

The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study

Michelle DeKlyen

Kevin Bradway

Sara McLanahan

NEWARK

First Follow-Up Report

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Non-marital childbearing has increased dramatically over the past forty years. Nearly one of every three births occurs outside of marriage today. Unmarried parents are disproportionately black and Hispanic and are at greater risk of poverty and family dissolution than are traditional families. Thus, policymakers are particularly interested in how these families and their children fare. The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was designed to increase self-sufficiency and reduce dependence on welfare. The legislation set time limits on receipt of welfare benefits, required welfare recipients to work, and mandated that paternity of unmarried fathers be established in order to enforce child support payment. More recently, the Bush administration has called on the states to promote marriage and union stability among unwed parents. Unfortunately, very little is known about the relationships between and resources of unmarried parents or the way in which government policies affect their lives. Consequently, public perceptions are often shaped by unsubstantiated myths about how these couples live, and policymakers and community leaders are forced to rely on anecdotal evidence when formulating programs to improve the lives of unmarried parents. The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study is designed to redress this lack of knowledge by providing previously unavailable information about the living conditions and capabilities of new unmarried parents, the nature of relationships between mothers and fathers, and the factors (including public policies) that encourage or discourage family formation. We use the term “fragile families” to describe unmarried parents: first to underscore the fact that they *are* families, and second to highlight that they have high rates of union and economic instability. Community leaders and policymakers will be better able to design programs and policies that more effectively meet the needs of unmarried parents and their children by gaining a more complete understanding of how they live their lives.

NEW JERSEY

Newark, New Jersey, is one of twenty cities in the United States included in the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study of unmarried parents.ⁱ The study is following a birth cohort of approximately 3,700 children born to unmarried parents. The national sample is representative of all non-marital births to parents residing in U.S. cities with populations over 200,000. The data are also representative of non-marital births within each city. A comparison group of approximately 1,200 children born to married parents is also being followed.

Mothers and fathers of infants born in Newark hospitals were interviewed between June and August of 1999, shortly after the birth of the child. Of these couples, 76% were unmarried (approximately the actual proportion of births to unmarried parents in Newark hospitals according to a preliminary survey conducted in 1998-1999). More details about the study and results from the interviews with 261 unmarried couples are presented in the *Newark Baseline Report* (August 2000).ⁱⁱ Between 12 and 18 months after the original interviews (November 2000 - January 2002), the same cohort of parents was asked to participate in a follow-up survey. In all, 289 mothers (71 married and 218 unmarried) and 203 fathers (61 married and 142 unmarried) responded, and the findings described in this report are based on those interviews. This report will focus on the “fragile families” of those parents who were not married a year after their children’s birth. When we refer to parents as unmarried, cohabiting, etc., this will indicate the relationship between biological parents at follow-up, unless otherwise noted.

Four main findings stand out:

Cohabiting relationships are relatively stable for many unmarried couples. Fifty-five percent of the couples who were cohabiting at the baseline interview are still living together after one year and an additional 9 percent have married. However, Newark parents are unlikely to get married in the year following their children’s births: 24% of those interviewed were married at the time of birth, and 25% were married a year later.

Most unmarried fathers are involved with their children in the year following the birth of the child. Fifty-four percent of the children born outside of marriage currently live with both parents. In addition, 62 percent of children not residing with their father see him an average of once a week or more.

Parents in these families, and especially mothers, are in precarious economic circumstances. Thirty-five percent of mothers unmarried a year after their children’s births collected welfare and 42 percent received food stamps during the previous year. Twenty-one percent of unmarried mothers and 13 percent of unmarried fathers reported no earnings from regular employment in the year following the birth of their child. Of those who worked, unmarried mothers earned less than \$13,000, on average, while unmarried fathers reported average earnings of \$27,000. In most cases education has not prepared unwed parents for better employment: a third of these mothers and fathers have no high school diploma, and only 1% of unmarried mothers and 5% of fathers have completed college.

Findings on infant health are mixed. On the one hand, the majority of mothers report that their children are healthy at 12 to 18 months of age. Yet 26 percent of the infants of unwed mothers have been identified as asthmatic, and 25 percent had sufficiently serious health problems to spend a night in the hospital during the previous year. Among the health risks these children face: only 46 percent of the unmarried mothers ever breastfed their infants and one third are cigarette smokers.

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Table 1. Parents' Demographic Characteristics at One Year

	Mothers				Fathers			
	Married	Cohabiting	Romantic	Other	Married	Cohabiting	Romantic	Other
Age (%)								
Under 20 ¹	0	5	19	10	0	3	4	2
20 to 24	22	49	28	40	15	29	26	24
25 to 29	36	24	31	25	18	34	30	35
Over 30	42	23	22	26	67	34	39	39
Average Age Difference (standard deviation)	3.3 (6.1)	1.9 (5.6)	2.6 (5.4)	3.0 (6.0)	-	-	-	-
Race/Ethnicity² (%)								
White non-Hispanic	6	0	0	4	3	1	3	4
Black non-Hispanic	44	69	91	64	50	69	87	74
Hispanic	44	30	9	30	41	29	10	18
Other	7	1	0	2	6	1	0	4
Immigrant² (%)	52	14	3	17	51	18	5	23
Education (%)								
Less than high school	24	29	28	37	17	35	24	38
High school or equivalent	31	41	47	32	37	44	52	31
Some College	38	30	22	29	34	16	24	23
College degree or more	7	1	3	1	12	4	0	8
Other Children (%)								
More than one child together	55	44	38	32	-	-	-	-
Mother has children with another man	18	46	28	43	-	-	-	-
Father has children with another woman	21	35	48	53	-	-	-	-
Total Number of Respondents	71	84	32	102	61	73	23	46

¹ Interviews with mothers under 18 years of age were not allowed at three Newark hospitals (UMDNJ-Newark, St. Michael's, and St. James' Hospitals).

² Race/ethnicity and country of birth are based on baseline reports. Country of birth information is missing for 35 Fathers who were interviewed at one year but not at baseline.

I. PARENTS DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The demographic composition of the Newark sample at the one-year follow-up closely resembles the statistics reported for the baseline interview (Table 1). The majority of parents are in their twenties, and fathers are two to three years older than mothers. Parents' educational attainment is strikingly low compared to state and national averages. In the Newark sample, 33 percent of unmarried mothers and 34 percent of unmarried fathers have not completed high school. This is alarming considering that only 17 percent of U.S. residents and 13 percent of New Jersey residents have less than high school educations.ⁱⁱⁱ Only one-quarter of the unmarried parents in this sample report any higher education. However, 26 percent of mothers and 17 percent of fathers were enrolled in school or a training program at the time of the follow-up. The majority of the unmarried parents identify themselves as Black, one-quarter as Hispanic, while only two percent are white. Unmarried mothers are much more likely than married parents to have been born in the United States (86 percent compared to 48 percent). Blended families are common: 42 percent of unmarried mothers and 45 percent of unmarried fathers have children with other partners.

II. PARENTS' HEALTH STATUS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

In general, parents residing in Newark say they are in good health (Table 2). These self-reported health values, however, are well below national averages. The national averages for males and females reporting only "fair" or "poor" health are five percent and six percent respectively.^{iv} In contrast, 16 percent of unwed mothers and 11 percent of unwed fathers in the Newark sample report "fair" or "poor" health. About eight percent of unmarried mothers and fathers say they have a health problem that limits the work they can do.

Table 2. Health and Substance Use at One Year

	Mothers			Fathers		
	Cohabiting	Romantic	Other	Cohabiting	Romantic	Other
Health (%)						
Self-reported health						
Excellent	27	19	34	37	39	39
Very good or good	61	50	52	56	57	39
Fair or poor	12	31	14	7	4	22
Any serious health problem	12	6	4	7	0	15
Substance Use in Past Month (%)						
Smoked cigarettes	23	41	36	43	52	48
Used marijuana	0	0	3	6	9	11
Used hard drugs	0	3	1	0	0	0
Five or more drinks in a day	5	9	6	33	33	29
Use interfered with life	0	4	0	0	5	0
Mental Health in Past Year (%)						
Major Depressive Episode	13	9	24	8	9	22
Generalized Anxiety Disorder	1	0	3	1	0	2

We are also interested in parents' drug and alcohol habits, which could contribute to family dissolution. We questioned parents on their use of cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana and other illegal drugs, including cocaine, heroin, LSD, and "speed." Only 1 percent of unwed mothers and 8 percent of fathers report smoking marijuana, and 1 percent of mothers and no fathers report use of other illegal drugs. Six percent

of unmarried mothers and 32 percent of fathers say they consumed five or more alcoholic beverages in one day in the preceding month. Cigarette smoking is very common among unmarried parents in the Newark sample: 32 percent of mothers and 46 percent of fathers smoked in the month prior to the interview.

Mental illness is another public health concern affecting many aspects of life, including parents' relationships, employment, and parenting. Using a survey measure, the Composite International Diagnostic Interview Short Form, we estimated the prevalence of major depression and generalized anxiety in the preceding 12 months. About 17% of unmarried mothers and 13% of unmarried fathers met criteria for a Major Depressive Episode, considerably higher than the prevalence rates reported in a nationally representative survey (13% for women and 8% for men ages 15-54).^v A much smaller proportion of unmarried parents indicated symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder (2% of unmarried mothers and 1% of unmarried fathers), somewhat lower than national figures.

III. RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN FRAGILE FAMILIES

Mother-Father Relationships

Policymakers were surprised to learn that 85 percent of unmarried parents in Newark were romantically involved with each other at the time their child was born and over half of these couples were living together. We are particularly interested in how these relationships may have changed in the year between the first and second interviews.

Almost half of the parents who were unmarried at the time of the birth are living together at the time of the follow-up: 6 percent married and 37 percent are cohabiting. Fourteen percent of the mothers say they are romantically involved but not living with their child's father, 22 percent report being "just friends," and the remaining 21 percent now have little or no relationship with the child's father.^{vi}

	Married	Cohabiting	Romantic	Other ¹	Total number
Overall (%)	25	29	11	35	288
By relationship status at child's birth (% of row)					
Married	92	0	0	8	63
Cohabiting	9	55	11	25	110
Romantic	2	26	20	52	82
Other	3	9	12	76	33
Total number of respondents	71	84	32	101	288

¹ Includes those who describe themselves as "friends," others with little or no contact, and five couples who separated or divorced since the birth. One unmarried father who died (due to illness) is not included in these figures.

Table 3 compares the relationships of parents at the time of the baseline survey to relationships at one year. Co-residence appears to be an important predictor in the continuity of relationships. Almost two-thirds of the parents who were cohabiting at the time of the birth are still living together (either married or cohabiting) at the follow-up interview. Of the remainder, 11% still describe themselves as romantically involved, 14 percent are "just friends" and 12 percent now have little or no contact. Romantic but non-residential relationships are less stable. Only 20 percent of couples continue this level of relationship, while half have become less engaged with each other. More than three-quarters of those who were not romantically involved when their child was born remain in that category. Next to marriage, non-romantic parents are the most stable group. About half of those who were "just friends" remain friends, but none

marry. Perhaps surprisingly, a few mothers (8%) who reported little or no contact initially are now married to the father of their child.

Quality of Romantic Relationships

Programs designed to promote marriage often focus on building parents’ relationship skills. These programs are based on the assumption that better skills will lead to a higher quality relationship, better parenting, and, therefore, healthier children.

Most unmarried mothers who are romantically involved with their child’s father one year after giving birth (whether cohabiting or not) are optimistic about their future with the father. Seventy-two percent of these mothers believe their chances of marrying the father are “pretty good” or “almost certain.” We also asked these mothers about the positive aspects of their relationships with the fathers. Seventy-two percent say that he “often encourages or helps” her and 74 percent say he “often expresses affection or love,” about the same proportion as among Newark mothers who are married.

Table 4. Relationship Quality Reported by Mothers at One Year

	Married	Cohabiting	Romantic	Other
Quality of Relationship (%)				
Excellent	27	21	13	9
Very good or good	64	63	69	37
Fair or poor	9	16	19	54
Chances of Marrying (%)				
Little or no chance	-	9	3	-
50-50 chance	-	21	22	-
Pretty good chance	-	27	34	-
Almost certain	-	45	41	-
Father often... (%)				
Fair and willing to compromise	44	38	47	32
Expresses love or affection	70	75	72	46
Encourages or helps	78	75	66	33
Father often or sometimes... (%)				
Keeps from seeing, talking to family	16	4	11	45
Prevents from going to work/school	11	6	7	39
Withholds, takes money	13	6	9	47
Insults or criticizes ideas	35	19	25	63
Father hit/slap/seriously hurt mother (%)	1	5	6	16

We also inquired about destructive behaviors that fathers may direct towards mothers. Twenty-one percent of cohabiting or romantic mothers report that the father sometimes insults or criticizes them, 7 percent state that the father tries to prevent them from seeing or talking to their families, 6 percent say that the father tries to keep them from going to work or school, and 7 percent reported that the father withholds, takes, or makes them ask for money. Additionally, 5 percent of these mothers say that they have been hit, slapped, kicked, cut, bruised, or seriously hurt during a fight with the father since the birth of the child. Two points are of particular interest here. First, married mothers appear more likely than those who are cohabiting or romantically involved to report negative interactions (but not physical abuse). Secondly, despite the fact that they presumably have less contact with fathers, mothers *not* in any form of romantic relationships are much more likely to indicate negative interactions, and three times as many

report physical abuse from fathers within the previous year. This evidence of destructive behaviors indicates that many parents could benefit from programs aimed at improving their relationships *and* that some mothers may be better off if they are not involved with the child's father.

IV. PARENTING AND CHILDHOOD

Fathers' Commitment

The role of fatherhood and fathers' involvement in raising children is at the center of numerous moral, economic, and social debates in this country. A striking finding in the baseline interviews of the Fragile Families Study was that most unmarried fathers in Newark were involved with the mothers of their children during pregnancy and at the time of birth. Eighty-nine percent of unmarried mothers sampled in the baseline survey said they planned to put the father's name on the birth certificate. More than 80 percent reported that the father had contributed financially or helped in other ways during the pregnancy. Every father who was interviewed in Newark told us that he wanted to be involved in his child's life. We were eager to see what happened in the year following the birth.

Table 5. Fathers' Financial and Legal Obligations

	Cohabiting	Romantic	Other
Paternity Establishment (%)			
Legal paternity has been established	83	84	68
Paternity established at hospital ¹	99	89	80
Child Support (%)			
Legal child support order in place	13	28	28
Have informal support agreement ²	-	70	38
Father often or sometimes³... (%)			
Buys clothes for child	-	89	51
Buys toys for child	-	85	46
Buys child care items (diapers, etc.)	-	93	48
Buys food or formula	-	78	49

¹ Asked of mothers who have established paternity

² Only asked of mothers who do not live with father of baby and have no legal support order.

³ Only asked of mothers not living with father of baby.

Establishing paternity is a first step towards ensuring that unmarried fathers will be responsible for supporting their children. Paternity has been legally established for 76 percent of the children of unmarried parents in the Newark sample (Table 5). The majority of parents report that this was done at the hospital.

Financial support from a non-residential parent may also require a legal child support order. The findings in this respect are less encouraging: only 28 percent of unmarried mothers who are not living with the father report that they have obtained a child support order.^{vii} If a mother receives welfare, the money goes to the welfare agency to reduce the cost of public assistance. This policy may distort parents' incentive to cooperate with the child support enforcement system. Forty-five percent of mothers who are not cohabiting *and* have no child support order say they have informal agreements with fathers. Mothers report that many non-residential fathers provide some assistance, for example, buying clothes, toys, diapers, food or formula. Romantically involved fathers are almost twice as likely as less committed fathers to do so; however, *nonromantic* fathers are no more likely to have formal support orders.

Father-Child Interaction

Table 6 provides information on fathers' interactions with their children, as described by mothers. Recall that half of the fathers are living with their child a year after the birth. Of the fathers who live apart from their children, 95% of those who are romantically involved with mothers see their children at least five days per month. On the other hand, a third of the less involved fathers did not see their child at all in the previous month.

Fathers who live with their child are more likely to engage in activities with the child. According to mothers' reports, 55 percent of cohabiting fathers play with their children nearly every day, 73 percent feed the child, and 22 percent read to him or her. Non-residential romantic fathers are only a little less likely to do most of these things, but fathers who are not romantically involved with mothers are also for the most part unengaged with their children.

	Cohabiting	Romantic	Other
Table 6. Parenting and Child Care			
Father's Contact with Child (%)			
Father saw child in past month			
Not at all	-	0	35
Once	-	5	3
2 to 4 days	-	0	16
5 to 12 days	-	5	12
13 to 20 days	-	10	8
More than 20 days	-	80	26
Mother's Interaction with Child (%)			
Nearly or every day...			
Played games	60	72	73
Sang songs or nursery rhymes	51	79	65
Read to child	32	48	45
Mother Spanked Child in Past Month	45	50	41
Father's Interaction with Child (%)			
Nearly or every day...			
Played games	55	48	17
Sang songs or nursery rhymes	36	40	9
Read to child	22	5	5
Fed child	73	57	23
Child Care Arrangements			
Child regularly cared for by someone else (%)	64	59	74
Primary child care provider: (%)			
Grandparent	29	39	36
Other relative	22	8	26
Day care center	29	15	17
Family day care	15	8	12
Other care	5	31	9
Average days/week in care	4.9	5.0	4.8
(standard deviation)	(0.9)	(1.1)	(1.1)

Many mothers in Newark have stimulating interactions with their children, regardless of whether or not they are living with the child's father. Two-thirds of the unmarried mothers reported playing games like "peek-a-boo" and "gotcha," and about the same number sing songs or nursery rhymes to their children. Far fewer read to their children regularly. Overall, mothers who do not live with the father seem to spend more time interacting with their children than do other mothers. On the negative side, almost half of the unmarried mothers and a third of those who are married also report spanking their infants.

Child care arrangements can significantly impact a child's health and wellbeing. A mother's access to safe and reliable child care also affects her ability to find and maintain regular employment. Access to quality child care is especially important for women who face work requirements under 1996 welfare reform regulations (TANF). Overall, 59 percent of children living with both parents and 70 percent living with just one parent are regularly cared for by someone other than their mother. About a third of the children in our sample are cared for by a grandparent while between 15 and 30 percent spend time in day care centers. Married and cohabiting mothers appear more likely to use professional arrangements (center or family day care) than other parents.

V. PARENTS ACCESS TO PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RESOURCES

We now turn to a description of these families' use of public and private resources. This information is critical in determining the needs of families as well as assessing actual and potential sources of support. Table 7 provides information about parents' economic resources including support from friends or relatives. The data speak to the economic conditions in which these families live, parents' ability to financially support their children, and the resources they can draw upon in times of crisis. In general, parents' economic resources were meager at the time of the follow-up survey, with mothers in a more precarious economic situation than fathers.

Parents' Employment

At the time of the follow-up the unemployment rate for Newark was moderate, at 4 percent.^{viii} Half of these unmarried mothers and one out of three unmarried fathers report that they were not employed in the week prior to the follow-up interview, and 21% of unmarried mothers and 13% of unmarried fathers state that they had no earnings from employment in the previous year. On average, employed fathers work more than 40 hours per week and employed mothers work nearly full-time. A number of parents have more than one regular job. Parents' income from employment remains low despite many working full time and some working multiple jobs. For those who reported any earnings, unmarried mothers earned an average of \$12,673 and unmarried fathers earned an average of \$27,099.

We are also interested in parents' participation in the underground economy, which may supplement income gained through regular employment. Participation in the informal economy may also sometimes indicate illegal activity. About 10 percent of unmarried mothers and 26 percent of fathers say they worked "off the books" or "under the table" during the previous year, but reported earnings from this employment are only a fraction of those earned in the formal economy.

Fathers' earnings and employment opportunities may be influenced by incarceration history. Twenty-one percent of unmarried fathers who were interviewed report serving time, while 32 percent of unmarried mothers report that their child's fathers had served a prison sentence. This disparity may be due in part to the difficulty of interviewing some fathers who have spent time in prison; mothers may also be more likely to report fathers' incarceration than fathers themselves. High incarceration rates may impede family formation by interfering with fathers' ability to secure employment and diminishing earnings potential. Married fathers are much less likely than unmarried fathers to have served time in prison.

Table 7. Parents' Resources at One Year

	Mothers		
	Cohabiting	Romantic	Other
Regular employment			
Did regular work for pay last week (%)	60	41	54
Mean hours worked per week	36	34	34
(standard deviation)	(13)	(11)	(11)
Worked more than one regular job (%)	5	13	13
Report no earnings in past 12 months (%)	16	29	23
Mean earnings ¹	\$11,056	\$7,957	\$9,816
Underground employment			
Worked "off the books" or "under table" (%)	8	13	11
Mean earnings ²	\$979	\$380	\$1855
Father ever incarcerated (mother report, %)	28	31	37
Support from relatives or friends (%)			
Could count on someone to...			
Loan her \$1000	53	50	51
Provide a place to live	89	87	86
Help with emergency child care	91	97	86
Received financial help since child's birth	31	69	46
Owens car or truck (%)	49	42	29
Fathers			
Regular employment			
Did regular work for pay last week (%)	67	74	63
Mean hours worked per week	44	43	46
(standard deviation)	(13)	(8)	(14)
Worked more than one regular job (%)	11	9	22
Report no earnings in past 12 months (%)	10	9	20
Mean earnings ¹	\$22,807	\$22,809	\$20,619
Underground employment			
Worked "off the books" or "under table" (%)	31	18	22
Mean earnings ²	\$3433	\$1200	\$4957
Incarceration			
Ever incarcerated (%)	22	22	20
Ever convicted of violent crime (%)	5	3	6
Average age of first conviction (years)	20.1	15.8	18.9
(Standard deviation)	(4.9)	(5.5)	(1.6)
Average time served in jail (months)	36	40	48
(Standard deviation)	(46)	(34)	(26)
Support from relatives or friends (%)			
Could count on someone to...			
Loan him \$1000	52	67	54
Provide a place to live	80	83	89
Help with emergency child care	85	87	91
Received financial help since child's birth	50	52	39
Owens car or truck (%)	50	42	46

¹ Mean includes all parents, including those with no earnings for the year.

² Mean includes only those parents who report some underground employment.

Lack of transportation may also interfere with steady employment. Unmarried mothers and fathers are much less likely than their married counterparts to report that they own a car or truck.

Support from family and friends may help to protect these families from major hardships, given their tenuous economic situations. Most unmarried parents report that they have family and friends they can count on in case of need, particularly to provide a place to live or child care in case of an emergency. Somewhat fewer say they know someone who would loan them \$1000. About half indicate that they actually did receive financial help from friends or family (other than the other parent) since the birth of their child.

Parents' Financial Hardships and Access to Government Services

According to the figures presented in Table 8, many Newark mothers have experienced significant material hardship. Fifty-three percent of unmarried mothers report at least one type of problem. The most common hardships include having to borrow money to pay bills, not being able to pay utility bills, having phone service disconnected for nonpayment, and being unable to pay for housing. Although married mothers are better off on average, a significant number report similar difficulties.

Many government services were established to serve as a “safety net” for the most vulnerable families. Our findings suggest that a significant number of parents in the Newark sample are not using these government resources.

Low-income parents are often highly mobile, and this is the case in Newark. Almost half of Newark mothers and fathers, married and unmarried, report they moved at least once since their child was born. Newark is an expensive housing market,^{ix} and high rates of mobility suggest that parents may have difficulty finding housing for their families that is both affordable and acceptable. About one third of these unmarried mothers either live in public housing or receive governmental rent subsidies.

The 1996 welfare reform law placed work requirements and time limitations upon benefit recipients. In New Jersey mothers (and their children) are no longer eligible for benefits after 60 months (including time receiving aid in other states).^{ix} Thirty-five percent of these unmarried mothers report receiving welfare in the past year. Somewhat more collected food stamps. Two-thirds of unmarried mothers received assistance for themselves and/or their children from Medicaid or a public health program during the year.

The government benefit most frequently used by these families is the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program; almost eight out of ten mothers participated. Only 6 percent report receiving help from a visiting nurse, Healthy Start, or parenting classes, and about the same number have children who participated in Head Start or Early Head Start. Child support enforcement for children born outside of marriage has been a common theme in recent welfare reform discussions and participation in the child support system is now mandatory for mothers who collect welfare. Only 22 of these unmarried mothers report they have a legal support order, and only 13 percent say they have received help from a child support agency.

There are also resources available to men who are fathers. Our data suggest that few men in Newark have used such services. Only one percent of these fathers attended any type of fatherhood program. Fathers also report little participation in public assistance programs, with the exception of Medicaid or other public health programs.

Table 8. Parents' Financial Hardships and Use of Resources

	Mothers		
	Cohabiting	Romantic	Other
Hardships in Past 12 Months (%)			
Received free food or meals	13	13	5
Children went hungry	1	0	0
Parent went hungry	1	3	4
Did not pay full rent/mortgage	12	0	18
Did not pay full gas/oil/electricity bill	29	9	19
Gas/oil/electricity shut off	4	9	10
Telephone disconnected for non-payment	13	19	20
Borrowed money to pay bills	18	22	28
Moved in with others	4	3	4
Stayed in place not meant for housing	2	6	3
Moved since child's birth (%)	42	38	56
Government Transfers and Services (%)			
Lives in public housing	20	13	21
Receives housing subsidy	22	19	19
Child support collection agency	8	25	14
Visiting nurse, Healthy Start, parenting class	6	9	6
Head Start or Early Head Start	5	9	8
Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	82	81	72
Employment Agency	6	9	14
Welfare/TANF	38	38	32
Food Stamps	47	41	39
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	4	0	5
Public health program (parent or child)	68	66	66
		Fathers	
Hardships in Past 12 Months¹ (%)			
Received free food or meals	-	0	8
Children went hungry	-	7	0
Parent went hungry	-	7	0
Did not pay full rent/mortgage	-	13	14
Did not pay full gas/oil/electricity bill	-	7	8
Gas/oil/electricity shut off	-	0	0
Telephone disconnected for non-payment	-	0	16
Borrowed money to pay bills	-	20	22
Moved in with others	-	0	5
Stayed in place not meant for housing	-	7	3
Moved since child's birth (%)	47	35	50
Government Transfers and Services (%)			
Lives in public housing	12	30	11
Receives housing subsidy	5	0	10
Fatherhood programs	0	0	2
Welfare/TANF	6	0	2
Food Stamps	14	0	4
Supplemental Security Income (SSI)	1	0	0
Public health program (parent or child)	60	52	38

¹ These questions were not asked of cohabiting fathers.

VI. HOW ARE THE CHILDREN FARING?

One of the main objectives of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study is to investigate the health and wellbeing of children born outside of marriage. Mothers report that most children in Newark born outside of marriage are quite healthy (Table 9). The percentage described as being in “excellent” or “very good” health is only slightly lower than the national average of 85 percent.^x However, cause for concern is suggested by other responses. Relatively few unmarried mothers in Newark provided the extra protection afforded by breastfeeding their infants, and one out of three had become pregnant again by the time of the follow-up interview (including miscarriages, stillbirths, and abortions). More particularly, 25 percent of these children have spent one or more nights in the hospital in the previous year. In addition, 26 percent of unmarried mothers indicate that a health care professional has said their infant has asthma.

Parents were also asked about their children’s behavior, as an indicator of early development. In most cases Newark mothers’ mean ratings were in the middle range, on a scale where “1” indicates that a specific behavior is “not at all like the child” and “5” indicates a behavior is “very much like the child.” Responses of married and unmarried mothers were similar.

Table 9. Child Health and Behavior

	Married	Cohabiting	Romantic	Other
Child Health (%)				
Mother reports child’s health is:				
Excellent	63	56	66	56
Very good or good	32	43	31	40
Fair or poor	4	1	3	4
Has physical disability	1	0	0	4
Stayed overnight in hospital	20	23	19	29
Has asthma	13	27	28	25
Risk Factors (%)				
Mother ever breastfed child	65	49	41	46
Mother pregnant again since birth	23	37	44	25
Child Behavior¹				
Shy	2.4	2.4	1.7	2.3
Often fusses or cries	2.5	2.7	2.6	2.4
Very sociable	4.2	4.0	4.1	4.1
Upset easily	3.0	2.8	2.7	3.0
Reacts strongly when upset	3.6	3.5	3.4	3.4
Very friendly with strangers	3.4	2.7	2.8	3.2

¹ Mean scores, with possible values of 1 to 5, standard deviations range from 1.2 to 1.7.

CONCLUSION

Consistent with the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing baseline surveys, the follow-up interviews described here indicate that many parents who have a child outside of marriage remain involved with each other and committed to parenting after the birth of their child. It is important to note the fathers who agreed to participate in the one-year follow-up interview are likely to be more committed than fathers who were not interviewed. At the time of the first follow-up, some parents have married, others intend to marry in the future, and a large number of fathers see their children on a regular basis. At the same time, unmarried parents may lack the skills and resources needed to ensure a stable economic future. In the year following their child's birth, many parents lack even a high school education, few mothers earn a living wage, and many fathers have a history of incarceration. Within this context, most children have stimulating interactions with at least one parent and are reported to be in good health. However, the relatively high incidence of asthma and hospital visits, and the number of mothers who spank their infants prompt some concern about these parents' childrearing skills and their children's development. We will learn much more about these children from parent interviews and child observations when they turn three years old. In the meantime, these findings suggest both opportunities and challenges for leaders who endeavor to effectively assist Newark's "fragile families."

ENDNOTES

ⁱ The other 19 cities, 16 of which were randomly selected to represent variations in policy environments and labor markets, are: Austin, Texas; Boston, Massachusetts; Chicago, Illinois; Corpus Christi, Texas; Indianapolis, Indiana; Jacksonville, Florida; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Nashville, Tennessee; New York, NY; Norfolk, Virginia; Oakland, California; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Richmond, Virginia; San Antonio, Texas; San Jose, California; and Toledo, Ohio.

ⁱⁱ Please visit the Center for Research on Child Wellbeing website at <http://crcw.princeton.edu/files/cityreports/newark08-00.pdf> to view the full report. All mothers giving birth in the five Newark hospitals with birthing facilities (Columbus, Newark Beth Israel, St. James, St. Michaels' and University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in Newark) were asked to participate in the study, until quotas for married and unmarried mothers were reached, resulting in a final sample of 261 unmarried and 81 married mothers. Because of its focus on nonmarital births, the national study was designed to oversample unmarried parents, resulting in a ratio of three unmarried to every one married couple. However, the proportion of unmarried to married parents interviewed in Newark (76%) is very close to the actual percentage of hospital births to unmarried parents in Newark (78%) according to a preliminary survey conducted in 1998-1999.

ⁱⁱⁱ Current Population Statistics, March 1999 and March 2000. U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Educational Attainment in the United States: March 2000* (P20-536).
<http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/education/p20-536/tab12.pdf>
<http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/education/p20-536/tab14.pdf>

^{iv} National health reporting averages are based on males and females ages 18-44 with 5.2 percent of males and 6.1 percent of females reporting "fair" or "poor" health. Department of Health and Human Services. "Summary Health Statistics for U.S. Adults: National Health Interview Survey 1997." *Vital Health Statistics*. 10 (205) May 2002: Tables 20 and 21. http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_10/sr10_205.pdf

^v Kessler, R.C., McGonagle, K.A., Zhao, S., Nelson, C.B., Hughes, M., Eshleman, W., Wittchen, H-U., and Kendler, K.S. Lifetime and 12-month prevalence of DSM-III-R Psychiatric Disorders in the United States: Results from the National Comorbidity Survey. *Archives of General Psychiatry*. 51 (1) 1994: 8-19.

^{vi} These figures do not include relationships with new partners.

^{vii} Mothers cohabiting with the child's father were not asked questions about child support arrangements.

^{viii} Unemployment figure for May 2001 obtained from <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/news.release/History/metro.11031999.news>.

^{ix} State Policy Documentation Project. December 30, 1997. <http://www.spdp.org/tanf/timelimits/tlovervw.pdf>.

^x "Percentage of Children in the United States Who Are Reported by Their Parents To Be in Very Good or Excellent Health by Age, Gender, Poverty Status, and Family Income: Selected Years, 1984-1998." Table HC 2.3 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Trends in the Well-Being of America's Children and Youth 2001*. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Washington, D.C.; U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001 (p. 113). <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/01/trends/HC2.pdf>.

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