NRFC SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Family Assistance

National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

FATHERS INCORPORATED

FATHERHOOD AND COPARENTING

This National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC) spotlight on research provides a quick look at findings from Fatherhood and Coparenting (2020), a research report written by Armon R. Perry, Aaron Rollins, and Abby Perez.

A previous evaluation of *4 Your Child*, a responsible fatherhood program in Louisville, Kentucky, indicated improvements in fathers' parenting knowledge and conflict resolution skills. However, many of the fathers still reported coparenting challenges.

To better understand these challenges, the researchers partnered with the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network to obtain funding for Fatherhood and Coparenting, a pilot project with coparenting partners of fathers who participated in *4 Your Child*.

READ FULL ARTICLE

The full article can be accessed at https://bit.ly/2z9Viev

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS[1]

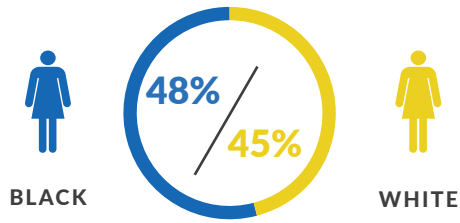
1. Engaging mothers in coparenting interventions is feasible and can lead to positive improvement in conflict resolution skills and coparenting relationship quality.
2. Mothers in the study appreciated the fatherhood program's efforts to encourage dads to take a more active role in their children's lives.
3. Messaging matters: to avoid recruitment challenges, let mothers know their experience and expertise is valued.
4. Coparenting interventions may be more effective if they:
    - Help coparents understand and appreciate each other's perspective.
    - Can be provided early, before relationship problems occur.

[1]The study results are only preliminary as they are based on a one-time, low-dosage intervention with a small number of mothers.

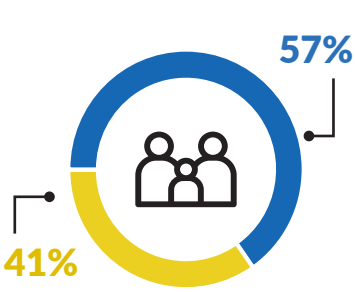
Total Participating Mothers

153 Mothers participated in the research project Fatherhood and Coparenting.

Participants by Ethinicity



Do mothers have children with one or more partners?



Mothers had children with one father only

Mothers had children with more than one father

Percentage of Mothers Working

52% FULL-TIME

14% PART-TIME

Mothers were randomly assigned to a control group or an intervention group

THE CONTROL GROUP RECEIVED:

- A brochure with coparenting tips developed by the National Fatherhood Initiative.
- No direct services.

THE INTERVENTION GROUP RECEIVED:

- A two-hour parent education workshop covering central components of the fatherhood workshops.
- Focus group sessions in which they were invited to share their opinions and feedback related to fathers and coparenting.
- The opportunity to participate in a joint "mediation" session with their coparent to develop a coparenting plan.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

A. Conflict Resolution and Coparenting Relationship Quality

Preliminary results showed statistically significant improvement in mothers' conflict resolution skills and coparenting relationship quality.

B. Mothers' Reports of Father Involvement

Although not statistically significant, results showed that mothers in the intervention group reported an increase in father involvement.

C. Parenting Plan/Mediation Services

Very few took advantage of these services.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Five themes emerged from in-depth focus group interviews with 55 of the mothers:

A. WHAT MAKES A GOOD DAD?

- A "good dad" makes time to be with his kids.

B. COPARENTING OUTLOOK

- Some mothers were hopeful that dads' behavior would change, but others were doubtful any intervention could lead to meaningful changes.

C. COPARENTING CHALLENGES

- Challenges mentioned included fathers' incarceration, substance abuse, and mental health issues. Also, the difficulty some fathers have separating their previous roles as romantic partners from their ongoing roles as coparents.
- Most frequently mentioned were fathers' lack of reliability, selfishness, and the complexity of families when dads have children with more than one mother.

D. MOTHERS' ADVICE

- For fathers:
  1. Dads should listen to their children more and "help them share their feelings and experiences."
  2. Dads could be more conscious of what moms deal with as primary caregivers.
  3. Many mothers did acknowledge they saw positive change after their coparent completed the program (e.g., improved communication, more patience).
- For programs:
  1. Offer joint workshops for coparents after their separate programs (when they both have a solid knowledge base to enhance skill building).
  2. Find a way to help coparents develop a parenting plan together.

E. MOTHERS' REFLECTIONS

- Some said they now realized they could improve their own communication skills.
- Some indicated the program helped them understand the fathers' perspective.
- Many acknowledged they had not thought much about what dads had to deal with in order to participate in their kids' lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

MESSAGING MATTERS - AND IT IMPACTS RECRUITMENT

- Care should be taken in how mothers are invited to participate in a coparenting intervention.
  - Mothers did not respond well to invitations focused on "improving their coparenting knowledge" and "strengthening their coparenting alliances," perhaps because they thought it was the fathers who needed improvement.
  - They were more receptive when the invitation was to receive information about what the fathers were learning and provide advice on ways to improve the fatherhood program.

HELP PARENTS DEVELOP COPARENTING SKILLS BEFORE PROBLEMS OCCUR

- Provide coparenting interventions as early in the relationship as possible; prenatally or soon after birth may be the best time.

EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPATHY

- Help coparents understand and appreciate each other's perspective and experience.

Disclaimer:

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