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She said, he said: Comparing mothers' and fathers' reports on the non-resident father's contact with his children

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Abstract

Background: Analyses of contact frequency between non-resident fathers and children have often been based on samples of non-resident fathers or resident mothers only. It is well established that non-resident fathers tend to report more contact than the resident mothers do, but it is less clear if it matters which parent we ask, when the aim is to explore predictors of father-child contact.

Objective: We wish to add to the literature on predictors of father-child contact, especially if it matters whether we rely on the resident mothers' or the non-resident fathers' answers.

Methods: Analyzing a high-quality Norwegian survey from 2004 of ex-couple-parents living apart, we ran separate OLS regressions estimating the predictors of number of contact days and nights, based on the mothers' and the fathers' answers, respectively.

Results: Father-child contact is largely associated with the same independent variables, whether we use the non-resident fathers' or the resident mothers' answers, but some differences do appear. We observe more significant associations between father-child contact days and the independent variables based on the resident mothers' than the non-resident fathers' reporting. The mother's educational attainment and whether the father has children with more former partners have significant effects in the subsample of resident mothers, but not in the subsample of non-resident fathers.

Conclusions: Future surveys should collect information from both parents. Using information from one parent only should be a last resort, if more adequate data cannot be obtained.

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