

Engaging fathers: Expanding the scope of evidence-based home visiting programs

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[Correction added on 10 February 2022, after online publication: Corresponding author email address was changed.]

Abstract

Objective: This descriptive study broadens the scope of father participation in home visiting and examines how fathers' participation varies by demographic and family characteristics.

Background: Consistent and supportive father involvement is associated with positive outcomes for children. Although parenting programs during early childhood provide opportunities to influence fathers' involvement with their children, father participation in these programs is low.

Method: We developed and administered a survey to mothers participating in home visiting programs ($N = 1,386$) to describe how fathers participate in home visiting programs. A series of logistic regression analyses were used to describe how father participation varied across key factors.

Results: Fathers frequently engaged with home visiting in ways that were more indirect, and therefore go unreported by home visitors (e.g., asking mothers about a missed home visit, doing homework or practicing lessons from the visit with the child). Father participation varied based on the relationship and coresidence status between the child's mother and father, father's employment status, and age of the child.

Conclusion: Findings suggest that fathers engage in home visiting more frequently than previously measured, as they often participate in ways that are not directly observed and reported by home visitors.

Implications: Expanding the scope of what defines father participation provides home visiting program staff a better understanding of how fathers participate in the programs and, consequently, how to target father engagement strategies. Informed engagement strategies may be more effective for increasing father engagement and the impact of father participation for families and children.

KEYWORDS

early childhood, fathers, home visiting programs, parenting

Supportive and consistent father involvement is associated with positive outcomes for children across multiple domains (Adamsons, 2018; Cano et al., 2019; Elam et al., 2016; Sarkadi et al., 2008). Children benefit from the financial support from (Lewis & Kornrich, 2020; Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel, 2011; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2009) and emotional involvement with (Cabrera et al., 2007; Gold et al., 2020; Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel, 2011) their fathers over time. Additionally, emotionally supportive fathers can provide children with a sense of security, which is associated with healthy behavioral and psychological outcomes for children, such as emotional regulation and self-confidence (Cabrera et al., 2000; Chary, 2020).

In response to the growing body of literature that identifies the marked importance of fathers' long-term involvement with their children, policymakers and practitioners have become increasingly interested in finding ways to promote fathers' involvement with their children during early childhood. Early childhood also may be the best time to engage nonresident fathers and provide them the parenting skills and resources they need to stay involved with their children and support their children's healthy development (Edin & Nelson, 2013). Early childhood programs, such as evidence-based home visiting programs, may be able to influence both the quantity and quality of fathers' early involvement with their children. Our understanding of how father participation in programs influences fathers' early involvement with their children is limited; however, because father participation in home visiting is typically low, and nonresident fathers and fathers who are not married to their child's mother are even less likely to participate (Duggan, Fuddy, et al., 2004a; Duggan, McFarlane, et al., 2004b; Raikes et al., 2005).

The ways in which fathers engage and participate with their children suggest that fathers' low participation in home visiting programs may, in part, be an artifact of how father participation is measured. Theory suggests that fathers can be directly involved with their children through one-on-one interactions with their children ("interaction"), and they also can be indirectly involved through their "accessibility" or "responsibility for caregiving" (Lamb et al., 1987). According to this multidimensional model of father involvement, responsive fatherhood is not limited to direct engagement but rather to a more holistic direct and indirect engagement over time (Lamb et al., 1987). If fathers show responsibility for their children's well-being by engaging with home visiting programs outside of the home visits, researchers will have previously underestimated the full scope of fathers' engagement with the program and involvement with their children altogether.

This study was designed to determine whether researchers have, indeed, underestimated the degree to which fathers are involved in home visiting programs. First, we investigate whether fathers engage in home visiting in ways beyond those that are directly observable and reportable by home visitors. Second, we aim to understand whether the ways in which fathers participate in home visiting programs vary by family characteristics that, in accordance with prior literature, may be associated with fathers' involvement in home visiting. Understanding how fathers engage in home visiting programs and the predictors associated with father engagement can inform broader family engagement and retention strategies among home visiting programs.

BACKGROUND

Home visiting is a service and support delivery strategy aimed at improving infant, early childhood, and parent health, safety, development, and relationships (Supplee & Adirim, 2012). Because services are offered directly in the child's home environment, formal home visiting programs provide timely opportunities to engage fathers in their children's lives. Despite this

opportunity, fathers' involvement in home visiting programs, as historically measured through participation in home visits, has been low (Duggan, Fuddy, et al., 2004a; Duggan, McFarlane, et al., 2004b). Programs have traditionally targeted mothers and their children (Sandstrom et al., 2015), and thus our understanding of the extent to which fathers are included and engaged in these services is limited.

Research has shown that when fathers do participate in home visiting programs, they play significant roles in shaping the degree to which families benefit from programs (Vecere, 2015). Studies have shown that even after accounting for family structure, families are between 4 and 7 times more likely to remain in home visiting programs if fathers are involved (McGinnis et al., 2018; Rostad et al., 2017). Another study demonstrated that mothers were more likely to remain involved with home visiting programs when their partners (i.e., husband or boyfriend) were engaged in services (Brand & Jungmann, 2014), indicating that father involvement may indirectly promote the success of home visiting by keeping families from dropping out early.

Fathers' participation in home visiting also has been shown to have significant benefits for the family. For example, both resident and nonresident fathers who participate in home visiting are more likely to remain emotionally involved with their families 6 months later than are fathers who do not participate (McGinnis et al., 2018). Data from the "Dads Matter" demonstration showed that fathers who received home visiting services (i.e., intervention group), demonstrated increased involvement with their child, better verbalizations toward their child, and fewer maltreatment indicators (Guterman et al., 2018) than did fathers who did not receive home visiting services. Results also indicated more distal results, such that the intervention improved the mother–father relationship quality, as well as mothers' and fathers' perceived stress (Guterman et al., 2018).

Despite the positive implications of fathers' participation in home visiting, the majority of fathers whose families participate in home visiting do not directly participate in the visits. One study noted that, even when given opportunities to attend monthly home visits, only one third of fathers (both resident and nonresident) participated in even one visit. Less than one-fifth of fathers participated in all the home visits offered (Raikes et al., 2005). Early childhood intervention programs differ in the extent to which they actively include fathers, making it challenging to accurately measure fathers' participation (Raikes et al., 2005; Sandstrom et al., 2015). Some fathers do not participate in home visiting because they are unaware that they are welcome or allowed to participate, and others report that they work during home visiting hours and thus cannot attend (Sandstrom et al., 2015).

Alternatively, fathers' historically low participation in home visiting may reflect, in part, how father participation in home visiting is typically measured. If, as Lamb and colleagues (1987) suggested, fathers engage with their children both directly and indirectly, fathers may participate in ways other than attending the visits. Relying on home visit attendance as the measure of father participation may be underestimating fathers' actual involvement in home visiting. Expanding the scope of father participation beyond participating in home visits could provide program staff additional opportunities and enhance strategies to engage fathers and may more effectively increase fathers' involvement (directly or indirectly) with the program.

Prior research points to several family characteristics that predict whether fathers participate in home visits, but whether those same factors predict other forms of participation is unknown. Fathers who reside or are romantically involved, as well as those who have better relationships and higher partnership satisfaction, with their children's mothers are more likely to participate in programs compared with their nonresident, unpartnered, or more discordant peers (McGinnis et al., 2018; Raskin et al., 2016). Moreover, older (Raikes et al., 2005) and unemployed (Lee et al., 2011) fathers are more likely to participate in home visits than their younger or employed peers. If, as we hypothesize, fathers engage with home visiting programs beyond simply attending home visits, we must explore the factors that predict greater involvement more

broadly. The factors that predict whether fathers can and do participate in home visits may differ from those that predict fathers' more indirect engagement with home visiting programs.

THE CURRENT STUDY

For the past decade, the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program has provided an opportunity for states to engage and support parents through the implementation of evidence-based home visiting programs and support communities through the development of coordinated early childhood systems. One large, geographically diverse state in the southwestern United States prioritized engaging fathers in their MIECHV-funded program. The state agency responsible for implementing the program provided fatherhood trainings, technical assistance, and funding for local father engagement activities to encourage father participation in home visiting services to 29 home visiting program sites across the state. Program sites implemented one of four evidence-based home visiting program models: Early Head Start (EHS), Home-Based Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPPY), Nurse Family Partnership (NFP), or Parents as Teachers (PAT). Staff from these programs, including program coordinators and home visitors, participated in at least two trainings regarding the importance of father involvement for children and father-friendly program approaches. In addition, each community developed a strategic plan for engaging fathers at the community-level and received funding to support the implementation of the plan.

The implementation of father engagement strategies across sites was inconsistent and included little documentation. This lack of systematic documentation precluded a systematic evaluation of the statewide fatherhood engagement efforts. However, the information available from mothers' reports of father involvement did provide an opportunity to better understand how fathers engage in home visiting programs, outside of attending home visits.

Relying on survey data from more than 1,300 mothers participating in 29 home visiting programs, this study examines two primary research questions. First, we investigate how fathers participate in the programs. We anticipated that fathers may engage in home visiting in ways that are not easily or directly observable by home visitors, and thus, fathers may be more actively engaged than previously reported. Specifically, we anticipated that fathers engage with home visiting programs more indirectly, beyond physically being present at a home visit. In a second research question, we explore whether the activities in which fathers participate vary systematically based on family characteristics previously identified as related to fathers' involvement with their children; it is possible that the factors associated with fathers' attendance at home visits may differ from those that predict fathers' more indirect engagement with home visiting. For instance, we hypothesized that the nature of the relationship between the child's mother and father and whether the father works during the day may be driving factors for whether fathers attend home visits, but less important for whether fathers engage with the program in other, indirect ways.

METHOD

Procedures and data

Data for this study were collected as a part of a larger evaluation from 2012 to 2014 of statewide efforts to engage fathers in home visiting programs. The evaluation included administrative data, observations of program staff's (e.g., program coordinators, home visitors) fatherhood trainings, as well as qualitative interviews with key stakeholders (e.g., local and national practitioners, policymakers, academics) and home visitors in the communities, and

focus groups with fathers in each community. We conducted seven semistructured focus groups with 38 fathers and father figures to inquire about fathers' perceptions of home visiting programs, the different ways that fathers participate in home visiting, and barriers to their participation. Focus groups were conducted in English, Spanish, and/or in both English and Spanish with translation.

As a follow-up to the qualitative focus groups with fathers, we aimed to quantify the various ways fathers participate in home visiting programs (2014–2015). The initial evaluation's administrative data (collected in 2012–2014) contained extremely limited contact information for fathers specifically, which precluded our ability to follow up with fathers directly. Instead, we conducted follow-up surveys with mothers about the biological father of their youngest child in the program. Informed by the previous focus groups with fathers, mothers reported on the different ways that fathers participate in home visiting programs. Mothers also reported on family characteristics not collected as a part of the administrative data, which included key demographic information about fathers.

Participants

The sample for the current study comes from a larger sample of 1,698 mothers who responded to at least one survey across three waves of data collection—June 2014, November 2014, and March 2015. To ensure the sample for the current study included mothers who were active participants in the home visiting program, we restricted the analytic sample to only those mothers who had three or more home visits recorded in the larger evaluation's (2012–2014) administrative data. If a mother answered the survey multiple times, we retained her first survey response. This led to a sample size of $N = 1,386$ mothers (46.9% response rate among the 2,955 families enrolled at the time of either of the three surveys who had at least three home visits).

Complete demographic characteristics for the families portrayed in this study ($N = 1,386$) are provided in Table 1. The majority of the mothers in the sample were from low-income families and had a high school diploma (or equivalent) or less. Most mothers in the sample reported being Hispanic (77%). Approximately three quarters of mothers were living with their child's father. The remaining mothers reported that they were in a relationship but not cohabiting (12%) or not romantically involved (13%) with their child's father. All fathers portrayed in this study (i.e., described by mothers in the surveys) were the biological fathers of children whose families participated in the program. Fathers, as reported by their child's mother, were predominantly Hispanic (74%), and 64% of fathers had attained a high school diploma or less. The majority of fathers (85%) were employed.

The sample of mothers who responded to the survey differed from those who did not in a number of ways: Survey respondents had higher income ($p < .05$), were more educated ($p < .001$), were more likely to report being Hispanic ($p < .001$) and more likely to be married than non-respondents ($p < .001$). Descriptive characteristics of the families of the sample of mothers participating in home visiting programs who responded to the survey are provided in Table 1.

Measures

All measures used for analysis (i.e., reported ways in which fathers can engage with home visiting programs, family characteristics) were collected through the survey. Although similar information was available for some of the family and demographic characteristics within the administrative data, the information was often missing or incomplete, and the programs collected no information on fathers. The survey data were a rich source of information on father

TABLE 1 Descriptive characteristics of families in home visiting programs

	<i>M (SD) or %</i>	<i>N</i>
Family characteristics		
Time enrolled in study (months)	17.86	1,386
Parental relationship status (%)		
Married	51.88	719
Dating and cohabiting	23.23	322
Dating (but not cohabiting)	11.47	159
Not in a relationship (and not cohabiting)	13.42	186
Mother characteristics		
Age (years)	28.95 (7.32)	1,386
Race/ethnicity (%)		
African American	6.20	86
Hispanic	77.13	1,069
White	14.57	202
Other	2.09	29
Highest education attained (%)		
Less than high school	33.04	458
High school diploma or equivalent	27.49	381
Some college	23.31	323
Associate degree or higher	16.16	224
Poverty status (%)		
≤ 50% FPL	31.02	430
50% ≤ 100% FPL	29.37	407
>100% FPL	39.61	549
Father characteristics		
Age (years)	31.33 (8.01)	1,386
Race/ethnicity (%)		
African American	8.23	114
Hispanic	73.67	1,021
White	15.01	208
Other	2.09	29
Missing	3.39	47
Highest education attained (%)		
Less than high school	38.53	534
High school diploma or GED	25.40	352
Some college	16.02	222
Associate degree or higher	11.33	157
Unknown (mother did not know)	5.63	78
Missing	3.10	43
Currently employed (%)	85.43	1,184
Child characteristics		
Age (months)	32.52 (21.93)	1,386

Note: *N* = 1,386. FPL = federal poverty line.

participation and provided more complete information on the characteristics of the families participating in home visiting.

Fathers' participation in home visiting

To better understand fathers' participation in home visiting programs, mothers were asked to answer how frequently their child's biological father participated in a series of home visiting activities. The home visiting activities were informed by fathers' descriptions of how they engaged with home visiting programs during semistructured focus groups conducted prior to the development of the survey. During the focus groups, many fathers described regularly engaging with the programs indirectly, outside of the actual home visit. Fathers discussed learning about home visit content from their partners or child and having their partners ask home visitors question on their behalf. Fathers also described completing homework or repeating lessons from the home visitor independently, with their partner or with their child. In the survey, mothers were asked about the frequency with which fathers participated in six home visiting activities. Specific items are presented in Table 2.

Fathers' direct participation in home visiting

Two of the six items represented forms of father participation that were directly observable by a home visitor or program staff (participating when the home visitor comes to the house and asking the home visitor questions). Answer choices ranged from 1 (*Always*) to 4 (*Never*). Responses were recoded into dichotomous indicators for the logistic regression analyses such that responses of *Always*, *Often*, or *Sometimes* = 1 (i.e., father participates at least sometimes); responses of *Never* = 0 (i.e., father never participates).

Fathers' indirect engagement with home visiting

Four of the six items represented forms of participation that were more indirect and often not observed or reported by home visitors (attending parent or group meetings hosted by the program, attending the programs' social events, practicing home visiting lessons with the child's mother and/or child, and asking the child's mother questions about the visits he did not attend). Answer choices ranged from 1 (*Always*) to 4 (*Never*). Responses were recoded into dichotomous indicators for the logistic regression analyses such that responses of *Always*, *Often*, or *Sometimes* = 1 (i.e., father participates at least sometimes); responses of *Never* = 0 (i.e., father never participates).

TABLE 2 Items corresponding to fathers' direct and indirect engagement with home visiting activities

Direct participation in home visiting	Indirect engagement with home visiting
Participates when the home visitor comes to our house	Asks me questions about the home visits that he did not attend
Asks the home visitor questions	Practices home visiting lessons with me or our child
	Attends parent meetings or group events hosted by our home visiting program
	Attends social events hosted by our home visiting program

Family characteristics

Parents' Relationship and Cohabitation Status

Mothers provided information on mothers' relationship and coresidence status with their youngest child's biological father. Relationship status options included: "Married," "Dating," and "Not in a romantic relationship." Coresidence status options included "Cohabiting" and "Not Cohabiting." Data were recoded to create the following dummy variables: (a) in a relationship (married or dating) and cohabiting, (b) dating but not cohabiting, and (c) not in a relationship and not cohabiting.

Fathers' employment status

Mothers provided information on their youngest child's biological father's current employment status. Response options included 1 (*Employed*) and 0 (*Unemployed*).

Fathers' and children's ages

Mothers also provided information on their youngest child's biological father's age (years). Mothers were also asked to report their youngest child's birthday, which was used to calculate child age (months).

Analytic strategy

The purpose of this study was to provide a descriptive portrait of how fathers participate in home visiting and identify factors associated with fathers' participation in home visits, home visiting program meetings and events, and more indirect engagement with home visiting. All analyses were conducted in STATA 16.1 (StataCorp, 2019). We first conducted a set of descriptive frequency analyses to identify patterns for the ways in which fathers participate in home visiting activities. Second, to examine whether family characteristics (i.e., parents' relationship and coresidence status, fathers' employment status, and fathers' and children's age) differentially predicted fathers' participation across the six home visiting activities, we conducted six binary logistic regressions to predict the likelihood fathers participated in each home visiting activity. We opted to use the dichotomized attendance variable to be consistent with how others have looked at fathers' involvement (e.g., McGinnis et al., 2018; Thullen et al., 2014). Doing so allowed us to explore the specific factors that promote whether fathers are, in any way, involved in these activities.

RESULTS

How frequently, and in what ways, do fathers participate in home visiting programs?

The first goal of the study was to describe how frequently, and in what ways, fathers participated in the home visiting programs. On the basis of feedback garnered from fathers through focus groups conducted before the development of the survey for this study, we expanded the scope of father participation beyond merely being physically present at the home visit. Results

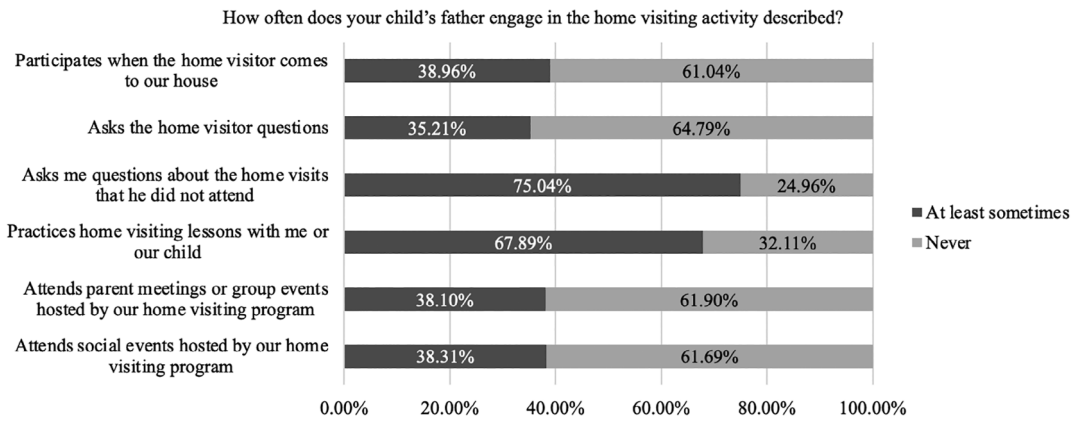


FIGURE 1 Fathers' engagement in home visiting activities. *Note.* $N = 1,386$. Percentages represent totals for at least sometimes (i.e., sometimes + often + always) and never

suggest that fathers were more likely to engage in home visiting in ways other than attending the home visits (Figure 1). Mothers reported that approximately one third (35%–39%) of fathers participated in home visiting programs in ways that the program staff could easily measure—participating in the home visit and asking the home visitor questions during the visit. In contrast, more fathers participated indirectly in the home visiting programs in ways that are not measured easily by program staff. Nearly two thirds of mothers reported that their child's father *at least sometimes* practiced lessons with them or their child when the home visitor was not present. Additionally, 75% of mothers reported that the father *at least sometimes* asked her questions about the home visit when he could not attend. Attendance at home visiting program group meetings and events, another more indirect form of engagement, had participation levels similar to the direct engagement. Approximately 38% of mothers reported that their child's father ever attended meetings or social events hosted by the home visiting program.

How does father participation vary across family characteristics?

The second goal of the study was to examine how father participation varies across family characteristics that have been previously associated with fathers' involvement with their children. Prior research suggests that fathers' participation in home visits may vary by family characteristics. Fathers participated in and engaged with home visiting in other, less direct ways than attending visits. We conducted six logistic regressions to examine whether the factors that predicted home visit attendance differed from the factors that predicted other, less direct forms of participation. Results are presented in Table 3.

Predictors of fathers' direct participation in home visiting

Results demonstrated that fathers who were in a relationship (i.e., married, dating) and cohabiting with the child's mother were significantly more likely to participate in home visits than fathers who were not dating or cohabiting with the child's mother. More specifically, compared with fathers who were both in a relationship and cohabiting with their child's mother, fathers who were in a relationship but not cohabiting with their child's mother had 64% lower odds (odds ratio [OR] = 0.36, standard error [SE] = .07, $p < .001$) of attending home visits and

TABLE 3 Family characteristics predicting fathers' likelihood of engaging in home visiting activities

Predictor variable	Direct participation in home visiting		Indirect engagement with home visiting			
	Participation in the home visit		Postvisit engagement with home visiting		Attendance at home visiting program meetings and events	
	Participates in the home visit	Asks home visitor questions	Asks mom questions	Practices lessons	Attends parent meetings	Attends social events
Parents' relationship and coresidence status ^a						
In relationship, not cohabiting	.36 (.24–.53)***	.49 (.33–.71)***	0.21 (.14–.32)***	0.29 (.20–.42)***	0.76 (.53–1.08)	0.71 (.50–1.01)
No relationship, not cohabiting ^b	.07 (.04–.12)***	.10 (.06–.18)***	0.02 (.01–.03)***	0.03 (.02–.04)***	0.08 (.04–.14)***	0.07 (.04–.14)***
Father is employed ^b	.59 (.42–.84)**	.60 (.42–.84)**	1.25 (.82–1.89)	0.94 (.64–1.39)	0.79 (.56–1.10)	0.82 (.58–1.16)
Father age (years)	.98 (.96–.995)*	1.00 (.99–1.02)	0.98 (.96–1.00)	0.99 (.97–1.01)	0.99 (.97–1.01)	1.00 (.98–1.01)
Child age (months)	.98 (.97–.98)***	.97 (.97–.98)***	0.99 (.98–.998)*	1.00 (.99–1.01)	1.00 (.99–1.00)	1.00 (.99–1.00)
Constant	5.86 (3.24–10.61)***	2.34 (1.31–4.16)***	14.90 (7.11–31.20)***	5.51 (2.90–10.50)***	1.54 (.89–2.69)	1.15 (.66–2.01)

Note: *N* = 1,386. Statistics are presented as odds ratio (95% confidence interval).

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

^aReference group = in relationship (i.e., married, dating) and cohabiting.

^bReference group = unemployed.

fathers who had no romantic involvement with their child's mother had 93% lower odds ($OR = 0.07$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$) of attending home visits. Employed, compared with unemployed, fathers were significantly less likely to participate in home visits ($OR = 0.59$, $SE = .11$, $p < .01$). Older, compared with younger, fathers were significantly less likely to participate in home visits. Odds ratios demonstrated that, for every 1-year increase in fathers' age, fathers had 2% lower odds ($OR = 0.98$, $SE = .01$, $p < .05$) of participating in home visits. Similarly, fathers of older, compared with younger, children were significantly less likely to participate in home visits. Odds ratios demonstrate that, for every 1-month increase in children's age, fathers had 2% lower odds ($OR = 0.98$, $SE = .00$, $p < .001$) of participating in home visits.

Trends were similar for the likelihood that fathers asked their home visitor questions. Results demonstrated that fathers who were in a relationship and cohabiting with their child's mother were significantly more likely to ask the home visitor questions than fathers who were not dating and/or cohabiting with the child's mother. Fathers who were in a relationship but not cohabiting with their child's mother had 51% lower odds ($OR = 0.49$, $SE = .09$, $p < .001$) of asking questions, and fathers who had no romantic involvement with their child's mother had 90% lower odds ($OR = 0.10$, $SE = .03$, $p < .001$) of asking home visitors questions compared with fathers who were in a relationship and cohabiting with their child's mother. Employed fathers were 40% less likely than unemployed fathers to ask the home visitor questions ($OR = 0.60$, $SE = .10$, $p < .01$). Fathers' age was not statistically significant, which suggests that the odds for asking home visitors questions were similar to chance regardless of fathers' age. Finally, fathers of older, compared with younger, children were significantly less likely to ask the home visitor questions. Odds ratios demonstrate that, for every 1 unit increase in children's age (measured in months), fathers have 3% lower odds ($OR = 0.97$, $SE = .00$, $p < .001$) of asking the home visitor questions.

Predictors of fathers' indirect engagement with home visiting

Fathers' postvisit engagement with home visiting

Similar to the results for fathers' participation in the actual home visits, fathers who were in a relationship (i.e., married, dating) and cohabiting with their child's mother were significantly more likely to ask their child's mother questions about the missed home visit than fathers who were not dating or cohabiting with their child's mother. More specifically, fathers who were in a relationship but not cohabiting with their child's mother had 79% lower odds ($OR = 0.21$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$), and fathers who were not in a relationship with their child's mother had 98% lower odds ($OR = 0.02$, $SE = .00$, $p < .001$) of asking questions than fathers who were in a relationship and cohabiting with their child's mother. Fathers of older, compared with younger, children were significantly less likely to ask mothers questions about the visit. Odds ratios demonstrate that for every 1 unit increase in children's age (measured in months), fathers had 1% lower odds ($OR = 0.99$, $SE = .02$, $p < .05$) of asking questions about a missed home visit. Results demonstrate that fathers' age and employment status were not significant predictors of fathers' likelihood of asking mothers questions; these findings suggest that the odds for asking questions about missed home visits were similar to chance regardless of fathers' age or employment status.

Trends in fathers' likelihood of practicing home visiting lessons were similar to those of asking questions. Results demonstrate that fathers who were in a relationship (i.e., married, dating) and cohabiting with the child's mother were significantly more likely to practice home visiting lessons after the visit than fathers who were not dating or cohabiting with their child's mother. Fathers who were in a relationship but not cohabiting with their child's mother had 71% lower odds ($OR = 0.29$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$), and fathers who were not in a relationship with their

child's mother had 97% lower odds ($OR = 0.03, SE = .01, p < .001$) of practicing home visit lessons than fathers who were in a relationship and cohabiting with their child's mother. Results demonstrate that fathers' age, children's age, and fathers' employment status were not significant predictors of fathers' likelihood of practicing home visit lessons, which suggests that the odds for practicing home visit lessons were similar to chance regardless of fathers' age, children's age, or fathers' employment status. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that relationship and residence status continue to be significant predictors of fathers' participation in home visiting. Fathers who were not romantically involved or did not live with their child's mother had lower odds of participating (even indirectly) in home visiting.

Fathers' attendance at home visiting program meetings and social events

Results demonstrate that the odds for attending home visiting program parent meetings and social events were similar to chance regardless of parents' cohabitation status. These events are held outside of the home, making living together less of a driver of whether fathers can attend. In contrast, parents' relationship status was significantly related to fathers' likelihood of attending parent meetings and social events; fathers who had no romantic involvement with their child's mother had significantly lower odds of attending parent meetings and social events than fathers who were in a relationship and cohabiting with their child's mother ($OR = 0.08; SE = .02, p < .001$) and ($OR = 0.07; SE = .02, p < .001$) for parent meetings and social events, respectively). Fathers' employment status was not significantly associated with fathers' likelihood of attending parent meetings or social events, suggesting that the odds for attending parent meetings and social events were similar to chance regardless of whether fathers are employed. These findings are in line with the notion that program-led events are often held in the evenings and on the weekends, making it easier for fathers who work to attend. Finally, fathers' and children's ages were also not significant predictors of attending home visiting program meetings and events, which suggest that the odds for attending parent meetings and social events were similar to chance regardless of these characteristics. Taken together, these findings suggest that for attending program-led parent meetings or social events, only the relationship status between the child's mother and father emerges as a significant predictor of attendance.

DISCUSSION

Our findings support the need to expand our understanding and measurement of father participation in home visiting to include activities that go beyond physically participating in the home visits. Mothers reported that the majority of fathers participated in activities such as asking the mother questions about the home visit or practicing lessons after the visit—activities not observable and, therefore, reported by a home visitor. In contrast, just over one third of fathers participated in home visits—the activity that is most commonly measured as an indicator of father participation.

Having a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which fathers engage in home visiting is important for accurately measuring father and family participation in home visiting programs, which can inform programmatic strategies to engage residential and nonresidential fathers in home visiting. Program staff should be more intentional about providing opportunities for fathers to engage in the program outside of the home visits.

In addition to having a better understanding of how fathers participate, knowing which family and demographic factors are associated with father participation is also important for informing engagement strategies. We hypothesized that the factors associated with a higher likelihood of attending and engaging with the home visits would differ from the factors

associated with fathers' indirect participation in home visiting activities. Findings only partially supported this hypothesis. Relationship or residence status were significantly associated with all forms of father participation. Child age was significantly associated with fathers' attendance and participation in the home visit and for asking mothers questions about the visit: Fathers of younger children were more likely to participate in these ways compared with fathers of older children. Fathers' employment status, however, was only significantly associated with fathers' attendance at and participation in home visits, suggesting that fathers who work may be less likely to attend visits compared with fathers who do not work, but they are equally as likely (or unlikely) to engage in other ways, as fathers who do not work.

The importance of parents' relationship and coresidence status for all forms of participation is consistent with previous research that finds fathers who are in a relationship or living with the child's mother are more likely to participate in home visiting than fathers who are not (Raikes et al., 2005). However, fathers in a relationship with the child's mother are more likely to participate both directly and indirectly, demonstrating the importance of not just coresidence status, but the salience of the relationship between the two parents. For instance, if a father is in a relationship with the child's mother, he is likely to have more frequent communication with the child's mother, and possibly, be more frequently reminded of home visits. Fathers who are in romantic relationships with their children's mothers are also more likely to spend time at the child's house with the child and mother, providing fathers with more opportunities to engage with home visiting.

In the present study, forms of fathers' indirect engagement were both observed and reported by the child's mother; thus, the nature of the relationship between the child's mother and father are critical to the forms of home visiting participation mothers can observe and the forms of participation reported on for this study. The extent to which fathers engage with the program in ways that are unobservable to the child's mother remain unknown and should be the focus of future work. Fathers' own reports of how they engage and participate in home visiting will be critical to this line of research, particularly among fathers who do not live with their child. For a variety of reasons, fathers who do not live with their child may not be able or willing to attend home visits with the child's mother. Program staff's ability to find ways for these fathers to engage indirectly with the program (e.g., through parent meetings or social events outside the home visit) will be important for providing nonresident fathers parenting skills and support.

The finding that fathers who work are significantly less likely to engage and participate in home visits compared with fathers who do not work but are no more or less likely to participate in other ways, highlights an important distinction on findings related to fathers' home visiting participation and employment status. Fathers who are employed during the day may be unable to attend home visits, but this does not necessarily represent their lack of desire to be engaged in home visiting. These scheduling conflicts may lead to an underestimation of employed fathers' engagement in home visiting altogether; employed fathers may be no less likely to participate in home visiting activities more holistically. In line with Lamb and colleagues' (1987) model of father involvement, although employed fathers may not always be present for the home visit(s), they may be devoting more effort and resources toward engaging in home visiting activities once the home visitor is no longer present and availability is more flexible.

In contrast to previous literature stating that fathers who were at least 20 years old participated in monthly home visiting more often than fathers who were younger (Raikes et al., 2005), our results indicate that younger fathers are slightly more likely to participate in the home visits than older fathers. The discrepant findings could be related to differences in study samples. In the current study, age was measured continuously, whereas Raikes and colleagues' (2005) measurement of fathers' age was dichotomized as ± 20 years old. In our study, fathers' mean age was 31; only 10% of our sample was age 21 or younger.

That fathers of younger children were more likely to participate in direct and indirect ways parallel previous research on mother's participation (Cho et al., 2017), showing that mothers of

younger children are more likely to be engaged in home visiting. It is possible that fathers of younger children are more engaged with home visiting activities than fathers of older children because fathers of younger children depend on home visitors (e.g., to learn basic parenting skills) in ways that they may not as children get older. Fathers of younger children may depend more on the home visiting for reassurance in the early stages of the child's life and may feel more confident in their parenting skills as children get older.

Limitations and implications

There are several limitations to this study, and the findings from this study must be interpreted within the context of those limitations. First, the distribution of participants in our sample (i.e., survey respondents) is not perfectly aligned with the population of parents participating in the statewide home visiting program. For instance, survey respondents were significantly more likely to be Hispanic and married and to have higher income and educational attainment than were nonrespondents. The Hispanic culture's strong focus on the family as a united whole (i.e., familism) and positive associations between families' socioeconomic status and participation (Roggman et al., 2002, Rostad et al., 2017) could overestimate the frequency with which fathers participate in home visiting more generally. Second, nearly three fourths of mothers surveyed were living with the child's father. In line with existing research, fathers in a relationship and living with their child's mother were more likely to engage both directly and indirectly with the program compared with nonresident fathers. How to define, measure, and promote engagement among nonresident fathers, particularly among those fathers no longer in a relationship with their child's mother, should be the focus of future research. And third, the survey respondents included in the sample are also likely among the most engaged participants in the programs. The extent to which the participation patterns of the fathers reported by survey respondents reflects overall patterns of father participation may be hampered by these limitations.

Additionally, although our measures (i.e., engagement with home visiting activities) were informed by fathers through our focus groups, our results solely relied on mothers' reports. With that, our results may be biased in favor of fathers with more amicable relationships with their child's mother, regardless of the amount of involvement the father has with the home visiting activities. It should also be noted that mothers, compared with fathers, often report lower levels of father involvement, demonstrating how mothers' report may have negatively skewed our findings (Charles et al., 2018). Although this is certainly a limitation of the current data, our findings still help us to more accurately depict and understand the fathers whose families participate in home visiting.

The results of this study show that fathers may be more engaged with home visiting programs than initially anticipated because they frequently engage with the home visiting program beyond the home visits themselves. Furthermore, results indicate that more direct and indirect forms of fathers' engagement in home visiting vary based on family characteristics, which ought to be taken into consideration by program and policymakers aiming to increase fathers' involvement in home visiting. Specifically, program staff should be deliberate in attempting to engage fathers who do not live with or are not in a romantic relationship with the child's mothers, fathers who are not employed, and fathers of older children.

Fathers may be unable to attend home visits, but that does not mean they are unwilling to participate. Staff should work to find ways for fathers to participate and engage with the programs outside of the visits. Engagement strategies could include the basics of collecting contact information for the child's father (especially important for nonresident fathers) and leaving (or mailing) materials specifically for fathers to use outside of the visit and developing specific programming in the evenings and weekends to engage fathers. Program staff may need to

incorporate content into the visit to help mothers and fathers understand the importance of healthy father and child relationships.

This study provides a descriptive portrait of *how* fathers participate in home visiting programs and understanding the benefits associated with father participation in home visiting programs is beyond the scope of this study. More research is needed to determine how father participation in home visiting, and other early childhood programs, is associated with child and family outcomes. Improving the measurement of father participation may help researchers and program staff develop a better understanding of the different ways in which fathers participate in the programs. With these better measures, researchers may be able to more accurately assess which strategies are effective for increasing father engagement and the impact of father participation for families and children.

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How to cite this article: Osborne, C., DeAnda, J., & Benson, K. (2022). Engaging fathers: Expanding the scope of evidence-based home visiting programs. *Family Relations*, 71(3), 1159–1174. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12636>