ORIENTING SERVICES TO SEPARATED/DIVORCED FATHERS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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We introduce a conceptual framework incorporating the various domains that programs and services must address when considering the needs of separating and separated/divorced fathers. The three core domains are: (1) Support for reconfiguring family structure, attending to transitions associated with decoupling while maintaining a co-parenting relationship; (2) Support for parenting, including acquisition of parenting skills and knowledge about the effects of separation/divorce on children; and (3) Support for psychosocial needs, addressing issues such as mental health, substance abuse, and emotional distress. These domains are situated within the broader context of socio-cultural and legal systems and will vary across time.

Keypoints for the Family Court Community
- Separating/separated fathers face major shifts in the configuration of family and spousal relationships, and in their roles as fathers. In addition, these significant life changes affect their personal wellbeing.
- A framework is presented to guide service providers (e.g., mental health, court-related, alternative dispute resolution services) and policy makers in addressing these three key domains of separated fathers' experience.
- Broader socio-cultural and legal contexts, and specific suggestions for implementing the framework are included.
- Goal is to effectively address fathers' needs in establishing positive postseparation parenting and parent–child relationships.

Keywords: *Conflict. Divorce*; *Fathering*; *Parenting*; *Psychosocial Well-Being Support*; *and Separation.*

INTRODUCTION

"It was the best of times; it was the worst of times"—Dickens' description aptly portrays the reality for many contemporary separated/divorced fathers. Today's "involved" father is heralded for his ability to care for and nurture his children while also engaging in a meaningful parent-child relationship. The increasing numbers of fathers sharing custody and assuming primary parenting roles after separation are touted for their efforts and the positive effect their engagement has on children. Yet, the worst is often ascribed to separated fathers who are frequently portrayed as villainous and demonized with much discussion about "deadbeat" and absent fathers (Braver & Griffin, 2000; Hallman, Dienhart, & Beaton, 2007; Mandell, 2002). In part, it is an increasing willingness on the part of society and researchers to stop and reflect on fathers specifically that has given rise to a great deal of interest in fathers' experiences, the role they have to play in child development, and those aspects of their parenting that may both mirror and complement the parenting of mothers, revealing the distinct ways that fathers contribute to their children (Day, Lewis, O'Brien, & Lamb, 2005; Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 2000; Doucet, 2006).

A father-focused lens, informed by critical theorizing on gender, highlights the difference between fathers' and mothers' experiences. By training such a lens on separating and post-separation family life, we attend specifically to the range of fathers' experiences and challenges in maintaining relationships with their children, negotiating changed relationships with ex-partners, and coping with associated stressors following marital dissolution. Some of these issues or challenges are similar to those of mothers, and some are unique to fathers. The focus on fathers in this paper reflects a deliberate decision of the authors who were active researchers in a five year pan-Canadian research

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project to study father involvement across a broad range of fathering domains including young fathers, new fathers, immigrant fathers, Aboriginal fathers, fathers of children with special needs, and separated/divorced fathers (see Father Involvement Research Alliance at www.fira.ca). We are cognizant of the contentious debates that tend to polarize divorced mothers and fathers, and of fathers' rights advocacy that has been central, particularly in its mandate for presumptions for shared custody (Erera & Baum, 2009; Geldhof, 2003; Rhoades & Boyd, 2004; Whitehead & Bala, 2012). There is an inclination in these debates to pit "fathering" against "feminism" and to view them in opposition and irreconcilable (Doucet, 2011). Such a perspective, however, limits one's ability to understand each perspective more clearly as well as respective needs and wants (Doucet & Hawkins, 2012). We trust that privileging the needs of fathers and their post-separation experiences in this paper will help bring about better and more effective opportunities, policies, and treatment practices directed toward fathers, yielding an array of positive and fulfilling post-separation relationships with their children and their former partners.

We propose herein a framework that is useful for conceptualizing the types of services and supports that could best be provided for separating and separated/divorced fathers (note that we are referring here to both the process of separating—involving changes, inconsistencies, and adaptation over time for fathers and all family members—as well as the post-separation experience of living as a separated/divorced father—for simplicity in balance of paper we will use these terms interchangeably). This framework incorporates the various domains of a separating and separated father's experience: his experience of structural reconfiguration of the family and former spousal relationship; his role as a parent; and his emotional and psychosocial well-being. This framework situates these three domains within the wider socio-cultural and legal contexts that influence the perceptions and daily life experiences in which these needs must be met. It is important to note that individual fathers' needs and resources will differ from each other's and will vary over time (as will mothers' and children's). We believe that it is useful to think about these three domains in considering the design and implementation of services for fathers across the spectrum of the separation experience. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed framework for support services directed toward separating/separated fathers. These services may be singular in focus or multifaceted, spanning domains. For example, a program that addresses parenting skills associated with specific developmental stages of children and the differential influences of parental separation on children of various ages may also support divorced fathers to identify and manage their own emotional experience of the dissolution of their marriage to ensure that this does not negatively impact their parenting.

Research in the areas of separation/divorce and fathering provides support for the conceptualization of these three domains. *Structural changes post-separation* mean that fathers often have less frequent contact with their children, changed daily routines, and new partnerships and parenting activities. In the face of these changes, fathers may lack clear and identifiable expectations about what father involvement should look like (Juby & Le Bourdais, 1998; Lewis & Welsh, 2005) and, while they may remain deeply involved in caring and providing for their children, some fathers may drift from their children's lives (Amato, Meyers, & Emery, 2009) or become less "visible" given their nonresident family status (Daly, Ashbourne, & Hawkins, 2008). New unions and family formation can also have a significant impact on nonresident fathers' contact with their children (Juby, Billette, Laplante, & Le Bourdais, 2007; Manning & Smock, 1999; Manning, Stewart, & Smock, 2003), with new obligations potentially overriding efforts to maintain contact with children from previous relationships. Post-separation structural changes also mean that former partners are engaged in renegotiating their relationships and shared responsibilities. Increasingly, separating parents are utilizing mechanisms of alternative dispute resolution to resolve matters pertaining to custody, support, and property division (Emery, Sbarra, & Grover, 2005). Within such a framework, case management, parent coordination, mediation and custody assessments move a consideration of the fathering role from the peripheral position of a "visiting parent" who pays child support to the much more complex ways in which a father maintains both decision-making and often day-to-day involvement with his child (Whitehead, 2006). This leads to further consideration of the parallel complexities in negotiating care-taking and the development and implementation of parenting plans.
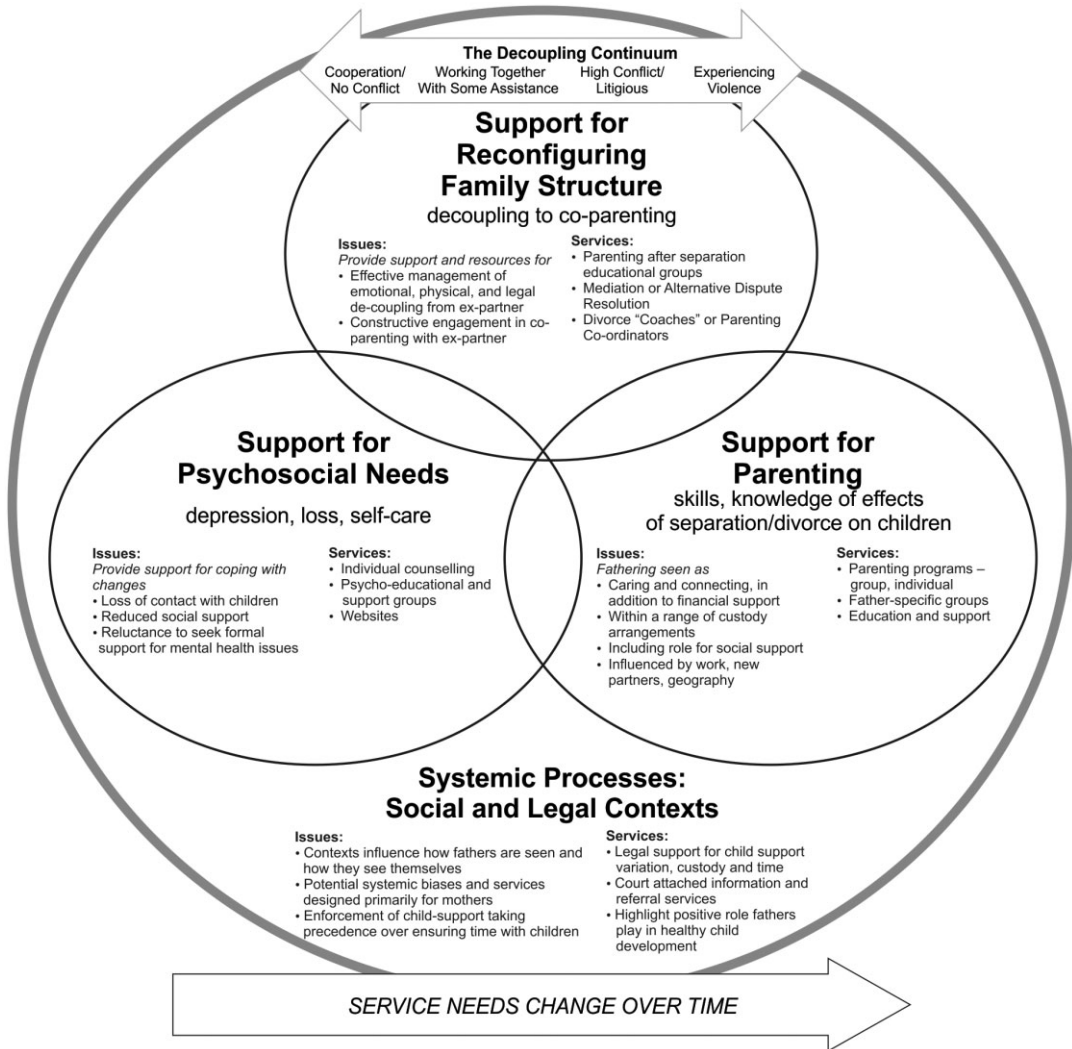
Figure 1   A conceptual framework for orienting services to separated/divorced fathers.

Parenting as a dimension of separated fathers' experience is viewed within the context of research evidence pointing to (a) the importance of father-child relationship quality to child outcomes (Allen & Daly, 2007; Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Sigal, Sandler, Wolchik, & Braver, 2011); (b) the positive benefit derived by both children and fathers due to the generative aspect of the fathering role on male identity and development (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998); (c) conflicting evidence regarding the relative contributions and mutual influences between quantity of contact time, quality of relationship, and parental cooperation (Amato, Kane, & James, 2011; Amato & Keith, 1991; Sigal et al., 2011); (d) the elevation of father involvement beyond providing for basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter to include active, child-oriented activities and authoritative parenting that translate into positive child outcomes associated with future success (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999); and (e) a recognition that divorce is associated with psychological pain and distress for children (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000; Marquardt, 2005; Menning, 2008).

Within the *psychosocial* domain we know that men experience higher rates of depression following marital dissolution than women, even when factors such as loss of contact with children, loss of social support, history of depression, work status, and income are controlled (Rotermann, 2007). Additionally, research in the area of help-seeking suggests that men do not seek professional help for mental

health or health concerns as frequently as do women regardless of age, ethnicity, and social background (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). It has also been suggested that some fathers' reluctance to seek out programs and services following separation and divorce may result from their perceptions that community services are unwelcoming or oriented primarily to women and children (Lehr & MacMillan, 2001). We posit that men experiencing unresolved difficulties or who are unable to access supports related to dilemmas in any of these domains will be less able to engage in ongoing positive engagement with their children, constructive interactions with their co-parenting partners, or healthy personal lives (Braver & Griffin, 2000; Doherty et al., 2000).

This paper considers a conceptualization that allows for some distinctions to be made that provide for normalizing separated/divorced fathers' experiences together with a specific focus in problem-solving—coping with transitions and relationships, becoming a better father within a new parenting context, taking care of emotional health, and coping with stress. Each father's needs are uniquely situated in the context of his particular circumstances including, for example, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and geographic location. As children grow and their needs change, relationships can improve or decline over time and family structure changes, including the introduction of new partners and children as well as the loss of partners or extended family members. These changes may contribute positively or negatively to men's coping strategies and experience as fathers. The balance of this paper will describe the various domains of the proposed framework in detail with particular attention to the experiences of separated and divorced fathers, the issues typically arising, and the goals and types of services associated with these.

RECONFIGURING FAMILY STRUCTURE

One of the important aspects of men's (and women's) experience at the time of separation is adapting to the dissolution of the coupled/marital relationship and the structural reconfiguration of the family. Despite increases in parents sharing physical custody after separation, most fathers will not be resident with their children (Melli & Brown, 2008; Robinson, 2009). The loss of the day-to-day fathering role and the accompanying sense of grief over this change with their children, particularly for nonresident fathers have been identified as acute emotional aspects associated with a father's struggle to maintain an on-going relationship with his child (Kruk, 1991). The overall goal for support at this point is to facilitate parents' transition as they undergo the de-coupling process without having either parent separate from their children. The process of de-coupling from a former partner involves a range of transitions including: *emotional de-coupling* that occurs as two individuals engage in detaching psychologically and from socially derived definitions as a couple from each other; *physical and geographical de-coupling* as former partners move to live separate and apart from each other; and *legal de-coupling* that typically engages the legal system to varying degrees in order to bring about property division, child custody arrangements, child and spousal support, and a formal divorce if the couple has been married.

These adaptations include the psychological processing of loss associated with ending the marital relationship together with physical and emotional adaptation to new space and time dimensions of family life, typically across two households. Kruk (1991) has identified that fathers require access to mental health therapy that assists them in working through the "bereavement" continuum of anger, denial, depression and acceptance while being sensitive to men's fear of self-disclosure, a desire to appear self-reliant and to show emotional restraint. While the role of spouse is ended, parenting roles continue within this new family configuration and, with increased father involvement, there is a corresponding need for practitioners to find ways to assist parents as they redefine their roles within a low conflict partnership (Amato et al., 2009). Family therapists have maintained that it can be useful to provide divorce-related therapy to both partners of a divorcing couple in order to negotiate transitions or stages of divorce (Emery & Sbarra, 2002; Kaslow, 1981). The suggestion here is that systemic treatment with both partners can help address some of the reorganizational processes associated with stages of pre-divorce, divorce decision-making, and post-divorce restructuring (Livingston & Bowen, 2006). The goals of support services specifically directed toward fathers related

to this domain of structural reconfiguration of the family include attending to the emotional losses and adjustments while at the same time offering adaptive parenting strategies, responsibilities, and activities to fit the new context.

Former partners continue in many cases to share parenting responsibilities and roles, requiring careful attention to separating the de-coupling strands (emotional, physical, and legal) of the previous relationship in which these various roles were intermingled. If one of these aspects of de-coupling takes precedence over the others, there is a risk that important areas of individual or family functioning may be ignored. For example, legal proceedings may become particularly acrimonious and present obstacles to a couple's ability to engage in emotional de-coupling.

In addition to maintaining pre-existing parent-child relationships, mothers and fathers are challenged to invent new strategies and approaches, or build on what worked in the past, to allow them to continue to be parenting partners. Mothers have been implicated as "gatekeepers" to a father's contact with his child (Marsiglio, Day, & Lamb, 2000), but there is also evidence that mothers (Dienhart, 2001) and stepfathers (Marsiglio & Hinojosa, 2007) can serve as facilitators and allies in promoting and strengthening post-separation father-child relationships. It would be difficult to overstate the challenge associated with mourning and ending the spousal or couple relationship while at the same time maintaining and/or reinventing co-parenting strategies. A critical element of support for fathers within this domain is to assist in acknowledging these complexities and ambiguities which have the potential to derail the best intentions of parenting partners. An equally important aspect of support for fathers during this reconfiguration is to encourage new approaches to their fathering role and coordinating with other parent(s) that acknowledge the new structure while also recognising what they already know about their unique relationships with their children and the strengths that they bring to fathering.

Co-parenting, the ways in which partners or ex-partners relate to each other with respect to their actions and roles as parents, can be conceptually viewed as playing a distinct role in the family system, separate and apart from a marital relationship (Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001). Co-parenting is motivated by concern for the child, rather than concern for the partner's well-being, and has been demonstrated to potentially mediate the relationship between the marital relationship and parenting practices (Margolin et al., 2001). Conflict between parents has been identified for its negative impact on children; finding ways to keep conflict low is crucial (Amato & Keith, 1991; Fabricius & Luecken, 2007). This suggests that intervening at a point of assisting couples to address their co-parenting relationship is likely to be more effective than either (a) addressing a marital relationship that is no longer intact, or (b) focusing on specific parenting strategies when there is potential for former partners to be actively undermining each other. Cowan & McHale (1996) describe a positive co-parenting relationship as transcending marital dissolution and being reflected in parents' abilities to accomplish parenting tasks while also conveying to their children a commonality of purpose. In positive co-parenting relationships former partners avoid undermining one another and the triangulation of children, and engage in cooperation related to parenting tasks (Margolin et al., 2001).

Fathers and mothers who are separating from each other, and those who have gone through a formal divorce process, operate along a continuum of de-coupled and co-parenting relationships ranging between those who practice cooperation and experience a relative lack of conflict, those who are working together as parents with some outside assistance, high conflict couples who are also frequently heavily litigious, and extreme situations of former couples who are experiencing violence (Bala, Jaffe, & Crooks, 2007; Fidler & Bala, 2010).

The goal of services provided to fathers (and similarly for mothers) within this domain is to support them to successfully de-couple from their former partner while not simultaneously disengaging with their children. In this context, we want to provide men with an opportunity to explore obstacles to and effective strategies for ending the legal, physical, and emotional spousal relationship, while also considering what aspects of the co-parenting relationship can be maintained or developed in cases where these have not been strong prior to separation (e.g., Dads For Life program evaluated in Cookston, Braver, Griffen, De Lusé, & Miles, 2007). Providing tools and support for ex-partners to use as they transition into co-parenting relationships outside of a marital or common-law relationship

is one aspect of these services. Counselling or psycho-educational programs that provide the father, or father and mother together, opportunities to explore how to negotiate these changes are also important from this perspective. These might include parenting after separation groups, mediation or alternative dispute resolution that allows successful negotiation of conflict in the context of de-coupling, and divorce "coaches" or parenting coordinators (Coates, Deutsch, Starnes, Sullivan, & Sydlik, 2004) who can help maintain a distinction between couple issues and parenting issues.

Mediation, for example, has been shown in a 12-year longitudinal study, to contribute to long-term benefits for the relationships between parents and between non-residential parents and their children (Emery et al., 2005). Emery et al., point to the potential for aspects of mediation to encourage cooperation between parents in a co-parenting relationship past the point of the initial separation, and to help build a "businesslike" (p. 33) partnership that takes the "long view of their relationship" (p. 33), ultimately benefitting parents and children. Most importantly, Emery and his colleagues argue, mediation supports parents in moving past the initial hurt and avoiding the adversarial relationship that necessarily attaches to litigation and generally serves to make the emotionally hurtful aspects of divorce worse. Incorporating the child's perspective more directly into parent negotiations/mediation has been found to be particularly beneficial for separating Australian families (McIntosh, Wells, Smyth, & Long, 2008). Providing a direct assessment (by a trained third party) of their child's experiences had the strongest effect on fathers, who reported lower acrimony, greater parental alliance, greater satisfaction with the care and contact arrangements (even though there were fewer overnights), and longer lasting agreements with fewer attempts at re-litigation.

SUPPORT FOR PARENTING

A second domain of separating or separated/divorced fathers' experience is the father role itself, separate and apart from the relational work and adaptation required to build a co-parenting relationship with a former spouse. Fathers may be seen as equal co-parents to children, with equivalent status to mothers (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). Nevertheless, it has been identified that fathers may struggle with their paternal identity and issues of paternal authority as they forge their fathering role outside of the marital relationship (Arendell, 1992). Most fathers in two-parent families express a sincere desire to be there for their child, but this care is often passive when compared to the day-to-day care responsibilities that mothers tend to assume. This may not translate into active parenting skills following separation (Lewis & Welsh, 2005). Involved fathering is sensitive to the quality of the co-parenting relationship with the mother, far more than mothers are influenced by the relationship (Doherty et al., 2000). For instance, fathers often lose the facilitator role that mothers may have played in managing the father-child relationship (Arendell, 1992). Baum (2004) argues that divorced fathers cope best when they are able to deal with the simultaneous absence of their role as a spouse and the presence of their role and identity as a father. Supports within this domain focus on maintaining, enhancing or developing a father's parenting skills and understanding about child development, as well as providing him with knowledge about the effects of separation/divorce on children, particularly conflict management with their ex-partner (Braver & Griffin, 2000). As Braver and Griffin (2000) identified, strengthening the bond between fathers and children early in the post-separation process can have a positive benefit on fathers' long-term involvement in their children's lives and on the payment of child support. Informal supports for fathers post-separation/divorce are most often provided by new spouses (Schmeeckle, 2007); little is known about how social support more broadly defined benefits these fathers with respect to parenting responsibilities (DeGarmo, Patras, & Eap, 2008).

As it does prior to the dissolution of a marriage, fathering after separation/divorce includes nurturing, sharing time, and connecting with their children, as well as providing financial support. Researchers have identified that the quality of parenting pre- and post-separation is often linked, so that diminished parenting capacity post-separation may in some cases be attributable to poorer parenting, family dysfunction, mental health issues and family conflict pre-separation (Amato & Booth, 1996). Nevertheless, following separation, father involvement varies across families based on

such factors as marriage duration and patterns of involvement prior to separation. For instance young fathers often have "unique developmental needs and issues related to parenting such as financial difficulties, an incomplete education, feelings of 'loss' as a parent related to their own youth, tensions with their own parents, and their partner's parents, and other stressors common to adolescence" (Dudley, 2007, p. 172). Whether the father was resident with the mother at the time of the birth and involved prenatally are predictors of whether fathers remain involved with their child (Shannon, Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, & Lamb, 2009). A young father may also have to "negotiate" with more people when it comes to his child. Teen and young mothers are more likely to move in with their parents following the birth, adding grandparents to the network with whom the young father must relate and negotiate (Ashbourne, 2006). These fathers can benefit from older, more experienced fathers who can serve as mentors and provide support and guidance to young fathers (Dudley, 2007).

Ethnicity of fathers and its potential impact on non-resident father-child relations must also be considered (King, Harris, & Heard, 2004). For instance, immigrant fathers, depending upon the culture of origin, may have different constructions about good and involved fathering from that of the dominant culture. Programs and service providers should be sensitive and open to the reality that the fathering experiences may look different from the dominant cultural standard and attend to the barriers associated with cultural adaptation, unemployment, underemployment, and language (Este, 2006).

Within the context of a marital relationship, mothers and fathers may have made unique arrangements contributing to how much fathers were involved and which aspects of parenting were seen as particularly well-suited to this father, these children at certain development stages, and to the broader context of work and family life. Some of these contextual factors will have changed subsequent to separation. For example, if the pre-separation sharing of tasks meant that father helped with homework while mother prepared meals, post-separation both parents will be called on to engage in each of these important parenting tasks. Fathers in these situations may find themselves faced with new roles and responsibilities associated with parenting for which they feel ill equipped. In addition, children's needs change as they cope themselves with the impact of their parents' separation, their own grieving, and the physical changes brought about by the marital dissolution. Over time, developmental stages and physical/emotional maturation present new challenges for parents. Supports for separated fathers in their parenting role may include education about the impact of separation/divorce on children, developmental needs of children, and opportunities to develop new parenting skills (as necessary) in the context of interacting with and understanding their own children.

Custody arrangements vary across families and fathers may have sole, joint, or shared custody, with many falling somewhere in between these designations and some having no contact with their children following separation/divorce. The degree to which fathers see and interact with their children is a function of many factors, such as re-partnering (Juby et al., 2007; Manning et al., 2003), non-marital births (Aquilino, 2006), work (Castillo, Welch, & Sarver, 2012; Daly et al., 2008), personality/parenting skills (Menning, 2008), mobility and geographic proximity (King et al., 2004), financial resources (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007; Greene & Moore, 2000), family violence (Jaffe, Johnston, Crooks, & Bala, 2008), and addiction/mental health issues (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007). Furthermore, a father's satisfaction with the custodial arrangement has been linked to a positive co-parental relationship between the father and mother, which in turn influences on-going father-child contact (Arditti & Kelly, 1994).

Fathers with full and shared custody face the highest rates of role overload due to work obligations and juggling childcare responsibilities (DeGarmo et al., 2008; see also Arditti & Madden-Derdich, 1997, regarding some differences in mothers' experience of stress as related to custody arrangements). Castillo et al., (2012) identified that flexible work arrangements have a significant impact on nonresident father involvement. Supports directed at addressing the stress that attends these competing demands include those outlined within the other two domains with respect to focusing on managing interpersonal conflict with a former spouse as well as one's own emotional well-being and, in addition, parent education that directly incorporates strategies for maintaining a focus on the needs of children

in the context of competing work and family demands (e.g., Parents Forever, Brotherson, White, & Masich, 2010; Focus on Kids, see Schramm & Calix, 2011). Social support also serves as a protective factor for fathers and influences the quality of parenting over time (DeGarmo et al., 2008; King et al., 2004), suggesting the importance of incorporating skillbuilding in the areas of help-seeking and building social networks into parenting programs.

For some fathers, past behavior such as violence directed toward their spouse or inappropriate actions directed toward their children requires that they be supervised during the time they spend with their child (Jaffe et al., 2008). Supervised access provides children with safe, conflict free time with each of their parents. Of central concern within this domain is the lack of services to support parents in such circumstances to move beyond the need for supervised access. While supervision of access provides a temporary measure to allow for maintaining contact, the longer term goal should be educating and supporting fathers to become positive, engaged, and informed parents who are sensitive to their child's needs, managing their own emotional reactivity and behavioral responses, and adapting to developmental changes and unique aspects of their child's personality. Clearly, fathers should receive services that specifically support interaction/engagement with their children and also services attending to resolution/mediation of conflict, ideally in concert. Furthermore, supervised access visits themselves may present opportune times to facilitate positive parenting, specifically by providing parenting sessions to encourage the acquisition of knowledge about the development needs of the child and ways to play, engage, and care for their child. Ongoing observation and evaluation of fathers' engagement with their children in a supervised access context, particularly when paired with support and education geared towards improved parenting, can allow for enhanced decisionmaking on the part of the broader legal system with regard to when and how to initiate changed or more autonomous parenting time; decisions that are then grounded in actual demonstration of parenting skills. Programs designed for men who have directed violence against women or children provide an excellent opportunity to discuss with men their role as fathers (e.g., Caring Dads, see Scott & Crooks, 2004), with direct reference to how violence has impeded their active engagement in parenting and the provision of specific tools and skills for how to manage emotional and physical reactivity in order to be a safe and positive presence in their children's lives. The general absence of the topic of domestic violence from most mandatory or court annexed divorcing parent education programs has been identified as a shortcoming that should be addressed, particularly given that the risk is most acute just before and after separation (Fackrell, Hawkins, & Kay, 2011; Jaffe et al., 2008).

The goals of services and supports directed to fathers in their parenting role include a primary focus on the needs of children. These needs can be seen as related to the impact on children of their parents' separation/divorce, changing developmental and unique individual needs of children, and the importance for children of maintaining quality connections with both parents (Ahrons, 2007). As identified within the domain of reconfiguring family relationships, an emphasis on coordination and cooperation between parents is a primary concern for meeting the needs of children. Flexibility to adapt what is working or change what is not working over time and in response to children's changing needs is an important aspect of this coordination. Fathers (and mothers) should be supported in learning to focus on their children's needs, protect them from conflict due to the detrimental effect (Amato & Keith, 1991), and promote a sense of stability and security. A recent meta-analysis of divorcing parents education programs concluded that these programs are effective at reducing parental conflict, positively impacting parent-child relationships, child well-being and parental well-being and reducing re-litigation rates (Fackrell et al., 2011). Other research has identified that such programming has been more beneficial to mothers than fathers (Schramm & Calix, 2011) suggesting that a program that is for all parents, regardless of age, gender, and/or education may not be equally beneficial across diverse individuals and groups.

Fathers' experience of the interface with childcare and school settings may be quite different from that of mothers. Fagan & Palm (2004) invite child care providers to consider the important role that they can play in modeling and promoting positive shared parenting practices, as well as in sharing their knowledge of community resources in supporting parent education. Fathers may see these settings and personnel as more oriented to forming relationships with women, and may be less

comfortable or more reluctant to appear to need help. Consequently, service providers may require a particular sensitivity to how men's interest or disinterest is assumed, and how support or engagement is extended (Fagan & Palm, 2004).

The types of services that will fit these goals for support include the provision of a variety of format and content for parenting programs, such as individual or group counseling, supervised access, parenting education programs such as "parenting after separation" groups, father-specific groups offered through early years programming (e.g., Parenting Wisely at www.promoteprevent.org/ publications/ebi-factsheets/parenting-wisely; Boot Camp for New Dads at www.bootcampfornewdads .org), and father-only support groups (e.g., Be a Great Dad at www.familiesmatter.ca) that contain an education component (for more examples see Hoffman, 2011).

SUPPORT FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL NEEDS

The third domain of separating and separated/divorced fathers' experience to which support can be directed is related to individual psychosocial needs. In the context of change, adaptation, loss, and potential conflict related to separation and divorce, as described previously, men may experience depression, difficulties related to mourning or coping with work/family stress or financial problems, tensions related to lack of contact with their children, or conflict with their former spouse (Amato, 2000; Beach & Whisman, 2012; Overbeek, Vollebergh, de Graaf, Scholte, de Kemp, & Engels, 2006). Marital discord and disruption, of which separation/divorce is only one point in a longer process, appear to contribute to recurrence and new incidence of mental health problems (such as depressive symptoms and social anxiety) primarily linked to the negative perceptions of marital quality prior to divorce, with additional risk of substance abuse more directly influenced by divorce itself (Overbeek et al., 2006). There appears to be a reciprocal influence between depressive symptoms and parenting problems, including negative parenting behavior and poorer parent-child relationships associated with depression (Beach & Whisman, 2012).

Rotermann (2007) found that rates of depression following marital dissolution, even when controlling for loss of contact with children, reduced social support, income, and work status, are higher for men than for women. The most salient contributors to this finding appear to be loss of contact with children and social support (Rotermann, 2007). Masculine socialization influences both men's attitudes about seeking mental-health related support and their emotional/psychological experience (Good, Thomson, & Brathwaite, 2005). Discrepancies between gender-socialized expectations or masculinity constructs and lived experience, particularly when compounded by a lack of experience and skills in identifying and responding to emotions, or a previous reliance on a partner for disclosing vulnerabilities (Good et al., 2005) can contribute to reluctance to attend counseling or support services. When men feel unable to seek formal support for mental health issues, either pre-existing problems or those arising post-separation can be exacerbated (Smyth, 2004).

Men tend to mourn the loss of a relationship differently than women (Baum, 2003)—experiencing the loss later (after the actual separation has taken place rather than before the decision is made), grieving the loss of children and participation in family life more than their loss of a partner, and expressing mourning in actions (such as withdrawing from their children) rather than through words or emotions (Arendell, 1992). Baum (2006) has further identified that some men have difficulty separating their role as husband from their role as father, inhibiting them from moving forward with a distinct fathering identity. Difficulties with mourning and failure to create a reconfigured fathering role may contribute to disengagement from their children (Arendell, 1992) and on-going conflict with their ex-spouses (Emery, 1994).

The experience of individual fathers will vary widely, influenced by the unique circumstances of the marriage dissolution, timing relative to other aspects of life (e.g., work, age, health, friends, and family), previous and current relationships, mental health, social supports, emotional resources, finances, and cultural background. Individual well being as well as ability to manage stressors and maintain a healthy status will be influenced by post-separation events such as conflict with former spouse and ongoing

relationships and contact with children. Previous coping strategies may have relied heavily on vacations or gym memberships that are no longer financially viable, emotional support from a former spouse in the context of the now-dissolved marriage, or time away from work and family responsibilities that is no longer feasible in light of financial need or family reconfiguration.

Addis and Mahalik (2003) describe men's help-seeking as influenced by at least three primary considerations: (a) Do other men experience the same problems I believe I am having and do they seek assistance for these problems? (b) Is this problem related to a central aspect of who I am? (c) How will others respond to my seeking help, can I reciprocate or will I become more dependent on others? These authors also suggest the importance of designing programs for men that focus on solving problems together, reciprocity, and normalizing problems.

The goal of interventions in this domain is to provide support and acknowledgement regarding the impact of current relationship status, in particular the changed relationship with their children. Supports are geared to facilitating the process of loss and mourning, particularly during times of potential depression and higher levels of stress. Types of services that may serve to meet fathers' needs include: individual counseling, psycho-educational groups directed at men's emotional health and well being, websites that help men to assess their own emotional well-being, support groups for men and particularly for groups of fathers struggling with similar issues. In addition, programs specifically designed for addictions treatment or anger management for men can incorporate direct attention to participants' fathering roles (Ashbourne, 2006). Beach and Whisman (2012) in their recent review of evidence-based practices for the treatment of affective disorders, point to increasing support in the research for linking parenting interventions with treatment for depression. To date this research has almost exclusively been carried out with mothers, and demonstrates both a preventative and treatment effect associated with enhancing parenting efficacy and alleviating depressive symptoms (Beach & Whisman, 2012). A future direction to provide parenting interventions for fathers with depressive symptoms and to enhance research in this area is warranted.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICE DELIVERY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

For the purpose of illustration, we provide here an example of how services for one group of separated fathers could be conceived within the framework for services described in this paper. In extreme situations of what can be termed high conflict divorce (see Birnbaum & Bala, 2010, for a more detailed discussion of differentiating these types of cases), former spouses demonstrate great acrimony throughout the separation and divorce process; often a lengthy process and frequently with a "no holds barred" approach to verbal expressions of anger and criticism in front of children, as well as potential for physical acts of aggression and misuse of legal and financial resources. These situations are obviously not beneficial to children or adults, and may risk physical safety of family members or contribute to alienation between parents and children (see Fidler & Bala, 2010 for a more detailed description of the concept of parental alienation). Early and proactive interventions are advocated in such circumstances (Jaffe, Ashbourne, & Mamo, 2010).

Interventions for fathers involved in high conflict divorce, considered within the framework we are proposing, could originate within each of the identified domains:

(1)   Early intervention with the separating couple focused primarily on the de-coupling process could provide support for resolving the financial and legal aspects of separation. The presence of more neutral parties, a format for problem identification and resolution, and strict adherence to protocols that limit angry and emotional outbursts or threats could ensure that non-parenting decisions are treated as separate and apart from child involvement. This also provides an opportunity to practice skills that may be valuable in addressing subsequent decisions about co-parenting.

(2)   Interventions spanning the domains of reconfiguring family structure and parenting could focus, with individual parents, on their children's needs and specifically on the potential

negative impact of parental conflict. These interventions would be directed at laying a foundation for co-parenting to the degree that this is possible given current levels of conflict. This may be an opportunity for parenting coaches to play a significant role.

(3) Interventions oriented to individual psychosocial needs could provide information, support, and appropriate treatment directed at managing anger, mental health issues, addictions, and/or grief that is exacerbating or maintaining the high conflict interactions between ex-spouses.

(4) Since high-conflict couples frequently have protracted engagement with the court system, highly visible court-attached information and referral services can provide early access and information about available services and important considerations.

The proposed framework attends to the multiple dimensions of individual, couple, and family functioning, together with the complexities that serve to maintain conflict. In the absence of knowledge about children's needs or specific parenting skills, or support for separating the development of co-parenting skills as distinct from engaging in legal de-coupling, or treatment of individual mental health concerns, actions taken by each parent will likely further sabotage efforts toward resolution of conflict.

With respect to more general implementation of this framework for services, it can be noted that father-supportive initiatives are not highly visible in the court and social service sector in North America and other jurisdictions. Given the historical primacy of women in care work oriented toward children, services supporting child rearing and coping with associated challenges have traditionally been both mother-oriented and predominately staffed by women. Only recently have we begun to ask fathers about their needs and to seek understanding with respect to how masculinity norms and male help-seeking behaviors influence their participation in programming.

One implication of this conceptualization might be the provision of exclusively father-focused services providing men with support, new networks, and an opportunity to express their experiences as they see and live them. Father-only support groups and father-child play groups give opportunities for men to address father specific issues and develop their fathering competencies. Such services should be tailored to the unique needs of fathers and men, and not simply renamed programs originally designed for women. While men may be reluctant help-seekers, fathers can be motivated to participate as they become aware that their behavior can positively influence their child's development; focusing on the child's perspective and well-being can be a good enticement to fathers' participation (McIntosh et al., 2008). Knowing that men may be more comfortable with physical activities, may have more financial resources (although not necessarily) and re-partner more readily than women, (Juby et al., 2007) service design can provide for sports or activity-based programming, the inclusion of children, and attention to the challenges of new relationships, blended families, and competing family demands. These aspects of men's lives might be seen as providing opportunities, such as fun-based interactions in a group setting and recommitment to parenting older children at the time of a new baby's arrival, in addition to challenges associated with multiple commitments, scheduling, and competing demands.

Coordination of services that encourage both parents' participation in mediation, assessment services, counseling, and parenting coordination can offer constructive, cost-effective, and time-efficient processes helpful to many parents. Programming related to mental health issues, addictions, anger management, and violence prevention are frequently provided as more generic supports for adult men and/or women. We would argue that being a parent, and in particular being a separated parent, brings with it unique and important aspects of one's life and circumstances that should be taken directly into account as these other concerns are addressed. Seeing men as fathers in addition to being men who struggle with anger, mental illness, or addictions brings a particular orientation to programming that allows for direct consideration of how these challenges impede a positive, safe and stable relationship with one's children.

The proposed conceptualization of support for separated/divorced fathers suggests research in the following areas (not an exclusive list): short- and long-term outcomes for fathers attending men-only parenting groups; enhanced understanding of the contributions of men's (and women's) psychosocial/

mental-health status to high-conflict divorce; outcomes for men and women who receive "couple dissolution" counseling at the time of separation that is specifically geared toward negotiating couple dissolution separately from co-parenting concerns; program design and evaluation for fathers engaged in supervised access; motivating factors for fathers who participate in parenting programs post-separation and in tandem with re-partnering; child outcomes, at various ages, associated with programming for fathers and mothers undergoing separation/divorce; potential benefits of providing separate and different interventions for high- and low-conflict separating couples.

CONCLUSION

Separation and divorce transitions are often difficult for fathers, mothers, and children. For some families, the associated challenges and negotiations are traversed over a relatively short time span and a reorganized family structure is established that meets individual family members' needs in large part. For others, this transition is much more difficult and lengthy. We present in this paper a conceptualization of the various domains that are influenced by the changes attending separation and divorce. We describe the importance of de-coupling from former partners in emotional, physical, and legal ways while ensuring that a co-parenting relationship is maintained that honors the parent-child relationship's post-separation. We also consider the specific aspects of one's parenting role that may require augmented skills and/or knowledge about developmental needs and the impact of separation and divorce on children. As well, we acknowledge the importance of attending to the impact of loss and change on oneself, along with the potential presence of mental illness or a history of family violence that can complicate transitions as well as compromise well-being. These latter concerns may also exacerbate acrimony and conflict between ex-partners and within the legal system with negative fallout influencing both parents and children. We are not advocating that father-only services be offered to the exclusion of services that can serve all parents, or services that specifically target both parents engaged in resolving separation and custody issues, particularly for high conflict disputes. In fact, it is likely that the domains outlined in this paper could equally apply to services for mothers as well. We are acknowledging, however, the relative invisibility of the multiple dimensions of fathers' experiences post-separation and the general lack of services that specifically address these. It is important to note that separated/divorced fathers are not a homogenous group and that their needs, as well as family constellations and dynamics will change over time. Recognizing what may be distinct and unique needs associated with being a separated father is a first step. Future efforts will call on service providers to address diversity issues among fathers. The unique challenges related to age, cultural diversity, mental health concerns, history of violence and trauma, socioeconomic status, geographic isolation, and parenting children with special needs, for example, require strategies and interventions that are thoughtful, well researched and effective, and which attend to the multiple dimensions of men's lives.

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