

Challenges in involving non-resident fathers in research on children

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- PIs/researchers with cohort studies internationally
- NGOs and lone parents
- GUI team
- Participants and their families

Background to the scoping study

- Internationally, research has been criticised for not taking adequate account of fathers' involvement, especially those not living ~~(full)~~ with their children (Goldman and Burgess, 2018)
- Variation across birth/child cohort studies in including resident fathers; even greater variation in including ~~non~~ resident fathers
- GUI has included all fathers (resident and ~~non~~ resident) in almost all waves of data collection for Cohorts '98 and '08; data not archived until recently
- Aim is to scope out potential for including ~~non~~ resident fathers in future waves of data collection for the new birth cohort

Methodology

- Review of literature on nonresident fathers
- Review of 25 cohort studies, including interviews with Principal Investigators and other team members
- New analysis of GUI data on nonresident fathers
- Interviews with separated parents and NGOs working with lone parents

International cohort studies

- Just over half of the studies examined included ~~resident~~ fathers in at least one wave
- Perceived value of including their perspectives

There are certainly some things about maybe the father's relationship with the child or the father's relationship with the mother, the father's perceptions of their role in the family, that we can't get very accurately from asking the mother or asking the young person. We're kind of getting stuff by proxy which might misrepresent some of the relationships and situations that we've got. (GUS)

To fully understand children's development, it was very important to have information from both parents since both have a vital role in their children's lives. (LSAC)

It's just a huge piece of what's going on in children's lives from the perspective of economic security and ... what's happening in the homes with regards to material hardship and poverty. (FFCW)

International cohort studies (2)

- Reasons for not including:
 - Focus on mother, especially antenatal influences and maternal health
 - Funding constraints coupled with challenges in securing their involvement
- Often collect proxy information from the mother (GUS: MCS), e.g. on level of contact with child, receipt of financial or other supports

International cohort studies - challenges

- How to contact? Usually mother as 'gatekeeper' (or) willingness to give contact information; selective nature of group

This is not an unbiased sample. This is not a random group of people who are not giving us contact information. ... It's the group who are invested and wanting to be involved still. (From Five to Twelve)

- ELCFS included Own Household Parents in their own right (from birth certificates) but challenges in contact

It was quite hard to find the OHPs. They were often not at the address listed on the birth registration. (ELCFS)

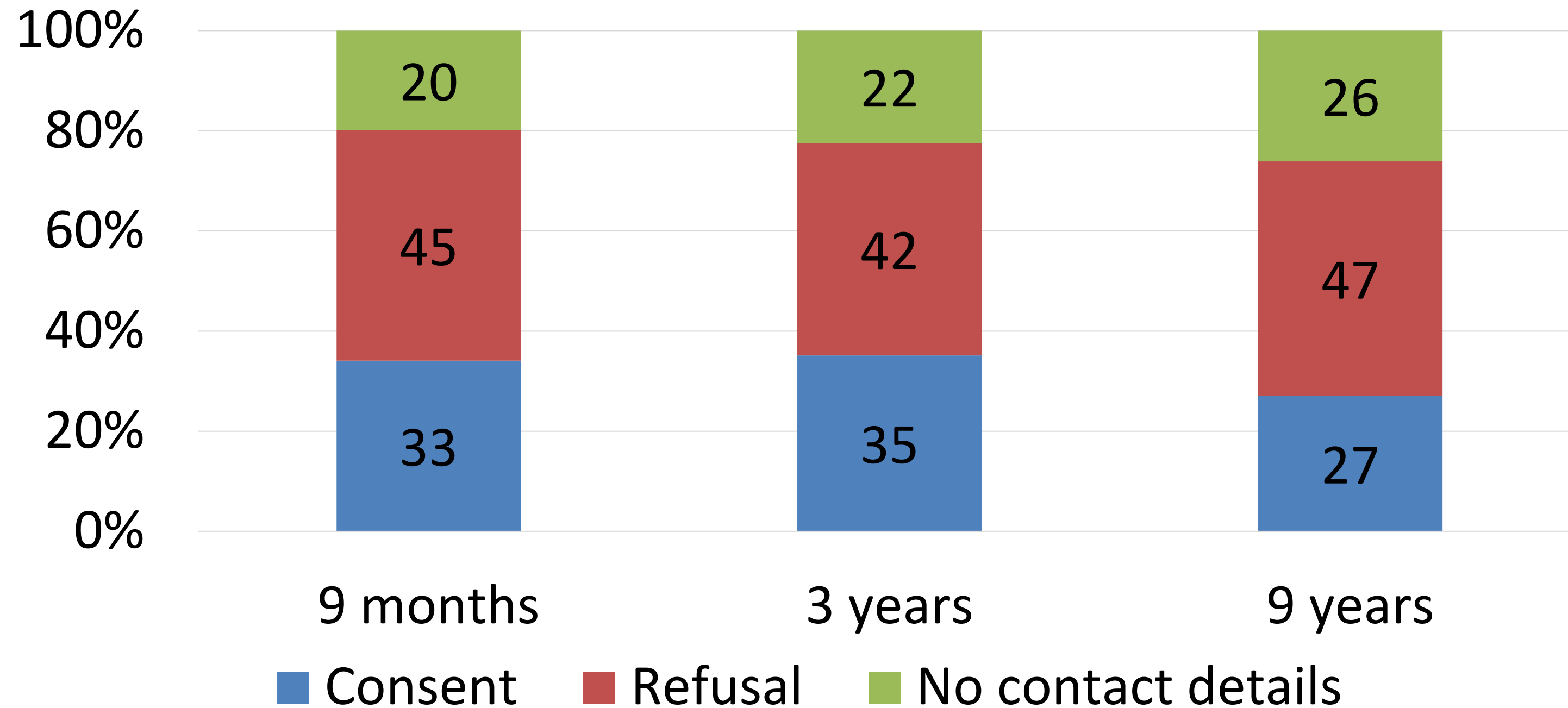
- Diversity of group of fathers

It was really challenging because this group is so diverse, some are really involved with their child and really want that recognised ... Whereas there are some that don't see themselves as part of the family at all. (ELCFS)

International cohort studies – good practice

- Three studies with higher response rates:
 - Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS-B) in the US
 - Growing Up in Australia – the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)
 - Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing (FFCW) Study in the US
- Common features:
 - Fathers included from beginning or early on
 - Messaging around importance of including fathers' perspectives
 - Proactive interviewer contact and follow-up

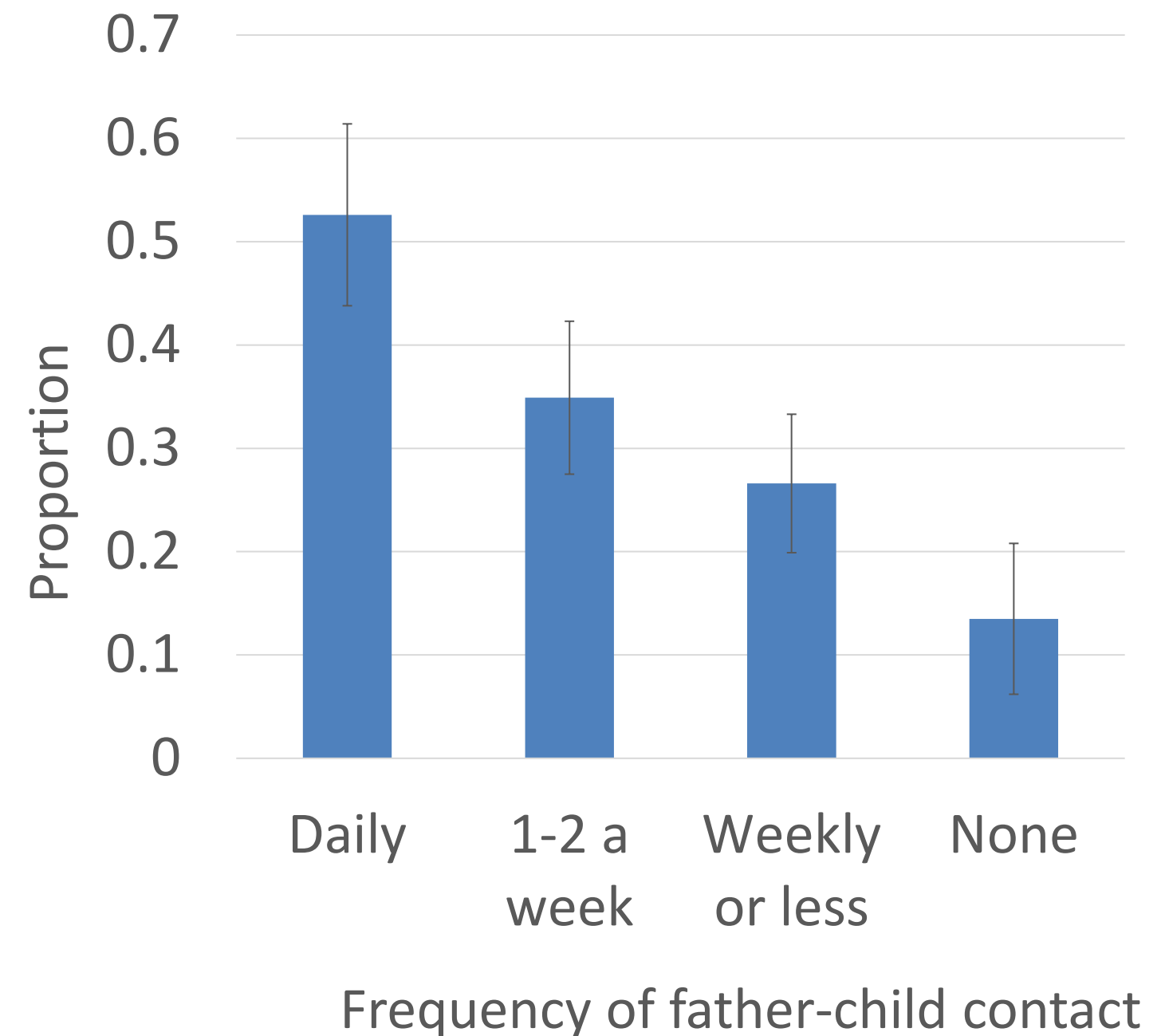
GUI – willingness of mothers to provide contact details



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Consent to contact:

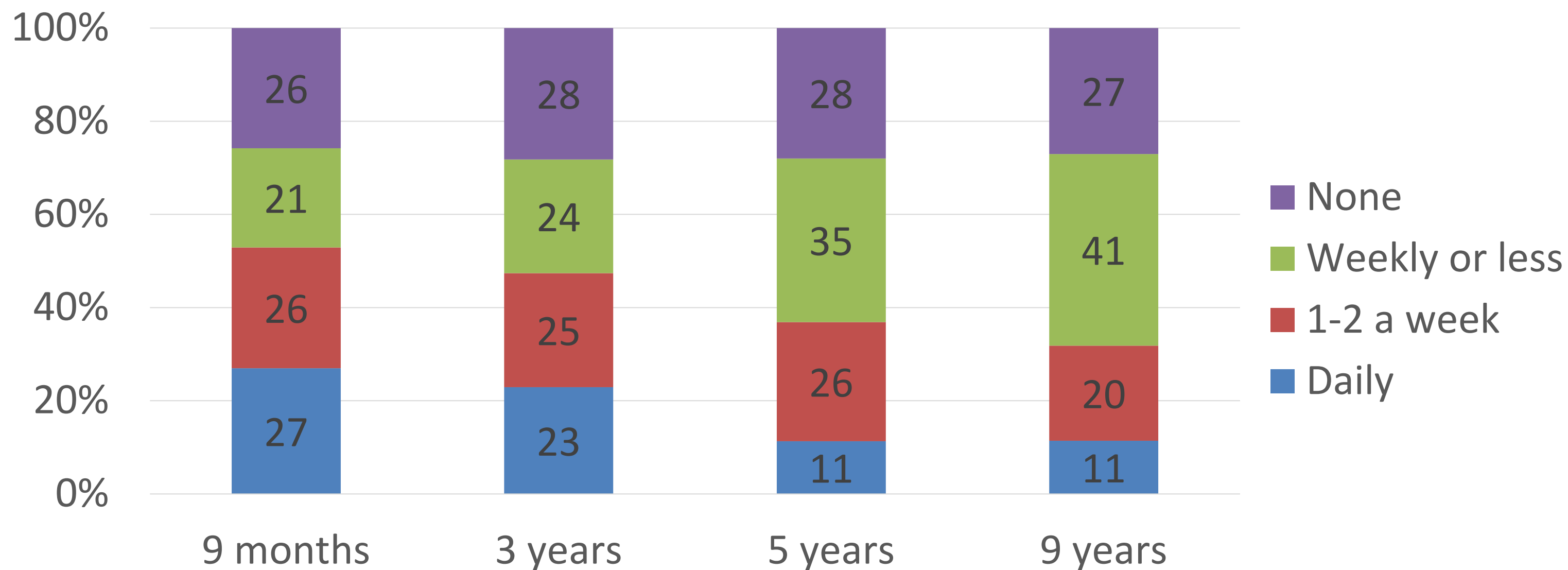
- More frequent father-child contact (reported by mother)
- Better quality relationship between mother and father
- Lower if never lived together or separated before birth



Survey responses among non-resident fathers

- Among those giving permission, 35% returned questionnaire when the child was 3 years old
- Response more common:
 - More frequent father-child contact
 - Better-quality parental relationships
 - More highly educated households
- At age 9, response rate of 14% similar patterns as at age 3

In-person contact between non-resident fathers and children (mother-reported)



Mothers report less communication about the child than fathers do

Perspectives of NGOs and lone parents

- Need to recognise role as co-parents; often overlooked in research and policy

I would say that if the father's a legal guardian, that both parents are invited at the very start to engage because a lot of men would say to us that nobody ever picks up the phone to them and asks them, they just move ahead with the mam saying yes to whatever. (NGO)

- Complexity of identifying 'primary' residence

You will have children who, their normal life is, you know, two houses, blended families, half siblings... And if you are naming that very openly, it just helps, I think, to normalise this, to open it up. (NGO)

- Challenges in contacting fathers via mothers

I would say it depends on the circumstances between the fathers and mothers – like... is the relationship amicable at this stage. It depends on the circumstances of their relationship. And maybe some mothers probably wouldn't want to give out information about fathers, because they'd have to get the father's permission first. (Father)

Conclusions

- Perceived value of including nonresident fathers in cohort studies
- 1/6 children do not live with their fathers fulltime – not including them gives a partial picture
- Around 1/2 of nonresident fathers have very frequent contact with their young children – key influence on their development
- Children themselves value the relationship: >1/2 9-year-olds get on very well with their nonresident father
- Differing perspectives between parents
- Group is more socioeconomically disadvantaged
Important insights in understanding child poverty

Conclusions (continued)

- But challenges in involving non-resident fathers in cohort studies
- Access: via mother or independently?
- Strong messaging to mothers on why fathers are being included
- Strong and tailored messages to all fathers as to their importance
- Include only those who have at least some contact with the child
- Proactive interviewer contact and follow-up
- Feedback of findings to participants and wider public

Thank you

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