

New Unmarried Dads and Father Involvement: Evidence from the Building Strong Families Evaluation

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MATHEMATICA
Policy Research

Acknowledgements

- **Sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families Department of Health of Human Services.**

Goal of Our Analysis

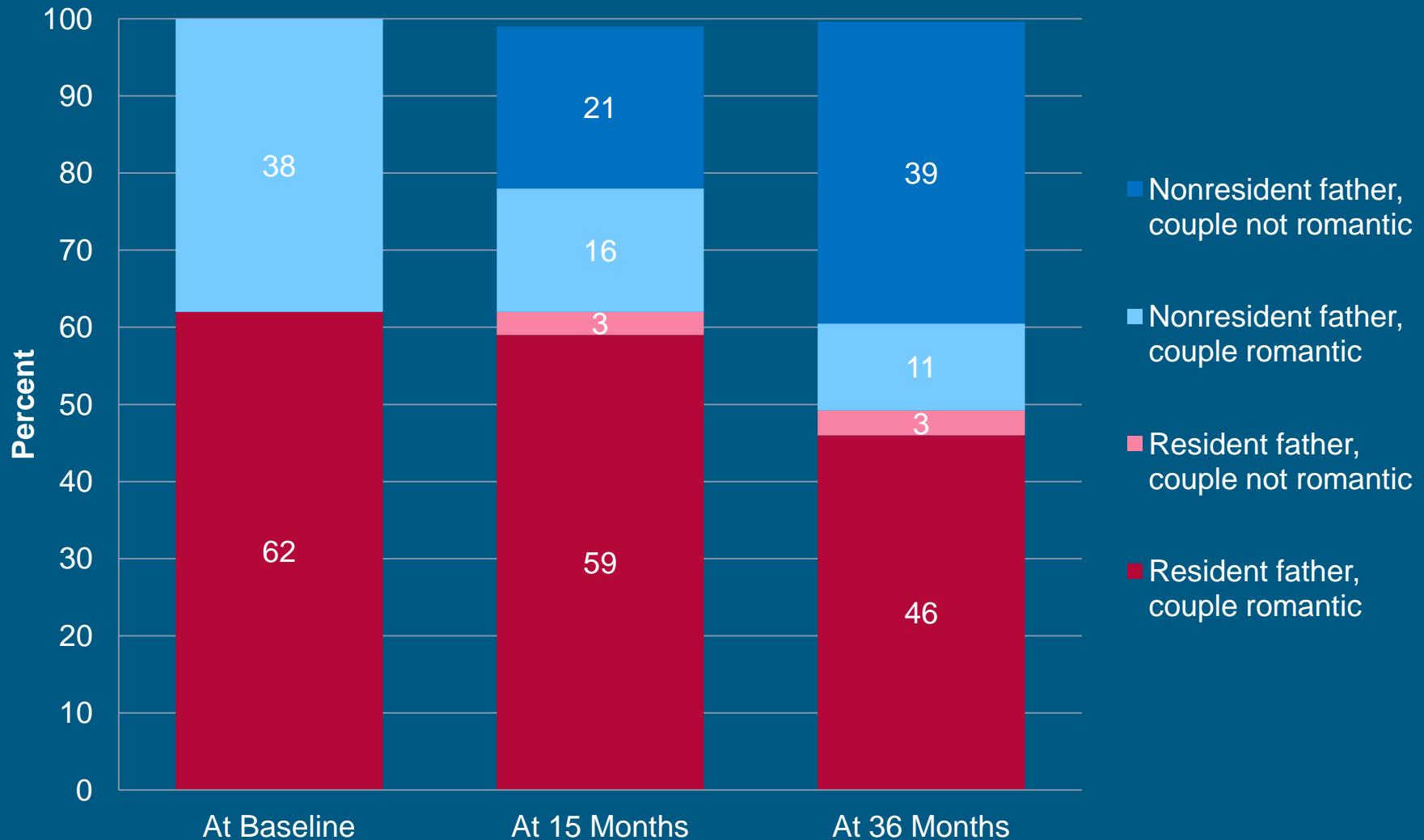
- **Data from BSF evaluation**
- **BSF: voluntary relationship skills program for unmarried parents**
- **A key goal of these programs: sustained father involvement**
- **Want to identify BSF families most at risk of poor father involvement outcomes**
- **Provide guidance for future programs**



BSF Data and Sample

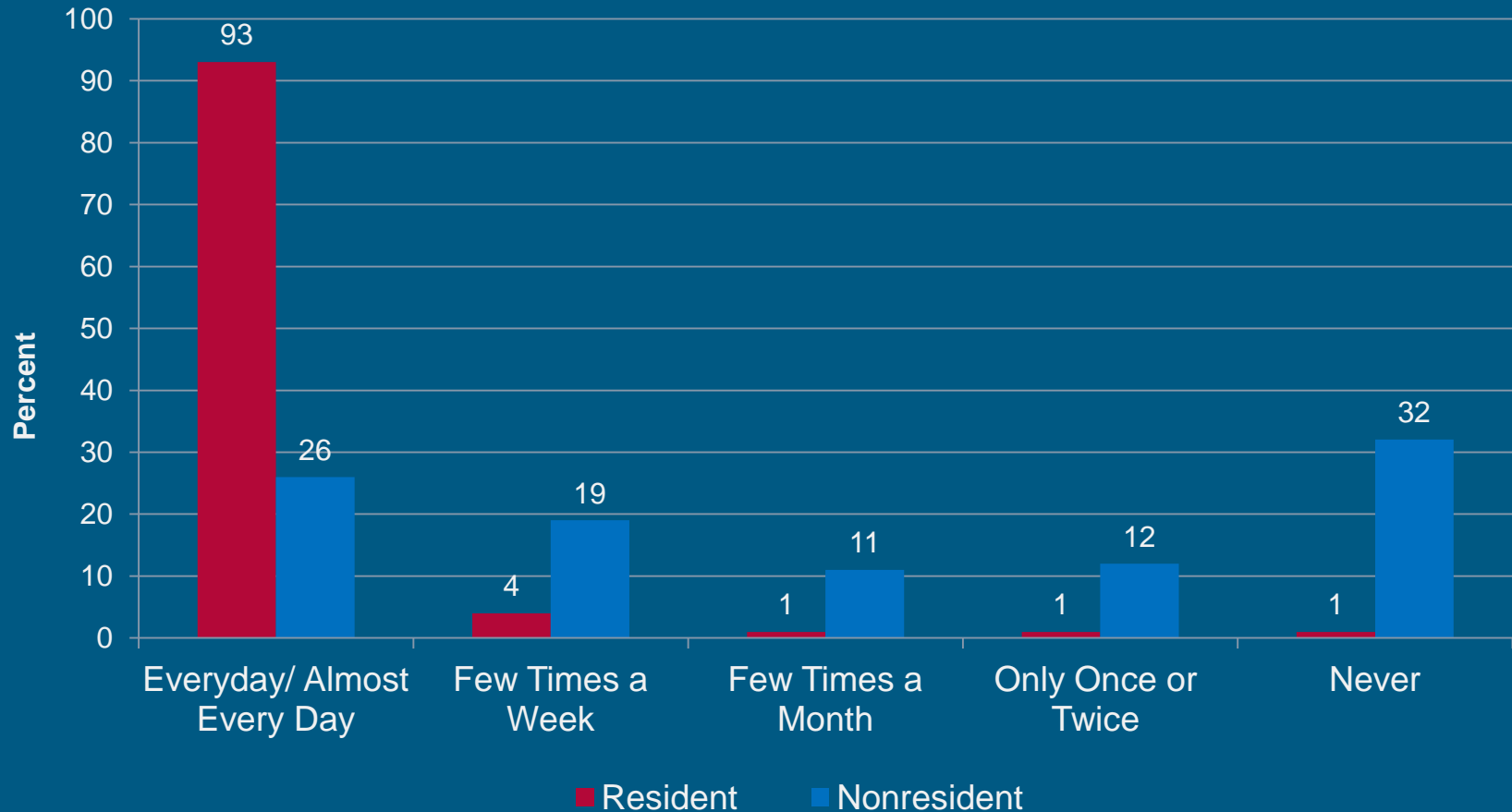
- **To be eligible, couples had to be:**
 - Romantically involved
 - Expecting or just had baby
 - Unmarried at time baby conceived
- **More than 5,000 couples applied across eight research sites**
- **BSF data collected from 2005-2011**
- **Analysis uses data from 36-mo follow-up**
 - When children were three years old

Half of BSF Fathers Nonresident When Their Children Are Three



Nonresident Fathers Varied Substantially in the Level of Contact with Their Children

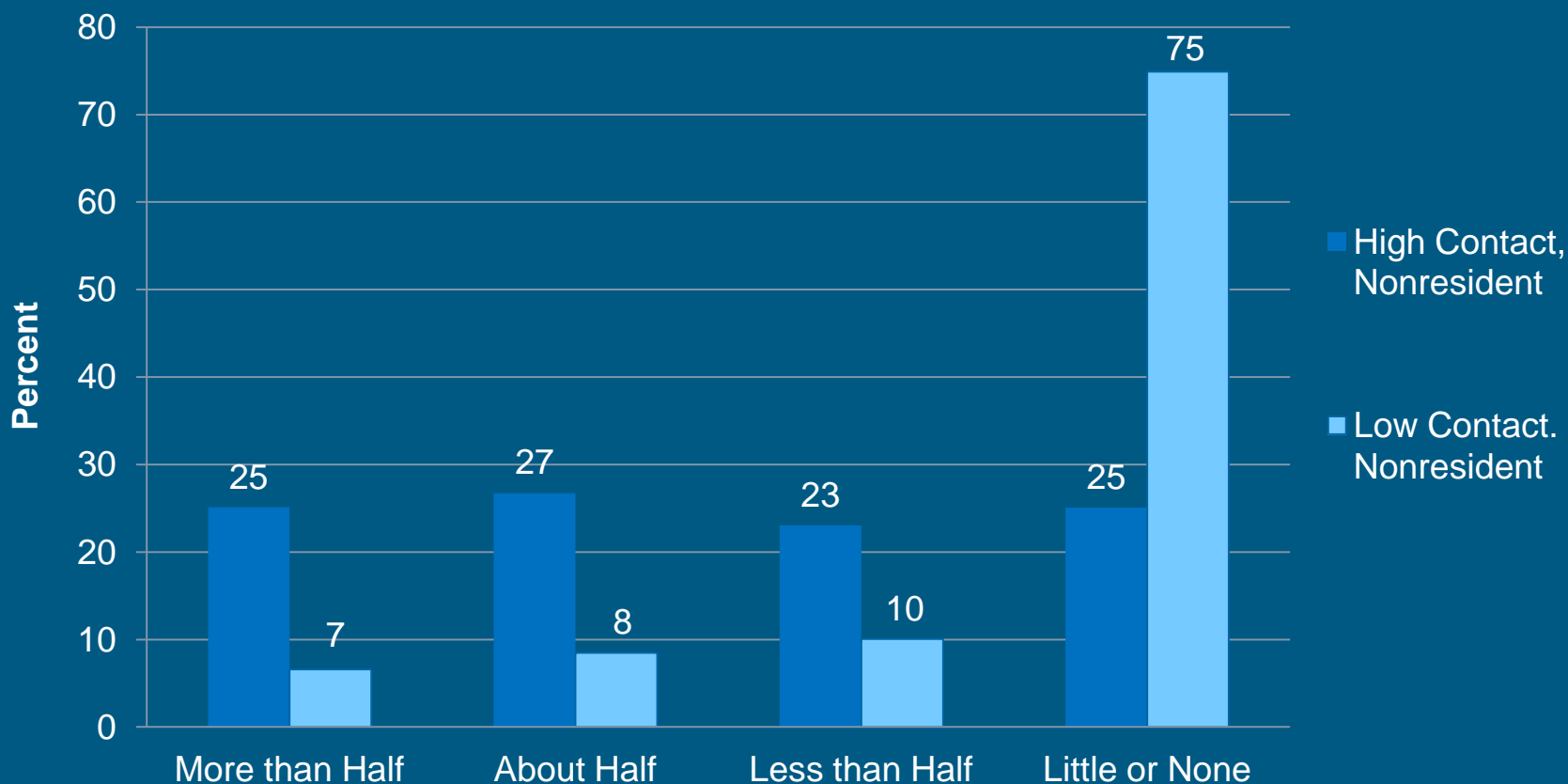
Frequency Father Sees Child



Source: Mothers' reports.

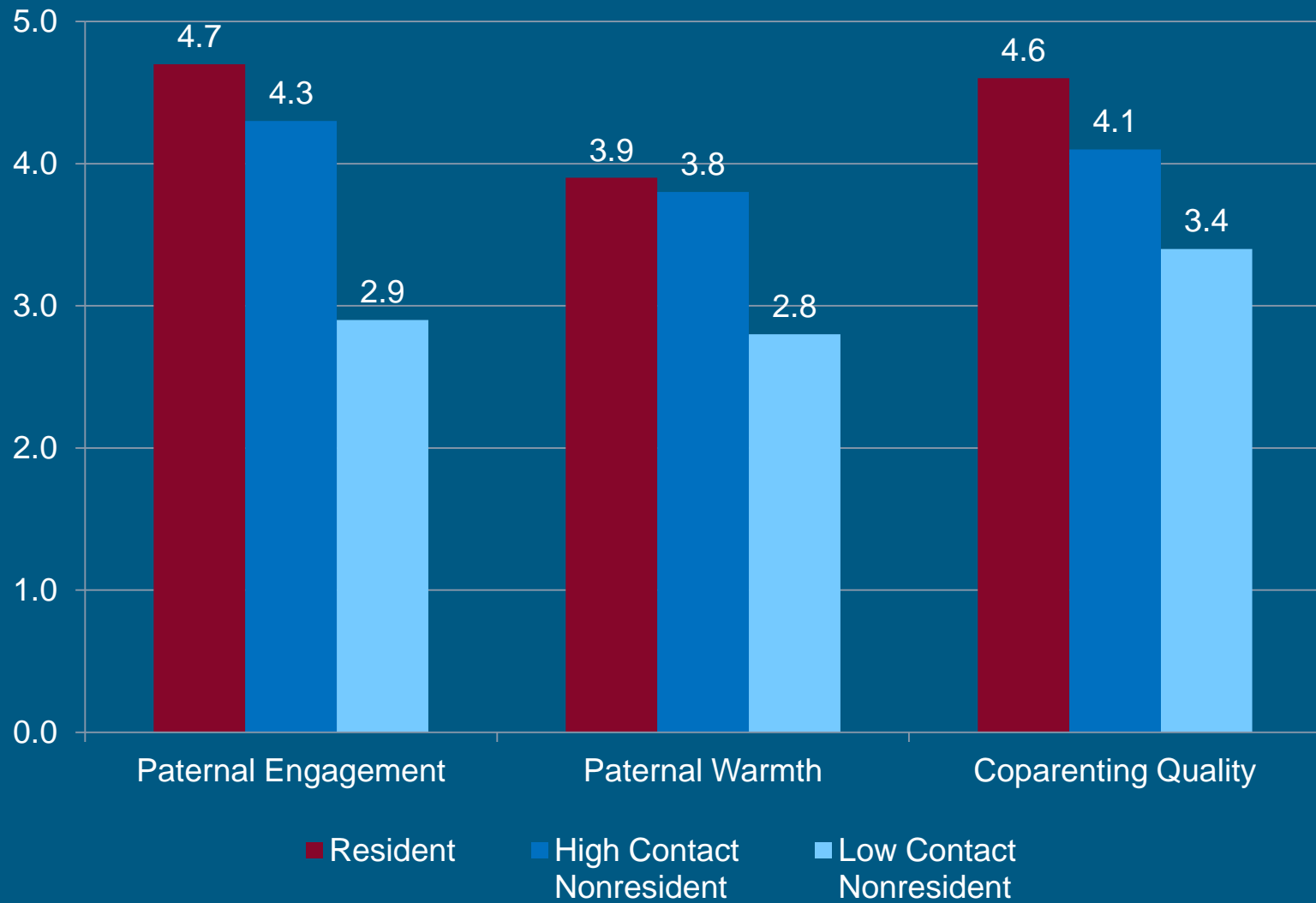
Strong Link Between Level of Child Contact and Financial Support

Proportion of Cost of Raising Child Father Covers



Source: Mothers' reports.

Low Contact Nonresident Fathers Report Lower Quality Relationships





Identifying Risk Factors for Being a Low Contact Nonresident Father

- **Examine factors linked to being low contact nonresident father**
- **Regression model controls for baseline characteristics**
- **Convert results to predicted probabilities**

Who's at Risk of Being a Low Contact Nonresident Father?

- **Initial relationship status and quality matters:**
 - Nonresident at BSF application
 - Lower quality relationship with mother initially
 - Mother reports pregnancy unwanted
 - Dad's multi-partner fertility
- **Dad's psychological distress a particularly strong predictor**
 - Unemployment, past jail time also increases risk
- **Dad's family background matters**
 - Growing up without own father increases risk
 - Being an immigrant reduces it



Closing Thoughts

- **Identified group of BSF families with poor father involvement outcomes**
- **These low contact nonresident fathers:**
 - Provide little financial support for their children
 - Have poor relations with children and coparents
- **Programs may want to target couples with multiple risk factors for additional support**
- **Father's psychological distress a particularly strong predictor**
 - May need to be a greater focus in future programs