Fathers’ Parental Leave Use and Relationship Promotion in Fragile Families

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ABSTRACT

Research consistently finds that fathers who take a significant amount of time off work when their children are born are more engaged with their children relative to fathers who do not take any time off of work and who take short periods of time off. However, little is known as to why these fathers are relatively more engaged. The current study uses data from the Fragile Families and Wellbeing Study and structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships between fathers’ use of leave from work when children are born, relationships with their children’s mothers, and levels of father-child engagement (n = 2,452). The number of weeks taken off work is positively associated with residential relationships with children’s mothers five years later, which in turn is positively associated with father-child engagement. Findings suggest that parental leave policies for fathers may promote relationships between mothers and fathers in socioeconomically disadvantaged families.