

Fathers can lower their children's risk of going hungry by staying involved

April 4 2014, by Beth Salamon



Fathers can help to make sure their child has enough to eat.

(Medical Xpress)—Fathers who don't live with their children can actually lower their son's or daughter's risk of not having enough food by just maintaining involvement in the child's life. And if the father provides support beyond money, such as gifts, groceries and other offerings, the child's risk of food insecurity may be further reduced.

The new research, published this month by Lenna Nepomnyaschy, assistant professor in the School of Social Work, in Social Service Review has found that nonresident father involvement in a child's life is positively associated with lower [food](#) insecurity in both early and [middle childhood](#). Involvement could include time spent with the child, monetary contributions, and "in kind" support, such as treats, gifts, and

payment of medical or childcare expenses. In particular, in kind support resulted in a 10 to 12 percent reduction in food insecurity for [children](#).

"These results add to mounting evidence that nonresident father involvement, outside of the formal child support system, positively affects children and must be considered in policy discussions related to child support, child poverty and child well-being," says Nepomnyaschy.

Research on food insecurity for children is especially timely, as 47 million food stamp recipients in the U.S. received a \$5 billion reduction in November. And Congress is preparing to cut even more out of the nutrition program. Lawmakers are currently finalizing a federal farm bill which is likely to reduce food stamp benefits by \$8.7 billion over the next decade.

"As families lose food stamps, any resources a father provides become even more important. Men overwhelmingly want to contribute to the well-being of their children, and child support alone may not increase food security. If a woman is on welfare, the state takes her child support to reimburse the cost for welfare, rather than it benefiting the child."

Using two nationally representative longitudinal panel data sets from the Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics which followed children through early and middle childhood and assessed economic stability and food insecurity in the home, the researchers found this trend to be consistent across both sets of data.

"For vulnerable families, fathers' contributions of time and material resources have a positive effect on [food security](#). Having in kind support may help the mother to re-allocate her resources to provide more food for the household. The father's visits may reduce her stress and enhance her parenting, providing her the resources and time to grocery shop and cook meals."

More than 1 in 10 children in the US experience food insecurity and children in single mother families are at greatest risk, being three times as likely to not get enough food, than children in two-parent families. In 2012, 21.6 percent of US children lived in households that were food insecure, defined by the Economic Research Service of the US Department of Agriculture as having limited access to adequate food due to lack of money.

Additionally, the researchers found that irregular cash support from the father increases [food insecurity](#) for children in middle childhood.

"The irregular nature of the support may affect the mother's ability to budget and may raise her expectations of support that may not come. The instability of irregular cash support had a negative effect on the child's food supply."

Provided by Rutgers University

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