

TITLE: Father Recruitment and Retention in Longitudinal Research: A Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

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Introduction

Longitudinal studies are increasingly including fathers as respondents, but techniques for recruitment and retention of fathers are both challenging and evolving. Fathers are more difficult to engage than mothers, and also may be more difficult to track and retain longitudinally. This literature analysis examines longitudinal studies that included fathers, focusing both on pitfalls and pathways to success. Our goals are to: Identify relevant studies; calculate and examine recruitment and retention rates for fathers; rank studies on their effectiveness in these areas; explore practices associated with effectiveness; and use this information to guide father recruitment into the NCS Main Study.

Method

We identified relevant studies through published and “gray” literature, abstracted information about recruitment and retention rates and practices, and verified the information with the studies’ investigators. We then conducted quantitative and qualitative analyses of the recruitment and retention data.

Results and Conclusions

Average baseline cooperation and retention rates were high, with substantial variability. Family characteristics and method of contacting fathers for recruitment emerged as important issues. For retention important factors were father’s residential status, frequency and method of contact, and operational considerations including tracing, tracking, and refusal conversion. The review also brought to light important issues in conceptualizing father participation, such as how to define father participants longitudinally as family structure evolves. Ultimately, effective studies reach out to fathers personally, value fathers’ time, and employ sophisticated methods to track and engage participants. These findings are being used to develop formative research, whose results will guide the NCS Main Study.

Table 1: Studies Reviewed for Recruitment and Retention and Their Inclusion Status for Analyses

STUDY NAME
Studies Included in Father Recruitment and Retention Analyses
Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children [ALSPAC] ¹
Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort [ECLS-B]
Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project (fathers) [EHSRE] ¹
First-Time Fathers Study
Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing
Growing Up in Australia [GUA]
Lifeways Study ²
Millennium Cohort Study
Oregon Divorced Father Study
Panel Study of Income Dynamics, Child Development Supplement and Transition to Adulthood [PSID-CDS/TA]
Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development [SECCYD]
Wisconsin Study of Families and Work [WSFW] ²
Studies Excluded Due to Insufficient Information about Fathers
Growing Up in Ireland
ELFE Longitudinal Study Pilot (France)
The Family and Community Health Study
National Health and Growth Study
Norwegian Mother and Child Study
Birth to Twenty Study (South Africa)

¹ These studies were included based only on review of published and gray literature; no PI feedback was received.

² These studies are included for recruitment rates only; insufficient information on father participation over time was available for retention analyses

Table 2: Father Baseline Cooperation Rates

STUDY NAME	BASELINE COOPERATION RATE
UPPER QUARTILE	
Wisconsin Study of Families and Work	96.5%
Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development	86.5%
Millennium Cohort Study	86.1%
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Growing Up in Australia	79.8%
Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing	78.1%
Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort	74.9%
First-Time Fathers Study	69.6%
Early Head Start Research and Evaluation	61.9%
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LOWER QUARTILE	
Panel Study of Income Dynamics, Child Development Supplement and Transition to Adulthood	50.9%
Oregon Divorced Father Study	40.2%
Lifeways Study	35.7%
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DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS	
Mean	69.1%
Standard Deviation	19.8%
Median	74.9%
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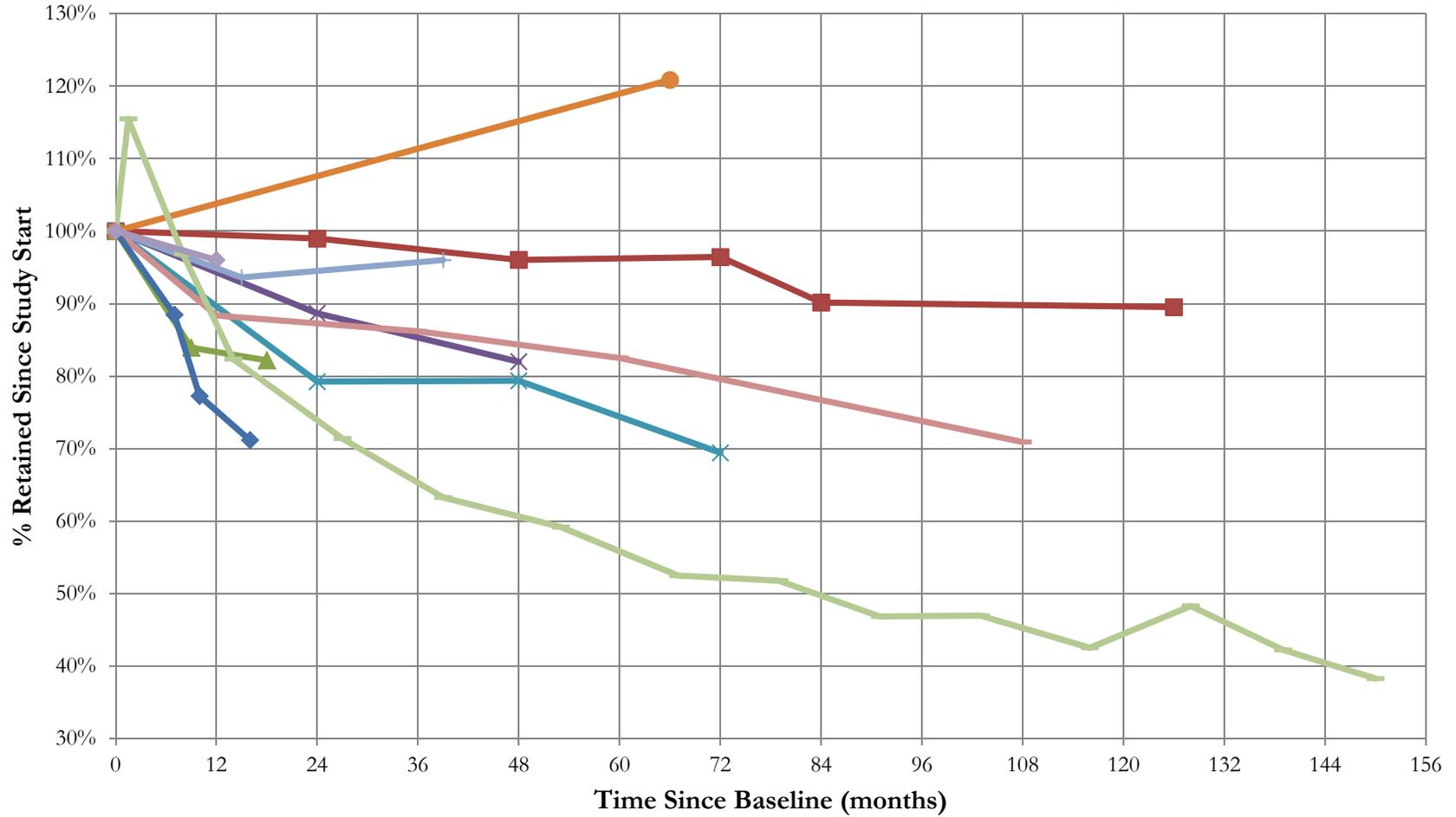
Table 3: Retention of Fathers at Key Time Points in Ranked Order

TIME POINT	STUDY RANK AND NAME
12 Months	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID-CDS/TA) 2. Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (SECCYD) 3. Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project (EHSRE) 4. Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) 5. Growing Up in Australia (AU) 6. Millennium Study 7. Fragile Families 8. Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) 9. Oregon Divorced Fathers 10. First-Time Fathers Study
36 Months	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Panel Study of Income Dynamics 2. Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development 3. Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Birth Cohort 4. Fragile Families 5. Growing Up in Australia 6. Millennium Study 7. Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children
60 Months	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Panel Study of Income Dynamics 2. Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development 3. Fragile Families 4. Millennium Study 5. Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children

Table 4. Mean and Median Father Retention Since Father Baseline

TIME POINT	NUMBER OF STUDIES	PERCENT SAMPLE RETAINED	
		MEAN (SD)	MEDIAN
12 months	10	92.50 (7.64)	93.79
36 months	8	90.82 (11.46)	87.26
60 months	5	87.12 (20.70)	81.67

Figure 1: Father Retention in Studies Since Baseline



- SECCYD (father)
- PSID-CDS/TA (fathers)
- ALSPAC (fathers)
- OR Divorced Fathers
- ECLS-B (fathers)
- EHSRE(fathers)
- Growing up in AU (father)
- Fragile Families (fathers)
- Millennium Cohort (father)
- First Time Fathers