

## *Meeting the Service Needs of Young Fathers*

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*ABSTRACT:* Until the early 1980s, the needs of young fathers went largely unnoticed by policy makers and social service providers. Many programs for adolescent fathers originally started in order to benefit teenage *mothers* and their children (Leitch et al., 1993). It was later recognized that young fathers also need assistance to successfully become productive and responsible adults (Robinson, 1988; Leitch et al., 1993; Kiselica, 1995). Program designs have been based on a set of implicit assumptions: 1) if programs are offered, young fathers will enroll; 2) the services will meet the needs of participants; 3) once young men enroll in a program, they will use the services that are available; and 4) the services will be beneficial for recipients and will produce positive outcomes (Kiselica, 1995; Children and Youth Funding Report, 1998; Smith, 1997; DeParle, 1998). However, only limited research has been conducted to explore whether these assumptions are appropriate or to document programmatic successes and difficulties (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994; Marsh and Wirick, 1991; Sander, 1993). This paper adds to the literature by reviewing each of the assumptions within the context of one program's experience. It considers issues associated with outreach and enrollment, service delivery, and achieving desired outcomes for program participants.

### **Introduction**

Until the early 1980s, the needs of young fathers went largely unnoticed by policy makers and social service providers. Most social service interventions for teenage parents focused on young mothers, and programs for adolescent fathers initially hoped to benefit those mothers and their children (Leitch et al., 1993). It was later suggested that young fathers also need supportive services to become productive, responsible adults and parents (Robinson, 1988; Leitch et al., 1993). It was argued that

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teenage fathers need: assistance with housing, employment, job training, transportation and education; counseling to address issues with their partners and families of origin; and emotional support to explore their loss of freedom and ambivalent feelings toward parenthood (Kiselica, 1995). Research showed that successful pregnancy prevention for teens addressed attitudes and behavior of both female and male partners (Freeman and Rickels, 1993). Some literature used an "ecological perspective," suggesting that societal attitudes toward young fathers contributed to their behaviors and needs (McAdoo, 1993; Miller, 1997).

Various types of programs have addressed the special concerns of adolescent fathers. These programs typically have been based on four assumptions: 1) if programs are offered, young fathers will enroll; 2) the services will meet the needs of participants; 3) once young men enroll in a program, they will use the services that are available; and 4) the services will be beneficial for recipients and will produce positive outcomes (Kiselica, 1995; Children and Youth Funding Report, 1998; Smith, 1997; DeParle, 1998).

When asked to conduct an evaluation of one young fathers program, the authors found themselves questioning these assumptions and their applicability. This article contributes to existing evaluation literature (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994; Marsh and Wirick, 1991; Sander, 1993) by reviewing each of the four assumptions in the context of the experience of one young fathers program. It carries out this goal by identifying the expectations that guided the program's staff, exploring the extent to which those plans were realized during the course of program implementation, and describing the efforts of the staff to adapt to the behaviors and needs of the target population. It considers issues associated with outreach and enrollment, service needs of clients, service delivery, and program outcomes. By identifying predictable flaws in program design, the authors hope that other program managers can anticipate and avoid similar pitfalls, and that further research can build on these findings.

### **Program Background and Methodology**

The authors were asked to assess the development and implementation of a young fathers program sponsored for four years by a multi-service agency located in a large urban area. This adolescent parenting support program for young men operated in four public high schools. The program goals included: 1) enhancing skills believed to be necessary for responsive and effective parenting, 2) reduction of the incidence of high

school dropouts, and 3) reduction of the rate of repeat pregnancies commonly found among young fathers (Robinson, 1988; Leitch et al., 1993). Three male case managers provided education, vocational guidance, support services and counseling on a part-time basis in each school. Education services included materials intended to promote safe sexual practices and reduce pregnancy, both within the client population and within the entire high school. Support services included assessment of social service and health care needs, referrals for appropriate services, and weekly parenting and life skill classes. The counseling component offered short-term and ongoing services to individual students as well as discussion/support groups for program participants. One case manager specialized in vocational counseling.

The study relied on multiple sources of information. First, data were extracted from 53 case files for individual clients who received services during one school year (a 10 month period). Members of the research team reviewed each case file and recorded data on Case File Extraction Forms. In this way, information from a variety of program forms could be consistently recorded. Second, the Contact Notes were used as narratives that provided descriptions of the nature of the helping relationships between case managers and their clients. This material supplemented the individual data points recorded on the Extraction Forms. Third, the researchers conducted individual interviews with key staff members in the sponsoring agency and the host high schools, as well as with experts from across the country.

### **National Perspective About Young Fathers Programs**

Programs for young fathers across the country typically have focused on emotional and financial support of children, prevention of future unplanned pregnancies, career planning and/or employment placement. Program priorities vary considerably. Choices are guided by needs assessments, the nature of the settings where services are provided, the philosophy and mission of the lead agencies, and requirements of funding sources. Program emphases may include efforts to help fathers complete education, obtain employment, and/or strengthen parenting skills. Some programs focus primarily on sex education, while others emphasize group participation where self-esteem and identification with community and family life are strengthened.

The program in this study was housed in public high schools, because completion of secondary education was felt to be a critical precursor to

achievement in other life arenas. The sponsoring agency also operated a successful program for young mothers in school settings. In contrast, most other programs for young fathers have been found in community or institutional settings. Community agencies have been selected because of their familiarity with the population, knowledge and skill in service provision (specifically in areas of case management, counseling or job training) and available resources for program support. Schools have been less likely sites, due to concerns that academic institutions are perceived as hostile environments by young men. In addition, schools have had limited experience in forming community wide coalitions to serve the target population (Allen-Meares, 1984; Robinson, 1988). The school-based programs usually have *not* attempted to offer comprehensive services to young men. Often school-based health centers focus on medical and contraceptive services, case management, or sex education (Zabin and Hirsch, 1988). Other programs are offered in "alternative" schools that provide flexible classes for students and collaborate extensively with social service agencies and hospitals (Kiselica, 1995). The young fathers program explored in this study was unusual, because it had no formal affiliation with school-based health clinics, and it offered a wide range of services at conventional public school sites. Thus, the program's experiences can add to the knowledge base in the field, since little is known about the successes and problems associated with this particular model.

## **Outreach and Enrollment**

### *Literature Review*

Designers of young fathers programs often assume that if services are offered, they will be used by the target population (DeParle, 1998; Smith, 1997). However, the literature suggests that enrollment often has been problematic. Low enrollment persisted even when program designers offered services that addressed practical needs identified by young men (e.g., vocational training, job placement, and information about legal rights) (Kiselica, 1995; Hendricks, 1988). Adolescent fathers rarely turned to professionals for assistance. For example, one study of first time adolescent fathers found that clergy and school teachers were used sparingly as sources of assistance, and only 7% of the young fathers said that they would seek help from a social service agency (Hendricks, 1988).

Various theories have been offered to explain these patterns. Some young fathers may not wish to reveal their parenting status to adults in official positions at “mainstream” organizations such as schools or health centers, they may fear stigmatization or criticism, or they may worry that they will be asked to provide additional financial or emotional support to the mothers and babies (Kiselica, 1995; Hendricks, 1988). Other studies (Rivara, Sweeney, and Henderson, 1985; Marsiglio, 1993) have revealed that urban, low-income adolescents do not perceive early fatherhood as troublesome or particularly disruptive to their lives. They do not feel that they are “in need” of services, so they do not respond to outreach efforts to enroll them in special programs. Thus, establishing trust with young fathers and successfully delivering services can be a slow process (Brown, 1990). One solution has been to “piggy-back” services on to everyday activities, such as recreational programming. Staff can develop rapport with young men and then offer educational and counseling assistance once relationships are in place (Williams, 1997; Kiselica, 1995; Sander, 1993).

#### *Programmatic Response*

The program planners in this study were aware of problems identified in the literature, but they hoped that their program could avoid enrollment difficulties by serving “captive” audiences in the high schools. The case managers expected to receive referrals from school personnel (teachers and administrators) and to contact young fathers during school-wide sex education classes.

The program also planned to attract primarily African-American and Latino teens, because they formed the largest ethnic groups in the schools. The agency employed adult male African-American and Latino case managers in hopes those young male clients would be likely to relate to adults of similar ethnicity. It was expected that the case managers would serve as mentors and role models as well as counselors, and that clients would identify with their personal characteristics as well as with their professional abilities (Sander, 1993).

#### *Outreach Results*

The outreach strategies had mixed success. During the period under study, 36 fathers received service. The program hoped to serve a total of 60 young fathers over the course of one academic year. The initial plan was to serve only current/expectant fathers and to exclude teenage

men who were not parents. In response to lower than expected enrollments, the program decided to expand the target population by including young men who were not fathers. This strategy represented a deliberate decision to move away from the program's initial focus and challenged a key program hypothesis regarding client participation. The new strategy of enrolling young men who were not fathers was based on several rationales. First, since these students were considered "at risk" of becoming parents, it was felt that the services of the program could help to forestall initial pregnancies. Second, the case managers found that some young men were reluctant to reveal that they were fathers when they first approached program staff for assistance. Therefore, the case managers were unwilling to turn away any young men, because some might be fathers after all. Finally, since enrollment was low, case managers had time to provide services to non-fathers. Because of this change, enrollment grew, and 53 young men received services by the end of the school year.

#### *Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

As noted earlier, the program staff anticipated serving teenage men of color, and these expectations were realized. The clients were predominantly African-American (75%), with smaller percentages of Latinos (18%), white (2%) and other/mixed race youths (5%). This pattern reflected the racial and ethnic makeup of the populations in the target schools. As intended, all of the clients were teenagers. Most of the young men were between ages 16 and 19 (88%). Two-fifths were aged 18 or 19, while almost half (48%) were either 16 or 17 years old at the time of program intake. A smaller group (12%) included clients aged 14 or 15.

### **Matching Participants' Needs with Program Services**

#### *Evaluation Questions*

The program planners subscribed to the assumption that the services they offered would meet the needs of the target population. They believed that the types and amounts of service they could provide would be suited to the requests articulated by young men enrolled in the program. To explore whether this assumption was accurate, the research team considered the following questions:

1. At the time of program intake, did prospective participants request services that were offered by the program? Which services were most frequently requested?
2. Did the young men ask for services that were not available? If so, how did the program respond?

#### *Available Services*

The on-site services offered by this young fathers program were similar to offerings at many other young fathers programs (Barth et al., 1988). Programming at the four high schools included:

- Education services (encouragement and assistance to remain in school, maintain good attendance and grades, obtain a high school diploma or alternative degree);
- Employment counseling (assistance to find jobs, vocational guidance, job retention advice);
- Information designed to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases;
- Life skills information (e.g., assistance with budgeting, parenting); and
- Personal counseling.

In addition, off-site services were available to participants. Case managers could accompany clients to court appearances, medical appointments or job interviews. Although the case managers did not provide substance abuse treatment, legal representation, psychiatric/psychopharmacological services, or long-term therapy for individuals or families, they could make referrals for such assistance.

#### *Type of Service Requests*

Each case manager considered how the program could meet needs of clients as he prepared individualized Service Plans. Soon after program intake, he recorded a teen's service needs and developed a plan of action. These Service Plans were used by the evaluation team to explore the match between the types of requests made by participants and the types of services that were offered.

Generally, clients' service needs could be met by the program. Almost all participants (94%) said that they needed educational services, such as information about alternative high schools, referrals for GED pro-

grams, or assistance with attendance and academic problems. Four-fifths (80%) of them requested assistance with employment matters. About one-third (35%) were not working at the time they joined the program, but close to three-fifths of them (59%) were holding part-time jobs, and a few (6%) had full-time employment. The clients usually held short-term positions that required few specialized skills and paid low wages—quite typical positions for teenage males. Therefore, the young men were often looking for their next jobs. Since *retention* of employment also was an important issue, the case managers provided encouragement and advice on matters such as attendance, promptness and work productivity.

The proportion of students who reported employment at the time of program entry was higher in this study than among the participants in other programs. For example, in one demonstration project, which operated in eight cities, only 35% of the young men were employed when they entered (Sander, 1993). This contrast may be due to the strong employment picture for entry-level, part-time jobs in the city studied here, as compared with economic conditions in other geographic areas.

More than half (57%) of new participants requested counseling. About half (55%) wanted assistance with life skills matters, 51% sought advice about financial matters (such as budgeting, or savings), 55% sought help with plans to live on their own, and 45% requested advice about parenting. A substantial group of teens wanted health care (38%) or legal representation (38%), although these services *were not* offered by the program.

#### *Number of Services Requested*

Another measure of service need was the number of services requested, as indicated by the number of different types of services specified on the Service Plan. These forms showed that most of the clients had multiple requests for service. More than four-fifths of the clients (81%) asked for four or more different types of services. Almost one-third (30%) requested four to seven types, while about half (51%) of the clients requested eight or more different types of services.

#### *Intensity of Services Requested*

A typology of service needs was developed as a way to summarize the complexity of participants' service needs. This *Intensity/Severity Index* indicates levels of client need. Those needs can be compared with the



service mix offered to participants. In this way, it is possible to assess the extent to which the program services matched the client needs presented to case managers. This Index measured three levels of need: Low, Medium and High. Each client's classification was based on the Service Plans combined with the Contact Notes that documented client requests and service delivery throughout program participation. This technique has been used by other researchers to clarify the major types of cases under study (Amodeo and Griffin, 1997).

At one extreme were clients with *Low Levels of Need*. They only requested *information* about educational options (GED, college) or employment, and no additional assistance. While the case managers could respond to these inquiries, the services were not particularly different from those available elsewhere in the school, such as the guidance office. An illustration of a client in this group was Clarence, a 19-year-old high school senior.<sup>1</sup> He met with the case manager three times during the last two months of the school year, seeking advice about college financial aid and full time summer employment.

The second category, *Medium Level of Need*, describes young men (typically current or expectant fathers) who needed information about educational options (GED programs, college) or employment *and* who also needed assistance with educational problems (e.g., attendance, grades, suspensions, discipline); and/or assistance to find employment; and/or assistance with pregnancy prevention/life skills/advice about relationships. *This mix of services represented the core mission of the program. Provision of these services and responding to clients who could benefit from them were the primary intentions of the overall project.*

A student like Allan, an 18-year-old high school senior and expectant father, is a typical participant in the Medium Level of Need category. He wanted to improve his relationship with the mother of his child who was planning to have her baby and continue to live with her mother. She was seeking assurances from Allan that he would provide financial support. Allan also was involved with the court due to a petty theft conviction. He asked the case manager to help him resolve conflicts with his probation officer.

A third group of young men with *High Levels of Need* also enrolled. They needed some or all of the core program services *plus other types of assistance that were not available*. For example, they also had serious drug/alcohol abuse, requiring in-depth assessment and treatment; and/

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<sup>1</sup>Note: Each case example is a composite picture developed from the case records of several actual participants.

or serious problems with the police/court system that required legal advice or representation; and/or serious mental health problems, such as depression or suicidality, where psychiatric or psychopharmacological intervention might be appropriate. These clients presented multiple, complicated and severe problems that exceeded the intent of the program's design and capacity to serve them. The severity of these students' needs usually emerged during the course of service provision. Jimmy, age 18, had fathered two children with two different women. In Jimmy's junior year, he had poor school attendance and poor grades, and, by the time he was a senior in high school, he knew he was unlikely to graduate. After several meetings with Jimmy during his junior year, the case manager suspected heavy drug use, gang involvement and a variety of illegal activities.

The Low Service Need group included 16% of the participants. Students with low levels of need typically were not fathers—only about one-fourth (29%) of this group were current or expectant parents at the time they joined the program. The group with Medium Level of Need included about half the clients (49%). Almost three-fourths (74%) of these men were expectant or current fathers at the time of program intake. The group characterized by High Level of Need included more than one-third of the clients (35%). Most of them (71%) were current or expectant fathers as well.

### *Implications*

Participants in the Young Fathers Program presented a wide array of concerns and demands to the case managers. Even though more than one-third of the participants made service requests that exceeded the original intentions of the project, the staff chose to serve all the young men who wished to enroll. No one was turned away, even if his needs were outside the scope of services. Thus, although the program designers had assumed that the services offered would meet client needs, those needs were often more complex than had been anticipated.

## **Service Delivery Patterns**

### *Evaluation Questions*

The next issue of interest is how the service needs of the clients were handled, particularly since more than one-third of the clients had more

severe needs than the program was originally designed to address. Those who planned the program assumed that if clients enrolled in the program, they would use its services by completing Service Plans, honoring appointments, and staying with the program over an academic year. To consider the validity of this assumption, several questions were considered:

1. Once young men began to meet with the case managers, how long did they use the services? Did they participate on a consistent basis?
2. How many types of services did they receive? What types of services did they receive?

#### *Length of Program Participation*

The median length of participation was five months, somewhat less than the median of six months noted in a review of eight similar programs across the country (Sander, 1993). Most participants in the current study (71%) were clients only during one academic year. However, about one-fifth of the group (19%) were program participants during the prior year, and a small group (10%) had been clients for more than two academic years.

However, the concept of opening and closing a case was a fluid one. Some cases were closed because students stopped coming to appointments, dropped out of school, or transferred to another educational program. Some remained open in hopes that a client would return to school and to meetings with the case manager. Many were closed because the school year ended. In addition, regular attendance was not common, as is true in many young fathers programs.

The pattern is described by Kiselica (1995, p. 356):

what typically happens in the development of service programs for young fathers is that a few young men will 'check out' an agency and, after they feel comfortable with a setting and are convinced that the staff will help them effectively, the fathers gradually spread the word to other young men who eventually get involved with the agency too. But participation of these youth over time tends to be inconsistent. Although some adolescent fathers attend structured programs regularly, others participate irregularly, drifting into an agency at critical times when they may need help, drifting out when they are preoccupied with other concerns that, in their minds, take priority over what is offered in the service program.

The literature also notes that clients who seek job placement, employment or completion of an education program are more likely to stay involved in the program until those outcomes are achieved. When outcomes were less clear, participants stayed for briefer periods or came and went as they chose (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994).

#### *Types of Services Delivered*

The program planners expected that the services they delivered would match the service needs of clients. This assumption was assessed by comparing the Service Assessment/ Service Plans to the Service Summaries prepared by the case managers. The analysis revealed that the service delivery pattern was similar to the pattern of service requests described earlier in the article. The most commonly used service was counseling: almost two-thirds of the clients (63%) received help with personal issues, such as problems with friends, parents, the mothers of their babies, girlfriends, teachers or employers. Education and employment-related services were received by almost half the clients. In the education category, the case managers typically tackled attendance problems by contacting individual students to explore why they were not coming to school and what could be done to make improvements. If student grades were problematic, the case manager contacted individual teachers. At clients' requests, they helped young fathers to explore alternate educational options such as GED programs. Employment assistance often consisted of specific referrals for job opportunities, advice on how to handle interviews, and guidance on retaining jobs. Vocational services, job training, and referrals for health care were used by one-third of the clients, while advice about independent living, budgeting assistance, and advice about legal matters were the least frequently used services.

#### *Additional Evaluation Hypotheses*

The evaluation team proposed three additional hypotheses about service delivery. First, since many students had multiple service needs, it was expected that delivery of multiple services would be common (Sander and Rosen, 1987). In fact, this pattern was found. Three-fifths of the clients (61%) received at least three types of services, and one-fifth received six or more different types. Frequent meetings with the

case managers were common as well. Only about one-fifth of the clients met with case managers seven or fewer times, while close to half (44%) had 16 or more meetings.

Second, it was speculated that clients who requested more services would be more likely to remain in the program for longer periods. This theory was supported by the data analysis ( $r = .41$ ,  $p = .00$ ). Thus, it appeared that once case managers established rapport and provided assistance to their clients, services continued on an ongoing basis.

The third hypothesis was based on the observation that the case managers were willing to try to help High Level Need students, even though they often required assistance that went beyond the program's scope. Since the case managers did not turn these students away, we expected to find that the High Need students would receive more service than students with Low or Middle Levels of Need. This expectation was supported by two analyses. The High Need students had more contacts with the case managers than students in the other two need categories. More than two-fifths (41%) of the High Need students had 23 or more contacts with their case managers compared with 17% of the Middle Need students and none of the Low Need students ( $\chi^2 = 29.96$ ,  $p = <.01$ ). In addition, High Need students were more likely to receive service from the program for long periods (more than nine months) than were those in the other two groups ( $\chi^2 = 25.36$ ,  $p = .00$ ). These findings suggest that the case managers developed and maintained relationships with the students, even if the students presented multiple problems.

### **Service Delivery Outcomes**

This young fathers program hoped to achieve positive outcomes in three arenas: academic performance, educational achievement, and pregnancy prevention. Some of the hypotheses related to these outcomes were specified by the program's designers, while others were put forward by the evaluation team. This section of the article compares the program outcomes to those predictions.

#### *Programmatic Expectations*

Program staff subscribed to the idea that if services were offered and used, young fathers would benefit, and positive outcomes would result.

They assumed that clients would find jobs, stay in school, go on to the next grade level or graduate from high school. With information and encouragement, the young men would avoid fathering additional children. The staff expressed these expectations as program goals for a one-year period: no school dropouts, no pregnancies, and employment for clients who sought jobs. They continued to voice these high expectations even though they had consciously admitted young men into the program with needs that exceeded service availability.

To assess the extent to which the program achieved desired outcomes, overall results were compared to the program's goals as well as to results from studies of other programs for young fathers. Data for these analyses came from Contact Notes, Exit Forms and the Program's end of the year Management Report.

The overall results were consistent with patterns in young fathers programs across the country; however, in some areas, they fell short of the program's expectations for itself. For example, the program's annual management report showed that 20% of the clients dropped out of high school during a one year period, compared with a program objective of *no* school dropouts. While the dropout rate was disappointing to the program managers, it was consistent with outcome research from programs that documented modest reductions in school dropout rates (Adams et. al. 1988; Kiselica, 1995). In addition, the results for this local program are better than dropout rates for teenage fathers across the country. One study reported that more than 40% of men who became fathers between the ages of 11 and 17 dropped out of high school, and that 35% of those who became fathers at age 18 or 19 were high school dropouts (Marsiglio, 1987).

Pregnancy prevention data for the program under study showed that more than one-third (37%) of clients became expectant fathers during the course of program participation. While a goal of no pregnancies had been established, that objective may have been unreasonably ambitious. Outcome studies on adolescent female pregnancy prevention have consistently reflected the failure of intervention efforts to delay *all* subsequent pregnancies (Marsh and Wirick, 1991; Maynard, 1995; Collins, 1998).

The implications are twofold. On the one hand, high goals can serve as important incentives for program achievement and staff performance. On the other hand, they may raise unrealistic expectations on the part of funding sources and agency administrators that can lead to inappropriate perceptions of program failure. Such a definition of

failure is likely to be accompanied by disappointment with the staff's performance and the clients' efforts.

### *Measuring Individual Client Outcomes*

In light of the mixed results regarding school dropout and pregnancy prevention, the evaluation team expected to find that some program participants had benefited substantially while others had poor outcomes. It was also speculated that young men with high levels of service need would be more likely to have poor outcomes.

To test these ideas, a mechanism was developed for summarizing the individual client outcomes. Each case was coded according to its *overall* result, with three types of possible outcomes: Positive, Negative and Undetermined/No Outcome. As was noted earlier, this technique has been used by other researchers as a way to clarify the major types of cases under study (Amodeo and Griffin, 1997).

An individual with a *Positive Outcome* at the time of program exit (or the end of the school year) was one who had graduated from high school OR moved to the next grade level OR received a GED AND/OR found a job. Those cases coded with *Negative Outcomes* were people who had dropped out of school (or other educational program) AND/OR fathered a new baby AND/OR were fired from a job for poor performance AND/OR were charged with a serious criminal offense (e.g., drug dealing, assault and battery (minor offenses such as traffic charges were not included here). Sometimes, a client had a mixture of positive and negative outcomes, such as moving to the next grade level AND fathering a new baby. In those cases, the negative outcome was counted. For a third group, no program-related outcomes had occurred at the time of the data collection for this study. These clients were treated as having *Undetermined Outcomes*, with no significant progress or failure. They had simply received program services. Often these cases were closed during the academic year, so no final determination had been made about their academic progression into the next school year. In other situations, the clients had requested help with searching for jobs, but no results had been achieved at the time they left the program.

As expected, the program achieved a distribution of outcomes. Close to half (47%) of the participants were coded with Positive Outcomes, while almost one-fourth (22%) of the clients had Negative Outcomes. Nearly one third of the clients were in the Indeterminate Outcome category (31%).

*Significant Factors Associated with Outcomes*

The study explored the relationship between the Outcome Summary and factors thought to be correlated with those results. The first consideration was the link between level of service needs and outcomes. It was hypothesized that students with High Service Needs prior to program participation would be more likely to have negative outcomes than those with Low or Middle Level Service Needs. High Service Need students might be more resistant to assistance and/or the program might not be able to meet the range or depth of their needs. Data analysis demonstrated the strength of this association ( $\chi^2 = 11.92$ ,  $p = <.05$ ). Close to half the High Level of Need group had negative outcomes, compared with 12.5% of the Middle Level Service group and none of the Low Service Need group.

In addition, students needing many different types of services (eight or more) at intake were more likely to have negative outcomes, although the statistical significance of this finding was not strong ( $\chi^2 = 8.44$ ,  $p = <.10$ ). Finally, students with High Service Needs at intake were somewhat more likely to become expectant fathers during program participation than those in the other two groups. Close to half (46%) of the High Need students became expectant fathers, compared to less than one-quarter of the Middle Level Need students (22%) and none of the Low Level Service Needs students ( $\chi^2 = 5.58$ ,  $p = <.10$ ).

With these patterns in mind, consider the experiences of the three illustrative clients described earlier.

Clarence (Low Level of Service Need), the 19-year-old high school senior, had positive outcomes. He met with the case manager three times during the last two months of the school year seeking advice about college financial aid and full time summer employment. The case manager gave him scholarship information and referrals for summer job openings. One of these contacts led to a full-time position. Clarence was not a father at the time of the initial meeting with the case manager and did not become an expectant father during his involvement with the young fathers program.

Allan (Middle Level of Service Need) had twelve contacts with the case manager during the school year and achieved positive outcomes. Meetings with Allan focused on how to improve his relationship with his girlfriend who was three months pregnant. Allan also had several contacts with his case manager regarding conflicts with his probation officer, although he missed several meetings with both of them. The case manager contacted the probation officer and developed a mutually acceptable compliance plan that Allan could maintain. The case manager also helped Allan to secure a full-time summer job with a local restaurant.



Jimmy (High Level of Service Need) had negative outcomes. Over two years, Jimmy had twenty-five contacts with his case manager. After several meetings, the case manager suspected heavy drug use and gang involvement. The case manager met with Jimmy and the mothers of his two babies to try to promote better interactions. He attempted to develop a plan for improved school attendance and studying, but that effort met with little success. He accompanied Jimmy to court when drug trafficking charges were brought. In the second year, the case manager began to arrange for a transfer to an alternative high school that seemed better suited to Jimmy's needs and confronted Jimmy about his drug habits, urging him to seek treatment. However, at the end of the school year, Jimmy was arrested for attempted murder and was awaiting trial and potential incarceration.

It is important to note that negative results should not be attributed to a lack of service by the case managers. Students with negative outcomes were somewhat more likely to meet with their case managers frequently (23 or more times) than were students in the other outcome groups. More than half of the Negative Outcome Group (55%) had 23 or more meetings with their case managers compared with 13% of the Positive Outcomes group and 13% of those in the Neutral Outcomes group ( $p < .10$ ). Although the students who ultimately had negative outcomes received considerable attention, they also were the most frustrating for the case managers. The staff worked over long periods to address the needs of these young fathers, often without success.

### *Program Redesign*

In response to the evaluation findings of the study, the program's administrators decided to respecify their purpose and redesign the case management approach. First, the mission of the program was clarified. The new message stated that the program focused on service for young fathers, but that all young men were welcome. In this way, it was hoped that young men at risk of fatherhood or those who did not wish to disclose their parenting status would join as well. Second, the program decided to supplement its case management activities through increased collaboration with collateral services inside and outside the schools. This strategy included increased referrals for ongoing services that were beyond the scope of the young fathers program. In this way, the staff recognized that it could not meet all of the needs of all of the clients, especially clients with high levels of need who had the most problematic outcomes.

Ongoing training for program staff was strengthened to improve

intake, assessment and service delivery skills for high need individuals. Consultation and supervision for program staff from specialists in a variety of arenas (e.g., juvenile justice, substance abuse, mental health) was increased. After six months of program revision, staff reported increased satisfaction with their abilities to meet client needs. Re-evaluation will be needed to assess whether outcomes match this positive trajectory.

### **Implications for Future Research and Program Planning**

The design of the current study precluded more subtle analyses of the impact of service provision upon program outcomes. For example, no information was available about the substance abuse histories of participants, in part because the young men were reluctant to reveal such information (Brown, 1990). This factor might be significantly correlated with outcome patterns as has been found in studies in other fields (Lane and Mulroy, 1993; U.S. General Accounting Office, 1991). In addition, without a control group of young fathers who received no service, it is not possible to determine whether outcomes that occurred here might have occurred even without program intervention. Future research needs to address these issues.

Putting the findings of this exploratory study into perspective is important. First, administration and managers should be wary of program designs based on assumptions such as those stated here. Young fathers do not form a self-identified group that is seeking services. Thus, outreach results are likely to be modest, especially during a program start-up period when young men are not familiar with and do not trust service providers. Offering services requested by young fathers does not guarantee the use of such services. Finally, program enrollment can continue to be challenging even in a school-based program with a captive audience.

Service provision to clients with multiple and severe needs may be slow and discouraging for program staff, but success is certainly possible. The complexity of these students' needs requires recognition that services for them are likely to take extra time and effort. The young fathers did use the services once they developed trusting relationships with the case managers and many achieved positive outcomes. One-quarter of the High Service Need students had positive outcomes as did close to half the students needing eight or more services. These findings about such a historically hard-to-reach population should be

heartening to program planners. They provide a solid foundation for future service expansion and creative outreach approaches.

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