



National Fatherhood Initiative
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NEW POLL REVEALS MOTHERS' POLARIZED VIEWS OF TODAY'S DADS

NATIONAL FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE'S *MAMA SAYS*, FIRST-EVER NATIONAL SURVEY ON MOM'S ATTITUDES ON FATHERHOOD, SHOWS IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE AND WORK-FAMILY BALANCE IN SHAPING MOMS' VIEWS OF MODERN FATHERHOOD

VAST MAJORITY OF MOTHERS AGREE THERE IS A FATHER ABSENCE CRISIS IN AMERICA, BUT MAJORITY FEEL DADS ARE REPLACEABLE

MARRIED MOTHERS GIVE DADS HIGHEST MARKS FOR DADS' PARENTING; MOTHERS NOT LIVING WITH DADS LARGELY DISSATISFIED WITH FATHERS

(Gaithersburg, MD) – Today, National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) released *Mama Says: A National Survey of Moms' Attitudes on Fathering*, the first-ever national survey taking an in-depth look at how today's mothers view fathers and fatherhood.

The survey's most revealing findings deal with the enormous gulf between the assessments of fathers by mothers who are married to or live with their children's dads and those who do not. More than 8 in 10 mothers married to or living with the father of their children were satisfied with his performance as a dad, but only 2 of 10 mothers not living with the father were satisfied.

Furthermore, only 1 of 3 moms not living with dad reported a "close and warm" relationship between their child and the father, while nearly 9 in 10 married mothers classified the relationship as close and warm. A majority of mothers – 2 of 3 – agreed that fathers perform best if they are married to the mothers of their children.

"This survey provides additional, powerful evidence that family structure matters. The enormous differences in responses between the moms who are married to or live with dads and those who do not are of a magnitude I have rarely seen in my years of analyzing data from social surveys. The mothers from the *Mama Says* survey have shown us that when fathers, mothers, and their children live together, fatherhood is optimized," said Norval Glenn, PhD, one of the report's co-authors.

Conducted online by the University of Texas Office of Survey Research, *Mama Says* surveyed 1,533 mothers over the age of 18 with at least one child in the home under the age of 18. They were asked a series of over 80 questions dealing with a range of topics, such as their general opinions about fatherhood, views on work-family balance, and obstacles to good fathering. The report was co-authored by Dr. Glenn and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, PhD.

While the survey revealed nearly identical views on fatherhood by both married and cohabiting mothers, other research has shown the relative instability of cohabiting relationships compared to marriages –

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married couples are at least three times more likely than cohabiting couples to be together two years after the birth of a child – further reinforcing the central role marriage plays in helping fathers be the best dads they can be for the long term.

Mama Says also revealed the central role that work-family balance plays in shaping modern fatherhood. The mothers reported that “work responsibilities” are fathers’ biggest obstacles to good fathering. Additionally, whether or not a father effectively balanced work and family – which only about half of the mothers said he did – was the second strongest predictor of whether or not she was satisfied with his performance as a dad. Furthermore, 2 of 3 moms reported that they could better balance work and family if their child’s father offered more support at home.

“*Mama Says* adds support to the growing body of evidence demonstrating that work-family balance is a critical issue for the success or failure of co-parenting in today’s busy world. The moms surveyed want to have more help from the fathers of their children - a view that strongly argues for creating effective work-family balance options for both moms and dads,” said Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, co-author of *Mama Says*.

The most troublesome finding for those who view fathers as playing unique roles in their children lives is the majority opinion among mothers that fathers are replaceable by moms or other men. More than half of the moms agree that fathers are replaceable by moms, and 2 of 3 moms agree that fathers are replaceable by other men. However, in a national survey of dads’ attitudes on fatherhood released by NFI in 2006, similar but slightly lower proportions of fathers agreed with these statements.

Therefore, it seems to be a majority view in the American public that fathers are replaceable despite near universal agreement that there is a father absence crisis in the United States – 93 percent and 91 percent of moms and dads, respectively, agree that such a crisis exists. The mothers who feel fathers are replaceable but feel there is a father absence crisis may believe that while possible, it is unlikely that an adequate substitute for a missing father can be found.

Other significant findings from *Mama Says* include:

- Mothers not living with fathers reported “lack of knowledge about how to be a good father” and “lack of resources specifically designed for fathers” as the first and third most significant obstacles to good fathering.
- When asked about potential sources of help for fathers in the community, mothers were most likely to choose religious organizations as the most important source of help, followed by schools and community organizations.
- Nearly 9 in 10 mothers feel they are a positive influence on the ability of their child’s father to be a good father.
- While white mothers reported significantly more satisfaction with fathers than did black mothers, the entire difference can be explained by the fact that black mothers are significantly less likely to be married to or live with the fathers of their children.
- Very religious mothers reported significantly more satisfaction with fathers’ performances than all other mothers, even when controlling for the father’s family situation.
- More than half of mothers agreed that the media tends to portray fathers in a negative light.

The findings of the *Mama Says* survey, when taken as a whole, reveal sharp differences in how today’s moms view dads, and these differences can mostly be explained by whether or not mom is married to or lives with dad, whether or not dad effectively balances work and family, and whether or not he has the skills he needs to be a good dad.

“The *Mama Says* survey validates the approach National Fatherhood Initiative has taken for the 15 years since its founding to strengthen the institution of fatherhood,” said Roland C. Warren, president of NFI. “The moms have shown us the importance of continuing to uphold marriage as the ideal environment in which the best fathering can take place. And they have also shown us the importance of making sure that all fathers, married or not, have the skills they need to be involved, responsible, and committed fathers to their children.”

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The entire *Mama Says* survey report is available for download at www.fatherhood.org/mamasays.

National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), founded in 1994, works in every sector and at every level of society to engage fathers in the lives of their children. NFI is one of the leading producers of research on the causes and consequences of father absence, public opinion on family issues, and trends in family structure and marriage. NFI's national public service advertising campaign promoting father involvement generated television, radio, print, Internet, and outdoor advertising valued at over \$500 million. Through its resource center, FatherSOURCE™, NFI offers a wide range of innovative resources to assist fathers and organizations interested in reaching and supporting fathers.

Norval Glenn is Ashbel Smith Professor and Stiles Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. His research over the past three decades has been mainly family-related and has focused on such specific topics as the trend in marital success in the United States, the social and demographic correlates of marital success, marital matching and mate selection, and the trend in the views of family scholars about recent family change. Glenn holds a BA in Social Science from New Mexico State University and a PhD in Sociology from the University of Texas at Austin.

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead has written widely on family, fatherhood, and child well-being for such publications as the Atlantic Monthly, New York Times, Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post. She is the author of *The Divorce Culture: Rethinking Our Commitments to Marriage and the Family* (1997) and *Why There Are No Good Men Left: The Romantic Plight of the New Single Woman* (2003). Her 1993 Atlantic Monthly article, "Dan Quayle Was Right" won an EMMA award from the National Women's Political Caucus. A co-director of Rutgers' National Marriage Project for nine years, Whitehead is the newly named founding director of the John Templeton Center for Thrift and Generosity at the Institute for American Values. She holds a MA and PhD from the University of Chicago in American history.