

# Nonresident Father Involvement and Child Self-Esteem after Divorce in Spain\*

## Implicación del padre no custodio y autoestima infantil tras el divorcio parental en España

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### ABSTRACT

This study seeks (1) to study nonresident father involvement and (2) analyze whether nonresident father involvement is related to children's self-esteem after divorce. Eighty-three divorced mothers and 96 children from Seville (Spain) were interviewed. Children were between 6 and 14 years old ( $M = 9.21$ ;  $SD = 1.94$ ). Families were accessed through the primary schools where the children attended. The results showed heterogeneity in nonresident father involvement: the contact frequency varied between those who had no relationship with their father and those who saw him weekly or daily; the majority of children (88%) assessed the relationship with their father as positive; 38.5% of them stayed overnight with him; 80.2% of the fathers did not participate in any important decision regarding his children, and almost half of the fathers (46.8%) failed to pay the amount established by the judge. Results indicated that children had a medium level of self-esteem ( $M = 2.96$ ;  $SD = 0.53$ ). Finally, data showed a significant relationship between children's self-esteem and the quality of the father-child relationship ( $F(1,73) = 5.92$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These results could improve children's self-esteem after parental divorce by considering the importance of the nonresident father's involvement.

### Keywords

divorce; nonresident father; involvement; self-esteem; children.

### RESUMEN

Este trabajo pretende (1) estudiar la implicación del padre no residente tras el divorcio y, (2) analizar si esta se relaciona con la autoestima infantil. Se entrevistaron a 83 madres divorciadas y 96 niños y niñas de Sevilla (España). Estos tenían entre 6 y 14 años ( $M = 9.21$ ;  $SD = 1.94$ ). Se accedió a las familias a través de las escuelas. Los resultados mostraron heterogeneidad en la implicación del padre no residente: la frecuencia de contactos variaba entre los que no tenían relación con él y los que lo veían semanal o diariamente; el 88% valoraba positivamente la relación con su padre; el 38.5% pernoctaba con él; el 80.2% de los

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padres no participaba en las decisiones de sus hijos e hijas; y el 46,8% no pagaba la pensión establecida por el juez. Los resultados indicaron que los niños y niñas presentaban una buena autoestima ( $M = 2.96$ ;  $SD = 0.53$ ). Finalmente, mostraron una relación significativa entre la autoestima infantil y la calidad de la relación padre-hijo ( $F(1,73) = 5.92$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Estos resultados ofrecen claves para mejorar la autoestima infantil tras el divorcio parental, considerando el papel que juega sobre la misma la implicación del padre no residente.

**Palabras clave**

divorcio; padre no custodio; implicación; autoestima; infantil.

In 2017, the European Union divorce rate was 2.0 per 1000 inhabitants; for Spain, this rate was 2.1, which is clearly above other European Catholic or Mediterranean countries, including Ireland (0.7), Greece (1.8), and Italy (1.5). Nevertheless, it is below that of other EU countries such as Denmark (2.6), Lithuania (3.0), or the Czech Republic (2.4) (Eurostat, 2020).

It is common practice, in Spain, to grant mothers child custody. Even after applying the current divorce law (Law 15/2005 dated July 8) that contemplates joint custody, mothers are still granted custody. In 2019, in 58.02% of all divorces, custody was granted to mothers; only in 4.1% of the cases, fathers were granted custody; joint custody was granted in 37.48% of the cases; in 0.4% it was given to others (institutions or relatives) (Statistical National Institute, 2020).

There is evidence that nonresident father involvement has increased over the past decades. For example, in the US, Amato et al. (2009) found that it has increased significantly over the last three decades, rising from 8% in 1976 to 26% in 2002, with fathers seeing their children weekly and complying with child support payments.

Today, fathers face challenges, and they are expected to be more than just breadwinners (Stahlschmidt et al., 2013). Being a responsible, nonresident father is associated with both financial benefits and the well-being of his children (Choi & Pyun, 2013). However, a father's financial support remains important because it increases the probability that his children enjoy greater resources while having better academic, behavioral, and emotional

outcomes (Marsiglio et al., 2000; Sharona & Shlomo, 2006).

The most studied indicators regarding nonresident father involvement after divorce are the frequency of contact with and the economic support of his children. Beyond the frequency of contact and economic support, other dimensions report about the nonresident father's involvement: overnight stays, involvement in decision-making and the quality of the father-child relationship. All of these indicators point out the accessibility and responsibility of the father for the care, education and well-being of his children. The fact that children perceive their father as part of their daily lives makes it more probable that they see him as a person who is close to them (Cashmore & Parkinson, 2008). Moreover, it dissipates possible feelings of abandonment and anger toward the parents, which helps children have a more positive perception of the situation during the post-divorce years (Sharona & Shlomo, 2006).

*Nonresident father involvement and child self-esteem*

Self-esteem is an indicator of psychological adjustment; it shows one's feelings of self-acceptance and self-worth (Rosenberg, 1973). Likewise, self-esteem is highly correlated to satisfaction with one's behavior and self (Diener & Diener, 1995). In this sense, DuBois and Flay (2004) emphasized the importance of self-esteem for a person's health and well-being.

Two theoretical frameworks could be proposed to explain the relationships between nonresident father involvement and self-esteem in children. On the one hand, the family system's perspective is useful to explain the relationship between the nonresident father and the child's well-being. Among other factors, children build self-esteem based on how their parents and significant other value them as a person. Harter (1999) explained that the precursors of self are cognitive and a social construction. When examining self as a cognitive construction, the sights focus upon those cognitive-developmental processes that

lead to changes in the structure of the self-system (namely, how self) representations are organized. When treating self as a social construction, attention turns to those socialization processes that reflect how children are treated by caregivers (mothers, fathers, etc.); this interaction impacts the evaluative content of self-representations. As Cooley (1922) stated, one's significant other (father, mother, etc.) constitutes a social mirror into which the individual gazes to detect opinions toward his/her self. These opinions, in turn, are incorporated into one's sense of self. Cooley contended that self becomes what we imagine that others think of us, including our appearance, motives, deeds, character, and so on.

Similarly, the social capital theory could explain the influence of nonresident father involvement in a child's well-being (Coleman, 1988). The transfer of social capital between nonresident fathers and their children is measurable by both the quality and the quantity of involvement (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995). Culp et al. (2000) found that greater father involvement was associated with an increased feeling of paternal acceptance on behalf of the child, which is a factor that plays a role in the development of self-concept and self-esteem. Following a divorce, children consistently do better when they can maintain a meaningful relationship with both parents unless the level of inter-parental conflict is high (King, 2006; Sharona & Shlomo, 2006). Consequently, the importance of a continued relationship with the nonresident father after the divorce must be highlighted (Beckmeyer et al., 2020), as it is essential for the child's well-being.

Very few studies have analyzed the influence of nonresident father involvement after divorce on children's self-esteem from 6 to 12 years old. As for the frequency of contact with the nonresident father, there are no consistent results of its influences on the child's self-esteem. Some studies have found that frequent contact with the nonresident father is associated with better self-esteem (Pagani-Kurtz & Derevensky, 1997). Others, however, have found little or no association between the frequency of contact with the father and the child's self-esteem after

divorce (King, 2006; Sharona & Shlomo, 2006). Also, it is known that receiving the father's economic support after divorce has a positive influence on the child's self-esteem (Maundeni, 2000). Another variable that greatly influences children's psychological adjustment after divorce is the quality of the father-child relationship (Adamsons & Johnston, 2013), not only in childhood but throughout different parts of one's life span (Topete, 2020). Several studies have also found that maintaining a good and supportive post-divorce relationship with the nonresident father positively influences the child's self-esteem (Bastais et al., 2012; Yuk-King, 2017).

On the one hand, these results are, to an important degree, supported by the meta-analysis with 63 studies carried out by Amato and Gilbreth (1999). These authors found that maintaining frequent contact with the father, receiving his economic support, maintaining a good relationship with him, and having a father involved in their education and upbringing positively influenced on the child's psychological adjustment. Adamsons and Johnston (2013), on the other hand, performed a meta-analysis with 52 studies of nonresident father involvement and the child's well-being. They found that nonresident father involvement was most strongly associated with the child's social well-being and was also associated with the child's emotional well-being, academic achievement, and behavioral adjustment.

### *Current study*

In Spain, very few studies analyze nonresident father involvement after divorce and its influences on the children's self-esteem. How children assess their relationship with their nonresident fathers after divorce (Cantón & Justicia, 2005; Morgado, 2010) has been studied. Also, the influence of the frequency of contact with nonresident fathers on the child's emotional adjustment (Pons & del Barrio, 1995) has been studied. Thus, we consider it essential to study post-divorce nonresident father involvement in Spain by paying attention to the various

dimensions. At the same time, the effects of nonresident father involvement on children's well-being need to be analyzed.

The study aims to learn about the post-divorce involvement of the noncustodial father and analyze whether nonresident father involvement is linked to the children's self-esteem of in primary school. We tested two hypotheses: 1) After divorce, most nonresident fathers are involved; 2) After divorce, frequent contact, overnight stays, decision-making, and a good father-child relationship are related to better self-esteem in children.

This work seeks to offer a multidimensional analysis of nonresident father involvement. Beyond the frequency of contact and economic support, other dimensions of nonresident father involvement will be considered: overnight stays, involvement in decision-making, and the quality of the father-child relationship after divorce. In this study, nonresident father involvement has been reported by both mother and child.

## Method

### *Participants*

The sample included 96 divorced mother families with the custody of their children, all of them from Seville and its province (southern Spain). In total, 96 children and 83 divorced mothers were interviewed. This sample is part of another, much more extensive study from the first national study carried out in Spain about single motherhood (IM-0028), consisting of 235 single-parent families in Spain headed by a divorced, single, or widowed woman where at least one child is in primary education. This project was supported by de Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

Families were accessed through the primary schools where the children attended. First, we contacted the Office of Education in Sevilla for information regarding all public and private primary schools in Seville and its province (urban and rural areas). With this information, we selected schools with varying socioeconomic

levels (low, medium, and high) in the urban areas of Seville. Also, schools in various rural areas of the Seville province (municipalities with less than 50.000 inhabitants) were selected. We selected all schools of Carmona, Los Palacios, Utrera and Lebrija. The directors at the selected schools were contacted. The initial contact was to present the study and request their collaboration. Once the directors agreed to participate, the tutors gave letters to those children in their classes who lived with their divorced mother (stepfamilies were excluded) requesting written informed consent to participate in the study. Seventy-six schools were contacted, with 40 agreeing to participate in the study (rate: 52.63%). Data was collected over thirteen months.

One child per family was included. In families with more than one child at the school, the oldest was interviewed. Participants were between the ages of 6 and 12, although one boy and one girl were 14 when interviewed because they were still in primary school. The mean age of the children when their parents divorced was almost 5 ( $M = 4.92$ ;  $SD = 2.75$ ), and their mean age at the time of the study was 9.21 ( $SD = 1.94$ ). Boys accounted for 61.5% of the sample, while 38.5% were girls. Most of the children in the study attended public schools (65.6%), while 34.4% attended private schools.

Of the 96 families, 13 mothers could not be interviewed for various reasons (incorrect telephone number, the impossibility of locating the mother during the established hours, among others). Eighty-three mothers were interviewed by phone using one qualified interviewer for this task. The variables that describe the demographic characteristics of the mothers in the study include age, time since the divorce (years), number of children, educational level, working situation, socioeconomic level, and income.

These women had a mean age of 36 years ( $SD = 5.32$ ) and with most being between 34 and 37 years of age (ranging from 22 to 53 years of age). The average time since the divorce was four years and three months, with a mean of 2.1 children per family.

More than half of the mothers in the study had primary education (60.2%), 21.7% had secondary studies, and 18.1% had university studies. Most mothers were employed at the time of the interview (85.5%) and were urban families (71.9%). The procedure to access the sample led us to obtain a homogeneous distribution of the urban families according to their socioeconomic level: 31.9% lived in an urban area with a low socioeconomic level, 37.7% lived in a working-class or medium-level urban area, while 30.4% lived in a high socioeconomic area. The family income level of those included in the study was calculated according to the Family Budget Survey (FBS) formula, where the average monthly income level of the family per unit of consumption is considered (monthly family income divided by the square root of the units making up the family). The mean of the corrected monthly family income was equal to €502.78 ( $SD = 84.16$ ) (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
*Children and Mothers Demographic Variables:  
Descriptive Statistics*

| <b>Children (n= 96)</b>    | <b>M</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>Range</b> | <b>%</b> |
|----------------------------|----------|-----------|--------------|----------|
| Age when parents divorced  | 4.92     | 2.75      | -1.25-12.25  | -        |
| Age                        | 9.21     | 1.94      | 6-14         | -        |
| Gender                     |          |           |              |          |
| Girl                       | -        | -         | -            | 38.50    |
| Boy                        | -        | -         | -            | 61.50    |
| School                     |          |           |              |          |
| Public                     | -        | -         | -            | 65.60    |
| Private                    | -        | -         | -            | 34.40    |
| <b>Mothers (n= 83)</b>     | <b>M</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>Range</b> | <b>%</b> |
| Age                        | 36.11    | 5.32      | 22 - 53      | -        |
| Time since divorce (years) | 4.28     | 2.70      | 0.17 - 11.5  | -        |
| Number of children         | 2.08     |           | 1 - 6        | -        |
| Education level            |          |           |              |          |
| Primary                    | -        | -         | -            | 60.20    |
| Secondary                  | -        | -         | -            | 21.70    |
| University                 | -        | -         | -            | 18.10    |
| Employed                   | -        | -         | -            | 85.50    |
| Income (€)                 | 502.78   | 478.43    | 0 - 3994.81  |          |

### *Instrument and procedure*

*Nonresident father involvement.* The instrument for nonresident father involvement is based on reports from both the children and their mothers.

A semi-structured interview was designed for this study (*had hoc*) to analyze the child's experience of their parental divorce. Among other factors, we explored the child's relationship with his/her father after the break-up. All children were interviewed individually by a qualified interviewer in the school context and a room other than the classroom. The interview varied between 30 and 50 minutes. Children were asked about the frequency of contact they had with their father; those who had contact were asked to assess their relationship. Two measurements of the degree of the father's involvement were obtained from the interviews with the children, which were treated as independent variables: frequency of contact (0 = *never*, 1 = *once or several times a year*, 2 = *monthly or fortnightly*, 3 = *weekly or daily*) and assessment of the quality of the relationship between both (1 = *poor* and, 2 = *good*).

At the same time, a semi-structured telephone interview with the mothers (duration between 40 and 150 minutes) was carried out. This interview was designed *had hoc* for this study. Mothers only reported about the father's involvement with the child participating in the study. We collected information about the contact frequency (0 = *never*, 1 = *once or several times a year*, 2 = *monthly or fortnightly*, 3 = *weekly or daily*), if the child stayed overnight with his/her father (1 = *no relationship*, 2 = *no* and, 3 = *yes*), the father's participation in the decision-making (1 = *yes*, 2 = *no*) and the payment of child support (1 = *no*, 2 = *yes, less than was agreed* and, 3 = *yes, what was agreed*). All these variables were also treated as independent variables.

*Child self-esteem* was assessed by the Perceived Competence Scale for Children (Harter, 1982). For this study, the primary school version was used. This scale was written for children between 8 and 13 years and was administered as a paper-and-pencil test that took approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The instrument assesses perceptions of scholastic competence, social acceptance or acceptance by peers, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioral conduct, and global self-worth. The task consists of a "structured alternative format" in which the

subjects are presented with two sentences, such as “Some kids often forget what they learn” and “Other kids remember things easily.” Children were asked to decide which sentence is more like them and then indicate whether the statement was “really true” or just “sort of true for them.” The answers yield a score from 1 “low perceived competence” to 4 “high perceived competence.” Each subscale contained six items; thus, the entire measure contained 36 items. Global self-esteem was obtained by averaging all scores, in which case, 1 is “very low”, 2 is “low”, 3 is “medium” and 4 corresponds to “high self-esteem.”

Reliabilities based on Cronbach’s alpha were 0.83 for scholastic competence, 0.66 for social acceptance, 0.62 for athletic competence, and 0.83 for physical appearance, which was 0.80 for behavioral conduct, and 0.76 for global self-esteem. The entire scale showed acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ).

### *Analysis Strategy*

First will be presented a descriptive analysis of the father's involvement, as reported by both the children and their mothers. This will be followed by a description of the child's self-esteem, and a comparison of mean analysis (factor ANOVAs) for the variables explored regarding the father's involvement and the child's self-esteem. Finally, we will perform a hierarchical linear regression analysis to scrutinize the variables (demographic and nonresident father involvement) that predict a child's self-esteem after parental divorce, bearing in mind both the information supplied by both the mothers and the children. The SPSS V.24 statistical software package was used for all the statistical analyses.

## **Results**

### *Nonresident father involvement: child's and mother's report*

According to the children's reports, there is an important degree of variability in the relationship between the children in the study and their fathers after divorce. In terms of contact frequency, we found that 20.8% of children interviewed never contacted their fathers, 11.5% had contact with him once or several times a year, 35.4% saw him monthly or fortnightly, while 32.3% saw their father weekly or daily.

As for the quality of the relationship with their father, the results indicate that the immense majority (88%) assessed this as positive (“*I get on well with him, J. - 11 years old*”), and only a minority (12%) stated that they got on poorly or not very well with their father (“*I get on badly, V.M. - 11 years old*”).

As reported by the mothers, the data indicate that mothers' perception about the contact frequency between the children and their father was very similar to what the children had stated. Again, the results indicated ample diversity in the frequency of contact between the children and their fathers. The frequency varies between those who had no relationship with their father (21.5%) and those who saw him weekly or daily (25.3%). Mothers indicated that 21.1% of the children had contact with their father once or several times a year and 31.6% monthly or fortnightly.

Additionally, and based on the mothers' indications, 39.7% of children did not spend nights with the father; only 38.5% stayed overnight (21.8% had no relationship with him). Mothers reported that 80.2% of the fathers did not participate in any important decision regarding their children.

When it came to economic support, mothers informed that almost half of the fathers (46.8%) failed to pay the amount established by the judge; only 39.3% met the agreed payment. The rest (13.9%) offered economic support, although a smaller quantity than established by the judge.

### Nonresident father involvement and self-esteem of children after divorce

The second objective pursued by this work was to explore whether the noncustodial father's involvement was related to the child's self-esteem after divorce. The results show that the children in the study had a medium level of self-esteem ( $M = 2.96$ ;  $SD = 0.53$ ), with the minimum score being 1.5 and the maximum 4. To analyze whether nonresident father involvement was related to the child's self-esteem, we compared means analysis (factor ANOVAs), followed by hierarchical linear regression analysis.

**Table 2**  
Nonresident Father Involvement and Self-esteem of Children after divorce ( $N = 96$ )

| Independent variable                | Category                     | Self-esteem<br>$M (SD)$ | $F$                      |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Children's reports (n = 96)</i>  |                              |                         |                          |
| Frequency of contact                | Never                        | 2.87 (0.49)             | $F_{(3,92)} = 0.35$      |
|                                     | Once or several times a year | 2.98 (0.62)             |                          |
|                                     | Monthly or Fortnightly       | 2.95 (0.48)             |                          |
|                                     | Weekly or Daily              | 3.01 (0.58)             |                          |
| Quality of relationship with father | Poor                         | 2.36 (0.39)             | $F_{(1,73)} = 5.92^{**}$ |
|                                     | Good                         | 3.1 (0.50)              |                          |
| <i>Mothers reports (n = 83)</i>     |                              |                         |                          |
| Frequency of contact                | Never                        | 2.69* (0.53)            | $F_{(3,75)} = 3.1^*$     |
|                                     | Once or several times a year | 3.11 (0.45)             |                          |
|                                     | Monthly or Fortnightly       | 2.91 (0.58)             |                          |
|                                     | Weekly or Daily              | 3.18* (0.53)            |                          |
| Overnight stays with the father     | No relationship              | 2.69* (0.53)            | $F_{(2,75)} = 3.86^*$    |
|                                     | No                           | 2.95 (0.56)             |                          |
|                                     | Yes                          | 3.14* (0.51)            |                          |
| Father involvement in decisions     | Yes                          | 2.99 (0.60)             | $F_{(1,79)} = 0.05$      |
|                                     | No                           | 2.96 (0.54)             |                          |
| Economic support                    | No                           | 2.88 (0.55)             | $F_{(2,76)} = 1.19$      |
|                                     | Less than agreed             | 3.02 (0.55)             |                          |
|                                     | What was agreed              | 3.08 (0.54)             |                          |

\* $p < 0.05$

\*\* $p < 0.01$

Table 2 shows the results for the ANOVAs. When children were the informants, the results indicate no significant differences in their self-esteem, based on the frequency of contact with their father. However, there are significant differences when the assessment regards the

quality of the child-father relationship: those who have a good relationship have significantly better self-esteem than those who consider the relationship to be poor.

As shown in Table 2, when mothers were the informants, the results indicate that the children with better self-esteem have more frequent contact with their fathers (weekly or daily) and spend nights with them. However, no significant differences were seen in children's self-esteem based on whether the father participated in decision-making and provided economic support.

A hierarchical linear regression analysis was performed. that included demographic variables (age and gender) and nonresident father involvement variables (VI) (only those variables that were significant in the previous analysis were included) as a predictor of the children's self-esteem (VD) after parental divorce. The regression equation was calculated with 60 children (those who had no contact with their nonresident father and those without a relationship with him were excluded).

**Table 3**

*Hierarchical linear regression analysis: demographic and nonresident father involvement variables and children's self-esteem after divorce (N = 60 children)*

| Variable                            | B     | $\beta$ | R <sup>2</sup> | F      |
|-------------------------------------|-------|---------|----------------|--------|
| <i>Model 1</i>                      |       |         |                |        |
| Age                                 | -0.07 | -0.22   | 0.11           | 3.66*  |
| Gender                              | 0.28  | 0.25*   |                |        |
| <i>Model 2</i>                      |       |         |                |        |
| Age                                 | -0.05 | -0.17   | 0.19           | 3.34*  |
| Gender                              | 0.24  | 0.21    |                |        |
| Frequency of contact                | 0.03  | 0.04    |                |        |
| Overnight stays with the father     | 0.26  | 0.27    |                |        |
| <i>Model 3</i>                      |       |         |                |        |
| Age                                 | -0.04 | -0.13   | 0.28           | 4.31** |
| Gender                              | 0.17  | 0.15    |                |        |
| Frequency of contact                | 0.03  | 0.06    |                |        |
| Overnight stays with the father     | 0.19  | 0.20    |                |        |
| Quality of relationship with father | 0.56  | 0.32*   |                |        |

Note. Quality of relationship with father is a variable reported by children, the rest are reported by mothers. <sup>a</sup> 0 = 6 - 8 years old, 1 = 9 - 14 years old. <sup>b</sup> 0 = girl, 1 = boy. <sup>c</sup> 0 = never, 1 = once a year, 2 = monthly or fortnightly, 3 = weekly or daily. <sup>d</sup> 0 = no, 1 = yes. <sup>e</sup> 0 = poor, 1 = good \*\*  $p < 0.01$  \*  $p < .05$

As seen in Table 3, the age and gender of children predict 11% of the variance of the child's self-esteem after parental divorce. The beta coefficient indicates that in boys, their self-esteem is 0.28 points above girls. When variables regarding nonresident father involvement are added (frequency of contact and overnight stays), 19% of the variance of the child's self-esteem is explained. In short, results indicate that children who stay overnight with their father have a self-esteem that is 0.26 points above those who do not go to sleep with their father. Finally, when the assessment that children make of the quality of their relationship with their father is

included, the fit regression model explains 28% of the variance of their self-esteem after divorce. Furthermore, the regression model indicates that what predicts better self-esteem in a significant and specific way is the quality of the relationship with the father, as perceived by the child. In fact, the results show that those who consider their relationship with their father as being good to have a self-esteem that is 0.56 points above those who assess it as poor.

## Discussion

In recent years, European society has experienced major changes in the roles of men and women within the family. These changes have, among other aspects, encouraged greater participation of fathers in caring for and educating their children (Sharona & Shlomo, 2006). Nevertheless, many fathers accept limited or no responsibility for their offspring (Cabrera et al., 2000). Therefore, it is difficult to predict the role fathers will play after divorce because, today, gender roles are changing.

This study shows that one in five children has no relationship of any type with their father. Demo (2000), who found similar results, stated that one in four children in the United States had no relationship with their father after the divorce. As Moxnes (2003) explained, this absence could be interpreted by the children as indifference and a lack of involvement on behalf of their father, to become one of the greatest, stress-generating factors after their parent's divorce. Fortunately, some nonresident fathers maintain a relationship with their children that varies in frequency. Monthly or fortnightly contact was the most common. This result was expected as it fits in with the standard mandate of most family courts in Spain (several hours, two afternoons during the week, and alternate weekends).

Thus, the results verify the variability regarding the contact frequency that nonresident fathers have with their children after divorce. Most of the children interviewed for this study indicated that they saw their father frequently (weekly or daily, monthly or fortnightly). Similar

results were found by Booth and Scott (2006) in their study with primary school-age children in the United States. However, when the opinion of the mothers was considered, results indicate that this was somewhat less positive than their children's. They reported that only half of their children had frequent contact with their father. There is a minority, although not inappreciable, who have more sporadic contact.

Therefore, we can say that most of the children in this study consider their nonresident fathers to be part of their lives. Other studies have found that the frequency of contact with the nonresident father after divorce is related to the father's involvement before the breakup and the inter-parental relationship. It is known that fathers involved with their children before the separation will continue to do so after divorce (Demo, 2000). Also, it is more likely that fathers have more frequent contact with their children if they have a non-conflictive relationship with their ex-partner (mothers) (Leite & McKenry, 2002; Sano et al., 2011).

Regarding the quality of relationship with their nonresident father, most children identified it as good, although twelve percent judged it as poor. Moura and Mena (2004) found that the quality of the inter-parental relationship mediates the relationship with the father after divorce. Nonetheless, several studies have found that a good relationship between children and their nonresident father after divorce is mediated by the elevated clarity of the father's role: the father's perception that his parenting abilities are high and his perception that the mother's parenting abilities are limited (Stone, 2006).

Once again, the results of this work indicate that there is variability for other indicators of father's involvement: overnight stays, decision-making, and economic support. In summary, the results showed that almost half of the children stayed overnight; somewhat more than half of the fathers offered economic support, although only a minority was involved in the decision-making. This verifies that approximately half of nonresident fathers continue to be involved, which is something that should make these children less vulnerable when faced with their

parents' divorce, as several studies have shown (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Moxnes, 2003; King, 2006; Sharona & Shlomo, 2006). The other side of the coin shows that in this study, those children with the worst well-being (see Morgado, 2008) were those whose fathers were less involved after divorce. About one-third did not have a relationship with their father, only a third were in regular contact and stayed overnight, a minority were involved in decision-making and more than half offered no economic support.

Having reached this point, we must ask: Does father involvement after divorce influence their children's self-esteem?

There are no consistent results regarding the influence of the contact frequency with the father on child psychological adjustment after divorce. Our results also indicate discrepancies regarding the influence of this variable on children's self-esteem. When bearing in mind the children's opinion, we found no significant differences in their self-esteem based on the frequency of contact with their nonresident father. When mothers were informed, the results indicated that those who saw their fathers weekly or daily were the children with significantly better self-esteem. Future studies need to investigate the discrepancy in the assessments made by the various informants. On the other hand, discrepancies may be since the child has an idealized vision of his/her father; perhaps the feeling that the child's father is still present in his/her life is more important than the estimation the child has about the frequency of contact. In summary, it is more important to feel that the child has not lost his/her father after divorce rather than the estimation that they have of the frequency of contact with him.

Then again, these discrepancies could, as suggested by Hetherington and Kelly (2002) and King (2006), be because the frequency of contact between nonresident father and his children after divorce, on its own, is not a variable that informs about the type of relationship they have. Adamsons and Johnson (2013), in their meta-analysis, found no relationship between frequency of contact and child well-being.

Regarding the father-child relationship, these authors found that having a positive father-child relationship is strongly and positively associated with the child's well-being. Similar results have been found recently by Beckmeyer et al. (2020). In this sense, and as Yuk-King (2008) found, the results of this work show that children who had a good relationship with their nonresident fathers had better self-esteem than those who qualified their relationship as poor. In this line, Topete (2020) concluded that parental divorce might impact individual self-esteem even throughout adulthood.

Taking other indicators of the father-child relationship into account, the data from this research only partially support the second hypothesis. Regarding father involvement in decision-making and economic support, no differences were found in the child's self-esteem. However, the results indicate that children whose fathers continue to be involved in their lives, with overnight stays, have better self-esteem than those who do not stay overnight with him. This could be the case because this variable only reports the intensity of the post-divorce relationship between the children and their father. The fact that they stay overnight indicates that they continue to have a close relationship after the divorce. This probably allows them to share daily life situations (school and homework, leisure activities, etc.), making them feel that their father continues to be present and plays an important role in their lives.

When considering all variables, including demographics and data about nonresident father involvement, the children's self-esteem is explained by gender and the quality of the father-child relationship. In the same line as Storksen et al. (2005), results indicated that boys have better self-esteem than girls after divorce. When demographic and nonresident father involvement variables are controlled, the results of this study indicate that the quality of the father-child relationship significantly explains the child's self-esteem after divorce. These results are supported by the meta-analysis by Amato and Gilbreth (1999) and recently by Adamsons and Johnston (2013). The results obtained by these

authors have indicated that the quality of the relationship between the nonresident father and his children after divorce is one of the variables that has a strong and direct influence on the child's psychological adjustment. In the words of Hetherington (2003), it is not the quantity of the contact but the quality that influences the psychological adjustment of the children after parental divorce.

These results allow us to conclude that better self-esteem in children after divorce is related to the fact that they feel that they have a close and good relationship with their nonresident father. This positive perception of the father-child relationship is probably linked to the fact that they share daily tasks and activities through daily life together. This makes them feel that their father is involved in their lives (Sharona & Shlomo, 2006). In this sense, Adamsons and Johnston (2013) concluded that fathers matter not when they spend time with their children but when they spend time being involved in activities with their children and nurturing the father-child relationship. These authors found the strongest effect sizes in studies assessing father-child relationship quality and those using multiple measures of father involvement, which, in the words of the authors, supports a move away from the traditional policy foci of visitation and economic support. Instead, fathers should be encouraged to be involved with their children in various positive ways (e.g., regular contact, overnight stays, decision-making, etc.).

The results obtained with this study help clarify how the noncustodial progenitor's involvement -the father- is related to the child's self-esteem after parental divorce. Thus, we would like to highlight one of the most relevant and novel aspects of this work: in addition to the assessment made by mothers, the opinion of the children themselves was borne in mind, because in accordance with a number of authors (e.g., Yuk-King, 2017) this is of great value when what is sought is to assess the child's psychological adjustment, and according to Havermans et al. (2015) including children in family research provide an additional perspective on family life.

Nevertheless, we consider that this study has a limitation; fathers were not interviewed. Future work will consider the father as an informant. With this, the perception of the mothers and the children could be compared with the fathers to have a more complex and complete vision of the post-divorce father-child relationship.

Another limitation of this study is that we use cross-sectional data. Therefore, we cannot know the long-term effects of the nonresident father-child relationship on children's self-esteem. We also consider that future studies should be conducted with larger samples and evaluating the quality of the father-child relationship with stronger and more specific instruments.

In conclusion, in this study, the degree of the noncustodial fathers' involvement in children's lives is very diverse. At the same time, it plays a relevant role in how these children live and adapt to their parents' divorce, as can be concluded by its effect on their self-esteem. Future studies should also examine the variables that may be influencing the way the father is involved in his children's lives after divorce (quality of father-child relationship, quality of inter-parental relationship, period of coexistence with children, geographical distance between the residence of the father and their children, father's emotional adjustment, father's educational level, degree of knowledge their role as a parent after divorce, among others). Adopting the words of Bastaits et al. (2012) and Bastaits and Motermalns (2014), future research should consider divorced fathers as people with the capacity to contribute to their children's self-esteem. Divorced fathers have the competence to play a unique role in the well-being of their children by being supportive and involved in their lives.

The results found in this study are relevant to social policy and practice with families during or after the divorce. It is relevant and essential that public devices for family guidance and mediation be created in Spain. This intervention is relevant during the initial year following separation when there is an improvement in the nonresident father's involvement in the lives of his children. Furthermore, guidelines should be offered to those fathers who need them to clarify their

role as a post-divorce father, their parenting skills, and how to promote a close father-child relationship (frequent, regular, predictable, coexistence, warm, communicative contact). It is known that receiving support from fatherhood programs is significantly and positively related to father involvement (Castillo & Fenzl-Crossman, 2010). As Bailey (2003) stated, society cannot forget to support the nonresident father family unit to help promote healthy family relationships.

It is also necessary to create more community information and public support services for children in Spain. In short, these services should offer, among others, information, provide children conflict resolution strategies, improve their relationship with their parents and increase their self-esteem.

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## Notes

- \* Research article.