

Ellis, B.J., Bates, J.E., Dodge, K.A., Fergusson, D.M., Horwood, J.L., Pettit, G.S., & Woodward, L. (2003). Does father absence place daughters at special risk for early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy? *Child Development*, 74, 801-821.

The impact of father absence on early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy was investigated in longitudinal studies in the United States (N=242) and New Zealand (N=520), in which community samples of girls were followed prospectively from early in life (5 years) to approximately age 18. Greater exposure to father absence was strongly associated with elevated risk for early sexual activity and adolescent pregnancy. This elevated risk was either not explained (in the U.S. study) or only partly explained (in the New Zealand study) by familial, ecological, and personal disadvantages associated with father absence. After controlling for covariates, there was stronger and more consistent evidence of effects of father absence on early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy than on other behavioral or mental health problems or academic achievement. Effects of father absence are discussed in terms of life-course adversity, evolutionary psychology, social learning, and behavior genetic models.