.2)	3.4 (1.0)	.43	3.6 (.7)	3.4 (1.1)	1.90
Maternal warmth	2.8 (.6)	2.6 (.7)	6.05*	2.8 (.5)	2.7 (.7)	3.40+	2.7 (.1)	2.7 (.1)	.09	2.7 (.7)	2.7 (.7)	.13
Maternal engagement	3.4 (.7)	3.0 (.9)	18.35***	3.5 (.6)	3.2 (.9)	8.76**	3.2 (.7)	3.3 (.8)	.54	3.5 (.6)	3.2 (.9)	5.57*

+  $p \leq .10$ . \* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

Note. The table shows mean scores with standard deviations in parentheses.

Summers et al., 2004). Other reasons for less involvement may have been a perception that there were simply no supports available for fathers, as evidenced by this comment: “I feel they don’t have enough programs for fathers and children. I mean there’s these deals where mothers can go take their children to go do all these mother and children things, and you just don’t hear [of] many for father and children.” Another pattern of response for the *uninvolved fathers*, in both the mature and less mature sites, was to respond to the question about possible benefits of Early Head Start to *them* by reciting benefits they believed their *child* had received; for example: “I believe it [Early Head Start] helped him out with socialization. He got to associate with other kids. . . . He learned how to say words and write, color, and that was good for him.”

*Involved fathers* from the less mature sites may have had characteristics and interests that led them to be involved regardless of the degree to which the program designed activities specifically for fathers. For instance, one nonresident, biological father described how the birth of his child had influenced him to be more active in general in issues related to children:

I hear stuff on the news about what young children are doing, and before it didn’t bother me, but now it really does. I want to be more active, where before I was very laid back and didn’t get involved, and now I feel more of a need to get involved, to have an influence on [my child] and his future . . . [at Early Head Start] the door has been pretty well open for me to be involved in

FATHER INVOLVEMENT

Table 3  
Chi Square Statistics Comparing Levels of Involvement

	Any Involve (N = 291-326)			High Involve (n = 291-326)			Monthly Home Visit (n = 187-268)			> 9 Drop-Off (n = 208-295)		
	Yes	No	$\chi^2$	Yes	No	$\chi^2$	Yes	No	$\chi^2$	Yes	No	$\chi^2$
Gender												
Male	44.5%	55.5%	2.07+	22.6%	77.4%	1.77	19.3%	80.7%	.74	6.6%	93.4%	8.71**
Female	52.5%	47.5%		29.0%	71.0%		15.3%	84.7%		17.7%	82.3%	
Age												
≥ 20	51.2%	48.8%	1.83	28.5%	71.5%	1.75	19.6%	80.2%	3.68*	12.4%	87.6%	.24
< 20	40.4%	59.6%		19.1%	80.9%		7.3%	92.8%		9.8%	90.2%	
Employed												
Yes	48.8%	51.2%	.13	26.4%	73.6%	.79	18.4%	81.6%	.02	10.5%	89.5%	.10
No	53.8%	46.2%		15.4%	84.6%		16.7%	83.3%		7.7%	92.3%	
Speaks English												
Yes	48.8%	51.2%	.43	26.0%	74.0%	.68	15.0%	85.0%	7.96**	12.2%	87.8%	.19
No	53.7%	46.3%		31.5%	68.5%		33.3%	66.7%		10.0%	90.0%	
Race/Ethnicity												
Hispanic	56.3%	43.8%	4.45	37.5%	61.0%	8.06*	18.8%	81.3%	3.46	20.5%	79.5%	17.35***
Black	42.3%	57.7%		26.9%	73.1%		6.5%	93.5%		22.0%	78.0%	
White	42.8%	57.2%		20.3%	79.3%		15.8%	84.2%		4.8%	95.2%	
Other	53.3%	46.7%		20.0%	80.0%		18.2%	81.8%		0.0%	100.0%	
Resident/Biological Father												
Res Bio	54.8%	45.2%	8.45*	30.8%	69.2%	4.97	22.8%	77.2%	12.59*	14.7%	85.5%	4.32
Nonres Bio	40.8%	59.2%		18.4%	81.6%		00.0%	100.0%		8.7%	91.3%	
Res Other	36.0%	64.0%		20.0%	80.0%		15.9%	84.1%		4.4%	95.6%	
Married												
Yes	52.9%	47.1%	1.51	31.0%	69.0%	3.27+	25.9%	74.1%	13.52*	12.0%	88.0%	.01
No	45.7%	54.3%		21.7%	78.3%		8.0%	92.0%		12.4%	87.6%	
Father high school												
Yes	51.3%	48.7%	.80	28.8%	71.2%	.87	14.0%	86.0%	4.82*	11.4%	88.6%	.06
No	46.0%	54.0%		23.9%	76.1%		25.0%	75.0%		12.4%	87.6%	
Mother high school												
Yes	49.0%	51.0%	.08	26.0%	74.0%	.01	11.6%	88.4%	10.45***	11.8%	88.2%	.02
No	47.5%	52.5%		25.4%	74.6%		27.0%	73.0%		12.4%	86.7%	
Mother employed												
Yes	49.7%	50.3%	.34	28.0%	72.0%	.48	18.9%	81.8%	.34	16.4%	83.6%	4.72*
No	46.6%	53.4%		24.4%	75.6%		16.0%	84.0%		7.6%	92.4%	
Program maturity												
Mature	62.5%	37.5%	12.04**	33.7%	66.3%	4.97*	17.2%	82.8%	.00	14.6%	85.4%	.86
Not	41.9%	58.1%		22.1%	77.9%		17.3%	82.7%		10.8%	89.2%	
Program Model												
Center-based	53.2%	46.8%	1.18	29.8%	70.2%	1.12	2.8%	97.2%	14.41***	29.3%	70.7%	31.67***
Home-based	46.6%	53.4%		24.1%	75.9%		22.5%	77.5%		70.7%	94.5%	

+  $p \leq .10$ . \* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

Table 4  
*Logistic Regression Analyses Predicting Program Involvement*

	Block 1	B	SE	Exp. B		Block 2	B	SE	Exp B		Block 3	B	SE	Exp B
Any Involvement vs. No Involvement														
<i>n</i> = 258; <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = 14% (for full model)														
$\chi^2$ (df)	7.01* (2)					12.18* (4)					39.40*** (6)			
Resident Bio		0.60	0.34	1.82	+		0.61	0.34	1.84	+		0.32	0.36	1.38 ns
Nonresident Bio		-0.21	0.44	0.81	ns		-0.12	0.45	0.89	ns		-0.39	0.48	0.68 ns
Male Child							-0.17	0.26	0.85	ns		-0.25	0.27	0.78 ns
Maternal Warmth							0.43	0.21	1.53	*		0.26	0.22	1.29 ns
Program Maturity												1.02	0.30	2.78
Maternal Engagement												0.70	0.19	2.02 ***
Higher Involvement vs. Less Involved														
<i>n</i> = 242; <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = 12% (for full model)														
$\chi^2$ (df)	6.28+ (3)					12.98* (6)					31.97*** (8)			
Black/African American		0.44	0.43	1.56	ns		0.70	0.46	2.02	ns		1.19	0.51	3.30 *
Hispanic		0.81	0.33	2.26	*		0.87	0.34	2.39	*		1.24	0.38	3.48 ***
Missing Race		0.13	0.49	1.14	ns		0.31	0.51	1.36	ns		0.54	0.53	1.72 ns
Maternal Warmth							0.31	0.28	1.36	ns		0.17	0.29	1.19 ns
Father Teaching							0.28	0.16	1.32	+		0.17	0.16	1.18 ns
Parents Married							0.35	0.31	1.42	ns		0.34	0.33	1.40 ns
Program Maturity												1.12	0.35	3.06 ***
Maternal Engagement												0.58	0.22	1.79 **

+*p* ≤ .10. \**p* ≤ .05. \*\**p* ≤ .01.



their meetings, just locally. And they're listening for your comments, and I have the freedom to comment and join in, which I was very pleased with.

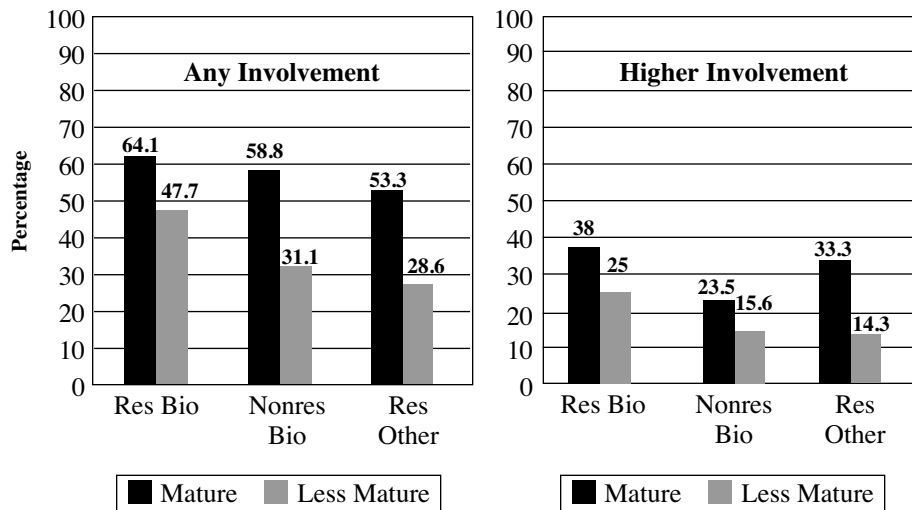
*Uninvolved* fathers in the *more* mature sites appeared to be at least more aware of the potential benefits of the program. Many of these fathers talked of working long hours or irregular shifts that kept them from participating. In one of the mature programs, a nonresidential father, who was incarcerated, seemed nevertheless to have information about the program: "They [the Early Head Start] are excellent. I know that a lot of things he learned, he learned at [Early Head Start]; he didn't learn them at home ... I would say learning how to deal with other little kids, as far as playing with other kids...."

The *involved* fathers in *mature* programs had an even greater awareness of the services offered and potential benefits. In contrast to the less involved fathers, these fathers could articulate what they had learned from the program; that is, uninvolved fathers often made vague comments such as "they helped out a lot," whereas the involved fathers were much more specific, for example: "[They helped me with,] childcare: where to go, who charges the most, who charges the least, who is responsible and not, whom I should be concerned about." Similarly, an involved father in a mature program described benefits of his participation in a group:

Yeah again, being in a group and talking to different people about different things and hearing their stories, too. Then again, talking about stuff like time out has been a big help and just focusing on different issues that help you. When something happens it just clicks in your head, especially time out and stuff.

#### QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSES OF HIGHER LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT

Higher levels of involvement were explored by investigating fathers who were involved across two or more types of possible involvement, which included 26% of the sample. Bivariate analyses show levels of involvement according to characteristics of fathers and their families (Tables 2 and 3). As shown earlier, mature programs had more highly involved fathers than less mature programs. Table 2 illustrates that higher-level participating fathers taught their children significantly more often, as measured by the HOME Teaching Scale (3.6 versus 3.4 for less highly involved fathers), and were in families in which mothers were rated both as warmer in interactions with children (2.8 versus 2.7) and more highly engaged in Early Head Start program activities (3.5 versus 3.2 on the engagement rating by staff). Table 3 shows that Hispanic fathers were significantly more likely to be involved at higher levels (38%) than were African American fathers (27%) and White fathers (20%) and that married fathers were more likely to be involved at higher levels (31%) than were single fathers (22%). Logistic regression analyses were computed using variables significantly associated with higher level of participation to determine unique predictors. In mature programs the odds of fathers participating at higher levels were 3.1 times greater than the odds of fathers participating in less mature programs. The



*Figure 1.* Percent of Fathers with Any Involvement and Higher Levels of Involvement, by Father Residency/Biological Relatedness and Program Maturity

*Note.* Charts show percentage of fathers with “Any Involvement” (at least one form of involvement in any program activity) or “Higher Involvement” (two or more types of involvement in program activities) among resident biological fathers, nonresident biological fathers, and other resident fathers in mature and less mature father involvement programs.

odds of fathers participating at higher levels increased 1.8 times for each level of maternal engagement. The odds of higher participation were approximately 3 to 1 for Hispanics and African Americans/Blacks compared to Whites.<sup>9</sup>

It is reasonable to question whether the findings that men of color participated at higher levels could be due to concentrations in one or a few sites. However, descriptive analyses showed that highly involved Hispanic fathers were distributed over nine programs and highly involved African American/Black fathers were in five sites and not all concentrated in a single program. We examined qualitative interviews with more highly involved African American/Black and Hispanic fathers in mature sites. Many White men also provided positive examples of involvement in Early Head Start, but here we examine interviews with men of color to better understand our quantitative findings.

In the qualitative interviews, Hispanic fathers from all sites appeared to place a high value on their role as teacher and role model for their children. For them, it appeared that “raising them up in the right way” was a critical motivator not only for their daily interactions with their children but for involving their family in Early Head Start. These fathers appeared to see the program as an ally in their role as an educator for their children. One Hispanic father said: “Well, we have attended many programs ... the discussions with the specialist, with many specialists, help a great deal, and so, ah, that’s the type of help that we have received, and that is very good.”

Some African American/Black fathers also placed a high value on their children's education and appeared to be motivated to be involved in order to improve their children's prospects in life.

R: Everything gets sophisticated, and if you don't learn now you gone' be left behind. And I wanna keep her up there. . . . I don't want her workin' at McDonalds. . . . So the more she learn the better it is for her. . . . Like I say, it make her where she can deal with it. If she get used to doin' this, and we can keep her learnin', that's it. That's the main thing.

I: Now have they helped you and her mom?

R: M-huh . . . I mean certain activities, she'll come home, and there's certain things she wanna do. Certain things she used to doin' at school. She try to show you what she been doin', and it's like you learn things. . . .

#### QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSES OF FATHERS' PARTICIPATION IN MONTHLY HOME VISITS OR FREQUENT DROP-OFFS

The next analyses explored more intense involvement within core program activities, frequent home visits (at least monthly), and frequent drop-offs at center-based services (at least nine times) in bivariate and qualitative analyses. Multivariate analyses are not presented because significant bivariate analyses verified that, although some center-based fathers participated in monthly home visits and some home-based fathers frequently dropped off their children at center-based care, fathers likely did not have comparable opportunities to participate in these activities across program models. Bivariate analyses showed that fathers who participated in monthly home visits had significantly lower education and were more often resident biological fathers and non-English speaking, compared with less involved<sup>10</sup> fathers (Tables 2 and 3). These fathers were married and more often to a mother who lacked a high school degree than typical fathers. The results show that home visits may offer a way to reach less-educated or non-English-speaking fathers.

Qualitative analyses suggest that fathers lacking a high school education may rely on the Early Head Start program to fill in important educational gaps; the program may motivate them by drawing the connection between their own learning and their child's well-being. One Hispanic father described getting help in learning to read Spanish. He was concerned that he might not be able to help his children with their homework. Another father, who was not a minority member but a teenaged father who had not finished high school, described his experiences with the home visits:

I: Can you think of how having [a child] has changed your life?

RAIKES et al.

R: Well, it has made me grow up.... I went from an 18-year-old teenager to a husband and father overnight, you know....

I: What kinds of help or support do you receive right now?

R: Early Head Start.... They come in once a week and sit down with the three of us, and they help us out, tell us what we can expect in the future and what we can't expect. Basically they just let us know what to expect.

A very different pattern emerged among the Early Head Start fathers who frequently drop their children off at the childcare center (see Tables 2 and 3). Frequent drop-off was significantly associated with child's female gender, less father-reported dysfunctional interaction with the child, more maternal employment, and being a father of color. The qualitative analyses suggest that fathers with high drop-off rates emphasized the equal partnership in parenting between themselves and the child's mother. One father whose Early Head Start involvement was primarily in dropping off his child also described the help he received from the program:

I: Are there any programs that help?

R: Early Head Start would be the only program we've had.... As far as finances—it's not as costly. We don't have to pay 70 or 80 dollars a week for childcare. That's a big help.

I: Do they help you in any other ways?

R: As far as working with us, they are real helpful on letting us know about potty-training and how things are going and what we need to work on.... The other day they told me she was getting a little bossy with the other kids, and that way we can correct that kind of problem.

#### SUMMARY

The results showed that the odds of fathers having any involvement or higher levels of involvement in Early Head Start increased if the mother was engaged in the program and if fathers were in mature father involvement programs. Mature programs were more successful than less mature programs in getting both resident and nonresident fathers to come to at least one program activity and to participate at higher levels. Controlling for many other factors, the odds that fathers of color were involved at higher levels were greater than 3 to 1 compared to White men. Looking within specific types of activities aligned with two Early Head Start program models, resident, married fathers who were non-English-speaking, less educated, and partnered with mothers who were less educated were more likely to participate in home visits, suggesting home visits are a way to reach parents lacking high school education and

those who do not speak English. Finally, fathers who frequently dropped off their child at the Early Head Start center were less likely to report a dysfunctional relationship with the child, more likely to be men of color, to be dropping off a female child, and to be partnered with a working mother or a mother highly engaged in the Early Head Start program. Consistent with a study of father involvement in Head Start (Fagan, 1999), the findings show that characteristics of the child, father, mother, and program are all associated with father program involvement.

## DISCUSSION

The current study found that fathers were involved in Early Head Start research programs and that their level of participation was similar to that found in Head Start programs (Fagan, 1999). About half of the fathers participated in some program activity. “About half” may be thought of as a baseline for father involvement given that Early Head Start is a relatively new initiative and is building expertise in father involvement over time. As an illustration of Early Head Start’s continuous evolution in father involvement, in 2000, 21 Early Head Start Fatherhood Demonstration grantees were funded to intensify father involvement in programs. The interim evaluation of those programs, mostly mature sites and all receiving additional funding for father activities, showed higher rates of participation than those reported here: 71% of the fathers in the Fatherhood Demonstration sites were involved in at least one program activity (Bellotti et al., 2003). The knowledge base as it applies to father studies in Early Head Start is expected to accumulate and inform this new program as it seeks to increase father program participation.

The activities that fathers participated in most were core program activities and are the same activities, for the most part, that mothers participate in, designed to support children’s development and healthy families. Fewer than a tenth of fathers participated in father-only activities, including among other things support groups and a fathers’ basketball team, activities that some might expect in a “father involvement program.” However, some of the fathers who participated in father-only activities were involved quite frequently, up to 24 times, and these activities do seem to offer creative opportunities for programs to get fathers more involved. In general, though, program staff seeking to reach fathers will do well to recognize their opportunities largely occur in the context of everyday program experiences. When a father is dropping off a child at the center or when he is there for a home visit, support and information for fathers can be conveyed. Program staff who participated in some of our focus groups also expressed excitement about opportunities for engaging fathers during the group socialization experiences that 15% of fathers in this study attended with their babies.

The current study showed that about a quarter of the fathers were involved in the program at *higher* levels, as defined here. Although this study did not address program effects, earlier work by Fagan & Iglesias (1999) demonstrated that higher levels of involvement were necessary to affect outcomes. Subsequent work with extant data from the Early Head Start national study will allow for exploration of father involvement as a mediator of program impacts on children as well as on the fathers themselves.

Which fathers participated, and which did not? There were some surprises. Looking at child, father, family, and program variables as predictors, some of our findings corroborate those from the existing literature, but others were new. Several have distinct implications for reaching policy-relevant groups of fathers often not participating in mainstream services.

Child factors were not as strong as other factors in influencing participation. However, the bivariate significant finding that fathers of girls were more involved in frequent drop-off demonstrates a lack of support for earlier findings that fathers of boys are more likely to participate in an early childhood program (Fagan, 1999). Additionally, that earlier study predicted the fathers would become involved in Head Start if a child had a behavior problem (Fagan, 1999), but these relations were not seen in the current study. Rather, based on our descriptive findings and review of fathers' narratives, we propose that a father's involvement in an infant/toddler program may be related less to his perception of his child's deficiencies and more to his sense of his child's competencies and the possibilities for both his child and himself as a father (Summers, Boller, & Raikes, 2004).

A number of factors intrinsic to the fathers related to their program participation. The literature suggests that more skilled fathers would be more likely to participate in the program (Fagan, 1999). Descriptive analyses in the current study supported this notion. Fathers who were more involved had higher HOME teaching scores and reported less dysfunctional interaction. Not all aspects of effective fathering were measured in the study but certainly the lack of dysfunctional interaction would seem to be at the heart of the child-parent relationships, while the HOME scores would capture fathers' intentional teaching of their children. The qualitative analyses regarding the involvement of fathers in dropping off children suggests a difference in father attitudes about his role *vis à vis* the mother's role, that is, a less traditional and more partnership-oriented attitude, which would help explain greater involvement with both program and child. Together, these findings suggest productive lines to follow for future empirical explorations of both causes and *effects* of father program involvement.

African American/Black and Hispanic fathers were more often in the high involvement group than White fathers and were also in the frequent drop-off group. The general finding of more involvement among men of color in Early Head Start is consistent with the Early Head Start Practitioners study in which programs with the most sophisticated or mature father involvement programs were more often serving fathers of color than not (Raikes et al., 2002). That study found programs serving a predominantly single cultural/racial group seemed to better build father involvement, more often hired charismatic men as father involvement coordinators, and often used approaches that seemed to galvanize the men within the communities they served. It is worth noting that salient approaches were quite different in programs serving men of different racial/ethnic groups. For example, programs serving Hispanic fathers often focused on whole family and employment/language-building activities while programs serving African American/Black men more often concentrated on "for men only" activities. In focus groups associated with the practitioners study, African American/Black men sometimes noted they were involved not just for themselves and their own child but in order to be a role model for other children

in the programs (Raikes et al., 2002). In this study, fewer distinctive stylistic approaches characterized programs serving White fathers. Father involvement was more often, but not always, handled by a woman in these programs, a strategy that less often propelled a program to maturity in father involvement.

The bivariate finding that less-educated fathers (often non-English speaking in this sample) were more likely to be involved in home visits than other fathers has implications for home visiting programs more generally. Together with findings showing that mothers in these households also were less educated, these results indicate that it may be important to encourage paternal as well as maternal continuing education through home visitation. In this study, it is possible that the non-English-speaking fathers wanted to assume a cultural role as head of the household when a visitor called or wanted to use program services for translation. The qualitative analyses suggest that less-educated parents may be highly motivated by their desire to be sure their children succeed and reach higher levels of accomplishment than they have. Program staff may be able to use this natural desire to see children “do better” to leverage greater involvement in services for both mothers and fathers.

In addition, the mother’s employment was also associated with frequent drop-offs. Perhaps there were higher levels of parenting partnership in low-income households with employed mothers, as has been found in middle-income households (Casper & O’Connell, 1998). Interestingly, fathers’ employment was not an important predictor of father participation, possibly due to program accommodations to one and two working parents in Early Head Start during the welfare reform era since 1996.

The influence of mother engagement in the program on father participation further demonstrates that mothers influence what fathers do. While maternal engagement is in part a family-level factor and in part a program-level variable, this finding suggests that mothers’ involvement in the program facilitates fathers’ involvement. Mothers have been characterized by some father researchers as “gatekeepers” who may control and limit access to fathers (Roggman, Fitzgerald, Bradley, & Raikes, 2002). Indeed, the data used for this study were collected only after the mother identified the father and provided contact information for him. The relation of mother engagement to father involvement in the program, however, suggests that mothers may also function as a “gateway” that provides an avenue for promoting father involvement (McBride & Rane, 2001). In qualitative interviews, some fathers believed they benefited when their partners benefited from Early Head Start involvement (Summers et al., 2004). Perhaps for some programs, an emphasis on “family involvement” could encourage both parents to be involved in a program aimed at promoting the development of their infant or toddler.

As expected, program maturity was important for involving fathers in any or higher levels of participation. The study showed the odds of father involvement in mature father involvement programs were approximately three to one over those for less mature programs. In mature programs more than 60% of resident, biological fathers participated in the program (40% at higher levels), and 50% of nonresident, biological fathers were involved (33% at higher levels), showing the mature programs’ potential for involving fathers in more fragile as well as those in more stable family configurations. The findings pertaining to program maturity reinforce the

importance of current Early Head Start program investments in father involvement program development (ACF, 2000) and of continued research to learn what works best in father involvement programs (Bellotti et al., 2003).

While the current study advances our understanding of fathers' participation in an intervention program for infants and toddlers, a number of caveats need to be considered. First, little is known about fathers as reporters of service use. Fairly high levels of service reported in the control group (ACF, 2002) together with findings in other studies showing that blending of service streams may obscure attribution for parent reporters (ACF, 2004) suggest that more work should be done to study the accuracy of fathers as reporters of services.

Second, the sample of fathers included in this study was biased by the willingness of fathers to participate. Recruitment into the research study was at the family level and was targeted toward eligible families without regard to the presence or involvement of a father in the household or with the child. Typically, mothers completed the application for enrollment in Early Head Start and agreed to participate in the research. It was only after the program and the research project had been underway for some time that fathers were asked to participate. Fathers who agreed to participate in the research tended to have higher education and were more often biological, resident, married fathers than nonparticipating fathers. Data from the interviews, then, are from fathers who would have been more likely to be involved in the program than fathers who would not consent to an interview. Nonetheless, fathers in this study do represent fathers that Early Head Start could serve.

Third, it is not clear what constitutes a meaningful amount of Early Head Start services for fathers. When it comes to mothers, we would not consider a single involvement in a service as meaningful. Yet, for fathers, it may be; it may signal an attitude that makes a large difference in how services are received for an entire family (or not received). It is for this reason that we summed across all types of father involvement to identify fathers who were involved at any level, similarly to a study of father involvement in middle schools (Nord, Brinhall, & West, 1997). Other studies raise questions about how to measure meaningful program intensity among primary caregivers (Korfmacher et al., 2004; Raikes et al., 2004). An additional caution is that the research was directed at "moving targets." Programs were continuously developing, changing, and refining their strategies for serving infants, toddlers, and their families, and father involvement programs were dynamic.

Fourth, many factors appear to influence father participation, and it is important to control for these features. Regression analyses completed in the current study that controlled for multiple factors necessarily inspire greater confidence than the bivariate analyses. The bivariate analyses, however, are helpful in suggesting directions for future research. Nevertheless, there may be other factors, not measured in this study, that also influence father involvement in programs.

Fifth, the current study does not link services to outcomes. Ultimately, meaningful units of service will be determined by establishing what level or types of services are required to introduce meaningful change within fathers. Such connections will be difficult to establish for reasons such as selection bias; fathers select themselves into their experiences for reasons difficult to measure and separate from outcomes. However, as we have noted, the extant data will offer an opportunity to fur-



ther examine the value of father involvement in this relatively large sample of fathers, families, and programs.

Altogether, findings from this study about father involvement in Early Head Start have several implications for programs and policy. Information about factors that are associated with greater father involvement may inspire additional strategies to increase father involvement in programs for infants and toddlers. The study underscored the importance of program maturity in developing their father involvement strategies and illustrated that policy-relevant groups (e.g., nonresident, biological fathers; fathers lacking a high school degree; and fathers partnered with working mothers) can be served in such programs. Programs and policymakers may be prompted to give greater attention to home visiting programs as a mechanism for reaching non-English-speaking and less-educated fathers, and childcare programs may be able to capitalize on fathers' roles in bringing children to childcare programs. Programs may be able to focus on factors that predict father participation and develop focused approaches to include more fathers, enabling them to capitalize, in more ways, on the potential of fathers to enrich the lives of infants and toddlers.

#### NOTES

1. See Tamis-LeMonda, Shannon, Cabrera, & Lamb (2003).
2. Custodial fathers were not included in the current study since they were included in the main study of primary caregivers and received a different battery of measures (ACF, 2002).
3. There were 2,083 mothers in the 12 sites in the program and control groups. Of these, approximately 75% identified a father or father figure, and about two-thirds of the mothers gave information to contact the father. Approximately three-fifths of the fathers identified by mothers agreed to participate in interviews. The shaping of the father sample through these successive "gates" is explained in greater detail elsewhere (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2003).
4. There were not significant demographic differences between mothers and fathers in the program and control groups or between fathers who completed the 24- and 36-month interviews (ACF, 2003).
5. Data were included for the current study from 11 of the 12 father sites that collected data about program experiences of fathers. One site did not collect program experience data and completed only qualitative interviews with the fathers.
6. The maturity rating scale was developed following several rounds of focus groups and in consultation with the National Head Start Association and the National Fathers Practitioners Network about components of father involvement considered essential in a father involvement program (NHSA, 2000).
7. The addition of the qualitative data to this study enabled us to triangulate our findings from the quantitative study and to expand and interpret those findings (Creswell, 2003). For other purposes, the qualitative interview transcripts were analyzed in detail using qualitative software (see, e.g., Summers et al., 2003). The purposive selections also included fathers who were residential biological fathers and nonresidential fathers and interviews with fathers reflecting several characteristics found to be of interest in the quantitative findings: fathers of color, fathers who had

not completed high school, and fathers who were frequently involved in home visits or in dropping off their children at centers. Two of the authors independently read the resulting 70 transcripts to identify patterns of response related to the quantitative findings that might help explain or interpret the results.

8. As a conservative measure, we conducted an additional level of logistic regression analyses that also included approach (whether center- or home-based, not significantly related to the outcome in bivariate analyses) and dummy codes for each of the participating sites, omitting one from the analysis as the reference group. The analysis is not presented, but findings largely upheld those of the regression analyses reported. Odds for maturity and engagement were 3.5 to one for maturity and 2.0 for each level of engagement in this analysis, similar to those in the original analysis, and sites and approach were not significant predictors.

9. As a conservative measure, we conducted an additional level of logistic regression analyses that also included approach (whether center- or home-based, not significantly related to the outcome in bivariate analyses) and dummy codes for each of the participating sites, omitting one from the analysis as the reference group. Lengthy results from this analysis are not presented, but findings largely upheld those of the regression analyses reported here, although odds for father participation in mature sites increased to nearly 10 to 1. Odds for engagement held at about 1.9 to 1, for Hispanics held at about 3 to 1, and for African Americans/Blacks decreased to about 2 to 1 (no longer significant). Site dummy codes and approach were not significant predictors.

10. Post hoc descriptive analyses showed that the 21 fathers who had not completed 12 years of schooling were spread over seven sites with about a third in a single site that served mostly Hispanic families.

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RAIKES et al.

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## APPENDIX

### FATHER INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES IN EARLY HEAD START

- Ensure that all mailing and printed materials include the names of fathers as well as mothers.
- Ensure that enrollment forms have a place for information on fathers.
- Obtain contact information about the father of the child, regardless of living arrangements.
- Develop program policies that include a clear expectation that fathers should and will participate.
- Involve male staff in recruitment of fathers.
- Complete needs assessments for fathers.
- Invite fathers to participate in all EHS events, home visits, and all aspects of the program.
- Make efforts to interact with fathers who accompany mothers when they tend to hang in the background.
- Send written information to both parents if they don't live together.
- Schedule group meetings and/or home visits with fathers' schedules in mind.
- Encourage mothers to work cooperatively with fathers.
- Plan the environment in the center/program to make it father-friendly.
- Display positive and diverse images of men and fathers on the walls and in brochures.
- Provide a room or space at the program facilities just for fathers.
- Provide bi-lingual program activities for non-English speaking fathers.
- Hire male staff.
- Provide training for all staff on working with men and fatherhood.
- Provide specific training for the father involvement coordinator or person in charge of father involvement.
- Allow staff time and resources for recruitment and outreach to fathers.
- Create a program image that makes it clear the program is designed for fathers as well as the mothers and babies.
- Integrate staff working with fathers into the overall program.
- Enable a majority of front-line staff to become open and receptive to working with fathers.
- Include the ability to provide services to fathers in performance appraisals of key staff.
- Develop a relationship with local child support enforcement.

*Note.* The list of strategies was developed as one assessment of father involvement in Early Head Start, used in the Ford Study (Raikes et al., 2002) and in the study of father involvement demonstration sites (Bellotti et al., 2003). Mature Early Head Start programs carry out from 20 to 26 of the strategies above; typical programs carry out 13 on average (Raikes et al., 2002).

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