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## **Workshop 70**

# **New Findings on Infant Overnights and Relocation**

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**William V. Fabricius, PhD**

## **Workshop 70.**

### **New Findings on Infant Overnights and Relocation**

Presented at the annual meetings of Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, Toronto, Canada, May 31, 2014.

## The Impact of Parental Relocation After Separation on Children's Outcomes

Mathew Stevenson, Ph.D.

University of New Mexico

## Parental Relocation

- Not uncommon following divorce
- Braver and O'Connell (1998) 17% moved within 2 years
- Braver, Ellman, & Fabricius (2003) 61% of freshman with divorced parents at least one parent moved more than 1 hour away
- Considerable dilemma for courts (Kelly & Lamb, 2003)
  - May pit custodial parent's wish to better circumstances by moving against noncustodial parent's desire to maintain frequent contact with child

## Braver, Ellman, & Fabricius (2003)

- 602 college students of divorced parents
- Reported parents' relocation, and their own current health & well-being
- Parental relocation associated with:
  - Less financial support for college
  - More inner turmoil & distress about parents' divorce
  - Worse relationship with non-resident parent
  - Worse relationship between their parents
  - More personal hostility esp. for girls
  - Worse physical health esp. for girls
  - Worse life satisfaction
  - Worse personal and emotional adjustment
  - More worry about college expenses

## Fabricius & Braver (2006)

- Re-analysis of previous data
- Addressed criticism of previous study
  - Without random assignment, data are correlational and a 3<sup>rd</sup> variable could cause families to relocate and children to have problems
  - Likely 3<sup>rd</sup> variable candidates are earlier parent conflict and domestic violence (DV)
  - Addressed this possibility by including earlier parent conflict and DV in re-analysis of the half of the previous data that had these measures

## Fabricius & Braver (2006)

- Replicated 3 key findings, controlling for earlier parent conflict and DV:
  - More inner turmoil & distress about parental divorce
  - Worse relationship with non-resident fathers
  - Worse relationship between their parents

Thus eliminated the possibility that these original findings were caused only by earlier parent conflict or DV

## New Relocation Findings

- Drawn from our longitudinal study of parental influences on adolescent development in 400 families in AZ and CA
- Criteria:
  1. Birth parents lived together when the child was born
  2. Birth parents permanently separated after the child was born
  3. Child lives primarily with mother and stepfather

## Sample

- 83 adolescents, their non-resident biological father, biological mother, and resident stepfather
  - 39 male, 44 female
  - Upper middle class (mean adjusted income \$74,241)
  - 37 Mexican-American, 46 European American
  - 40 relocated, 43 not relocated
  - Mean age at relocation = 4
  - Mean relocation distance = 4-5 hours away

## Measures

- **Relocation:**
  - Grade 10 asked mothers “After the two of you permanently separated, did you or (child's) birthfather ever move more than a one hour drive away from each other?”
  - Divided families into two groups: Relocate, Non-Relocate
- **Controls:**
  - Grade 7 Mother report **Parent Conflict with resident stepfather**
  - Grade 7 Mother report **Domestic Violence with resident stepfather**
  - Grade 7 Mother report **Co-Parenting Relationship with non-resident biological father**

## Outcomes

- **Delinquent Peers:**
  - Grade 10 Youth report
  - “During the past year how many of your friends...”
  - Item content included (among others):
    - Used threats or fighting to get things from people
    - Were in gang fights
    - Gotten drunk or high
    - Suspended from school
    - Stole something worth \$50 or more
    - Used a weapon
    - Hurt animals on purpose
  - Answers ranged “none” to “almost all” of my friends

## Outcomes

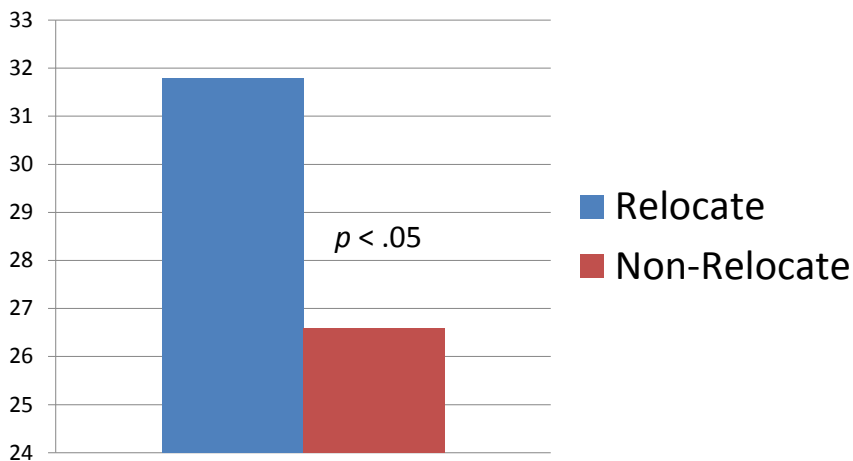
- **Externalizing Behavior:**
  - Grade 10 Youth report
  - “In the past month you”
  - Items included (among others):
    - Were mean to others
    - Destroyed things belonging to others
    - Disobeyed at school
    - Got in many fights
    - Lied or cheated
    - Stole
    - Physically hurt other people
  - Answers “not true”, “somewhat true”, “very true”

## Outcomes

- **Drug Use:**
  - Grade 12 Youth report
  - “During the past 30 days did you”
  - Substances used:
    - Cigarettes
    - Alcohol
    - Marijuana
    - Cocaine
    - Inhalants
    - Any other type of illegal drug (LSD, PCP, ecstasy, mushrooms, speed, ice, heroin, pills without prescription)
  - Answers individual scored 0 = no use, 1 = use
  - Summed to a total score of # of drugs used that month

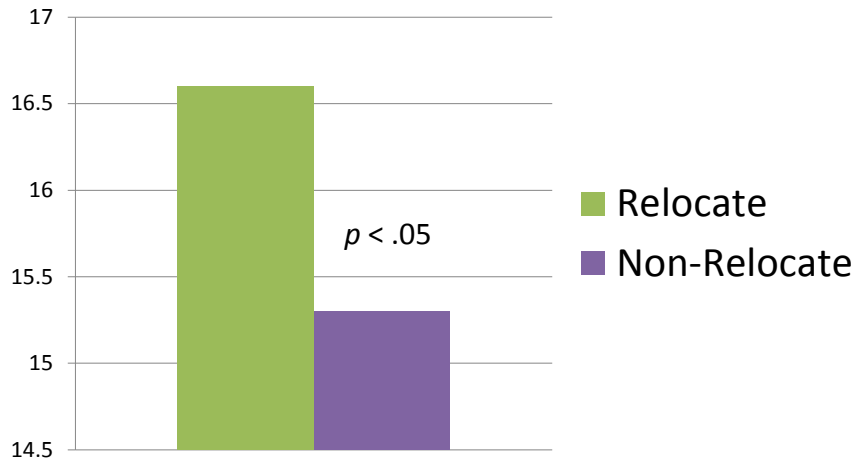
## Increased Involvement with Delinquent Peers at Grade 10

over and above effects of Parent Conflict, Domestic Violence, Co-Parenting



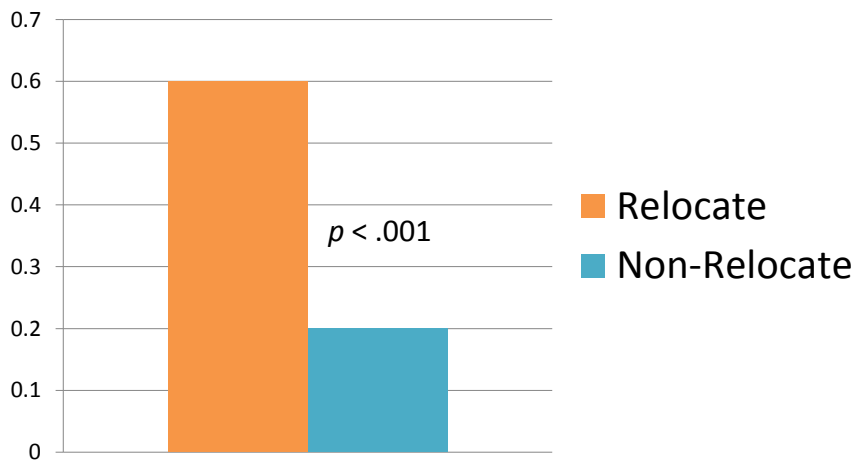
## Increased Externalizing Behavior at Grade 10

over and above effects of Parent Conflict, Domestic Violence, Co-Parenting



## Increased Drug Use at Grade 12

over and above effects of Parent Conflict, Domestic Violence, Co-Parenting





## Limitations

- Important note:
  - Data are not causal
    - Not possible to randomly assign families to relocate
    - Thus, alternative explanations remain possible
  - However, present study outcomes not due to:
    - Conflict with resident stepfather
    - Domestic Violence with resident stepfather
    - Poor relationship between mother and non-resident biological father

## Implications

- Results suggest relocation of either parent more than an hour away puts adolescents at greater risk for
  - Involvement with delinquent peers
  - Externalizing behaviors
  - Using drugs
- Consistent with previous findings (Braver et al., 2003; Fabricius & Braver, 2006) that relocation also puts children at greater risk for long-term:
  - More inner turmoil & distress about parental divorce
  - Worse relationship with non-resident fathers
  - Worse relationship between their parents

# Implications

- Need for courts to weigh BIS standard in relocation decision making
  - Often assumed permanent move with stable parent most likely to produce best outcomes for children
  - Present results suggest that parental relocation carries increased risk for serious maladaptive outcomes for children
  - From child's interests, there may be value in discouraging moves by custodial parents provided:
    - Move not needed to remove child from detrimental environment (e.g. domestic violence, abuse, substance abuse)

## **Workshop 70.**

### **New Findings on Infant Overnights and Relocation**

Presented at the annual meetings of Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, Toronto, Canada, May 31, 2014.

## Short-Term Correlates of Overnight Parenting Time for Infants: The Current Literature and Re-analyses

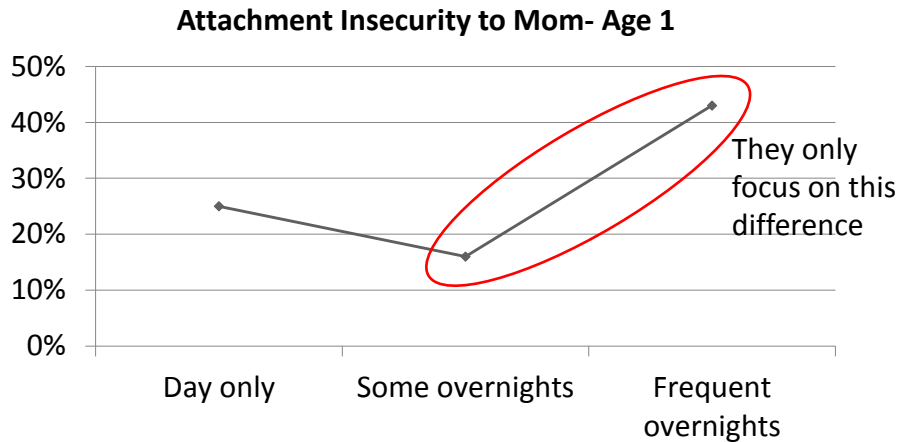
Karina Sokol, Ph. D.  
Glendale Community College

## Tornello et al. (2013)

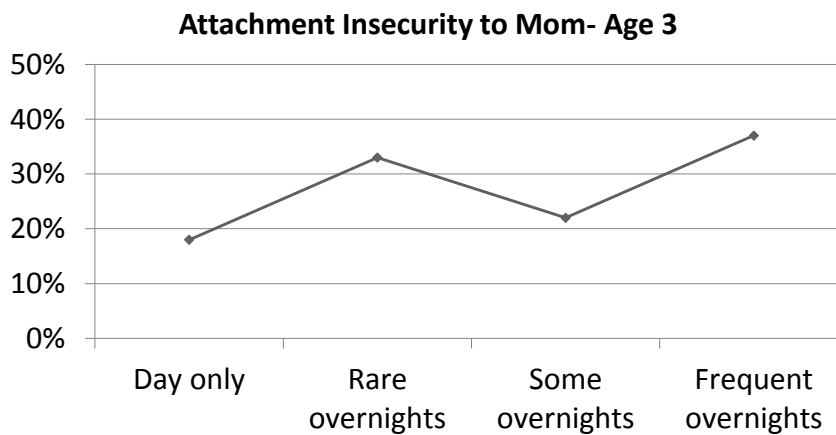
- Data - Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study, collected in 20 U.S. inner-cities in 1998 to 2000.
  - High risk sample
    - Almost all unmarried and most were racial/ethnic minority and low-income status
  - Overnights at ages 1 & 3 (reported by mothers)
    1. None (Daytime-only)
    2. Moderate
    3. High
  - Outcomes (reported by mothers)
    1. *Attachment Q-Sort* (ages 1 & 3); Unusual procedure.
    2. *Child Behavior Checklist* (ages 3 & 5); Normal procedure.

If overnights caused harm to the mother-infant attachment relationship, then there should be a linear association between increasing number of overnights and increasing mother-infant attachment insecurity.

There was no linear effect of  
overnights at age 1



There was no linear effect of  
overnights at age 3



## Tornello et al. (2013) Findings Cont.

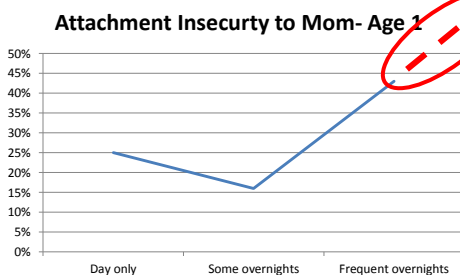
### Ages 3 & 5 Behavioral Adjustment

- Of the 14 analyses of children's behavioral adjustment, there was one effect: overnights at age 3 were associated with more positive behaviors at age 5.

In sum, the findings could be best described as *contradictory* (1 negative effect on early attachment and 1 positive effect on later adjustment) and *limited* (14 remaining analyses showed null effects).

## Our Reanalysis

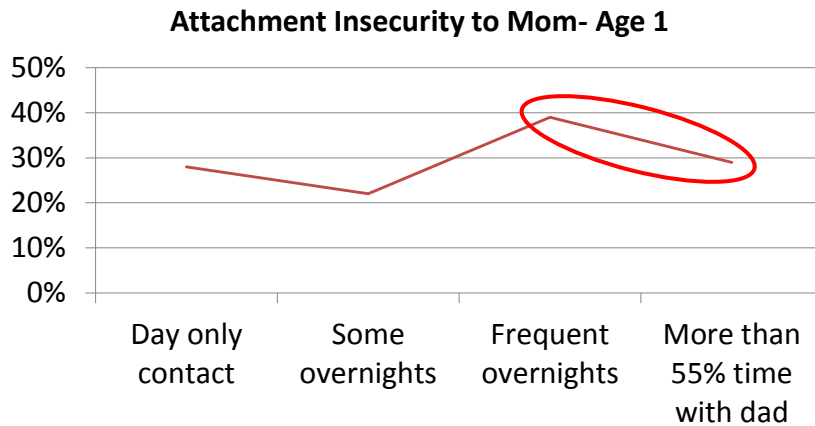
- We used the same data set in order to explore some of Tornello's findings, but
  - We separated out the children in the Frequent overnight group who had > 55% overnights.



They should be even MORE insecure with their mothers

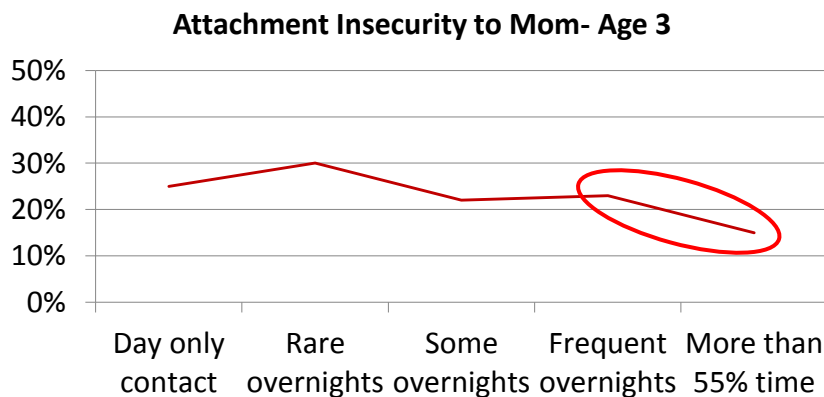
We did not use the complicated data weights because they are only needed to make the sample representative of the 20 cities.

## Attachment with Mom by Overnights with Dad- Age 1



The father-custody infants (> 55% overnights with father) are LESS insecure with their mothers, not MORE

## Attachment with Mom by Overnights with Dad- Age 3

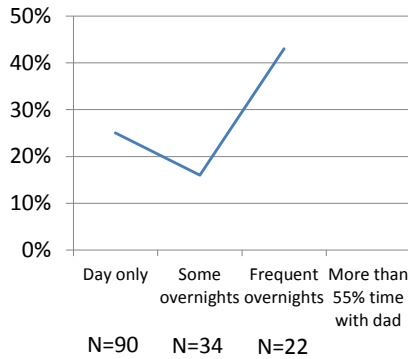


The father-custody infants (> 55% overnights with father) are LESS insecure with their mothers, not MORE

## Results Comparison

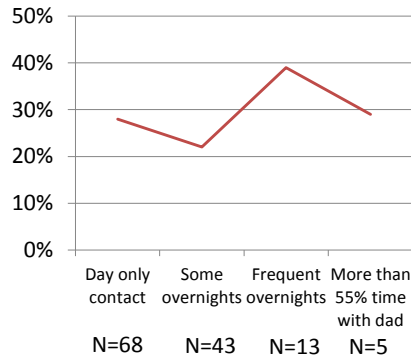
### Tornello et al. (2013)

Attachment Insecurity to Mom-  
Age 1



### Our Results

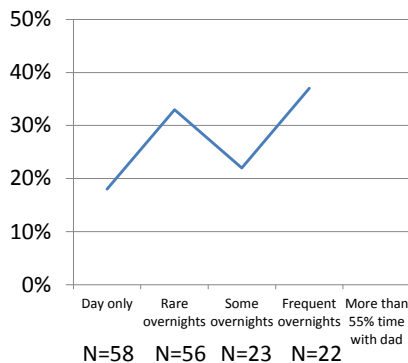
Attachment Insecurity to Mom-  
Age 1



## Results Comparison Cont.

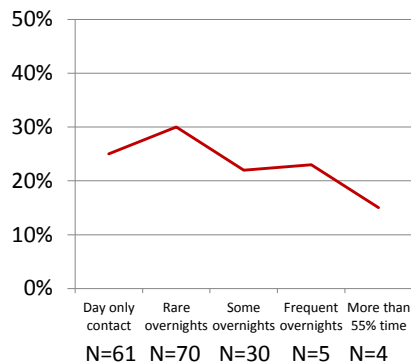
### Tornello et al. (2013)

Attachment Insecurity to Mom-  
Age 3



### Our Results

Attachment Insecurity to Mom-  
Age 3



Dividing the mothers into 3 or 4 groups is a good way to DISPLAY the results, but it is not a good way to ANALYZE the data.

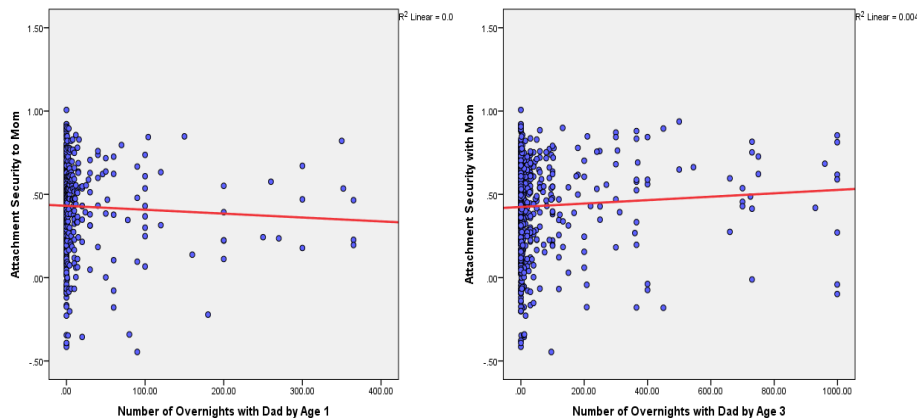
The best way to analyze data on overnights and parent-child relationships is to CORRELATE the scores before dividing them into arbitrary groups.

This focuses on all the data, not just some arbitrary comparisons between some arbitrary groups.

We did that next.

## Correlations

- We correlated the number of overnights children were with dads and their attachment security to moms.
- For age 1- No correlation ( $r = .04$ ,  $p = .41$ )
- For age 3- No correlation ( $r = .06$ ,  $p = .12$ )





## Conclusions

If overnights led to mother-infant attachment insecurity, then  
(a) there should be linear associations at ages 1 and 3, and  
(b) there should be behavioral consequences at ages 3 and 5.

On re-analysis, there was no evidence of linear associations at ages 1 or 3 between overnights and mother-child attachment insecurity.

There were no negative effects of overnights on behavioral adjustment at ages 3 or 5. There was one positive effect.

The unusual attachment measure produced an unusually low number of insecure attachments for a high-risk sample of mothers. Even the frequent groups had only 40% insecure, which is close to the rate in middle-class, non-risk samples. The mothers may have been over-rating their children's security with them. A better measure of attachment might detect negative effects of overnights.

### **Workshop 70.**

#### **New Findings on Infant Overnights and Relocation**

Presented at the annual meetings of Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, Toronto, Canada, May 31, 2014.

### Long-Term Correlates of Overnight Parenting Time for Infants

William Fabricius, Ph. D.  
Arizona State University

After decades of accepted wisdom in the divorce literature that “the quantity of parenting time is less important than the quality of the time,” there is currently an urgent argument being made that quantity IS important.

The argument is that quantity is detrimental ...  
To the child and to the mother-child relationship ....  
If it occurs in the form of overnight stays with the father ...  
When the child is under 3 years of age.

The previous studies have only looked for short-term effects of infant overnights, but our real concern ought to be with any long-term effects.

Behaviors in infancy, even if they look like attachment-related, anxious behaviors might only be temporary.

Also our real concern ought to be with long-term effects on the child’s relationship with both parents, because infants develop attachments to both.

## How to study long-term effects without waiting 20 years

My sample:

1. College students whose parents divorced when they were 0 to 3 yrs old
2. Their parents

Students filled out a survey assessing:

1. Their current relationship with each parent
  - a. *Parental Bonding Inventory* (how sensitive, caring, responsive, and involved the parent was during the first 16 years)
  - b. *Mattering Scale* (how important child feels he is to the parent)
  - c. *Parental Blame* (child blames parent for troubles in the family)
  - d. *Overall Quality of the Relationship* (how well they get along)
2. Their current stress-related physical health
  - a. *Somatic Symptoms Scale* (14 symptoms (e.g., headaches, dizziness, chest or back pains) rated as "never" (1), "rarely" (2), "sometimes" (3), and "often" (4).
  - b. *Global Health* ("Would you say that in general your health is \_\_\_?" rated as "poor" (1), "fair" (2), "good" (3), "very good" (4), and "excellent" (5).

Parents were emailed a survey assessing

- a. *Parenting Time* (number of days and overnights in each of first 3 years; at ages 5 to 10; at ages 10-15)
- b. *Parent Conflict* during 4 time periods (before, during, 1 - 2 years after divorce, 3 - 5 years after)
- c. *Parent's Education*

Final Sample N = 72 had to meet 3 criteria:

- a. Parents Separated Before Age 3;
- b. Primary Maternal or Equal Parenting Time (the child had spent at most an equal number of overnights at the father's home at age 2 to 3);
- c. Father Present (the father either had some parenting time before the child was 15 (N = 66), or had lived with the mother during the child's first two years (N = 4), or had submitted a survey (N = 2).

Parents agreed with each other about  
Number of Days and Overnights at Dad's.

Below are correlations between mothers' and fathers' reports (all  $ps < .001$ )

	AGES		
	0 to1	1 to 2	2 to 3
Days at Dad's	.93	.95	.85
Overnights at Dad's	.87	.90	.85
	N = 15	N = 16	N = 31

Parents agreed with each other about  
Frequency of Parent Conflict.

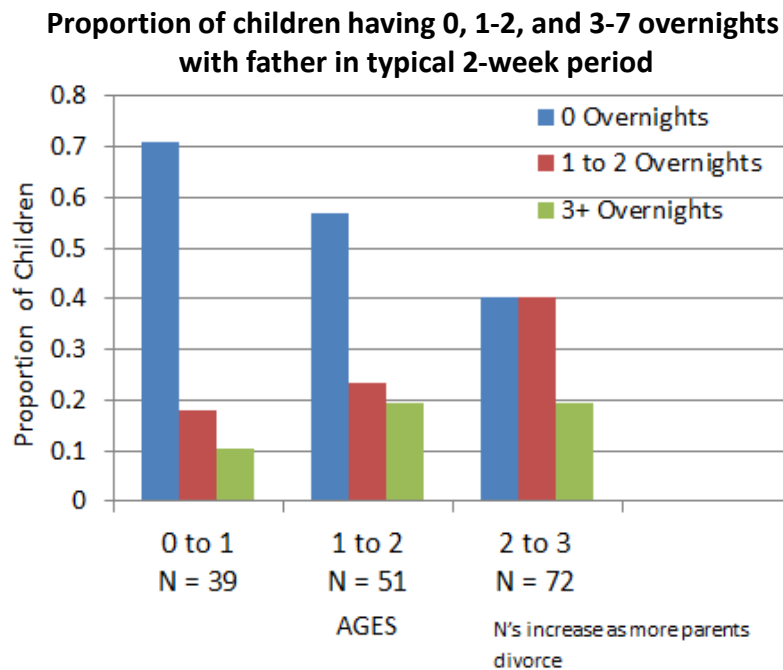
Below are correlations between mothers' and fathers' reports

	Before	During	Years 1-2	Years 3-5
	.43	.51	.51	.73
	$p < .05$	$p < .01$	$p < .01$	$p < .001$
	N = 31	N = 31	N = 32	N = 32

We used Mothers' reports of Parenting Time and Parent Conflict

How common was overnight parenting  
time with father?

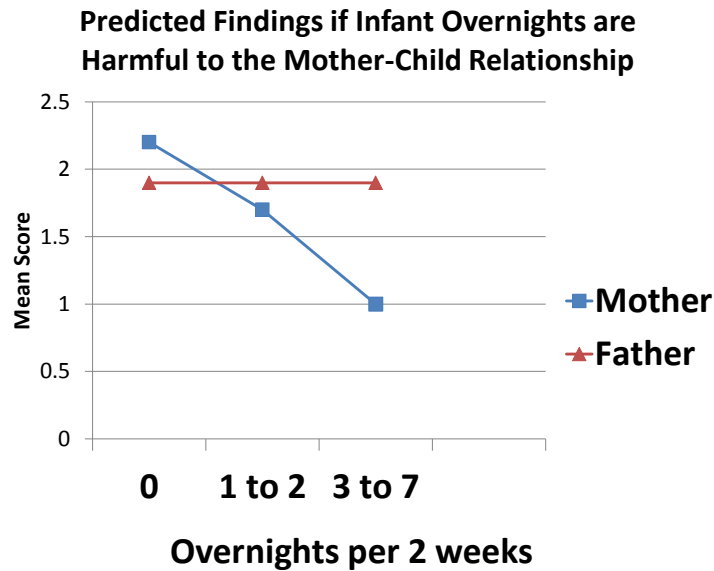
By age 2 to 3 years 60% of the Final  
Sample of N = 72 had some overnights.  
The following Figure shows how many  
overnights:



What are the predicted findings if in fact infant overnights are harmful to the mother-child relationship?

As overnights with the father increase, there should be a linear decrease in the quality of the relationship for mothers, but not for fathers.

It's useful to visualize the pattern of findings that we would see in that case, as the next slide shows...



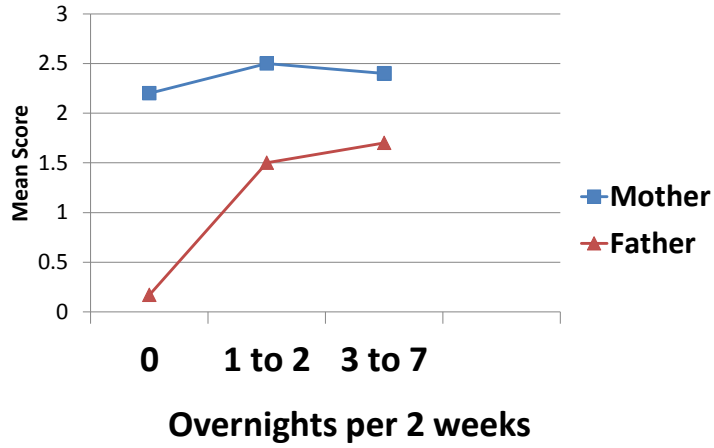
However, that is not the pattern we found.

The following results showed that there was no long-term harm to the mother-child relationship associated with greater numbers of overnights with the father.

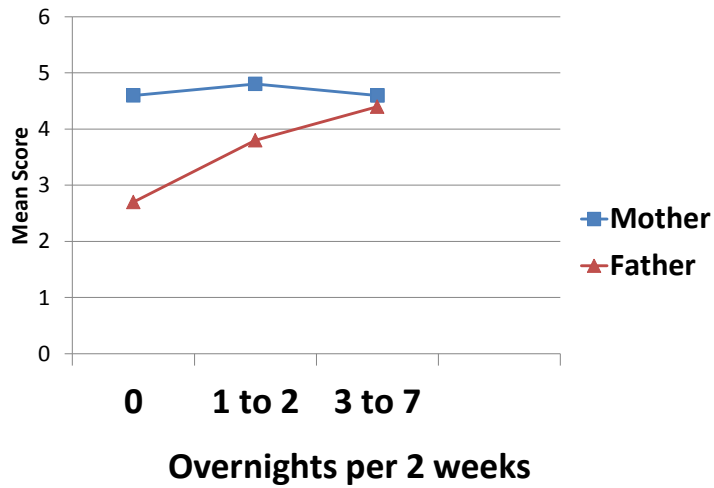
In contrast, there was long-term harm to the father-child relationship associated with fewer numbers of overnights with the father.

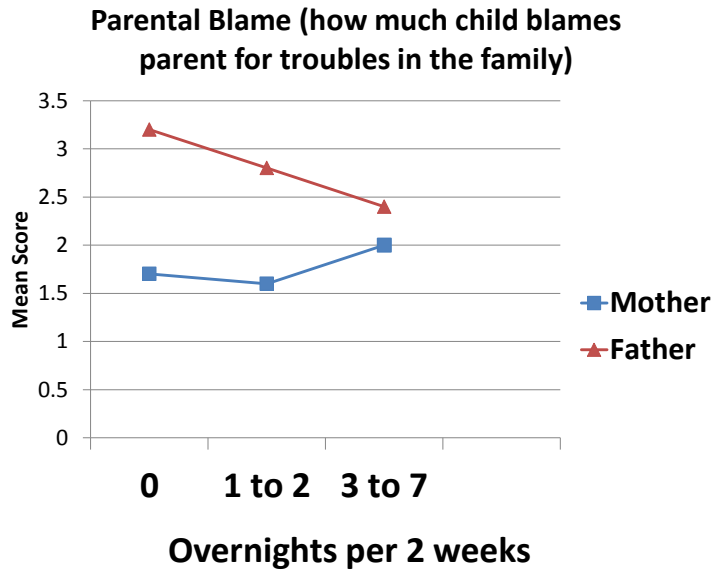
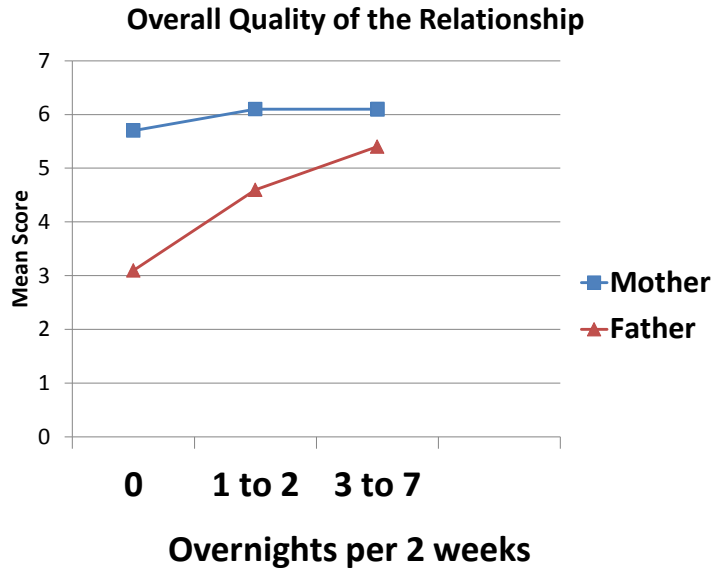
These findings are all statistically significant, controlling for parent conflict, mother's education, and daytime-only parenting time.

**Parental Bonding Inventory (how sensitive, caring, responsive, and involved the parent was during the first 16 years)**



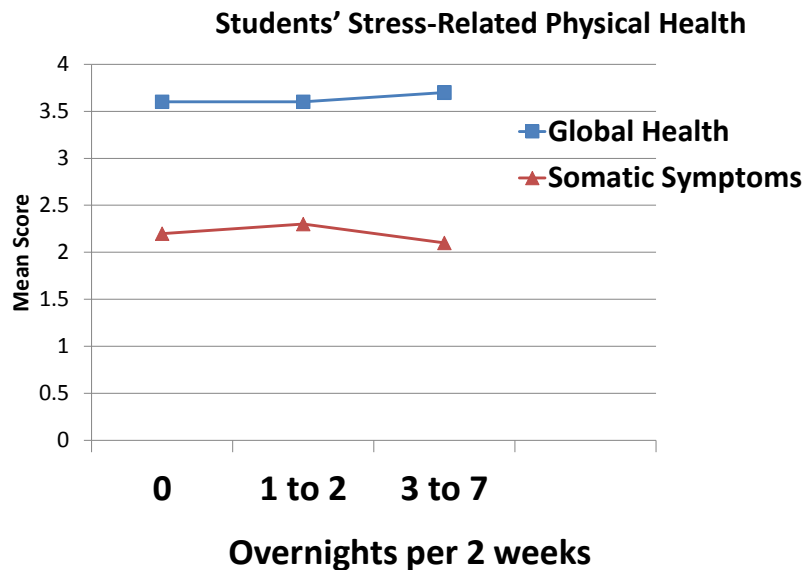
**Mattering Scale (how important child feels he is to the parent)**







Finally, there were no indications of any long-term stress-related health concerns, thus, parents can be reassured when choosing overnight parenting time for their infants.



It thus appears that the infant behaviors that have caused the concern about overnight parenting time are either temporary, or they do not signal the long-term effects that were feared.

The infant wheezing, and early communication bids to the mother, and self-reports by the mother of her infants' attachment behaviors toward her are apparently not deserving of too much concern.

Of much greater concern is the substantial detriment to the long-term father-child relationship associated with lack of overnight parenting time with fathers, and the difference only a few nights seem to make.

These long-term findings can shed some light on the current debates, as nicely summarized by Peter Salem and Arnie Shienvold:

**CONVENORS COMMENTARY**  
**CLOSING THE GAP WITHOUT GETTING TO YES: STAYING WITH THE SHARED PARENTING**  
**DEBATE**

Peter Salem and Arnold T. Shienvold  
FAMILY COURT REVIEW, Vol. 52 No. 2, April 2014 145–151

“For example, one think tank participant discussed the merits of a step-up parenting plan for a young child and expressed concern about introducing instability with a parenting schedule that includes substantial time in two homes. A colleague offered another perspective: that instability would be introduced not by a child living in two homes, but rather by eliminating consistent contact with one of the parents....

“One person placed a greater value on the stability that spending most of the time in one home would provide a young child and, by default, was willing to risk some damage to the relationship with the nonresidential parent. The other person placed a premium on the stability that a consistent relationship with the nonresidential parent offered and was willing to risk the potential impact of overnights and time away from the parent who was the primary caretaker.”

Instead, the current findings suggest it is not a trade-off. We see long-term risks to the father-child relationship in the absence of overnight parenting time during the first 3 years, but only benefits to both parents with the presence of overnight parenting time.

Finally, how could these detriments to the father-child relationship be sustained for so many years?

All modern developmental psychology models posit that early parent-child interaction can easily take a turn for the better or worse, and set in motion a self-sustaining system that becomes harder to correct as time goes on.