

Single Mothers, Nonresident Fathers, and Preschoolers’ Socioemotional Development: Social Support, Psychological Well-Being, and Parenting Quality

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ABSTRACT. Using data from two waves of a short-term longitudinal study, the influences of mothers’ social support with respect to parenting from nonresident fathers and significant others on behavioral outcomes among poor and near-poor preschool-aged Black children were examined. The sample consisted of 99 single Black mothers—each with a preschool-aged child (ages 3 and 5 years old, respectively, at Time 1 and Time 2)—who were current and former welfare recipients. Results revealed protective effects of nonresident fathers’ presence in the context of mothers’ parenting stress and depressive symptoms at Time 1 that appeared to operate through decreases in the negative influences of these variables on the children’s development of behavior problems 1.5 to 2 years later. Greater availability of instrumental support from significant others, including nonresident fathers, was associated with more adequate parenting at Time 1, and through the latter, with fewer child behavior problems at Time 2. Implications of these findings for program and policy interventions are discussed. Nonresident fathers are described in the Appendix.

KEYWORDS. Single mothers, nonresident fathers, social support, depressive symptoms, parenting stress, parenting quality, child behavior problems

Nearly 80% of births to Black women who are younger than 30 years of age are to single mothers, and for Black children, more than half (51%) are being raised in a family headed by a single-parent mother (Hamilton, Martin, & Ventura, 2011; Kreider & Ellis, 2011). These families are disproportionately poor (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Huston, McLoyd, & Garcia Coll, 1994). Countless studies have demonstrated that poverty diminishes the quality of parenting due to persistent daily stressors (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; McLoyd, 1990; McLoyd & Wilson, 1991) and that single parenting—especially among mothers with limited access to

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supportive parenting resources—is associated with diminished psychological well-being, stemming in part from the single-handed negotiation of heavy parenting responsibilities (see, e.g., Ceballo & McLoyd, 2003; Jackson, Preston, & Franke, 2010; Lamb, 1997; McLanahan & Teitler, 1999; McLoyd).

Recent research has raised issues about the role of nonresident fathers in outcomes for children in single-mother families. For example, some have found no relationship between the extent of father–child contact and child well-being (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Amato & Meyers, 2009; Furstenberg, Morgan, & Allison, 1987; Lerman, 2010). Others have found beneficial effects when parents get along well together (Cheadle, Amato, & King, 2010; Cummings & Davies, 2002; King, 1994). Much of this research, however, has focused on the effects of father absence (due to divorce) in middle-class White families (see also, Juby, Billette, Laplante, & Le Bourdais, 2007; Lamb, 1997). For poor and near-poor Black children in single-mother households, there is evidence that the extent of nonresident fathers' contact with their children and the children's mothers is associated with beneficial developmental outcomes for preschool-aged children (Jackson, Choi, & Bentler, 2009; Jackson, Choi, & Franke, 2009) and that such contacts may be beneficial for the children not necessarily due to the fathers' greater involvement in childrearing but in the greater emotional support father–child contacts provide to mothers (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, & Wong, 2009; Waldfoegel, Craigie, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010). There also is evidence that access to instrumental support from others when needed can be an important parenting resource for single mothers (Cairney, Boyle, Offord, & Racine, 2003; Jackson, Brooks-Gunn, Huang, & Glassman, 2000; McLoyd & Wilson, 1991; Ryan, Kalil, & Leininger, 2009). Some speculate that the salutary effect of such support may be due to mothers feeling less isolated, overwhelmed, and stressed by their parenting when support is available (see, e.g., Crnic & Greenberg, 1987; Hashima & Amato, 1994; Jackson et al., 2000; Waldfoegel et al.). Others have found that mothers who receive higher levels of social support, including help and sup-

port from their partners, are more nurturing toward their children compared with those who receive lower levels and that when single mothers have more material and instrumental support, children have fewer behavioral problems (Cairney et al.; Chase-Lansdale, Brooks-Gunn, & Zamsky, 1994; Jackson et al., 2000; Weinraub & Wolf, 1983). Moreover, because fathers and mothers influence each other's parenting in married-couple families (see, e.g., Belsky & Vondra, 1989), it is plausible that the nonresident father–mother relationship might influence children in single-parent families through its effects on mothers' parenting (see also, Jackson, 1999).

Although this evidence is consistent with Belsky's theory of the determinants of parenting (1984), which posits linkages among contextual sources of stress, social support with respect to mothering from fathers and significant others, parental psychological well-being, and children's development, there is a substantial gap in the literature linking fathers' involvement and children's outcomes in understanding the processes by which involvement by nonresident Black fathers might be associated with positive outcomes for mothers and children in families headed by poor and near-poor single mothers. This gap is important because of the large number of Black children being raised in such families and because it limits our ability to explain how individual differences in poor Black children's family relationships explain differences in their socioemotional development.

Nonresident Fathers

Studies of nonresident fathers tend to find positive associations among father involvement, fathers' regular payment of child support, and children's behavioral adjustment (Cheadle et al., 2010). However, few studies have examined the parenting behavior of fathers in low-income and ethnic-minority populations. Those that have done so are limited mostly to Black–White comparisons regarding father visitations (Cheadle et al.; Hofferth, 2003; King, Harris, & Heard, 2004; Lerman, 2010; Seltzer, 1991). The extant results suggest that nonresident Black fathers are more likely than their White, mostly middle-class, counterparts to be in poverty, to be less

educated, to pay less child support, and to be either less engaged with their children (Hofferth) or (paradoxically) more likely to sustain contact with their children (Lerman; Seltzer), while also showing less stability in their patterns of contact (Cheadle et al.; Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1999; Waldfogel et al., 2010). The contradictions in this evidence make it difficult to generate a consistent profile of nonresident Black fathers and underscore the importance of understanding the ways in which their involvement affects family functioning and child well-being in poor Black families. This is important because, as noted, single Black mothers, on average, are more likely than others to have fewer parenting resources, to experience increased stress in the parenting role, and to be in poorer mental health, any of which might influence outcomes for their children.

The Present Study

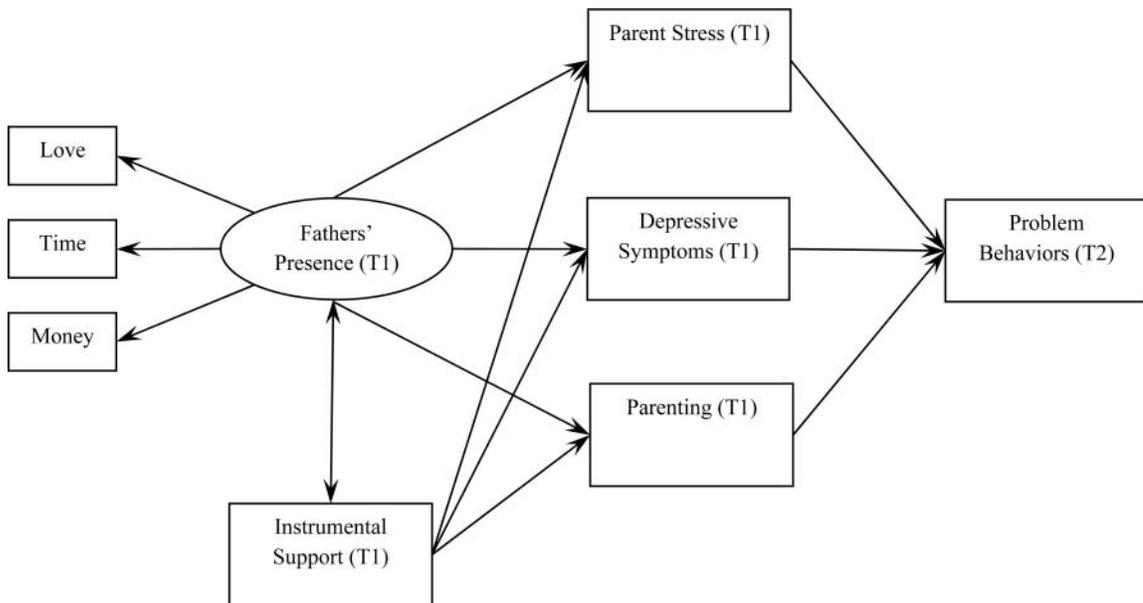
In this study, the influences of mothers' social support with respect to parenting from nonresident fathers and significant others on behavioral outcomes among poor and near-poor preschool-aged Black children were examined. The theoretical and conceptual analyses that make up this study were informed by ecological (Belsky, 1984; Bronfenbrenner, 1986, 1988) and risk and resilience (McLoyd, 1990; Rutter, 1987) perspectives. These perspectives assume that processes operating in different ecological contexts are interrelated. These interrelationships, according to Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1988) person-process-context model—in particular, proximal processes that occur between parents and children in the home environment—are considered key mechanisms by which child developmental potential is realized. Belsky highlights the beneficial contextual influences of social support from significant others and from fathers, in particular, on maternal psychological well-being and parenting. According to his model, the availability of a network of significant others and a supportive and caring mother–father relationship are considered protective factors with respect to child outcomes through their influences on parenting in the home environment. While the risk and vulnerability perspective holds that particular children or groups of

children are at risk for decrements in well-being due to harsh environmental conditions (Brooks-Gunn, 1990; Garnezy & Rutter, 1983), the risk and resilience perspective highlights the differential and interactive influences of individual, family, and environmental variables in efforts to better understand the contexts in which resilience is most likely. Stated differently, the risk and resilience perspective is concerned with individual differences in people's responses to stress and hardship (McLoyd; Rutter).

Informed by these perspectives, our conceptual model (see Figure 1) hypothesizes that the availability of social support—from nonresident fathers and significant others in the environment—serves a “protective” function with respect to single mothers' psychological well-being, the quality of their parenting in the home environment, and the influences of these, in turn, on their preschool-aged children's development. As noted, studies have found that social support has beneficial effects on children's development in poor families (Cairney et al., 2003; Jackson et al., 2000; Ryan et al., 2009), particularly in families headed by low-income single mothers (see, e.g., Pianta & Bell, 1993).

The conceptual model begins with nonresident fathers' presence, a latent variable with three indicators (mothers' satisfaction with the fathers' love for the child, time spent with the child, and money provided for the child), and instrumental support from others and proposes that they will be related to the mothers' psychological well-being and parenting quality—all measured at Time 1. In our figure, the latent variable is circled and the measured variables are in rectangles. More explicitly, Figure 1 shows paths from fathers' presence to mothers' parenting stress, depressive symptoms, and parenting quality, as well as from instrumental support to the same variables. It then shows paths from the two psychological well-being variables and parenting quality to child problem behaviors at Time 2. The double-headed arrow between fathers' presence and instrumental support depicts the expected correlation between these variables, given that involvement by fathers with their children in the form of love, time, and money is also an aspect of instrumental support in the context of single parenting. In sum, this study tested the hypothesis

FIGURE 1. Conceptual Model of the Influences Through Which Fathers' Presence and Instrumental Support Affect Child Problem Behaviors Longitudinally.



that rather than influencing the development of preschoolers directly, nonresident fathers' presence and the availability of instrumental support from others affect young Black children's development over time through their impacts on poor and near-poor single mothers' psychological functioning and parenting adequacy.

The terms "poor and near-poor" are used interchangeably with the term "low-income" to describe mothers in this study. However, low-income mothers are more likely to be near poor and welfare recipients are more likely to be poor. Poor and near-poor mothers and their young children (some of whom also have low income) are the population in which the outcomes that we wished to evaluate are most pressing. The analyses that follow present an empirical evaluation of the proposed model.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

First interviewed between February and June 2004, participants in this study were 100 current and former single-mother welfare recipi-

ents and their preschool-aged children at Time 1. The mothers resided in communities in Pittsburgh that were composed predominantly of poor and low-income Black families. Recruited through the Allegheny County Assistance Office (the main welfare agency in Pittsburgh), the sample consisted of 134 randomly selected mothers with a focal 3-year-old child and who also were single, Black, and 18 years of age or older. To preserve anonymity, random selection was carried out by the Allegheny County Assistance Office, which then sent out letters of solicitation that described the study as an ongoing survey on raising young children and family life. Prospective respondents were asked to indicate their interest in participating in the study by either calling the project office or returning an enclosed participation form (giving their name, address, and telephone number) in a self-addressed, stamped envelope. For the initial interview, a 75% response rate was achieved (see also Jackson, Choi, & Bentler, 2009, 2010). For the final interview (between October 2005 and January 2006), the sample consisted of 99 mothers and their kindergarten-age children (one mother died in the interim between Time 1 and

Time 2). For each interview, mothers completed a computer-administered questionnaire focusing on parenting and family life.

Procedurally, each interview occurred in the mother's home. Self-report questionnaires were administered in an interview format. Each interview was conducted privately between the mother and the researcher. During the presentation of the self-report instruments, at no time was it assumed that the mother could read, although most could. When responses to a Likert-type scale were required, the mother was read the relevant question/statement by the interviewer and was asked to indicate the magnitude of her response via corresponding options indicated on a computer screen. Data were collected by a trained doctoral student and the first author, an African American researcher with extensive experience in administering self-report instruments and conducting the observational procedures involved in the larger study from which the present data came. Home visits enhanced rapport and cultural understanding. Mothers were paid \$75 at Time 1 and \$150 at Time 2.

Prior to data collection, institutional review board (IRB) approval was obtained. It should be acknowledged that for the larger study, mothers were assigned randomly to an experimental ($n = 50$) and a control ($n = 50$) group. The experimental group participated in a psychoeducation intervention in the interim between the Time 1 and Time 2 interviews. The university IRB required that all study participants receive the same amount of compensation for their time at both interviews; thus, mothers in both the experimental group and the control group were paid \$150 at Time 2. In the interim between the two interviews, weekly phone calls to and a trusting relationship with the mothers resulted in a retention rate of 100%.

Measures

The measures that follow are multiple- and single-item scales. Items were reversed as necessary so that a higher score indicates more of the attribute named in the label. Alpha coefficients were obtained for scales with multiple items.

Fathers' Presence (Time 1)

Fathers' love, time, and money were assessed by three single-item scales asking mothers to indicate how satisfied they were with, respectively: "the amount of love and caring your child's father has shown her/him," "the amount of time your child's father spends with him/her," "the amount of money and help he's provided for raising her/him." For each item, mothers indicated if they were *very dissatisfied* (0) to *completely satisfied* (5).

Instrumental Support (Time 1)

The availability of instrumental support was assessed by asking mothers to indicate on a scale (developed by McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, & Borquez, 1994) the level of help they could get from others if such support was needed. This four-item, 6-point scale (0 = *not at all* to 5 = *completely*) asked mothers to indicate how true the following statements were for them: "If I need to do an errand, I can easily find a friend or relative living nearby to watch my child(ren)"; "If I'm feeling exhausted or depressed, like at the end of a long day, I have to cope alone. There is no one to help me"; "If I need a ride to get my child to the doctor, there are friends I could call to help"; "If I need to buy a pair of shoes for my child(ren) but I am short of cash, there is someone who would lend me the money." Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .75.

Parenting Stress (Time 1)

Parenting stress was measured by a seven-item, 6-point scale (0 = *not at all* to 5 = *completely*) asking mothers to indicate how true statements such as the following were for them (Abidin, 1990): "My child seems much harder to care for than most"; "There are some things my child does that really bother me a lot"; and "I find myself giving up more of my life to meet my child's needs than I expected." Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .65.

Depressive Symptoms (Time 1)

Depressive symptoms were assessed by use of the 20-item Center for Epidemiological

TABLE 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Love-1	—	.78**	.72**	.32**	-.24*	-.22*	-.00	-.14
2. Time-1		—	.70**	.31**	-.15	-.19 ⁺	.03	-.16
3. Money-1			—	.25*	-.10	-.39**	.04	-.14
4. Support-1				—	-.15	-.06	.25*	-.09
5. Dep-1					—	.20*	.03	.37**
6. P. Stress-1						—	-.14	.36**
7. Parenting-1							—	-.18 ⁺
8. Beh-2								—
Mean	2.58	1.85	1.74	3.50	14.62	1.45	25.53	1.62
SD	2.84	2.11	2.05	1.30	9.10	0.88	3.13	0.28

Love-1 = satisfaction with fathers' love for child at Time 1; Time-1 = satisfaction with fathers' time spent with child at Time 1; Money-1 = satisfaction with fathers' money provided for child at Time 1; Support-1 = instrumental support at Time 1; Dep-1 = depressive symptoms at Time 1; P. Stress-1 = parenting stress at Time 1; Parenting-1 = parenting quality at Time 1; Beh-1 = problem behaviors at Time 2.

⁺ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Studies-Depression Scale. Mothers were asked to indicate on a 4-point scale (0 = *less than once a day* to 3 = *most or all of the time*) how often during the past week they felt depressed, lonely, sad, unusually bothered by things, or that they could not get going (Radloff, 1977). The Cronbach's alpha was .86.

Maternal Parenting Quality (Time 1)

Parenting quality was assessed by use of the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME). Designed to assess whether the child's home is an environment that enhances intellectual and emotional development and helps to prepare him/her for the challenges of school, the HOME is a well-validated and widely used instrument (Bradley, 1989; Bradley & Caldwell, 1984; Caldwell & Bradley, 1984). The version used in this study (18 items) includes maternal report items and interviewer observations that tap the regularity and structure of the family's daily routine, the amount of intellectual stimulation available to the child, and the degree of emotional support and warmth provided by the parents. The Cronbach's alpha was .86.

Child Problem Behaviors (Time 2)

Problem behaviors were assessed by asking mothers to indicate on a 26-item, 3-point scale (1 = *very much like my child* to 3 = *not at all like my child*) the extent to which statements such

as the following described their child's behavior during the last 3 months (Peterson & Zill, 1986): "Tends to fight, hit, take toys when playing with other children"; "is disobedient at school or with child care providers"; and "bullies or is cruel or mean to others." Cronbach's alpha was .82.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analyses

At Time 1, the average mother in this study was 25 years old; at Time 2, she was 27. The focal children were 3 and 5 years old, respectively, at Time 1 and Time 2. Means, standard deviations, and correlations between variables are shown in Table 1. In general, the results are in accord with our expectations. Instrumental social support was significantly positively correlated with parenting, which in turn was associated with fewer child behavior problems. The lack of significant associations between the father presence variables and the quality of the mothers' parenting in the home environment was unexpected but might be explained by the significant positive association between instrumental support (which includes help also from nonresident fathers among the significant others) and parenting quality. As expected, however, significant associations were obtained between depressive symptoms, parenting stress, and parenting quality, respectively, and problem behaviors. More

precisely, mothers with higher levels both of depressive symptoms and parenting stress at Time 1 had children with more behavior problems at Time 2, while those who scored higher on our measure of parenting in the home environment at Time 1 had children with fewer behavior problems at Time 2.

Model Estimation

First, the assumptions of univariate and multivariate normality, linearity, and multicollinearity were evaluated through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and EQS. There were no univariate or multivariate outliers, and none of the measured variables were significantly univariately skewed. Additionally, Mardia's (1974) normalized coefficient of kurtosis was 1.1, indicating that the data were multivariate normal, and maximum likelihood would be appropriate. Latent variable analyses were performed using the EQS structural equation modeling program (Multivariate Software, 2008). As depicted in Figure 2, the model with 18 degrees of freedom produced a chi-square of 20.7 ($p = .29$), as well as a comparative fit index of 1.0 and a root mean

square error of approximation of .04, all indicating good fit to the data.

Figure 2 provides the standardized parameter estimates, representing correlations (two-way arrows) or beta weights (one-way arrows). Given that the sample was somewhat small ($N = 99$) and two-tailed significance tests were used (which are more conservative than one-tailed tests), $p < .10$ was interpreted as a meaningful finding (see, e.g., Huston et al., 2001; Jackson et al., 2000). The path between fathers' presence at Time 1 and mothers' parenting stress at Time 1 is Beta = $-.32$, indicating that fathers' support predicted lower levels of mothers' stress in the parenting role. A similar negative relationship between fathers' presence and mothers' depressive symptoms at Time 1 (Beta = $-.21$) is exhibited by the path from the former to the latter. Consistent with the theoretical expectation, instrumental support from others predicted more adequate maternal parenting in the home environment (Beta = $.25$), and the latter, in turn, was associated with fewer child problem behaviors at Time 2 at $p < .10$ (Beta = $-.15$). The reverse was so with respect to parenting stress and depressive symptoms (i.e., each predicted higher levels of problem behaviors at Beta = $.28$ and Beta

FIGURE 2. Observed Structural Model of the Pattern of Influences Through Which Fathers' Presence and Instrumental Support Affect Child Problem Behaviors Longitudinally ($N = 99$). Note. T = time. $\chi^2(18) = 20.7$; root mean square error of approximation = .04; comparative fit index = 1.00. + $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

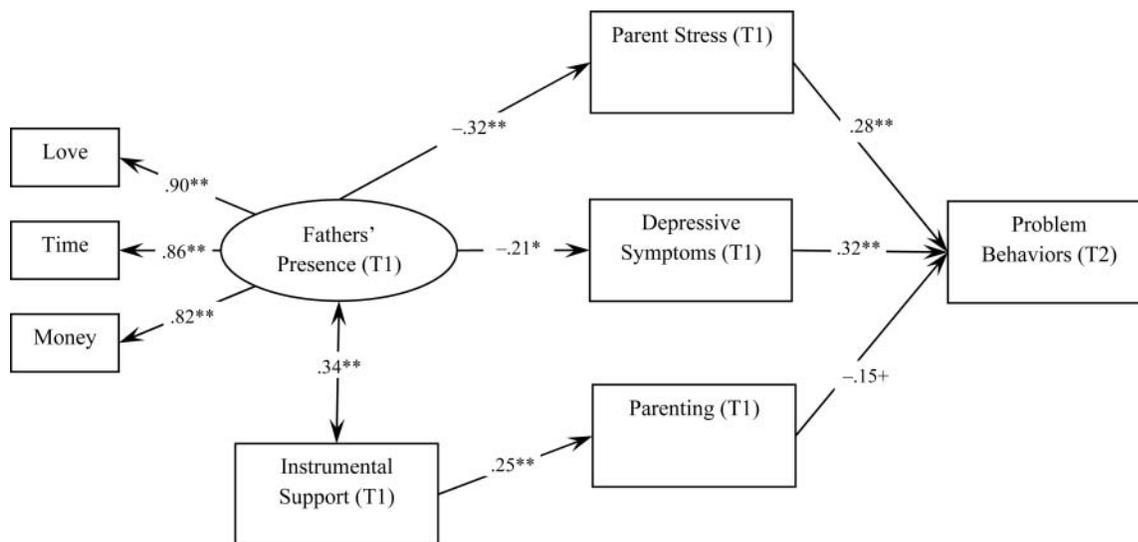


TABLE 2. Decomposition of Standardized Effects of the Influences Through Which Fathers' Presence and Instrumental Support Affect Child Problem Behaviors Longitudinally

Predictor	Dependent Variable	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Fathers' Presence	Parent Stress (T1)	-.32**	—	-.32**
	Depressive Symptoms (T1)	-.21*	—	-.21*
	Problem Behaviors (T2)	—	-.15*	-.15*
Instrumental Support	Parenting (T1)	.25**	—	.25**
	Problem Behaviors (T2)	—	-.04 ⁺	-.04 ⁺
Parent Stress (T1)	Problem Behaviors (T2)	.28**	—	.28**
Depressive Symptoms (T1)	Problem Behaviors (T2)	.32**	—	.32**
Parenting (T1)	Problem Behaviors (T2)	-.15 ⁺	—	-.15 ⁺

Note. T = time. Dashes indicate no effect.

⁺ $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

= .32, respectively). Given that nonresident fathers' presence in the lives of single mothers and their children is a form of instrumental support, the positive correlation (note the double-arrowed path) between the father factor and instrumental support (Beta = .34) was expected, suggesting that getting assistance when needed from others (including nonresident fathers) was associated with more adequate maternal parenting. In addition, both fathers' presence and instrumental support had significant ($p < .05$ and $p < .10$, respectively) indirect effects (Beta = -.15 and Beta = -.04, respectively) on child problem behaviors at Time 2 (Table 2). The components of these indirect effects include the Beta = -.32 and Beta = -.21 paths from fathers' presence to parenting stress and depressive symptoms, and from instrumental support (Beta = .25) to parenting quality, indicating further—and in accordance with our expectations—that higher levels of fathers' presence were associated with lower levels of mothers' parenting stress and depressive symptoms, while higher levels of instrumental support were associated with more adequate maternal parenting.

DISCUSSION

Using data from this short-term longitudinal study, we tested a conceptual model of the processes whereby social and instrumental support from nonresident fathers and others might influence maternal psychological well-being and parenting adequacy, and through these, the so-

cioemotional development of poor and near-poor Black preschoolers. We found protective effects of nonresident fathers' presence in the context of mothers' parenting stress and depressive symptoms (at Time 1) that appeared to operate through decreases in the negative influences of these conditions and circumstances on the children's development of behavior problems over time (1.5 to 2 years later). Similarly, greater availability of instrumental support from significant others was associated directly with more adequate parenting (at Time 1) and, through the latter, with fewer child behavior problems over time (at Time 2). This pattern of findings is consistent with the "buffering" interpretation of social support, which holds that social support is beneficial in the main to those who need assistance from others due to conditions and circumstances such as single parenting and limited access to social and financial resources (see, e.g., Cairney et al., 2003; Hashima & Amato, 1994; Jackson et al., 2010). It also is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1986, 1988) person-process-context model and Belsky's (1984) ecological theory of the determinants of parenting, which posit linkages among personal characteristics of family members, family processes, and particular external environments, and their influences in turn on parenting in the home environment and children's behavioral development.

There were differences, nevertheless, between the observed model and the conceptual model. We expected fathers' presence and the availability of instrumental support to be associated directly with all three of the maternal

psychological well-being and parenting variables (Figure 1). However, fathers' presence—that is, the latent variable representing mothers' satisfaction with the fathers' love, time, and money—was associated directly with less parenting stress and fewer depressive symptoms, but not with more adequate parenting in the home environment; and instrumental support was associated with more adequate parenting, but not with parenting stress and depressive symptoms. Despite these differences, the present findings appear to suggest that children in this study benefitted when their mothers got parenting support from significant others, including nonresident fathers. Notably, fathers' presence was associated indirectly (through less maternal parenting stress and fewer maternal depressive symptoms) with fewer child behavior problems at Time 2. Recall that other studies have found associations between more nonresident father involvement and maternal psychological well-being, respectively, and better child outcomes (Cowan et al., 2009; Jackson, Choi, & Bentler, 2009; Jackson, Choi, & Franke, 2009). Still, conclusions regarding the present findings remain tentative pending further investigation. Larger-scale studies that yield greater power to detect in greater detail how individual differences in poor Black children's family relationships explain differences in their socioemotional development in the preschool and early-elementary school years will be especially important. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that partial support for our conceptual model was found.

CONCLUSION

There are several limitations in this study that should be noted. First, the sample was relatively small, and the mothers were residing in Pittsburgh. Further research with additional (and larger) samples from other cities is needed to explore more fully these important issues. Second, although the present study used two waves of data, causal inferences about the observed relations among the variables with respect to the child outcome examined would be inappropriate.

Third, our measures, for the most part, relied on mothers' reports. The measure of child problem behaviors, in particular, reflects mothers' perceptions, which often are intertwined with family stress (Black & Jodorkovsky, 1994), such that mothers like those in the present study who were feeling stressed and unsupported might have perceived their young children's behaviors as more problematic (see also Black, Dubowitz, & Starr, 1999), even though we used a well-established measure of behavior problems appropriate for preschoolers. However, others have found that parents' reports of children's behaviors correlate positively with teachers' reports and that such reports are not just reflections of maternal characteristics (Conrad & Hammen, 1989; Richters, 1992; Richters & Pellegrini, 1989; Schaughency & Lahey, 1985). We acknowledge, nevertheless, that objective reports of our constructs would have removed the potential for shared error variance.

In spite of these limitations, our results make an important contribution to the literature by focusing on individual differences with respect to parenting, family processes, and child outcomes among single Black mothers who are disproportionately represented among the poor and welfare-dependent (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Huston et al., 1994). As such, we believe there are important implications of this study for program and policy interventions. If valid, the direct positive relationship between availability of instrumental support from significant others (including nonresident fathers) and more adequate maternal parenting early on and the relations, in turn, between each of these (directly for parenting and indirectly for instrumental support) and fewer child behavior problems subsequently suggest that interventions that focus on sharpening single mothers' coping skills and behaviors (including obtaining social resources such as emotional and instrumental support from others) and that encourage nonresident Black fathers to stay involved with their children (including honing relationship skills between these men and the mothers of their children) should be a high priority (see, e.g., Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; Crnic & Greenberg, 1987; Hashima & Amato, 1994; Jackson et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2009;

Tran & McInnis-Dittrich, 2000). These matters merit further consideration by researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

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APPENDIX

Description of Nonresident Fathers in the Study

At Time 1, nonresident fathers of the focal children in the present study were, on average, 29 years old and had an 11th-grade education. Almost half (48%) were categorized as unemployed; 32% were categorized as employed either full- or part-time; and 14% were incarcerated. However, 58% were described as

paying child support. While 27% had reportedly never seen the focal child and 9% had not seen the child in the past year, almost half (46%) were described as visiting their child from one to three times a month in the past year. These data—collected from the mothers—were not used in the present analyses, and we do not know the degree to which they correspond to actual situations and circumstances. In this sample, the mothers were, on average, slightly better educated and more likely to be employed than the nonresident fathers (i.e., the average mother's educational attainment was 13 years [some education beyond high school] and 43% were employed either full-time or part-time). The mothers' household income in the prior month at Time 1 ranged from \$244 to \$3,817; the mean was \$1,222.84 ($SD = \622.74). We do not have comparable figures for the fathers.