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Is "being there" enough? Father's instrumental support and union dissolution among disadvantaged families

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Is “being there” enough? Father’s instrumental support and union dissolution among disadvantaged families

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Abstract

Objective: The objective of this paper is to explore the relationship between financial provision, instrumental support and union dissolution among low-income men – particularly whether men can compensate for lower income and employment levels through increased presence and availability in the home.

Background: In recent years, disadvantaged fathers have expressed a determination to not only provide financially for their families, but to also "be there" for them, giving support in other instrumental ways. Little is known about the relationship between these two types of provision and the relationship they have in stabilizing or dissolving unions.

Method: Using five waves (nine years) of data from the Future of Families and Child Wellbeing Survey (FFCWS, n = 3239), I conduct discrete-time event-history analysis to assess the probability of union dissolution among cohabiting and married couples based in relation to levels of income, division of paid labor, and instrumental support.

Results: Instrumental support is highly protective against union dissolution. Odds of union dissolution were 62% lower for those with high levels of instrumental support, with a stronger association seen among married couples than cohabiting couples.

Conclusion: Results suggest that no level of instrumental support can completely compensate for lower incomes and employment levels among disadvantaged fathers: both financial and instrumental support are important.

Keywords: father involvement, romantic relationships, socioeconomic factors, division of labor, gender

Is "being there" enough? Father's instrumental support and union dissolution among disadvantaged families

In the US, the male breadwinner model of family relationships prevails despite women earning half or more of the family income in 28% of families (Parker & Stepler, 2017). This is evident in (the lack of) US family policies, institutional biases that favor fathers over mothers, and cultural norms regarding gender in employment, unpaid work, and childcare (see Adler & Brayfield, 2006; Katz-Wise et al., 2010; Sayer et al., 2011). With income and wealth inequality deepening, the shrinking of the middle class, and decreasing demand and wages for low-skilled jobs, disadvantaged fathers face increasing difficulties in filling the traditional role of the main provider (Bridges & Boyd, 2016). Although some reports find the breadwinner role to be shrinking in recent decades (Schwartz & Gonalons-Pons, 2016), economic provision remains a key component in relationship quality (Lucas et al., 2020; Williams & Cheadle, 2016), longevity, and eventual marriage among lower-income couples (Gibson-Davis et al., 2005; Sassler et al., 2014; Smock et al., 2005; Tach & Eads, 2015).

The effects of father's economic provision on unions are compounded by the gendered norms and expectations for each parent. Multiple studies have shown that in all couples regardless of income and education levels, violation of the male breadwinner norm (i.e. women out earning their husbands) destabilizes marriages (Bertrand et al., 2015; Teachman, 2010). Other studies indicate that women earning the same or more than their partners is only problematic when the relationship quality is also low, or when the woman is unhappy (Nock, 2001; Rogers, 2004; Sayer & Bianchi, 2000). It is well documented that women do a disproportionate amount of housework and childcare (Bianchi et al., 2000), even when they are employed full-time (Hochschild & Machung, 2012), and this imbalance in paid and unpaid work

leads to mothers' relationship dissatisfaction and conflict (Chong & Mickelson, 2016; Grote & Clark, 2001; Hiekel & Ivanova, 2023).

One potential way to rebalance the division of paid and unpaid labor and promote relationship quality is for men to increase their involvement and presence in the home. A growing literature on low-income fatherhood identifies several components of fatherhood that have become increasingly salient in the context of low economic provision. These fathers – and their partners – see breadwinning alone as insufficient for being a good father, and place greater emphasis on emotional connection, quality time, and being a role model (Edin & Nelson, 2013; Randles, 2020; Waller, 2002, 2010), often summed up as "being there" for their child(ren). Being there for the mother and the child can take on many forms and have different meanings for disadvantaged families and may help compensate for low economic provision in the traditionally prescribed breadwinner role. However, the impact of this instrumental support by men on their relationships remains largely untested quantitatively. The objective of this paper is to explore the relationship between income, employment and instrumental support, with a particular focus on whether men can compensate for lower income and employment levels through greater presence and availability in the home, i.e., "being there."

BACKGROUND

Low-income fathers and fathers of color face a wide range of obstacles and difficulties in establishing the level of involvement in paid and unpaid work they desire to attain in their families (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010). Labor force participation is the lowest among Black men (66.5%), and the highest among Hispanic men (79.5%), compared to White men at 71.2% (Bundage, 2017). However, poverty rates are 100% higher for Black men and 50% higher for Hispanic men. Despite economic struggles – and counter to outdated stereotypes of

"deadbeat" or absent fathers – low-income men's qualitative accounts of fatherhood reflect strong commitments to provide not just financially, but to be physically and emotionally present and involved in their families (Edin & Nelson, 2013; Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010; Waller, 2002).

Born out of these qualitative accounts was a push to better empirically measure and understand the different forms of involvement low-income fathers engaged in and the impact it had on the relationship with their children and partners. In the non-resident and non-custodial fatherhood literature, this took the form of measuring informal and in-kind support and their meaning, as opposed to compliance with formal child support orders and time spent with children. A comparison of these forms of support revealed that informal and in-kind support are a unique form of support, are valued more by the mother, and are more predictive of the quality the relationship the father has with the child (Waller et al., 2018) and is associated with several positive outcomes in children (Nepomnyaschy et al., 2020).

For resident fathers, a measure more closely tied to being there for their partners and children was also created and has received less attention. Instrumental support was designed to measure a father's presence and availability to look after the children and the home, and includes watching over the child, running errands, fixing things around the house, and taking the child to appointments. In some ways, instrumental support may be conceptually similar to in-kind and informal support as well as measures of child involvement, in that they all represent a father's desire and willingness to assess the needs of his family and do what he can to meet those needs. It is also unique in that it more directly supports the mother and may lead to more equal sharing of paid and unpaid work. This type of support may be particularly salient in low-income contexts, as poor and women of color have long been more likely than their higher-income

counterparts to be employed. For example, in 2017, White women had a labor force participation rate of 53.9%, compared to Hispanic women at 58.2% and Black women at 66.5% (Bundage, 2017). Increased support from fathers in the home may lead to less work-family conflict, improved father-child relationships, and better relationship outcomes.

Employment and Income

As couples divide paid and unpaid labor, expectations based on gender roles might restrict the amount of support in the home that fathers are able to provide or that mothers are willing to accept. Housework among women declines as their employment and relative earnings increase, but once gender norms regarding earnings are violated and the mother earns more than the father, women either increase their hours spent in housework as men decrease theirs (Greenstein, 2000), or they reduce their level of employment (Bertrand et al., 2015).

Expectations for men regarding economic provision in relationships remain strong, with some variation across contexts. Men with higher incomes are more likely to marry and have longer relationship durations than lower-income men (Hopcroft, 2021), while men's lack of full-time employment continues to be a predictor of divorce in married couples, though neither women's relative income nor their level of employment was associated with divorce rates (Killewald, 2016). In lower SES households, unexpected shocks to income are predictive of union dissolution, though less consistently for Hispanic and Black households for which spells of unemployment may be more common (Nunley & Seals, 2010).

Decreasing economic provision leads to lower levels of partner supportiveness and overall relationship quality (Lucas et al., 2020), whereas high levels of father involvement are associated with higher levels of relationship quality (McClain & Brown, 2017). Employment and relationship satisfaction work together to predict dissolution, such that men's unemployment

leads to separation initiation by both mothers and fathers, whereas women's employment only leads to their seeking dissolution when relationship quality is low (Sayer et al., 2011). The authors of these findings point to the difficulty in producing more egalitarian behaviors in the fathers as the reason these more economically independent women do not stay in the relationship. In support of this reasoning, research finds the relation between women's employment and union dissolution to be significant only when the man contributes 30% or less of childcare and unpaid work (Mencarini & Vignoli, 2018). While men's increasing contributions in the home can offset relationship instability associated with women's increased earnings, it is not yet known if – or to what extent – men can compensate for low income provision and employment.

Married and Cohabiting Relationships

The predictors of dissolution differ among married and cohabiting unions. In general, cohabiting relationships are less stable than marriages (McLanahan, 2011; Perelli-Harris & Gassen, 2012; Sassler et al., 2014). Earnings, education and relationship quality are stronger predictors of stability among married couples than cohabitors (Tach & Edin, 2013), while low educational attainment is highly predictive of cohabitation among couples (Musick & Michelmore, 2018). There exists among cohabitors a "marriage bar" where expectations from – and the perquisites for – a relationship are much higher (Gibson-Davis et al., 2005; Smock et al., 2005) in marriage than cohabitation, which may protect cohabiting couples from the pitfalls of economic uncertainty and disadvantage. The marriage bar consists of three elements that motivate couples' decisions toward or away from marriage: financial concerns, relationship quality, and the fear of divorce. Not only must men be good providers to be marriageable, but they must also attain a certain level of financial stability – ranging from being able to buy a

house to having a certain level of savings. Additionally, men must prove themselves to be committed to ensuring sustained relationship quality as a protective factor against divorce and the negative outcomes associated with it.

Relative earnings between fathers and mothers are differentially predictive of union dissolution for married and cohabiting couples. Men's positive economic circumstances are associated with remaining in cohabiting unions (Sassler & McNally, 2003), while cohabiting relationships are more likely to end when women make more than their partners (Brines & Joyner, 1999). Greater income equality among cohabiting couples is associated with union stability, while income inequality promotes union stability in marriages, but only if the father earns more (Brines & Joyner, 1999; Kalmijn et al., 2007). Other studies have found that the type of employment and hours employed are more predictive of relationship type, longevity and duration than the amount of income (Kalmijn, 2011; Killewald, 2016).

Viewing cohabitation as the proving ground for marriageability, Oppenheimer's theory of removing uncertainty before marriage fits well in predicting how relationships might be affected by men's more egalitarian contributions in cohabiting relationships. The precarity of cohabiting partners' equal earnings is ameliorated through increased relationship satisfaction and happiness among mothers (Rogers, 2004), and there is evidence to suggest that men's increased participation in the home may relieve the burden and stress of working mothers (Mencarini & Vignoli, 2018). Thus, when fathers increase their involvement with their children and in the home, it may serve as a signal of commitment to the relationship as a whole.

Economic Provision vs Instrumental Support

Beyond economic provision, fathers vary widely in their level of instrumental support, or their availability for and engagement in household responsibilities and childcare activities –

colloquially described as “being there” for their partners and child(ren). As previously mentioned, economic provision is not the predictor of relationship quality and union duration for disadvantaged families that it is for middle and upper class families (Teachman, 2010). An extensive qualitative literature outlines the various motivations and approaches of low-income fathers in supporting their families through non-economic means, for example, by becoming more involved in childrearing during spells of unemployment, alternating shifts of employment and caregiving with their partner (Waller, 2009), or reconstructing their notion of providing to include close and nurturing engagement with their children (Roy, 2004).

The level of instrumental support a father has is influenced by a number of contextual and compositional factors. Married and cohabitating fathers are more involved than nonresident fathers, and long-term cohabiting fathers show higher levels of involvement than married fathers (Hohmann-Marriott, 2011; McClain & DeMaris, 2013). Due to declining employment prospects, the shift to more service sector positions, and nonstandard work schedules, and increasing dependence on the mother’s employment, disadvantaged fathers are often more involved in household chores and childcare (Carlson et al., 2018; Shows & Gerstel, 2009; Wilson, 2012). Fathers who work irregular hours, nights or weekends are more involved in these activities and experience less stress in them than fathers with more traditional work hours (Hewitt et al., 2012; Nomaguchi & Johnson, 2014). Qualitative accounts highlight how though nontraditional work schedules allow for more caregiving among low-income men, they can also lead to greater financial difficulty and consequent relationship stress and volatility, illustrating the difficult in navigating employment and instrumental support among disadvantaged fathers (Waller, 2009). Though higher levels of instrumental support may be more of a norm among more disadvantaged

couples, it is not yet clear what impact it has on relationship longevity, especially as fathers may place a higher priority towards their children than to their relationships (Edin & Nelson, 2013).

Gender Attitudes and Roles

Adherence to traditional gender attitudes and roles by parents prescribes a father placing priority on paid work over housework and childrearing, and a mother doing the opposite. Egalitarian attitudes allow more crossover and sharing between roles. Despite initial attitudes, couples tend to fall back into more traditional parenting roles after the birth of their first and subsequent children (Katz-Wise et al., 2010; Miller & Sassler, 2012; Miller, 2011), with men placing greater importance on employment and women on caring for the family. Gender is still the leading predictor of the division of labor among households (Bianchi et al., 2000; Forste & Fox, 2012; Hook, 2006), with mothers doing the majority. Fathers' contributions have grown in recent decades, but remains unequal, and the increase has been in non-routine unpaid work, rather than in the more traditionally feminine work of routine chores (cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc.) and childcare (Bianchi et al., 2000; Doucet, 2006). Qualitative work highlights that poor and working-class families face many more complicating factors in negotiating the division of labor than just gendered expectations. They often struggle to find work, deal with substance abuse (theirs and/or their partners), and incarceration, and they may have experienced these or other negative outcomes in previous relationships, leading to wariness in their current relationship (Sherman, 2016). In the face of these struggles, it may be easier for mothers and fathers to default to traditional gender roles (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

Fathers' reluctance to contribute more towards unpaid work and childcare in the home may be due to fear of negative consequences related to the violation of gendered norms. Men who feel masculinity is important to their self-worth, and those who adhere to more traditional

masculine ideologies are less likely to participate in both housework and childcare (Kaplan & Offer, 2022). Another source of masculinity threat comes from being out-earned by their partner, and this can lead to men doing less household work and women doing more (Bertrand et al., 2015; Bittman et al., 2003). Gender deviance in work occupations can also influence work in the home as men who work in more traditionally female occupations are more likely to engage in male-related work and activities in the home (Schneider et al., 2018). As couples work to protect their gender identities at work and in the home, it is unclear whether men's increased presence in the home and in childrearing might lead to greater union stability or instability, especially in the context of struggling to fill the breadwinner role.

Research Question and Hypotheses

This study explores the relationship between economically disadvantaged fathers and union dissolution. The question at the core of the study is whether fathers' increased activity and availability in the home (instrumental support) can reduce the odds of dissolution associated with long-standing risk factors such as low-income, imbalanced divisions of paid labor and cohabitation. Based on previous research and guiding theories, I test the following hypotheses:

H1: Lower-income fathers can reduce their odds of union dissolution through higher levels of instrumental support.

H2: Fathers with lower levels of employment than their partners can reduce the odds of dissolution through higher levels of instrumental support.

H3: Cohabiting couples with high levels of instrumental support will have odds of dissolution that more closely resemble those of married couples.

METHOD

Data

Data come from the first five waves of the Future of Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS, previously known as the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu; Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, & McLanahan, 2001), following a cohort of nearly 5000 children. The waves span nine years after the birth of the focal child, born between 1998 and 2000. Mothers and fathers (where available) of the children are interviewed at each wave, starting with the baseline interview shortly after the child's birth, and then at follow-up surveys 1, 3, 5 and 9 years afterwards. The survey contains an oversample of Black and Hispanic families, low-income families, and unmarried parents and is representative of nonmarital births in US cities with populations over 200,000.

Sample

The full sample contains reports from 4,898 mothers, with surveys from fathers collected where possible. Ultimately, 78% of fathers were included in the baseline wave, which is a relatively high completion rate for fathers in this demographic. I drop households in which the mother and father never cohabited (1,074). Another 585 had missing data on relationship status, (the dependent variable), and 592 respondents had missing data on one or more of the independent variables, resulting in a sample of 2,647 couples. Because the most disadvantaged respondents are more likely to drop out of the survey, results can be overestimated without the use of multiple imputation (Sassler et al., 2014). After imputing the data, I was able to recover 592 responses, resulting in a sample of 3,239 households. This analytic sample resulted in 14,231 person-year observations (3239 at 1 year, 2632 at 3 years, 4040 at 5 years, and 4320 at 9 years).

Measures

Dependent Variable

The focal outcome variable (the failure event) in the event-history analysis is union dissolution (separation or divorce) in cohabiting and married couples. Relationship status is measured at each wave (Years 1, 3, 5 and 9), and any change from married to not married is counted as a divorce, and any change from cohabiting to not cohabiting is counted as a separation. The relationship is measured as beginning at baseline, or at the wave the couple was first married or began cohabiting if this began after baseline. The end of the relationship was the end of the last wave of the survey if the couple did not separate, or the date of separation/divorce given by the respondent. Couples with any missing data on relationship status across waves were dropped from the sample. Relationship status was assessed with a constructed variable, using mother reports, on whether the couple was married, cohabiting, visiting, friends – and so on – at the time of the focus child's birth and at each subsequent interview.

Independent Variables

The objective of the study is to examine the influence that instrumental support has on the relationship between several traditionally strong predictors of union dissolution. The first is income from employment, measuring mothers' and fathers' absolute and relative earnings (father's share of household income). Each participant reports their own income, and father income is supplemented by mother reports in the Year 1 survey where his own report is missing.

The second is employment, measuring over the past year whether either partner worked over five hours more per week on average than the other partner, or whether they both worked roughly the same amount (within five hours of each other). Previous research has shown mothers' absolute and relative income and cumulative employment hours to be more important than fathers' income in predicting the risk of divorce (Teachman, 2010), while other research has found no association between couples' paid work hours and dissolution (Ishizuka, 2018). Still

other work finds that fathers' – but not mothers' – unemployment was also predictive of lower relationship stability (Lucas et al., 2020). Including variables on both income and employment allows further analysis of the relationship between these variables and dissolution among disadvantaged couples. Participants reported their own number of hours worked in a typical week over the past 12 months.

The third independent variable of focus is union type (cohabiting vs marriage), as dissolution rates are known to vary greatly in cohabiting and married unions (Lichter et al., 2006). Union type is drawn from a constructed measure based on mothers' reports. A dichotomous variable was created and measures whether the couple was cohabiting vs married at the birth of the focal child. I also created a variable that keeps track of whether a cohabiting couple was married in a later wave. There were 291 married by Year 1, 162 by Year 3, 124 by Year 5, and 88 by Year 9. In later models, a categorical relationship variable was created which measured whether the couple was married at birth, married later, or remained cohabiting through the duration of the study. This was to allow for testing for differences in the influence of instrumental support on each of these relationship types; however, this was ultimately unfeasible due to small cell sizes among low levels of instrumental support in later waves.

Moderator

I use instrumental support as a moderator between the main dependent and independent variables. Support is reported by mothers and measured at all waves except baseline and the scale includes four items: "How often does he look after child when you need to do things?" "How often does he run errands for you like picking things up from the store?" "How often does he fix things around your home, paint, or help make it look nicer in other ways?" and "How often does he take child places he/she needs to go, such as to daycare or the doctor?" Items are

scored from 0 "*Often*" to 3 "*Never*" and reverse coded so that higher values reflect more support. The alpha coefficient for the scales increases across waves, from α = .82 at baseline to α = .90 at Year 9.

The nature of the FFCWS data is that the later waves are separated by increasingly longer periods of time. This makes it potentially problematic to measure instrumental support and whether or not a separation occurred in the same wave, because the separation may have taken place at a timepoint that precedes the assessment of instrumental support. That is, a mother who separated from the father of the focal child two years previous to the survey may rate a father's instrumental support very low in response to the separation, rather than the level of support predicting the separation. To account for this, I lagged the independent variable, running all analyses with instrumental support from the wave prior.

Controls

I include various covariates in the analysis, the majority of which are measured at each wave, with a few that are assessed only at baseline or one-year follow-up. Of these single-year covariates, several are those which do not vary by year: race and ethnicity, and father and mother age. To avoid collinearity, I included the father report of his age and race, and then created a variable that assesses whether the mother's race is different from the father's. Race and ethnicity are measured as non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic and other. Mother's and father's adherence to traditional gender attitudes (self-report) was only assessed at the baseline survey. Gender attitudes is a scale created from seven items, such as "the important decision in the family should be made by the man of the house" and "it is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family." The items were

rated from 1 “Strongly Disagree” to 4 “Strongly Agree,” with higher scores reflecting more traditional gender attitudes.

The remaining variables were measured at each wave. Education (mother and father report) is assessed and categorized by whether the father had less than a high school education, a high school diploma or equivalent, some college or a bachelor’s degree or higher. Education is another variable that can cause collinearity among partners, so I created a difference variable for whether the partners had the same amount of education, or if one or the other had more. Mothers were also asked about the number of children she had with the father of the focal child, and whether the father had children from previous relationships. I also included a variable which measures the number of years the couple was together before the birth of the focal child and start of the survey.

Father’s incarceration history is a constructed variable from mother’s report, with father’s report filling in any missing information on whether the father had been incarcerated up to the time of the interview. Fathers and mothers were both asked to report on the father’s alcohol and/or substance abuse problems. I combined these reports into a three-item scale, including “Does bio dad have a problem keeping a job/friends because of drugs or alcohol use?” “Have you ever sought help for drugs/alcohol problems?” and “In the past year, has drinking/drugs interfered with work/relationships?” A yes response to any of these questions was counted as a problem with drugs or alcohol.

Analysis

I conducted discrete-time event-history analysis to assess the odds of union dissolution over time. Because instrumental support was not assessed at baseline, and due to using the prior wave of support to predict dissolution, this resulted in being able to assess dissolution at Years 3,

5, and 9. I set Year 3 as the base comparison category to be able to assess any non-linearity in the odds of dissolution. I apply Sandwich estimators for increased robustness in calculating standard errors. I first construct a base model that assesses the relationship between the independent variables (income, employment, and union type) and union dissolution, and then compare it with models that incorporate instrumental support as a moderator. Finally, I create margins plots to facilitate the interpretation of the moderation analyses.

Using the chained method in Stata 17, I created 10 imputed data sets with the multiple imputation then deletion (MID) method. All models are reported with the imputed data, with the unimputed models used to create statistics describing the overall sample (Table 1.1) and differences between the married and cohabiting sample (Table 1.3).

RESULTS

I began with several assessments of the instrumental support scale and its items. Histograms showed an initial right-skew of the individual items of the scale which turn u-shaped in later years, indicating a more bimodal than normal distribution. To account for this, I created categorical versions of the items in the scale based on quartiles, with low (bottom 25%), medium (26-75%), and high (top 25%) levels of involvement in each activity. I ran correlations of the continuous version of the scales with mothers' and fathers' income and education levels to get an idea of the distribution of instrumental support across these variables (Appendix Table A.1). There was no correlation between father's income and support, but mother's income was weakly correlated ($r = .06$, $p = .003$) at the Year 1 follow-up. The education of both parents was weakly correlated to support, at .09 for fathers and .07 for mothers. The correlation between instrumental support and father's income became stronger over time, from $r = .08$ at Year 1 up to $r = .19$ at Year 9. Two-way tabulations indicate a somewhat even distribution of instrumental support

across income levels (Appendix Table A.2) and education levels (Appendix Table A.3), though fathers with a bachelor's degree tended to have slightly higher levels of support which remained steady at Year 1 and Year 9.

Descriptive statistics for the unimputed sample are provided in Table 1. Here I list the basic dissolution rates at each wave by relationship type. For a full list of the trajectories by wave, see Table 3 below and Appendix Table A.8. Among those married at birth, around 10% of the sample at Years 3, 5, and 9 divorced. For those who married later, 6% of the sample at Year 3 separated, 15% at Year 5, and 20% at Year 9. Separation rates were much higher for those who always cohabited, with 40% of the sample at Year 3 separating, 43% of Year 5 and 36% of Year 9. The median household income (in 2023 dollars) was $51,158 with fathers providing an average of 67% of the income at baseline. Median father income was $41,295 and mother income was $23,059. Around 60% of fathers reported working at least 5 hours more than their partner each week, and 26% of couples worked around the same number of hours. 24% of the fathers were White, 41% were non-Hispanic Black, 30% were Hispanic, and 5% were in another racial category.

Instrumental support was recoded as a categorical variable by quartile, with the bottom 25% having scale score of less than 1.75 out of 3. The middle two quartiles (26% to 75%) had a score between 1.75 and 2.75. And the top 25% had a score of 2.75 or higher, with the scale maxing out at 3.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics at baseline (unless marked otherwise) for union status, instrumental support, employment, and relationship predictors (FFCWS, n = 2647)*

Variables	Mean/%	SD	Range
Dependent variable	Year 3	Year 5	Year 9
Married experiencing event	9	10	10
Married later experience event	6	15	20

Never married experience event	40	43	36
Independent variables			
Income[1,3]			
Household income (median)	51,158	61,201	0 – 200,000
Father income[2] (median)	41,295	30,690	0 – 200,000
Mother income (median)	23,059	31,585	0 – 200,000
Father's relative income (%)			
Overall mean	67		
0 – 20%	12.8		
21 – 40%	8.7		
41 – 60%	14.2		
61 – 80%	14.4		
81 – 100%	49.9		
Father works more (%)	60		
Mothers works more (%)	14		
Both work the same (%)	26		
Married couples (%)	40		
Instrumental support[3] (%)			
Low (bottom 25%)	<1.75		0 – 3
Medium (26-75%)	1.75 – 2.75		0 – 3
High (top 25%)	>2.75		0 – 3
Control variables			
Father race/ethnicity (%)			
Non-Hispanic White	24		
Non-Hispanic Black	41		
Hispanic	30		
Other	5		
Interracial couples (%)	15		
Father employment hours[2]	44.8	11.8	0 – 80
Mother employment hours	34.5	14.0	0 – 80
Father education[2] (%)			
<HS	29.4		
HS/GED	29.1		
Some college	25.9		
BS or higher	15.6		
Relative education (%)			
Same	50.1		
Father more	22.9		
Mother more	27.0		
Father age[2]	29.7	7	17 – 60
Mother age	27.1	6	16 – 48

Children in household	2.4	1.2	0 – 8
Father has child with other mother[3]	0.29	0.45	
Years together before survey	3.1	3.4	0 – 16
Father ever incarcerated[3] (%)	0.25	0.43	
Father drug/alc problem[3] (%)	0.06	0.24	
Traditional gender attitudes (Dad)	2.06	0.39	1 – 4
Traditional gender attitudes (Mom)	2.15	0.38	1 – 4

1 – Adjusted to 2023 dollars
2 – Father reported variable, substituted with mother-report in case of missing data
3 – Measured at 1-year follow-up

In Table 2, I provide longitudinal outcomes of unions for the overall sample, and then separately for couples who were married at birth, those who married later, and those who remained cohabiting for the duration of the survey. 33% of the sample was married at baseline, whereas 23% married later and 44% never married. In the overall sample, 57% of couples ultimately separated. Only 31% of married couples separated, compared to 41% of those who married later, and 83% of couples who never married, consistent with another study on dissolution rates (Tach & Edin, 2013).

Table 2. *Relationship status (together, separated) across waves for parents who were married, cohabiting or dating at the birth of the focal child (FFCWS)*

Baseline N	Wave	Together	Cumulative Proportion Together	Separated	Cumulative Proportion Separated
Full Sample: 3239	One Year	0.80	0.80	0.20	0.20
	Three Year	0.82	0.65	0.20	0.32
	Five Year	0.79	0.52	0.21	0.48
	Nine Year	0.82	0.42	0.19	0.58
Married at Birth: 1071	One Year	0.93	0.93	0.07	0.07
	Three Year	0.92	0.85	0.09	0.15
	Five Year	0.90	0.76	0.10	0.24
	Nine Year	0.90	0.69	0.10	0.31
Married Later: 737	One Year	0.92	0.92	0.08	0.08
	Three Year	0.94	0.87	0.06	0.13
	Five Year	0.85	0.74	0.15	0.26

	Nine Year	0.80	0.59	0.20	0.41
Never Married: 1431	One Year	0.66	0.66	0.34	0.34
	Three Year	0.64	0.42	0.40	0.58
	Five Year	0.59	0.25	0.43	0.75
	Nine Year	0.67	0.17	0.36	0.83

Note: larger sample size due to less missing data on relationship status. Data on proportion of couples who got married, by wave, included in Appendix Table A.8

Comparing married and cohabiting couples on the main variables of interest (Table 1.3), I find substantially lower median incomes among cohabitors at the household level and among each partner. Cohabiting fathers make on average 64% of the household income, compared to 72% among married fathers. Around 66% of married fathers and 57% of cohabiting fathers worked over 5 hours more per week than their partners, whereas 24% of married couples and 28% of cohabiting couples worked roughly the same hours per week.

Table 3. *Comparison of income and employment between married and cohabiting couples (FFCWS, N = 2647)*

Variables	Married (*n* = 789)		Cohabiting (*n* = 1858)	
	Mean/%	SD	Mean/%	SD
Independent variables				
Income[1] (median)				
Household income	85,264	45,507	39,905	31,300
Father income[2]	58,546	35,785	25,091	24,472
Mother income	16,727	25,546	12,545	22,727
Father's relative income (%)	72		64	
Father works more (%)	66		57	
Mothers works more (%)	11		15	
Both work the same (%)	24		28	

1 – At baseline, adjusted to 2023 dollars
2 – Father reported variable

Event-History Analysis

Income

Using discrete-time event-history, I first assess the main effect between income and union dissolution, controlling for father's level of instrumental support and the other control variables (Table 4). Based on previous research, I include both the absolute earnings of mothers

and fathers, as well as father's relative earnings (Gupta, 2007). Results are reported as odds ratios, with higher coefficients larger than 1 indicating higher odds of union dissolution.

The results confirm previously established general relationships between income and union longevity: fathers' absolute income is negatively associated with union dissolution (*OR* = 0.93, $p < .019$), whereas mothers' absolute income is positively associated with union dissolution (*OR* = 1.07, $p = .001$). In this sample, for each one-unit increase in the father's logged income, the odds of union dissolution were 7% lower. Among mothers, for each one-unit increase in logged income, union dissolution had 7% higher odds of occurring. Interestingly, father's relative income significantly increased the odds of separation, with each percentage point of father earnings relative to mothers' leading to 1% higher odds (*OR* = 1.01, $p = .046$), perhaps highlighting greater precarity in low-income families that rely more heavily on one income.

Table 4. *Discrete-time event-history model with multiple imputation: odds of union dissolution based on level of instrumental support – FFCWS, N = 3239*

	Odds Ratio	t
Time since child's Birth (Ref = Year 3)		
Year 5	1.07	0.58
Year 9	1.33*	2.35
Instrumental support[1] (Ref = Low)		
Medium	0.52***	-4.13
High	0.38***	-5.64
Father's earned income[1] (logged)	0.93*	-2.35
Mother's earned income[1] (logged)	1.07***	3.40
Father's relative income[1]	1.01*	2.00
Division of labor[1] (Ref = Dad +5 hours more)		
Mother works +5 hours more	1.38**	2.58
Work same hours (+/- 5)	1.18	1.51
Traditional gender attitudes (Dad)	1.26	1.83
Traditional gender attitudes (Mom)	0.96	-0.31
Married at birth of child	0.60***	-4.07

Father's age at birth	0.99	-1.02
Mother's age at birth	0.97*	-2.54
Father's education at birth (Ref = Less than HS)		
HS/GED	0.93	-0.65
Some college	0.71*	-2.22
Bachelor's	0.45***	-3.27
Relative Education at birth (Ref = Same)		
Dad more	1.32**	2.31
Mom more	1.07	0.60
Father's Race/ethnicity (Ref = Non-Hisp White)		
Non-Hispanic Black	1.36*	2.42
Hispanic	0.97	-0.19
Other	0.87	-0.53
Mother/father diff race/ethnicity	1.41***	2.76
Ever incarcerated (Year 1 follow-up)	1.11	1.02
Drug/alcohol abuse (Year 1 follow-up)	1.41	1.87
Number of children[1]	1.02	0.68
Multi-partner fertility (Year 1 follow-up)	1.27	2.34
Years together before survey	0.95*	-2.99
Average r^2 (across imputations)	0.09	

ǂp < .10 *p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001
1 – Time-varying variable (Year 1 follow-up through Year 9)

Instrumental support was strongly predictive of union dissolution: compared to those with low levels of support, fathers with medium levels had 38% lower odds of separation or divorce, whereas fathers with high levels of support had 62% lower odds. Couples where the mother worked 6 or more hours per week than the father had 38% higher odds of separation than couples where the father worked 6 or more hours per week than the mother. Parents who were married at the birth of the child, as opposed to cohabiting, had 40% lower odds of divorce ($p <$ .001). Odds of dissolution also declined with higher maternal age at the birth of the focal child,

and for more educated fathers. Compared to couples with similar levels of education, those where fathers had higher education were more likely to experience union dissolution. Black fathers had 36% higher odds of dissolution than White fathers. There were significantly higher odds of separation in Year 9 compared to Year 3 (*OR* = 1.33), but not in Year 5 compared to Year 3, controlling for all other variables.

Moderation analysis

After establishing baseline relationships between income, employment, relationship type, and instrumental support, I then assessed whether the level of instrumental support moderated these relationships. Surprisingly, instrumental support did not moderate the relationship between income and dissolution or between division of paid labor and dissolution. In other words, a father's income was an important predictor of divorce or separation regardless of the level of instrumental support he had. The same was true whether or not the father worked longer hours than the mother (6 or more per week). Instrumental support did, however, moderate the relationship between relationship status and dissolution (Table 1.5).

Table 5. *Moderation analysis: odds of union dissolution based on level of instrumental support by relationship status at birth – FFCWS, N = 3239*

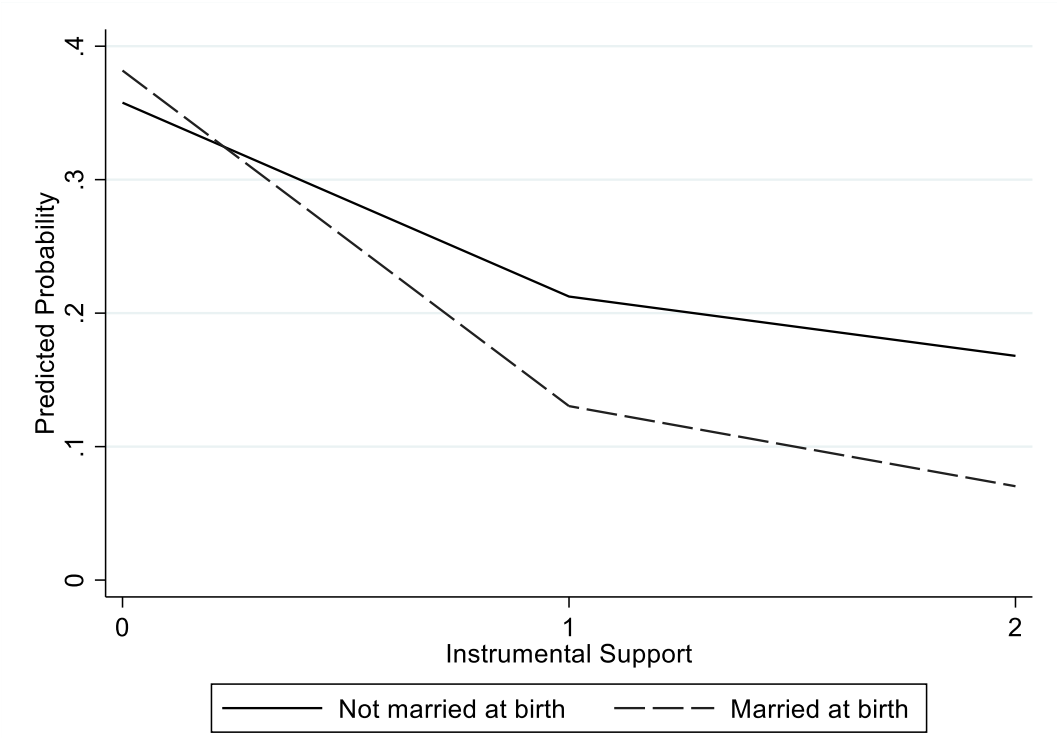
	Odds Ratio	t
Time since child's birth (Ref = Year 3)		
Year 5	1.08	0.67
Year 9	1.34***	2.43
Instrumental support[1] (Ref = Low)		
Medium	0.59	-3.04
High	0.47	-4.05
Married at child's birth	1.07	0.22
Inst supp[1] x marital status (Ref = low support, not married)		
Medium support, married	0.58*	-1.74

High support, married	0.39***	-2.53
Average r^2 (across imputations)	0.10	

‡p < .10 *p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001
*Controls omitted for space. Full table in Appendix, Table A.6
1 – Time-varying variable (Year 1 follow-up through Year 9)

Compared to the reference group of low support cohabiting couples, medium support married couples had 42% lower odds of dissolution, whereas high support couples had 61% lower odds. I calculated the predicted probabilities of dissolution among each relationship type (married vs cohabiting) by the level of instrumental support at the sample mean for each covariate and plotted them for easier interpretation (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. MARGINS: PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF UNION DISSOLUTION AT LOW, MEDIUM, AND HIGH LEVELS OF INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORT BY RELATIONSHIP STATUS AT BIRTH (FFCWS, N = 3239)



Note: all controls held at analytical sample means
Instrumental support: 0 = bottom quartile, 1: middle two quartiles, 2: top quartile

The odds of divorce among couples who were married at the time of the focal child's birth were significantly lower at each increasing level of instrumental support but were only lower at high levels of support for cohabiting couples. For married couples, the predicted probability of divorce was lower than cohabiting couples, except when instrumental support was low.

To examine the differences in predictors of dissolution – particularly in instrumental support – I ran separate models for married and cohabiting couples (Table 6). I include a time-varying variable that tracks whether the cohabiting couple later married. Due to a limited sample size, I was unable to predict whether instrumental support predicted marriage among these cohabiting couples. I was also unable to run moderation analysis to see if instrumental support had a different impact on couples who remained cohabiting throughout the observed periods and those who later married. As perhaps a partial indicator of the potential relationship between instrumental support and later marriage, only 8 couples with low levels of instrumental support married in Year 3, 4 in Year 5, and 1 in Year 9, compared to between 40-80 couples with higher levels of support, depending on the wave.

Table 6. *Discrete-time event-history model with multiple imputation: comparing association of instrumental support by relationship status – FFCWS*

	Married (n = 1,071)		Not Married (n = 2,168)	
	Odds Ratio	t	Odds Ratio	t
Time since child's birth (Ref = Year 3)				
Year 5	1.63‡	1.76	0.99	-0.04
Year 9	2.43**	3.12	1.16	1.04
Instrumental support[1] (Ref = Low)				
Medium	0.26***	-4.10	0.62**	-2.82
High	0.12***	-5.24	0.49***	-3.86
Father's income[1] (logged)	0.81*	-2.79	0.95	-1.53
Mother's income[1] (logged)	1.19	3.00	1.06*	2.45

Relative income[1]	1.03	2.35	1.01	1.30
Division of labor[1] (Ref = Dad +5 hours more)				
Mother works +5 hours more	1.59‡	1.71	1.36*	2.17
Work same hours (+/- 5)	1.26	1.00	1.15	1.18
Traditional gender attitudes (Dad)	1.13	0.47	1.28‡	1.71
Traditional gender attitudes (Mom)	0.96	-0.17	0.97	-0.23
Got married later[1]	-	-	0.61***	-3.21
Father's age at birth	0.97	-1.53	0.99	-0.33
Mother's age at birth	0.98	-0.69	0.96	-2.73
Father's education at birth (Ref = Less than HS)				
HS/GED	0.47**	-2.62	1.06	0.45
Some college	0.36**	-2.95	0.86	-0.86
Bachelor's	0.20***	-3.74	0.91	-0.27
Relative education at birth (Ref = Same)				
Dad more	1.66‡	0.45	1.14	0.98
Mom more	0.98	-0.08	1.07	0.60
Father's race/ethnicity (Ref = Non-Hisp White)				
Non-Hispanic Black	1.05	0.18	1.40*	2.22
Hispanic	0.66	-1.45	1.03	0.16
Other	0.24‡	-1.76	1.23	0.71
Mother/father diff race/ethnicity	1.62‡	1.85	1.34*	2.02
Ever incarcerated (Year 1 follow-up)	1.11	0.36	1.14	1.24
Drug/alcohol abuse (Year 1 follow-up)	1.40	0.71	1.28	1.28
Number of children[1]	0.98	-0.27	1.04	1.07
Multi-partner fertility	1.94*	2.41	1.14	1.22
Years together before survey	0.95	-1.92	0.97	-1.40
Average r^2 (across imputations)	0.09		0.07	

‡p < .10 *p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001

1 – Time-varying variable (Year 1 follow-up through Year 9

Table 6 compares the odds ratio of dissolution between couples who were married at the birth of the focal child compared to those who were cohabiting. Perhaps the most interesting

difference between the groups is the strength of the association between instrumental support and dissolution. For married couples, medium levels of support were associated with 74% lower odds of divorce than those at low levels of support, and 88% lower odds for those with higher levels of support. For cohabiting couples, odds of separation were 38% lower for those at medium levels of support and 51% lower for high levels of support, compared to those at low levels. The rest of the differences seem to cluster around indicators of socioeconomic well-being. For married couples, higher education, more educational and racial homogamy, and less multi-partner fertility were the largest predictors of longer unions. For cohabiting couples, mother's higher earnings and employment hours predicted more separation whereas, unsurprisingly, getting married at a later point predicted less dissolution.

Robustness Checks

I implemented a few strategies to avoid bias in the various models of the analysis. First, to avoid shared variance bias, I include father reports for their own education, employment, and income. Next, I conducted the analysis of the base model with unimputed data to check for bias due to missing data. Despite slight variations in the magnitude of some of the associations, the overall results were consistent. Finally, I questioned whether I should include a measure of relationship satisfaction in the models because of the possibility it could be endogenous to the model. That is, whatever strengthening effect instrumental support has on unions, it almost invariably would work through the impact it has on mothers' estimation of her satisfaction with relationship. Conversely, it seems unlikely that a mother would endure low relationship quality solely because of the instrumental support she receives. With a correlation of $r = 0.62$, the measures are highly correlated but measure different constructs. I ran the base model with both instrumental support and a global measure of relationship quality, and the relationship between

support and dissolution became non-significant. This suggests that the association between support and dissolution does indeed work through relationship quality. Though it lies outside of the scope of this study, mediation analysis might be able to parse out the various aspects of the mechanisms involved in these various relationships.

DISCUSSION

Decades of research point to socioeconomic status and the availability of economic resources as vital to the stability and quality of romantic relationships (Conger et al., 1990; Edin & Reed, 2005; Williams & Cheadle, 2016). Couples with higher levels of education have more stability and lower risk of union dissolution (Heaton, 2002; Orbuch et al., 2002), and lower education levels and income are predictive of divorce (Raley & Bumpass, 2003). Lower-income and less educated fathers have long expressed a desire to be seen as more than a financial provider, and they describe various ways that they connect with their children and partners. For non-residential fathers this has come in the form of informal and in-kind support. Resident fathers express the desire to be there for their families and contribute in daily activities. The purpose of this study was to assess whether resident fathers' increased support in the home and with their children could help overcome three major predictors of union dissolution – income, division of paid labor, and cohabitation.

With the first hypothesis, I supposed that lower-earning men could reduce their odds of separation or divorce through higher levels of instrumental support. This is partially supported by the data, in that the risk of separation and divorce was lower when mothers reported higher levels of instrumental support from the fathers. But this was true for fathers at of all income levels – the data does not suggest that being there for their families can be an adequate substitute for the fathers' role as breadwinner. Instead, the results suggest that both income *and* instrumental

support are important. In this sample, women worked the same or more as their partners in 40% of the couples, and high levels of instrumental support may help distribute the various aspects of unpaid work in the home more equally, leading to greater harmony and relationship satisfaction.

The second hypothesis was that a similar relationship to income and dissolution would be found for families in which paid labor was imbalanced, with mothers working longer hours (6+ per week) than the father. This too went partially unsupported. Though households in which the mother worked more than fathers had higher odds of dissolution than those in which the father worked longer hours, this relationship did not differ by level of instrumental support. There are several potential explanations for this. In low-income and racial minority couples, financial resource provision is not as much of a predictor of dissolution as labor force participation, and mothers who increase their work hours more may do so in preparation for leaving an undesired union (Teachman, 2010). Additionally, there are strong gendered expectations regarding time-use, and mothers may see unbalanced divisions of paid labor as too strong a violation of these norms. That said, the construct of instrumental support itself is highly gendered, asking whether the father fixes stuff around the house or runs errands, rather than assessing his involvement in traditionally female housework in repetitive tasks such as preparing food or doing the laundry or dishes. Women who spend more time in paid labor than the father still return home to do the lion's share of these tasks, which may outweigh whatever gains father's increased instrumental support may produce.

The third hypothesis was that cohabiting fathers with high levels of instrumental support would overcome some of the greater risks and precarity of cohabitation to more closely resemble married couples, or at least married couples in which instrumental support was lower. This hypothesis was confirmed, with some interesting nuance to the results. At low levels of support,

cohabiting and married couples were no different in their odds of dissolution. For married couples, each increase in support came with lower odds of divorce, but for cohabiting couples, only high levels of support predicted lower odds compared to the lowest levels. Overall, instrumental support had a much stronger association with relationship stability and duration among married couples, perhaps indicating mothers' stronger expectations of support from husbands as opposed to cohabiting partners. This could also indicate greater agreement between mothers and father on the appropriate division of household labor, as disagreements in this area are known to be highly disruptive to relationships (Hohmann-Marriott, 2006).

The relationship between economic circumstances, instrumental support and relationship stability may be a result of one of several potential mechanisms. The first is through the direct effect support may have on mothers' parenting stress and relationship satisfaction. Disadvantaged mothers are less able to outsource housework and childcare (Bianchi et al., 2000) and tend to hold themselves more responsible for this work than their partners (Usdansky, 2011). Fathers with higher levels of instrumental support may ease these burdens and reduce the associations between relationship quality, parenting stress, mental health and other factors related to separation (Lyngstad & Jalovaara, 2010; Sayer et al., 2011; Williams & Cheadle, 2016). Previous research has found that economic circumstances do not account for relationship success alone: relationship stability declines when couples have similar incomes (Nock, 2001), but women who are economically more able to leave a relationship only do so when relationship quality is low (Sayer et al., 2011). Additionally, men's more equal participation in routine chores leads to increased relationship satisfaction and increase sexual intimacy in couples (Carlson et al., 2018; McClain & Brown, 2017), and can improve relationship outcomes when mothers are employed (Mencarini & Vignoli, 2018). In this study, I treat relationship quality as endogenous

to the relationship between support and dissolution, but future research could test whether relationship quality mediates the relationship between egalitarian divisions of labor and relationship stability and longevity. For the present discussion, however, if instrumental support eases the burdens of mothers, reduces stress, and/or increases relationship quality, it does so in contrast to role specialization and gender norms models of relationships.

The second mechanism is through a sign of commitment. Both quantitative and qualitative work has highlighted the importance of mutual dependence and commitment to relationship stability among disadvantaged families and families of color (Chaney, 2010; Goodwin, 2003), and fathers' provision of instrumental support may be perceived as a sign of greater commitment. Cohabiting men with the lowest levels of commitment (those who intend to marry someone other than their current partner) spend the least amount of time on housework (Ciabattari, 2004), and fathers who help more in the home have longer lasting relationships (Mencarini & Vignoli, 2018). The findings in the present study – much greater relationship duration in cohabiting couples where father's instrumental support is high – reinforce the idea of commitment as a mechanism for relationship stability. In Oppenheimer's (2003) wait-and-see approach to marriage that cohabitors take, a constant commitment from the father to participate in all aspects of family life may signal favorable relationship prospects to the mother, even during times of economic uncertainty and employment precarity.

The final mechanism I propose is potentially the least studied and an area for future research, and that is the effect that increased involvement in the home has on men themselves. Fathers' involvement with their children may be a source of fulfillment and enjoyment that can lead to a variety of positive outcomes (Eggebeen et al., 2010; Knoester et al., 2007), particularly in men for whom the father role is more salient or central to their identity (see Adamsons &

Pasley, 2013). In a sample of men who became highly involved with their children during parental leave, the following description sums up this mechanism well:

> "The fathers in this study reported a growth in experience, as they acquired confidence and increased feelings of self-esteem, thriving on being loved, and appreciated by the child, all of which seems to have provided their life with a new meaning and purpose." (Brandth & Kvande, 2018, p. 16)

Evidence indicates that couples in which either partner is wholly responsible for parenting and housework have the lowest levels of relationship satisfaction, and those who share the tasks equally have the highest satisfaction (Bauer, 2015), and male breadwinner norms are associated with relationship dissatisfaction, especially for men (Lee, 2022). There are many different reasons men might have for increased instrumental support, with varying levels of constraint or willingness, enjoyment or resentment, which could result in different outcomes for the relationship, and each of these factors deserve further attention.

Traditional gender attitudes were not found to have a significant relationship to union dissolution, nor was there any interaction between instrumental support and gender attitudes. Whatever relationship gender roles and norms may have with instrumental support, it is not captured by self-reported gender attitudes. That said, Dominguez-Folgueras (2022) makes the argument that trying to specify whether the division of labor is best described through economic specialization, time availability, or gender is a futile pursuit because they are interrelated. Including a measure of gender attitudes is hardly sufficient to understand the role gender plays in shaping romantic relationships, the division of paid and unpaid labor, and decisions regarding separation and divorce. Instead, it is important to acknowledge that gendered norms and expectations are woven throughout these factors and relationships, and work to determine how

couples specialize and how they spend their time. Expectations of income provision and work hours is gendered, as well as the balance of work done in the home and time spent with children. When men do become more involved in the home, it tends to be in more gender aligned ways, such as yardwork, home maintenance, and play activities with their children rather than repetitive tasks (Bianchi et al., 2000; Biehle & Mickelson, 2012). Instrumental support, as defined in the FFCWS survey, lends itself to this gendered expression of support, measuring whether the father fixes things around the house or runs errands. And though working class couples may not have any explicit intention of working towards gender equality (Miller & Sassler, 2012), the evidence is clear that engaging in these activities, however degendered they may be, promotes relationship stability.

Limitations

This study is a first step in examining the ways that instrumental support influences union dissolution and several of its predictors, but it is not without limitations. One potential drawback of the study is missing data regarding separation. Couples who did not report separation, or for whom relationship status could not be assessed, were coded as missing and excluded from the analysis. Simple t-tests revealed that mothers who dropped out of the survey (or had missing relationship data) had slightly higher reports of instrumental support. If couples who attrit are more likely to be separated, this could result in inflated odds ratios for instrumental support.

Fathers' income is a key piece of the present study, and there are potential problems with the amount of missing or inaccurate reports that may exist in the data. Father's self-report their income, and a household income variable is constructed using father and mother reports of different sources of income by different reports. However, in many instances the father report of his own income is larger than the constructed report of household income. In the study, father

income as a predictor of union dissolution followed general patterns previously established in the literature, but there may be reason to question the accuracy and reliability of the coefficients.

Another limitation is the potential for shared method variance, due to a lack of father reports on their own instrumental support and other variables, and a consequent reliance on mother reports. There are several factors that could influence each partner's perceptions of the father's contributions in housework and childcare, leading to disparate reports and questions regarding accuracy in predicting the influence of instrumental support on union dissolution. However, it is estimated that two-thirds of all divorces are instigated by women (Brinig & Allen, 2000; Sayer et al., 2011), so it may be the mother's perception of instrumental support that matters more to relationship quality and/or divorce than the actual amount of support the father offers. This concept is born out in previous research which demonstrates that despite the actual fairness or unfairness in the division of labor, the mothers' perception of unfairness leads to relationship dissatisfaction and conflict (Chong & Mickelson, 2016; Grote & Clark, 2001; Hiekel & Ivanova, 2023).

Conclusion

The division of paid and unpaid labor between couples – and each partner's satisfaction with it – is a major predictor of relationship quality and longevity. Despite changes in recent decades, women still do more housework and childcare than men regardless of relationship type (Baxter et al., 2010) and men are expected to be the primary earner (Killewald, 2016). In this study, I find that instrumental support – fathers' willingness and availability to participate more in the home and with his children – is a strong predictor of union duration and can help lessen the negative impacts that poor employment and income levels can have on relationships. As employment continues to offer economic benefits and increased autonomy while housework and

childcare continue to be devalued (England, 2010), more work is needed to identify and promote incentives for father's increased support in the home.

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