

**The Influence of Non-resident  
Father Involvement on Adolescent Well-being**

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# **The Influence of Non-resident Father Involvement on Adolescent Well-being**

This study investigated the influence of non-resident fathers' involvement in the well-being of their adolescent children after divorce. Guided by a systemic ecological framework on father involvement and utilising data from a representative sample of adolescents from intact and divorced families, father involvement was measured by means of the Hawkins Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI). Adolescents' sense of well-being was measured by means of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The results obtained on the IFI indicate that adolescents from divorced families perceived their fathers as lacking in support for their mothers and in salient aspects of all three components of Lamb, Pleck and Levine's (1986) concept of father involvement, i.e. interaction, availability and responsibility. Consequently, the adolescents from divorced families obtained lower scores on reported well-being on the SDQ in terms of externalising behaviours (hyperactivity) and internalising behaviours (emotional symptoms and pro-social behaviour). Recommendations to promote increased father involvement were made.

**Keywords:** involvement of non-resident father, adolescent well-being, externalising behaviour difficulties, internalising behaviour difficulties, Hawkins Inventory of Father Involvement, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

*In hierdie studie is die invloed van nie-residensiële vaders se ouerskapsbetrokkenheid op die welstand van hul adolessente kinders ondersoek. 'n Sistemies-ekologiese model van vaderbetrokkenheid is gebruik om die navorsing te rig. 'n Steekproef van adolessente uit intakte en geskeide gesinne is gebruik om vaderbetrokkenheid deur middel van die Hawkins Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI) te meet. Die adolessente se welstand is bepaal deur die Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). Die resultate van die IFI toon aan dat die adolessente uit geskeide gesinne hul vaders se betrokkenheid in terme van ondersteuning vir hulle moeders as problematies ervaar, asook wat betref kernaspekte van Lamb, Pleck en Levine (1986) se drie konstrunkte van betrokkenheid van nie-residensiële vaders, naamlik interaksie, beskikbaarheid en verantwoordelikheid. Die adolessente uit geskeide gesinne het laer tellings van gerapporteerde welstand in die SDQ behaal ten opsigte van eksternaliserende gedrag (hiperaktiwiteit) en internaliserende gedrag (emosionele simptome en pro-sosiale gedrag). Aanbevelings is gemaak om verhoogte vaderbetrokkenheid aan te moedig.*

*Sleutelwoorde: betrokkenheid van nie-residensiële vader, adolessente welstand, eksternaliserende probleemgedrag, internaliserende probleemgedrag, Hawkins Inventory of Father Involvement, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire*

Relative to a prodigious body of literature on the parenting role of mothers after divorce, the importance of fathering after divorce became the focus of sustained scholarly attention only during the past two decades (Amato, Meyers & Emery, 2009; Castillo, 2010; Dunn, 2004; Kruk, 2010; Mason, 2011; Wilson, 2006). This spate of interest seemed to coincide with important reformulations of the multifaceted concept of fathering. Over time, the dominant or defining motif has evolved from conceptualising fathers as all-powerful patriarchs wielding enormous power over families (Lamb, 2000), moral teachers (Videon, 2005) and economic providers (Pleck, 2007) to newer formulations of fathers as nurturing and involved parents (Goldberg, Tan & Thorsen, 2009). As a result, substantial advances have been made in efforts to understand the particular effect of the involvement of non-resident fathers<sup>1</sup> on the well-being<sup>2</sup> of children, and current research increasingly emphasises that non-resident fathers can mitigate some of the negative outcomes for children affected by divorce by maintaining close and supportive relationships (Cheadle, Amato & King, 2010; Dunn, 2004; Lamb, 2000; Pleck, 2007; Wilson, 2006).

Even so, most research on the role of fathers after divorce still primarily focuses on aspects such as the payment of child support, frequency of contact, and to a lesser extent the quality of the father-child relationship (Hawthorne & Lennings, 2008; Stewart, 2003). This limited focus on the role of fathers after divorce is unfortunate, given that “there are several reasons why one should expect fathers to be particularly significant in influencing children’s outcomes and psychological well-being” (Flouri, 2007, p. 152). Among these reasons, Flouri (2007) indicates that fathers not only shoulder their responsibilities as

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the term “non-resident father” refers to fathers who do not live with their children by virtue of divorce but remain involved in their children’s lives.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, “well-being” refers to psychological, emotional and subjective well-being (Videon, 2005) and the term is used interchangeably to define the subjective self-reports of a group of adolescents exposed to parental divorce. Amato and Keith (1991) coded the variables related to well-being during adolescence into several categories that include academic achievement, conduct problems, psychological adjustment, social adjustment, mother-child relations and father-child relations. These aspects of adolescent well-being will be explicated in this study.

parents differently from mothers in that they encourage their children to be more competitive and independent, but also spend more time than mothers do in playful and physically stimulating activities with their children. Furthermore, involvement of fathers after divorce is positively associated with not only children's peer relationships (Parke, 2000), but also their psychosocial adjustment (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004) and emotional and cognitive development (Allen & Daly, 2007; Pleck, 2007). In support of this argument, Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid and Bremberg (2008) found in a systematic review of 24 longitudinal studies involving 22,300 children that nearly all studies reported the positive effect of paternal influence on children's adjustment after divorce.

In an attempt to build empirically informed conceptual models to explicate the role of fathers after divorce and elucidate *why* involvement of fathers may be expected to have positive effects on development and well-being of children, various theoretical models have been proposed (Pleck, 2007). Doherty, Kouneski and Erikson (1998) and Lamb, Pleck and Levine (1986) provide some of the most influential conceptual frameworks to illuminate the complexity of measuring fathers' influence on the well-being of children. Based on a systemic ecological perspective, which combines family systems theory with sensitivity to ecological and temporal influences, Doherty and his colleagues propose that no group of characteristics in isolation can adequately predict father involvement and argue for a more thoughtful approach to the complex multivariate implications of divorce. They argue that fathering after divorce is influenced by the complex interaction of *contextual factors*. These contextual factors include (i) the nature of the relationship between the father and the child (influenced by factors such as the father's own developmental history, the father's willingness to assume the identity of father, and the temperament of the child) (Kenyon & Silverberg Koerner, 2008); (ii) the nature of the relationship between parents (with evidence suggesting that conflict between parents after divorce has a particularly

devastating effect on children's well-being) (Mason, 2011); and (iii) cultural practices that influence fathering style (Holmes & Huston, 2010).

Lamb et al. (1986) offer less guidance in explaining contextual factors of father involvement and instead focus on the *fathering behaviours* that promote the well-being of children after divorce. This model described father involvement as comprised of interaction (i.e. engagement with children), availability (i.e. responsiveness to gestures of the child and availability of the father) and responsibility (i.e. providing care for children). These constructs have been particularly influential in research on the potentially damaging effects of relegating fathers to the role of "visitors" in the lives of their children (D. H. Hawkins, Amato & King, 2006, p. 125) and continue to dominate research on the involvement of fathers after divorce. Despite making important contributions in addressing specific aspects of fathering after divorce, neither of the above-mentioned theories specifically focuses on *how* fathering, relative to mothering, affects children. In an attempt to address this important aspect, Pleck (2007) proposes a *developmental perspective* for understanding the unique contributions that fathers make in the lives of their children from infancy to young adulthood. In essence, Pleck (2007) proposes that the father involvement construct can be understood adequately only through a number of theoretical vantage points ranging from Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory (particularly salient during infancy), Coleman's (1988) social capital theory (most dominant during adolescence), Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological theory of human development (focusing on the overarching role of fathers across the developmental lifespan of the child), and Silverstein and Auerbach's (1999) essential father theory (important during young childhood and the latency phase). Pleck (2007) argues that all the aforementioned theories make important contributions to provide the best available foundation for developing future theory about exactly *how* fathering promotes well-being. In this view, fathers not only contribute to children's well-being from

the inception of their lives through processes of bonding and attachment, but also through fostering a complex kinship of networks and parental capital, regardless of marital status. As such, Pleck (2007) proposes that fathering begins at the onset of the child's life. He states that Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory, although initially focusing primarily on mother-child relationships, provides an important foundation for understanding the importance of fathering, not only in terms of defining fathers as potential attachment figures, but also in understanding *how* attachment orientates the child towards *relating* to the father in different ways than to the mother. In support of this argument, Palkovitz and Palm (2009) indicate that it has long been recognised that infants form attachment relationships with their fathers as well, while Flouri (2007) indicates that positive social and cognitive outcomes in children are nearly as strongly related to secure infant-father attachment as to secure infant-mother relationships. Additional support for this vantage point indicates that paternal behaviour predicting secure attachment are similar to maternal behaviour (Goncy & Van Dulmen, 2010), that infants have a sense of "father presence" (Krampe, 2009, p. 877) from the onset of life. From early infancy of their children, fathers also provide "internal working models" (Main, Hesse & Hesse, 2011, p. 427) that essentially providing infants with a "secure base" from which to explore the world to ultimately foster cognitive development, skills acquisition, and social and emotional development.

The second theory proposed by Pleck (2007) concerns Coleman's (1988) *social capital theory*. This theory is utilised increasingly to describe how fathers can facilitate optimal development in children, especially during young childhood and adolescence. Coleman identifies two types of capital provided by parents, i.e. financial/bonding capital (i.e. providing material resources, schooling, food and housing), and social/bridging capital (i.e. social networks). This second type of capital is differentiated into social capital in the

family, i.e. parents' socialisation of their children by promoting the child's cognitive-social development) and social capital in the community (i.e. the linkages to the larger world that parents provide to children in the form of serving as advocates for children in school and other settings, as well as sharing their own social networks with their children, or sharing knowledge of how to negotiate entry into the adult world). The social capital inherent in father-child relationships is more likely to be realised when relationships are close and consist of continued involvement and care. Coleman (1988) links social capital to the parents' level of education and socioeconomic status and proposes that at different points of development, different aspects of parents' socioeconomic status are especially relevant to parental influence in outcomes of their children. Applied to the study of families affected by divorce, social capital theory emphasises the need to examine the influence of non-resident fathers in the context of their larger familial, social and cultural environments.

The third theory deemed important by Pleck (2007) for understanding father involvement concerns Bronfenbrenner's (1986) *ecological perspective* on human development. This model has become highly influential since the 1990s and is perhaps best known for distinguishing between different ecological "levels" or "systems" involved in the child's development. Starting from the innermost level, these ecological systems are: *microsystems* (face-to-face relationships the child has with parents, peers, teachers and other adults); *mesosystems* (links between microsystems i.e. the relationship between parents and teachers, or between mother and father); *exosystems* (relationships in which the patterns of the child's microsystem are embedded, but in which the child does not participate directly, i.e. a parent's relationships with co-workers); *macrosystems* (social policies and broader cultural scripts influencing the broader systems); and *chronosystems* (historical change in prior systems as well as developmental change during the life course of the child in these systems). The enduring patterns of reciprocal and increasingly

complex interactions with significant others ultimately drive development from childhood into adulthood. In this view, development is an inherently relational event, rather than an event that takes place within the individual. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, the dynamics of fathers' specific influence as parents may be formulated in two ways. First, fathers function as microsystem partners with whom children can experience good "proximal processes" that will foster healthy psychological development. The second view is that fathers are unique in their facilitation as microsystem providers. Because their parents' personalities usually differ, children's proximal process interactions with their fathers differ from those with their mothers in ways that are potentially important for development.

Finally, Pleck (2007) proposes the *essential father theory* (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999) for understanding the unique contributions of fathers to the well-being of their children. This theory has particular relevance in studying the potential effects of the involvement of fathers after divorce in terms of the expected developmental outcomes for boys or girls. Some proponents of evolutionary psychology and psychoanalytic theories state that fathers' primary role in child development is to promote appropriate gender identity, especially among sons in whom its acquisition is viewed as inherently risky and failure-prone after divorce (Mason, 2011). The essential father theory departs somewhat from the proposition that sons are especially in need of fathering, that the primary mechanism of paternal influence is identification or modelling, and that the primary consequences of inadequate fathering are hypermasculinity or effeminate behaviour and possible homosexuality (Pleck, 2007). In contrast, essential father theory gives more equal attention to daughters as beneficiaries of fathering and promotes the notion that fathers make a unique and essential contribution to child development, regardless of gender. Essential father theory further argues that fathering makes important contributions to adult

outcomes such as completing high school, economic self-sufficiency, and self-actualisation independent of mothering.

## **Method**

### **Purpose and Aim of Research**

The aim of this paper was to examine the effect of the involvement of non-residential fathers on the well-being of adolescent children by means of a quantitative analysis. The study has two primary aims: first, to provide an overview of aspects of father involvement deemed important to provide children with a sense of being fathered and, secondly, to determine whether children's perceptions of their fathers' involvement affect their emotional and psychological adjustment and well-being. This paper aims to provide a unique contribution to the field of study concerning fathering after divorce in South Africa by comparing results obtained from adolescents from intact and divorced families respectively. Furthermore, the study focuses on the perspectives of male and female participants from families affected by divorce to determine whether father involvement affects male and female adolescent children differently with regard to their reported feelings of well-being.

### **Data Gathering**

Data were obtained from five secondary schools within the area of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality. Schools were selected randomly to provide a representative sample of all the population groups, i.e. white, Coloured, black and Asian. The percentages of responses from the five different schools were respectively 20,5% (middle/lower socio-economic inner-city school), 28,7% (middle socio-economic suburban school), 17,3% (upper socio-economic suburban school) 19,3% (private school) and 14,2% (middle/lower

class inner city school). Written permission was obtained from the principals of all the schools prior to the commencement of the research. The participants received consent forms to obtain permission from their parents to participate in the study.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were school-attending adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19 years (N=344<sup>3</sup>). The median age of the participants was 16 years. The median age of the group instead of the mean age is reported because the ages of the respondents did not follow a normal distribution, and 24 of the respondents did not indicate their ages. In this sample, 236 research participants indicated that they were from intact families, while 22 participants reported that their parents were separated. The participants from families affected by divorce constituted 86 participants of the total sample. Of these, 61 participants indicated that they were in the primary residential care of their mothers, and a further four participants indicated that they resided with their extended families. One participant did not indicate a particular living arrangement after divorce, and another participant indicated an arrangement of residing with both mother and father despite parental divorce. Nineteen of the participants from divorced families indicated that they primarily resided with their fathers. Contact was measured to ascertain whether participants from families affected by divorce who did not reside with their fathers had direct and/or indirect contact with their fathers, as this was deemed a prerequisite in attempting to examine father involvement. The participants from families affected by divorce who did not reside with their fathers reported regular direct (face-to-face) and indirect contact with their non-resident fathers, ranging from daily contact to bi-weekly, weekly, once a week and every second weekend, every

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<sup>3</sup> N does not always equal 344 because responses were included in the sample only when the data collected related to an aspect that could be assessed.

second weekend and every holiday with no significant differences in the contact reported by boys and girls respectively. The participants also reported regular indirect contact with their non-resident fathers via mobile phones.

### **Measuring Instruments**

The research participants completed the following questionnaires during this investigation:

*Biographical information:* The adolescents recorded their age, gender, position in the family and ethnic group on a self-compiled biographical questionnaire. They also reported whether their parents were married, divorced or separated. If they indicated that their parents were divorced, they were asked to comment on how long their parents had been divorced (from a period of 1 year to 4 years and more) and whether their respective parents married again, were living with a partner or single.

*The Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI):* The involvement of fathers was measured with Hawkins et al.'s (2002) Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI), which was modified to be suitable for use with South African participants. Permission to do so was obtained from the author. The IFI is composed of nine subscales and measures the following aspects of father involvement: (i) discipline and teaching responsibility; (ii) school encouragement; (iii) other parent support; (iv) providing care and encouragement; (v) time and talking; (vi) praise and affection; (vii) developing talents and future concerns; (viii) reading and homework support; and (ix) paternal attentiveness. The IFI measures behavioural, cognitive, affective and moral/ethical dimensions of father involvement and allows for direct as well as indirect involvement. The adolescents were requested to think about their experiences with their father over the past year and to rate on 26 items how good a job (ranging from 1 "very poor" to 5 "excellent") they thought their fathers were doing in

raising them. Hawkins et al. (2002) established the face and construct validity of all nine scales of the IFI through confirmatory factor analysis and established overall validity. Cronbach's alpha for the respective nine subscales are as follows: discipline and teaching responsibility (0,85); school encouragement (0,82); mother support (0,87); providing (0,69); time and talking together (0,80); praise and affection (0,79); developing talents and future concerns (0,75); reading and homework support (0,83) and attentiveness (0,69). Finely and Schwartz (2004) also found the psychometric properties of the IFI were satisfactory. No data on the use of the IFI in South Africa could be found.

*The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)*: The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) was used to assess the emotional and behavioural well-being of the research participants. The SDQ is a comparatively new but widely used instrument (Liabo & Richardson, 2008). It was developed as a short screening tool for problem behaviour in 4- to 16-year-olds and designed for self-reporting by children and adolescents, parents and teachers. In this article, the self-reporting version was used. The SDQ consists of five scales, each of which has five sub-questions. The 25 items assess five problematic behavioural traits that, from a developmental perspective, can be grouped into internalising and externalising behaviours. Internalising behavioural problems are manifested through withdrawal, low self-confidence, emotional distress, depression, somatic concerns and poor social interactions (Zionts, Zionts & Simpson, 2002). Externalising behaviours consist of the more disruptive maladaptive behaviours and have a direct impact on others by violating the norms of the environment through conduct such as fighting, non-compliance, poor performance in school, and delinquent behaviour (Zionts et al., 2002).

The five subscales of the SDQ involve emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems, which relate to problem behaviour, and pro-social behaviour, which relates to strengths. The five factors of the SDQ have been demonstrated in principal component analysis (Goodman, 2001; Muris, Meesters & Van den Berg, 2003). It has also been used widely in studies evaluating treatment (Patterson, Barlow, Mockford, Limes & Steward-Brown, 2002; Scott, Spender, Doolan, Jacobs & Aspland, 2001; Tischler, Vostanis, Bellerby & Cumella, 2002) and clinical practice (Glazebrook, Hollis, Heussler, Goodman & Coates, 2003). A total score for difficulties can be calculated by adding together the scores for emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and peer problems. The SDQ has been recognised as a tool for providing an evidentiary base to inform decision-making on the well-being of children (McCrystal & McAloney, 2010).

The psychometric properties of the self-report version of the SDQ were assessed using exploratory factor analysis in a number of studies, and it was found that self-report SDQ scores compared favourably with cross-informant correlations (Goodman, Meltzer & Bailey, 1998; Shevlin et al., 2012). Muris et al. (2003) found that the internal consistency coefficients for the SDQ subscales were generally satisfactory and reported that the mean Cronbach's alpha for the self-report version was 0,64. The self-report version of the SDQ has also been used in South Africa (Cluver & Gardner, 2006) and Zambia (Menon, Glazebrook, Campain & Ngoma, 2007).

### **Statistical Analysis**

Data were analysed statistically using SAS Version 9.2. Descriptive statistics, namely medians and percentiles percentages, were calculated for the numerical data. Analytical statistics were used to compare the median values in different groups by calculated p-

values to indicate significant median differences. The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to calculate the appropriate p-values. A significance level of 0.05 was used.

## Results and Discussion

Table 1 provides the results of reported father involvement as measured by means of the Inventory of Father Involvement (IFI). The results provide a comparison of the median values of the participants from homes in which marriages were intact and families affected by divorce.

Table 1

*Median scores (inter-quartile range) for each IFI scale for the reported father involvement.*

<b>Inventory of Father Involvement Scales</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>Divorced</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Discipline and teaching responsibility	4.8 (3.8-5.3) N=223	4.3 (2.5-5.2) N=59	□0.0007*
School encouragement	5.0 (4.0-5.7) N=221	4.7 (3.0-5.7) N=61	□0.0377*
Mother support	5.3 (4.3-6.0) N=225	4.0 (1.7-5.5) N=53	□0.0001*
Time and talking together	6.0 (5.5-6.0) N=225	5.0 (3.5-6.0) N=62	□0.0001*
Providing	4.6 (3.3-5.3) N=226	4.1 (2.8-5.0) N=59	□0.0140*
Praise and affection	4.8 (3.5-5.5) N=225	4.5 (3.0-5.3) N=60	0.1405
Developing talents and future concerns	5.3 (4.7-6.0) N=224	4.7 (3.3-5.7) N=60	□ 0.0001*
Reading and homework support	3.7 (2.3-4.7) N=222	3.3 (1.4-4.4) N=53	0.0618

Attentiveness	4.7 (3.7-5.7)	3.7 (2.0-5.0)	$\square 0.0001^*$
	N=226	N=52	

\*If  $p \leq 0.05$ , there is a significant difference between the two groups.

The results of Table 1 indicate significant statistical differences between participants from homes affected by divorce and intact families respectively on seven of the subscales of the IFI, with participants from families affected by divorce consistently reporting lower levels of father involvement than those from intact families do. A breakdown of the scores indicates that non-residential fathers are similarly involved than residential fathers on only two of the subscales: praise and affection (Scale 6) and reading and homework support (Scale 8), although the margin of significance is very small in the latter instance. This is a perturbing finding, and in an attempt to elaborate on these results, it was deemed necessary to provide a more elaborate overview of the IFI scales.

In essence, the IFI provides information that can be conceptualised in terms of the threefold definition of father involvement proposed by Lamb et al. (1986), i.e. interaction, availability and responsibility. The *interaction dimension* is covered in particular by aspects such as time and talking together, praise and affection, reading and homework support. The second dimension of *availability* is covered by aspects such as attentiveness as well as the scale measuring time and talking together. The *responsibility dimension* is covered by discipline and teaching responsibility, school encouragement, providing, and developing talents and future concerns. The results indicate that adolescents from families affected by divorce reported statistically significant differences in terms of perceived involvement of non-resident fathers in all three these dimensions. Three of these scales concern the *responsibility aspect* of fathering i.e. discipline and teaching responsibility (Scale 1), providing (Scale 5), and developing future talents and concerns (Scale 7).

Attentiveness (Scale 9) and school encouragement (Scale 2) concern the *availability* dimension of father involvement, while time and talking together (Scale 4) imply the *interaction* dimension. From the results, it is evident that for children, divorce alters the sense of being fathered in almost all aspects of fathering. In particular, it is evident that the participants in this study experienced their non-resident fathers as lacking in aspects such as discipline, attentiveness, developing their future talents and careers, and spending quality time with them. The results of this study seem to support Flouri's (2006) findings that adolescents still hold a fairly traditional view of the role of their fathers as being responsible for providing for the family, planning and guiding (Flouri, 2006).

These results also support Bailey's (2003) findings that divorce alters the authoritative aspects of fathering (i.e. Lamb et al.'s (1986) notion of *responsibility*) because of the lack of control over child rearing and discipline and the inability to provide consistent guidance. Providing for children is also an important protective factor in children's well-being, as it fosters closer father-child interactions (Holmes & Huston, 2010). However, the results obtained on providing (Scale 5) may have been underreported in this study, as 77,7% of the boys and 91,3% of the girls from families affected by divorce indicated in their biographical information that they were not aware of the financial contributions of their fathers. In terms of aspects such as fathers' *availability* and *interaction* through shared activities and attentiveness, Goncy and Van Dulmen (2010) indicated that shared communication, participation in shared activity and feelings of emotional closeness between adolescents and their non-resident fathers serve as salient protective factors in the reported well-being of adolescent children. Even though mother support (Scale 3) does not measure father involvement directly, the results indicate poor support of mother by non-resident fathers after divorce. The results are also consistent with findings from a study by Flouri et al. (2004), which indicated that, after divorce, these

results might be expected to be lower for children with non-resident fathers. This aspect is of particular importance as literature consistently indicates that the extent of cooperation, support and communication between non-resident fathers and their former partners are consistently found to be associated positively with the patterns of contact between child and father, and the quality of the relationship between child and father (Bailey, 2003; Dunn, 2004; Shek, 1997). Furthermore, in their study on alcohol abuse during adolescence, Goncy et al. (2010) point out that mother involvement may be the most salient aspect when drawing conclusions regarding adolescent well-being and paternal influence. This supports the assertion by Doherty et al.(1998) that the complexity of family relationships, such as the relationships between father and ex-partner, between child and mother, and between child and stepfather, should be considered when attempting to determine factors associated with the quality of the relationship between children and their non-resident fathers.

Table 2

*Median scores (inter-quartile range) for each IFI scale by the gender of the adolescents*

<b>Inventory of Father Involvement</b>	<b>Boys (N=27)</b>	<b>Girls (N=34)</b>	<b>p-value</b>
<b>Scales</b>			
Discipline and teaching responsibility	4.5 (2.5-5.2) N=25	4.2 (2.5-5.1) N=33	0.6826
School encouragement	4.7 (3.2-5.7) N=26	4.3 (3.0-5.7) N=34	0.9880
Mother support	4.3 (3.7-5.3) N=21	2.7 (1.0-5.5) N=34	0.3373
Time and talking together	5.0 (3.8-6.0) N=27	5.0 (3.5-6.0) N=34	0.5079
Providing	4.2 (3.0-5.0) N=26	3.9 (2.1-4.9) N=32	0.8449
Praise and affection	4.5 (3.0-5.3) N=27	4.6 (3.5-5.3) N=32	0.3140

Developing talents and future concerns	5.0 (4.0-5.7) N=27	4.3 (3.3-5.7) N=32	0.9512
Reading and homework support	3.5 (2.0-4.7) N=23	3.0 (1.3-4.3) N=29	0.3929
Attentiveness	3.7 (1.8-5.0) N=22	3.7 (2.0-5.0) N=29	0.5795

The results of Table 2 indicate no statistically significant differences in the perceived involvement of non-resident fathers of male and female adolescents from families affected by divorce. This finding is particularly noteworthy, given that previous literature indicated that non-resident fathers were more involved with their sons than with their daughters (Lamb, 2000) and that sons tended to report closer relationships with their fathers and enjoyed longer and more frequent visits than daughters did (Stamps Mitchell, Booth, & King, 2009). The results of this study further support findings by Stamps Mitchell, Booth and King (2009) that fathers tend to be equally involved with their daughters and sons, even though their involvement may be expressed in different ways.

Table 3

*Median scores (inter-quartile range) for each SDQ scale by marital status*

SDQ Scales	Married (N=236)	Divorced (N=65)	p-value
Total Difficulties Score	10.5 (8-14)	11 (8-15)	0.5084
Emotional Symptoms Score	3 (2-5)	3 (1-5)	0.5481
Conduct Problems Score	2 (1-3)	2 (1-3)	0.5760
Hyperactivity Score	3.5 (2-5)	4 (3-6)	□0.0114*
Peer Problems Score	2 (1-3)	2 (1-3)	0.3393
Pro-social Score	8 (6-9)	8 (7-9)	0.5711

\*If p □0.05, there is a significant difference between the two groups.

The results in Table 3 indicate that, regardless of parental divorce, most children in this sample reported high levels of subjective well-being. Only on Scale 4 (measuring

hyperactivity), results obtained indicate differences in levels of well-being between the adolescents from homes affected by divorce and intact families. Flouri (2006) reports similar results on hyperactivity when comparing adolescents from homes affected by divorce and intact families and suggests that this may be a reflection of externalising problems such as non-compliance and poor school performance rather than hyperactivity in the clinical sense. Because of these findings, it was deemed necessary to compare the results for well-being of male and female participants from families affected by divorce to obtain a more sensitive analysis of possible differences in well-being.

Table 4

*Median scores (inter-quartile range) for each SDQ scale by gender (N=65)*

SDQ Scales	Boys (N=27)	Girls (N=38)	p-value
Total Difficulties Score	11 (8-12)	12 (8-15)	0.1470
Emotional Symptoms Score	2 (1-3)	3.5 (2-6)	□0.0030*
Conduct Problems Score	2 (1-3)	2 (1-3)	0.2330
Hyperactivity Score	5 (3-5)	4 (2-6)	0.9892
Peer Problems Score	2 (1-3)	2 (1-3)	0.6241
Prosocial Score	7 (6-8)	9 (7-9)	□0.0025*

\* If  $p \leq 0.05$ , there is a significant difference between the two groups.

The results obtained indicate that significant differences in well-being were obtained on Scale 2 and Scale 6. Scale 2 (emotional symptoms) comprises 5 items measuring emotional symptoms such as anxiety, depression and downheartedness, fearfulness in new situations, and psychosomatic symptoms. Scale 6 (pro-social behaviour) also comprises 5 items measuring aspects such as kindness, volunteering to help others, helpfulness, sharing with others and being nice to people. Even though male and female adolescents from families affected by divorce reported no significant differences in non-residential father

involvement on the IFI, the overall results of this study indicate that reported levels of father involvement in terms of lack of engagement, interaction and availability maybe contributed to variances in well-being and adjustment for boys and girls in terms of their emotional symptoms and pro-social behaviour. These results are consistent with Flouri's (2007) findings that low frequency of contact between children and their non-resident fathers was positively related to conduct problems and emotional symptoms. The results obtained on Scale 4 (hyperactivity) and Scale 6 (pro-social behaviour) suggest the possibility of the development of externalising behaviour problems in boys after divorce and internalising behaviour problems, i.e. depression and anxiety, for girls. The results support Flouri's (2007) findings that in adolescence, father-child relationships change, particularly for girls who consistently rate their affect towards their fathers as lower and perceive their fathers as less available.

### **Conclusions**

The results of this study have important implications for practitioners and policy makers in that it is important that fathers should continue to play an active role in the lives of their children in a variety of contexts. It is also apparent that the dimensions of father involvement in the developmental stages of their children are unique, and that greater content-orientated involvement (i.e. talking about relationships and the future), communication (i.e. sharing of ideas, thoughts and feelings), and time (i.e. participating in activities) during adolescence may need to be included in policies regarding parenting after divorce, particularly during adolescence. Given the current care and contact schedules that are in place in most settlement agreements after divorce, it the question may be asked whether more contact between a non-resident father and his child will prove more beneficial in addressing some of the above, especially with regard to authoritative

parenting. The Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 (2006) advocates the concept of parental rights and responsibilities for both parents and emphasises the importance of shared parenting and shared responsibility. If fathers are allowed more uninterrupted contact time with their children, they will inevitably play a more prominent role in all aspects of parenting. This will not only alleviate some of the emotional burden on single mothers, but also facilitate more meaningful parenting relationships with potential benefits for both children and their parents. Closer relationships with and more authoritative parenting by non-resident parents have been found to be associated with better medium- and long-term outcomes for children (Dunn, 2004; King & Sobolewski, 2006). In essence, this study affirms the importance of the vision of the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 (2006) by emphasising the importance of promoting ongoing relationships between parents and their children after divorce. In terms of practice implications, the present study emphasises the importance of not only more contact, but also more involvement and the potential benefits of this for children. This leaves important areas of intervention for clinicians working with families and children affected by divorce. DeGarmo (2010) states that greater involvement of non-resident fathers can be facilitated if non-resident fathers take greater responsibility in assuming their paternal identity. This affects not only fathering behaviours, but also parenting experiences. The more the role of non-resident fathers is clarified, the greater the potential for successfully addressing aspects such as continued conflict and eventual disengagement from children after divorce. Hofferth, Forry and Peters (2010) indicate that greater father-child contact is associated with lower levels of maternal involvement, thus giving non-resident fathers more opportunities to play an active role in the lives of their children. It is postulated that the more time fathers spend with their children, the more time mothers may spend in developing new relationships with benefits for mothers, fathers and children. Intervention programmes for non-resident fathers to encourage parenting that is

more collaborative should thus focus on assisting fathers to understand the importance of the fathering role, but should also aim to provide cognitive behavioural skill training interventions that provide positive reinforcement and feedback for strengthening definitions of self and family. Although fathers are becoming more involved in the lives of their children, research indicates that fathers still consistently identify with the “breadwinning” role (Mauer & Pleck, 2006, p. 109), while “caregiving” is primarily defined as the mother’s work. These stereotypes need to be redefined to encourage greater co-operation between parents. Presently, there are few evidence-based programmes for divorced fathers (DeGarmo, 2010). Based on the results of this study and international research in this regard, intervention programmes for non-resident fathering to facilitate more contact with and involvement of non-resident fathers should focus on

1. assisting non-resident fathers to take more responsibility in terms of authoritative aspects of parenting, which may be facilitated by more regular contact schedules;
2. addressing issues of continued conflict between parents, which may in turn facilitate more regular and uninterrupted time between non-resident fathers and their children; and
3. assisting non-resident fathers to have a greater sense of fathering identity, which will facilitate a growing sense of affirmed paternal identity. This in turn may have the potential of fathers taking more responsibility for their role as custodial parents. Given the fact that biological fathers are currently legally viewed as primary custodial parents in term of the regulations of the Children’s Act No. 38 of 2005 (2006), it also serves to protect fathers from having to face the potentially painful consequences of severed relationships with their children. This may stimulate

greater father involvement and promote the psychological presence of fathers even in their physical absence.

The findings of this study should be considered in the light of its limitations. First, this study investigated the link between fathers' involvement and adolescents' psychological well-being; hence, the findings may not be applicable to children of other age groups, different dimensions of fathering, or different child adjustment domains. Second, mothers' involvement was not controlled for, and the measures used in this study were all based on reports by adolescents with regard to father involvement, so that these findings may be influenced by reporting bias. Third, the degree of variance in adolescents' emotional and behavioural well-being was generally modest. Parents' reports may have added to the reflections on well-being, and this aspect should be included in future studies on adolescent well-being after divorce. Finally, it must be noted that other unmeasured variables could be responsible for these findings. Among these various factors could be economic support by fathers (Amato et al., 2009), pre-existing personality and temperament of fathers and adolescents (Belsky, 1984), parenting behaviour of mothers (Papp, Cummings & Goeke-Morey, 2005), and/or psychological health of mothers and the role of mothers as potential gatekeepers in fostering continued relationships between the child and the father after divorce (Cummings, Keller & Davies, 2005). Regardless of these limitations, it is evident from the reported results that fathers make important contributions, and that fathers should take cognisance of their important role in the lives of their children.

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