Partner's Involvement Helps Adolescent Mothers

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SAN FRANCISCO — A study of adolescent mothers revealed that frequent contact with the father of their baby was associated with several beneficial effects, including improved maternal mental health and less endorsement of physical punishment for the child, Dr. Lee Savio Beers reported in a poster at the annual meeting of the Pediatric Academic Societies.

The study involved 138 mothers under the age of 20 years whose children were younger than 12 months old, said Dr. Beers of Children's National Medical Center, Washington, D.C., who conducted the study with Amy Lewin, Psy.D., and several other colleagues.

The women came from an urban population, and 94% were African American. They were questioned about the father's involvement in parenting the child, and they completed several standardized instruments intended to measure, for example, their mental health and level of self-esteem.

Only the 130 mothers who were 16-19 years old were asked about the age of the father. Eighteen percent of these fathers were age 17 or younger, 30% were 18-21, and the rest were 22 years old or older. Legal concerns prevented the investigators from asking younger mothers about the age of their child's father.

Overall, 52% of the fathers had completed high school, 30% were currently in school, 43% were employed, and 29% had children with other mothers.

The mothers reported a large amount of paternal contact with the babies; 62% of the mothers reported contact several times a week or more, 25% reported contact 1-8 times per month, and 14% reported rare contact or none at all, Dr. Beers said.

Sixty-one percent of mothers reported that they were satisfied with the level of paternal contact, 27% said that the contact was not frequent enough, and 12% said that their contact with the father was too frequent.

Although 75% of the mothers wanted the fathers to have frequent contact with the baby during the next 12 months, they had lower expectations for caregiving. Only 63% expected the fathers to feed the baby, 43% expected the fathers to change the diapers, and 35% expected the fathers to attend the baby's medical appointments, she said.

Mothers with daily contact with the father had less depression and higher self-esteem.

DR. BEERS

Fifty-two percent of the mothers reported being in a romantic relationship with the father of their baby; 85% said that these men treated them with respect, and 24% reported having arguments with the men often or very often, Dr. Beers reported at the meeting, sponsored by the American Pediatric Society, the Society for Pediatric Research, the Ambulatory Pediatric Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Daily contact with the father clearly had beneficial effects. Compared with mothers who had less-than-daily contact with the father, mothers with daily contact had significantly lower levels of depression, had significantly higher levels of self-esteem, and were significantly less likely to say that they endorsed physical punishment of their child.

The investigators found several outcomes among mothers satisfied with the level of paternal contact that were not considered positive in adolescent parents: these mothers were significantly less likely to live with their own mothers or grandmothers, significantly more likely to have more than one child, and were significantly less likely to be in school. ■

References: 1. Rush AJ, Sackeim HA, Marangell LB, et al. Effects of 12 months of vagus nerve stimulation in treatment-resistant depression: a naturalistic study. *Biol Psychiatry.* 2005;58:355-363. **2.** George MS, Nahas Z, Bohning DE, et al. Vagus nerve stimulation: a new form of therapeutic brain stimulation. *CNS Spectr.* 2000;5(11):43-52. **3.** *Depression Physician's Manual. VNS Therapy™ Pulse Model 102 Generator and VNS Therapy™ Pulse Duo Model 102R Generator.* Houston, Tex: Cyberonics, Inc.; December 2005. **4.** George MS, Rush AJ, Marangell LB, et al. A one-year comparison of vagus nerve stimulation with treatment as usual for treatment-resistant depression. *Biol Psychiatry*. 2005;58:364-373.

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