Fatherhood Research & Practice Network

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Framing the Future of Responsible Fatherhood Evaluation Research for the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network

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Framing the Future of Responsible Fatherhood
Evaluation Research for the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network

The Fatherhood Research and Practice Network (FRPN) convened a workgroup of experts in the field of fatherhood and father involvement to develop a research agenda that defines the state of the current research in this area, identifies extant gaps in this research, and generates suggestions for future research. The goal is for the workgroup's ideas to inform subsequent funding by the FRPN for evaluation and research projects that seek to enhance our collective understanding of the important role fathers play in the lives of their children and how programs and policies can strengthen this role. This brief provides an overview of the workgroup's conclusions.

Why Focus on Responsible Fatherhood?

Fathers matter. For too long, this simple statement was debated by researchers and advocates and the important role that fathers play in their children's lives went undervalued and under-researched. Research is now clear that the extent to which fathers participate in childrearing carries significant implications for the welfare of a child. Indeed, involved fatherhood has been linked to better outcomes on nearly every measure of a child's wellbeing, from cognitive development and educational achievement to self-esteem and pro-social behavior.[1] When fathers are committed to the lives of their children, those children are also more likely to be healthy, productive, empathetic, and emotionally secure.[2]

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[1] Rosenberg, J., & Wilcox, W. B. (2006). United States Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children and Families. Child Welfare Information Gateway. *The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children.* Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S. Children's Bureau. Retrieved from https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/chaptertwo.cfm; Bronte-Tinkew, Jacinta et al. (2008). Involvement among resident fathers and links to infant cognitive outcomes. *Journal of Family Issues*, *29*(9), 1211-1244.; Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2007). Fathers' influence on their children's cognitive and emotional development: From toddlers to Pre-K. *Applied Developmental Science*, *11*(4), 208-213; Black, M. M., Dubowitz, H., & Starr, R. H., Jr. (1999). African American fathers in low income, urban families: Development, behavior, and home environment of their three-year-old children. *Child Development, 70*(4), 967-978.; Carlson, M. J., & Magnuson, K. (2011). Low-Income fathers' influence on children. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 635*(95), 95-116.; Carlson, M. J., McLanahan, S.S., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2007, September). Fathers' involvement and young children's behavior in fragile families. Extended Abstract.; Carlson, M. J., McLanahan, S.S. (2009, May 11) Fathers in fragile families. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. Working Paper WP09-14-FF.; Harris, K. M., Furstenberg, F.F., & Marmer, J.K. (1998). Paternal involvement with adolescents in intact families: The influence of fathers over the life course. *Demography, 35* (2), 201-216.; Carlson, M. J. (2006). Family structure, father involvement, and adolescent behavioral outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 68*, 137–154.

[2] United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2011, July*). Promoting Responsible Fatherhood: Effective Parenting*. Federal Research Site. Retrieved from http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/Parenting/index.shtml

Given the substantial role that a shared household plays in facilitating paternal interaction, much of the literature on how father involvement is associated with child outcomes has been moderated by father residential status. Fathers who live with their children tend to have unambiguously positive influences on child wellbeing. Children with resident fathers are significantly less likely to be poor, use drugs, commit crimes, experience emotional or behavioral problems, or experience child abuse.[3] Greater involvement by resident fathers has also been linked to a host of significant developmental outcomes, from decreases in delinquency and behavioral problems, to improved cognitive development, educational attainment, and psychological wellbeing.[4] Although much of the literature on residential fathers has been confined to middle-class samples, a growing band of research on low-income fathers with pre-school-aged children has shown similar benefits to cognition, language, and behavior from positive father-child interaction.[5]

The research on nonresident father involvement is considerably more mixed. Though a number of studies have linked nonresident father involvement to fewer internalizing and externalizing problems in children and adolescents, the beneficial associations of involvement seem to be moderated by the quality of the father-child relationship.[6] Nonresident fathers who have a warm and supportive bond with their children are less likely to have children who act out in school, show signs of depression, or exhibit antisocial/aggressive behavior.[7] These effects hold independent of the mother-child relationship, suggesting that nonresident fathers make a unique contribution to their children's wellbeing.

Yet others have cast doubt on the degree to which nonresident father involvement improves child wellbeing – especially when involvement is narrowly characterized as increased visitation, frequency of contact, or shared leisure activities.[8] More nuanced measures of father involvement however, such as

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[3] United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2011, July*). Promoting Responsible Fatherhood: Effective Parenting*. Federal Research Site. Retrieved from http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/Parenting/index.shtml

[4] Carlson, M. J., & Magnuson, K. (2011); Carlson, M. J., McLanahan,S.S., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2007); Carlson, M. J. & McLanahan, S.S. (2009); Harris, K. M., Furstenberg, F.F., & Marmer, J.K. (1998); Carlson, M. J. (2006).

[5] Shannon, J. D., Tamis-LeMonda, C., London, K., & Cabrera, N. (2002). Beyond rough and tumble: Low-Income fathers' interactions and children's cognitive development at 24 months. *Parenting: Science and Practice, 2*(2), 77-104.; Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Shannon, J. D., Cabrera, N. J., & Lamb, M. E. (2004). Fathers and mothers at play with their 2- and 3-year-olds: Contributions to language and cognitive development. *Child Development, 75*, 1806-1820.; Martin, A., Ryan, R. M., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2007). The joint influence of mother and father parenting on child cognitive outcomes at age 5. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 22*, 423-439.; Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D., & Tamis-LeMonda, C., (2007).

[6] Amato, P. R., & Gilbreth, J. G. (1999). Nonresident fathers and children's well-being: A Meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 61*(3), 557-573.; King, V., & Sobolewski, J. M. (2006), Nonresident fathers' contributions to adolescent well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 68*, 537–557.; Carlson, M. J., (2006).

[7] King, V., & Sobolewski, J. M. (2006).

[8]Furstenberg, F. F., Jr., Morgan, S. P., & Allison, P. D. (1987). Paternal participation and children's well-being after marital dissolution. *American Sociological Review, 52*(5), 695-701.; King, V. (1994). Nonresident father involvement and child well-being: Can dads make a difference? *Journal of Family Issues*, *15*, 78-96.; Stewart, S. D. (2003). Nonresident parenting and adolescent adjustment: The quality of nonresident father-child interaction *Journal of Family Issues, 24*, 217-244; Marsiglio, W., Amato, P., Day, R. D., & Lamb, M. E. (2000). Scholarship on fatherhood in

father-child closeness, the provision of emotional support, and responsive parenting, do appear to correspond with positive outcomes on a broad range of indicators for child and adolescent wellbeing.[9] For example, nonresident fathers who engage in authoritative parenting (providing emotional support to children, praising children's accomplishments, and appropriately disciplining children for misbehavior) have children who are better adjusted, do better in school, and are less likely to have internalizing or externalizing problems.[10] On the whole, much of the literature seems to suggest that mere contact is not enough; rather, it is the type of interaction that is most important for a child's development.[11]

In some cases, increased involvement from nonresident fathers can even have detrimental effects on children. Several studies, for example, have demonstrated that when a child's mother and father do not get along, frequent visitation from the nonresident father is associated with negative behavioral outcomes in the child.[12] Research on the topic of co-parenting affirms this conclusion, especially with regard to nonresident fathers. Whereas heightened paternal involvement from resident fathers yields improved behavioral outcomes across the board, greater interaction from nonresident fathers only translates to better behavioral outcomes when the mother and father have a strong co-parenting relationship.[13]

Among unmarried fathers, evidence from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study suggests that in addition to the quality of the parental relationship, whether parents live together or are romantically involved also prove highly correlated with father involvement.[14] These associations are reinforced by analyses that find the quality of the parent's romantic relationship to be the strongest predictor of paternal involvement.[15] Yet even when parents are not romantically involved or cohabiting, there is

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the 1990s and beyond. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62* (4), 1173-1191.; Amato, P. R., & Gilbreth, J. G. (1999).

[9] Amato, P. R., & Rivera, F. (1999). Paternal involvement and children's behavior problems. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *61*(2), 375-384.; Lamb, M. E. (2004). *The role of the father in child development*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.; Harris, K. M., Furstenberg, F.F., & Marmer, J.K. (1998); Amato, P. R., & Gilbreth, J. G. (1999); Marsiglio, W., Amato, P., Day, R. D., & Lamb, M. E. (2000).

[10] Amato, P. R., & Gilbreth, J. G. (1999); Marsiglio, W., Amato, P., Day, R. D., & Lamb, M. E. (2000).

[11] Amato, P. R., & Gilbreth, J. G. (1999); Marsiglio, W., Amato, P., Day, R. D., & Lamb, M. E. (2000).

[12] Amato, P. R., & Rezac, S. (1994). Contact with nonresidential parents, interparental conflict, and children's behavior. *Journal of Family Issues, 15*, 191–207.; Healy, J. M., Malley, J. E., & Stewart, A. J. (1990). Children and their fathers after parental separation. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 60*, 531–543.

[13] Carlson, M. J., & McLanahan, S.S. (2009).

[14] Carlson, M. J., & McLanahan, S. S. (2004). Early father involvement in fragile families. In R. D. Day & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Conceptualizing and Measuring Father Involvement* (pp. 241-271). Mahwah, N J: Lawrence Erlbaum; Fagan, J., & Palkovitz, R. (2007). Unmarried, nonresident fathers' involvement with their infants: A risk and resilience perspective. *Journal of Family Psychology, 21*(3), 479-489;

[15] Gavin, L. E., Black, M. M., Minor, S., Abel, Y., Papas, M. A., & Bentley, M. E. (2002). Young, disadvantaged fathers' involvement with their infants: An ecological perspective. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 31*, 266 –276.

some evidence to suggest that their ability to get along and engage in positive co-parenting matters greatly for a father's interaction with his children.[16]

Cohabitation plays a large role in the involvement of unmarried fathers, with resident fathers tending to exhibit far greater involvement with their children than nonresident fathers.[17] Moreover, research suggests that resident and nonresident fathers tend to interact with their children in different ways, with nonresident father involvement more likely to be characterized by leisure and play rather than discipline or cognitive support.[18] There is also evidence to suggest that involvement by nonresident fathers who are not romantically involved with the mother may be significantly mediated by the parents' ability to cooperate and engage in positive co-parenting.[19]

The distinction between resident and nonresident fathers is not as clear as it may seem, however. Research by Edin and Nelson (2013) shows that many disadvantaged fathers are often simultaneously a resident father in one household and a nonresident father to another household.[20] These "serial fathers" typically cannot meet all of their emotional or financial obligations to their children across multiple households and tend to "love the one they're with" or focus their attention on their current household.[21]

Research also affirms that most fathers, whether living in the household or not, desire to financially provide for their children and be involved their lives.[22] When fathers are absent or fail to contribute financially to their child's support, this is typically a sign that the father suffers from multiple risk factors, rather than merely neglect or irresponsibility. Fathers who are unemployed; have a history of incarceration, substance abuse, or family violence; or who have obligations to children across multiple households tend to be less involved - emotionally and financially - in their children's life.[23]

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[16] Carlson, M. J., McLanahan, S. S., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2008). Coparenting and nonresident fathers' involvement with young children after a nonmarital birth. *Demography, 45*(2), 461-488.; Sobolewski, J. M., & King V. (2005). The importance of the coparental relationship for nonresident fathers' ties to children. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 67*, 1196–212; Doherty, W. J., Kouneski, E. F., & Erickson, M. F. (1998). Responsible fathering: An overview and conceptual framework. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 60*, 277– 292.
[17] Carlson, M. J., & McLanahan, S. S. (2004); Fagan, J., & Palkovitz, R. (2007).
[18] Furstenberg, F. F., & Cherlin, A. (1991). *Divided families: What happens to children when parents part*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; Marsiglio, W., Amato, P., Day, R. D., & Lamb, M. E. (2000).
[19] Coley, R. L., & Hernandez, D. C. (2006). Predictors of paternal involvement for resident and nonresident low-income fathers. *Developmental Psychology, 42*(6), 1041-1056.; Carlson, M. J., McLanahan, S. S., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2008); Sobolewski, J. M., & King, V. (2005); Doherty, W. J., Kouneski, E. F., & Erickson, M. F. (1998).
[20] Edin, K., Nelson, T. (2013). *Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the inner city.* University of California Press
[21] Edin, K., Nelson, T. (2013).
[22] Edin, K., Nelson, T. (2013).
[23] Waller, M. R., & Swisher, R. (2006). Fathers' risk Factors in fragile families: Implications for "healthy" relationships and father involvement. *Social Problems, 53*(3), 392-420.; Nepomnyaschy, L., & Garfinkel, I. (2010). Child support enforcement and fathers' contributions to their nonmarital children. *The Social service review*,*84*(3), 341.; Holzer, H. J., Offner, P., & Sorensen, E. (2005). Declining employment among young black less-educated men: The role of incarceration and child support. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *24*(2), 329-350.; Mincy, R.

What Has Been Learned from Evaluations of Programs and Policies?

Programs targeted toward unmarried fathers have traditionally aimed to increase a father's financial contributions toward his children by increasing employment and, hence, child support payments. The level and quality of involvement a father has with his children and the quality of the co-parenting relationship became the focus of many programs funded through the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA, also known as "welfare reform") and subsequently the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005.[24] However, the overarching impetus of federally-funded programs has been to enable fathers to provide for their children – indeed some may argue that this focus has been too narrow and has perpetuated the view of "father as provider" rather than acknowledging the broader role that fathers play in their children's lives. Our knowledge on the effectiveness of these programs remains somewhat limited given the lack of rigor in most of the evaluations. More limiting still, is that research has taught us little about what it is about any program that actually *causes* any change in outcomes. Below is an overview of the relatively small number of fatherhood program evaluations that have provided the best information to date.[25]

One of the first programs to include a rigorous evaluation was the Parents' Fair Share (PFS) Demonstration, which ran from 1994 to 1996.[26] PFS was a random assignment evaluation that divided 5,600 noncustodial parents evenly between a program group that received PFS services and a control group. The aim of PFS was to increase fathers' involvement in parenting, improve the ability of these fathers to attain well-paying jobs, and increase their child support payments. In regards to the impact of PFS on noncustodial fathers' involvement with children, the results of the evaluation showed that PFS did not have a significant impact on noncustodial fathers' frequency of contact with children. There was only one significant impact on noncustodial fathers' participation in activities with their children: fathers in the PFS group were more likely to participate in religious activities with their children.

Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2007) reviewed 34 fatherhood programs conducted in the U.S., UK, Australia, and Canada.[27] Six of the fatherhood programs were categorized as model programs because they were subjected to randomized control trials and retained at least 60 percent of the original sample. Of the six

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B., & Sorensen, E. J. (1998). Deadbeats and turnips in child support reform. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *17*(1), 44-51.; Fagan, J., & Palkovitz, R. (2007).

[24] Klempin, S., & Mincy, R.B. (2012). *Tossed on a sea of change: A status update on the responsible fatherhood field*. Informally published manuscript, Columbia University School of Social Work, Columbia University, New York, NY, USA. Retrieved from http://crfcfw.columbia.edu/files/2012/09/OSF-Fatherhood-Survey_Final-Report_9.25.12_SK_RM.pdf

[25] Cowan, C.P., Cowan, P.A. & Knox, V. (2010). Marriage and fatherhood programs. *The Future of Children, 20*(2), 205-230. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/20773701.

[26] Knox, V., & Redcross, C. (2000). *Parenting and providing: The impact of parents' fair share on paternal involvement*. Retrieved from the Internet, http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_469.pdf

[27] Bronte-Tinkew, J., Carrano, J., Allen, T., Bowie, L., Mbawa, K., & Matthews, G. (2007). *Elements of promising practice for fatherhood programs: Evidence-based research findings on programs for fathers.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Family Assistance.

rigorous evaluations identified in the report, only two were targeted toward low-income, unmarried fathers. The others focused on divorced fathers or higher income fathers who were married. One of the two focusing on low-income, unmarried fathers was the Young Dads project which was an experimental study of adolescent fathers who were assigned to a treatment group or a control group that received no services.[28] The adolescent fathers in the treatment group were more likely to report that they had an excellent or good relationship with their child at follow-up than were fathers in the control condition. The second experimental study examined the effects of a responsible fatherhood program targeting incarcerated fathers.[29] The results of this study showed that fathers in the experimental group reported increased contact with their children and improved knowledge and attitudes toward fatherhood.

The federal Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) catalog of research on programs for low-income fathers identified 13 rigorous impact studies on fathers.[30] Rigorous studies were defined as those that include research designs or methods that provide unbiased estimates of the program's impact on fathers and families. Of the 13 studies, only eight evaluations included programming intended to increase and improve fathers' amount and quality of involvement with their children. All of the studies targeted low-income and primarily nonresidential fathers. Most of these studies showed positive impacts of fathers' participation in the treatment group on fathers' involvement with children, although the largest of the studies (PFS was included in the OPRE catalog) did not show significant effects on paternal involvement with children, as described earlier in this brief.

The studies were conducted in a variety of settings. For example, Fagan and Iglesias (1999) conducted a quasi-experimental study that explored the effects of Head Start fathers' participation in a program that included three components: classroom volunteering, attendance at organized father-child activities, and a monthly support group.[31] Fathers in the intervention group showed significantly greater gains in direct interaction and support for learning activities with children at home than the comparison group of fathers, but only if the fathers were at least moderately involved in the program. Also, children of high-involvement, intervention-group fathers showed greater gains in math readiness than children of low-involvement, comparison-group fathers. One of the conclusions of this study was that dosage of fathers' involvement in the program was an important moderating variable.

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[28] Mazza, C. (2002). Young dads: The effects of a parenting program on urban African-American adolescent fathers. *Adolescence, 37*(148), 681-693.

[29] Robbers, M. L. P. (2005). Focus on family and fatherhood: Lessons from Fairfax County's Responsible Fatherhood Program for incarcerated dads. *Justice Policy Journal, 2*(1).

[30] Avellar, S., Dion, M.R., Clarkwest, A., Zaveri, H., Asheer, S., Borradaile, K., Angus, M.H., Novak, T., Redline, J., & Zukiewicz, M. (2011). Catalog of Research: Programs for Low-Income Fathers, OPRE Report # 2011-20, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from: http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/family_support/catalog_research_rpt.pdf

[31] Fagan, J., & Iglesias, A. (1999). Father and father figure involvement in Head Start: A quasi-experimental study. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 14*, 243-269.

Since the OPRE catalog was published, there have only been a few additional rigorous evaluations of responsible fatherhood initiatives (e.g., Rutgers University Economic Development Research Group, 2011).[32] Many more studies are based on less rigorous research designs, such as pretest/post-test studies that do not include control or comparison groups.[33] The findings of these less rigorous studies tend to show positive program effects on fathers' behavior and attitudes. For example, 12 out of the 13 evaluations of interventions with teenage, incarcerated fathers reviewed by Buston et al. (2012) showed positive results for fathers.[34]

The small number of rigorously evaluated studies point to a significant gap that the FRPN workgroup thinks should be addressed in the next wave of responsible fatherhood evaluations. Although several rigorous studies have shown positive effects of fatherhood programs on fathers and children,[35] there is a need to replicate findings in these studies and to evaluate a wider range of programs that have not been included in previous studies.

There is also a significant need to determine if programmatic efforts are effective for different populations of fathers. For example, virtually no experimental or quasi-experimental studies have been conducted specifically with Latino or American Indian fathers, although many responsible fatherhood programs target these populations. Robbers (2011) conducted one of the few studies of primarily Latino fathers, but this study was based on a pretest/post-test design with no control group.[36] The results of this study showed that father involvement increased steadily and significantly from the program pretest to two years post program.

Fathers with children exposed to vulnerable situations are also typically not studied. The American Humane Association conducted a multi-site, pre/post study of a program to help fathers with children in foster care become more involved with their children and to improve their parenting skills. However,

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[32] Rutgers University – Newark, Economic Development Research Group, School of Public Affairs and Administration. (2011). Assessing the impact of InsideOut Dad on Newark Community Education Centers (CEC) Residential Reentry Center residents. Newark, NJ: Rutgers University.

[33] Buston, K., Parkes, A., Thomson, H. Wight, D., & Fenton, C. (2012). Parenting interventions for male young offenders: A review of the evidence on what works. *Journal of Adolescence, 35*, 731-742.; Robbers, M. P. (2011). Father involvement among young Hispanics. *Families In Society, 92*(2), 169-175.; Scourfield, J., Tolman, R., Maxwell, N., Holland, S., Bullock, A. and Sloan, L. (2012) Results of a training course for social workers on engaging fathers in child protection. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34*(8), 1425-1432;Thoennes, N., Harper, C., Folaron, G., Malm, K., McLaughlin, O., Bai, J., & Kaunelis, R. (2011). Where are the dads? Identifying, locating, contacting, and engaging non-resident fathers of children in foster care. *Protecting Children, 26*(3), 30-43.; Avellar et al, (2011).

[34] Buston, et al., (2012)

[35] Cowan, P. A., Cowan, C., Pruett, M., Pruett, K., & Wong, J. J. (2009). Promoting fathers' engagement with children: Preventive interventions for low-income families. *Journal Of Marriage And Family, 71*(3), 663-679. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00625.x; Fagan, J., & Iglesias, A., (1999).

[36] Robbers, M. P., (2011).

the study suffered serious recruitment problems and the results have been inconclusive.[37] In addition, several promising programs target incarcerated fathers,[38] but most of the research on these programs is based on case studies or pre/post design.

Another area of research that is understudied, but informative, is the role of child support and visitation policies in supporting father involvement. Given that paternity laws and child support orders do not confer visitation rights on unmarried parents and most states require unmarried fathers to pursue a separate legal filing in a family court to obtain a visitation order, relatively few unmarried fathers have parenting-time agreements that spell out when they will spend time with their child. Not surprisingly most previous studies of low-income, never-married parents, such as Parents Fair Share and the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) Responsible Fatherhood Demonstration Projects, found that fathers were dissatisfied with the amount of time they spent with their children and many fathers accused the other parent of being a "gatekeeper" and withholding access to children.

The failure to address parenting time for unmarried parents has many consequences. Although there is debate about the causal direction, there is little doubt that paternal contact and support are related,[39] and that the receipt of child support has positive effects on child wellbeing.[40] There is growing momentum to address parenting-time problems in the child support caseload, as evidenced by the State Access and Visitation (AV) grant program, which provides total annual grant awards of $10 million for states for mediation, supervised visitation, and parent education. Moreover, President Obama's 2014 budget proposal includes a provision requiring states to establish parenting time in all new child support orders. And Senate Bill 1870 mandates states to develop voluntary parenting time programs for never-married parents.

OCSE has sponsored numerous studies to assess the association of AV services with both child support payments and father-child contact, and how the services can be integrated in child support agencies. For example, evaluations of the AV program conducted by the Office of the Inspector General (2002) and

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[37] Thoennes, N., Harper, C., Folaron, G., Malm, K., McLaughlin, O., Bai, J., & Kaunelis, R. (2011). Where are the dads? Identifying, locating, contacting, and engaging nonresident fathers of children in foster care. *Protecting Children, 26*, 2.

[38] Brito, T. L. (2012). Fathers behind bars: Rethinking child support policy toward low-income noncustodial fathers and their families. *Journal of Gender Race & Justice, 15*, 617.

[39] Chambers, D. L. (1979). *Making fathers pay: The enforcement of child support*. University of Chicago Press; Seltzer, J. A., McLanahan, S. S., & Hanson, T. L. (1998). Will child support enforcement increase father-child contact and parental conflict after separation. *Fathers under fire: The revolution in child support enforcement*, 157-190.; Koball, H., & Principe, D. (2002). Do nonresident fathers who pay child support visit their children more? New Federalism: National Survey of America's Families, Series B, No. B-44. Assessing the New Federalism: An Urban Institute Program to Assess Changing Social Policies.

[40] Argys, L. M., Peters, H. E., Brooks-Gunn, J., & Smith, J. R. (1998). The impact of child support on cognitive outcomes of young children. *Demography, 35*(2), 159-173.; Garfinkel, I. (2001). Child Support in the New World of Welfare. *The new world of welfare*, 452-53.; Knox, V. W., & Bane, M. J. (1994). Child support and schooling. *Child support and child well-being*, 285-316.

Center for Policy Research (CPR) both showed statistically significant, post-program increases in parent-child contact levels and child support payments for never-married parents.[41] Although neither study used a comparison group, one-third to one-half of noncustodial parents in every program reported that parent-child contact increased following program participation.

Further evidence that AV services have a positive association with parent-child contact and child support payments comes from evaluations of several OCSE-funded projects that integrated attention to AV problems in regular child support case processing. Three random assignment studies performed by CPR in Colorado, Texas, and Tennessee offered parents in the high-level treatment group the opportunity to participate in informal facilitation by a specially trained worker at the child support agency or a free consultation with an attorney and a mediator, with the objective of developing a parenting plan that spelled out when the children would spend time with each parent or to resolve a parenting-time disagreement.[42] The evaluations found that most parents who participated in these interventions reached agreements on parenting time (69% in Tennessee, 74% in Colorado, and 81% in Texas). In addition, members of the high-level treatment group in Tennessee reported statistically significant gains in parent-child contact and nonresident parents in Texas who participated in parenting-time interventions reported substantial improvements in co-parental relationships. Child support payments in the high-level treatment group also improved significantly in the Tennessee and Texas sites.[43]

One concern, however, is that only about one-third of targeted parents with visitation problems in the high-level treatment group were actually served at any project site. Many eligible families could not be served either because the nonresident (33%) or resident parent (33%) could not be reached to arrange a meeting or failed to appear for a scheduled meeting and an additional 10 percent had domestic violence and other factors that might make parenting time unsafe.

What Studies are Ongoing?

Currently, a number of important evaluations of responsible fatherhood programs are being conducted. Notably, the Parent and Children Together (PACT) evaluation study, being conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., is the only large scale randomized control study that is currently being conducted of responsible fatherhood programs.[44] This evaluation was initiated to develop greater understanding of the

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[41] Office of the Inspector General (2002). Effectiveness of access and visitation programs. OEI-05-02-00300. U.S. Department of HHS, Washington, D.C.; Pearson, J., Davis, L., & Thoennes, N. (2007). Colorado Parenting Time/Visitation Project. Center for Policy Research, Denver, Colorado.

[42] Pearson, J., Davis, L., & Thoennes, N. (2007). *Colorado Parenting Time/Visitation Project*. Center for Policy Research, Denver, Colorado; Pearson, J., & Davis, L. (2007). *Ensuring access, encouraging support: Final report*. Center for Policy Research, Denver, Colorado; Davis, L., Pearson, J., & Thoennes, N. (2010). *Tennessee Parenting Project: Final report*. Center for Policy Research, Denver, Colorado.

[43] McHale, J., Waller, M. R., & Pearson, J. (2012). Coparenting interventions for fragile families: what do we know and where do we need to go next? *Family process, 51*(3), 284-306.

[44] Campbell, N., Chamberlain, S., McConnell, S. & Dion, R. (in publication). Parents and Children Together (PACT) Evaluation, 2011-2016. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/parents-and-children-together-pact-evaluation.

challenges and successes of healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood service implementation, the needs and experiences of participants, and the effectiveness of these types of programs. Seven federally-funded grantees are participating in impact/process studies through this evaluation, including three healthy marriage programs and four responsible fatherhood programs. The PACT Evaluation includes both a program group and a control group. Program group participants are able to participate in the programs, whereas the control group members are eligible to receive community-based services only. The impact studies are examining whether the programs improve outcomes for the fathers, mothers, and children participating in the program group compared to those in the control group, and the process studies will shed light on barriers to recruitment and retention, along with other implementation challenges.

The Home Visiting: Approaches to Father Engagement and Fathers' Experiences qualitative research project, funded by the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation and conducted by the Urban Institute, is designed to collect information about innovative approaches home visiting programs are using to actively engage and serve fathers, as well as fathers' perspectives on participating in such programs.[45] The evaluation of the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) federally funded program in Texas is also paying close attention to the strategies that community programs use to successfully engage fathers in home visiting services, and the role that fathers play in retaining families in the programs.

The Fatherhood and Marriage Local Evaluation (FaMLE) and Cross-Site Project evaluation study seeks to formulate greater understanding of what strategies federally-funded healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood programs use to design well-conceived programs; what strategies they use to successfully implement these well-conceived programs; and the reported outcomes of participants in the programs.[46] The goals of the FaMLE research project are to support high-quality data collection, strengthen local evaluations of healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood programs, and conduct cross-site analysis. The Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED) is a rigorous, random-assignment demonstration and evaluation project taking place in child support agencies in eight states. This project provides unemployed noncustodial parents services including: integrated case management; employment-oriented services that include job placement and retention; fatherhood/parenting activities using peer support; and enhanced child support services including the review and appropriate adjustment of child support orders.

One of the sites, Colorado, is offering parents in the treatment group free mediation services to develop parenting-time plans. It is expected that CSPED will yield important information on the effectiveness of

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[45] Campbell, N. (in publication). Home Visiting: Approaches to Father Engagement and Fathers' Experiences, 2013-2015. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/home-visiting-approaches-to-father-engagement-and-fathers-experiences.

[46] Chamberlain, S. (in publication). Fatherhood and Marriage Local Evaluation (FaMLE) and Cross-Site Project, 2013-2015. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/fatherhood-and-marriage-local-evaluation-famle-and-cross-site-project.

providing low-income, noncustodial parents workforce services, fatherhood programming, and help with the development of parenting-time plans.

Parenting Time Opportunities for Children in the Child Support Program (PTOC) is a four year demonstration project that OCSE awarded to five states in September 2012 to pilot strategies to establish parenting-time responsibilities as part of child support orders and test techniques to integrate the child support and child access systems. Although grantees are also required to have an independent, site-specific evaluation, they are of limited scope due to low funding levels and none involve random assignment strategies.

It is possible that Network-funded projects could leverage and enhance the ongoing research to broaden our understanding of the effectiveness of responsible fatherhood programs.

What are the Key Gaps in Research and Knowledge?

The primary weakness of the extant research on responsible fatherhood programs is that we lack evidence of a causal link between participating in the program and changes in fathers' behavior and children's outcomes. As noted, most of the prior studies provide only correlational evidence of change, and the outcomes that tend to be measured are the amount of time the father spends with his child, changes in attitudes about being a father, or payment of child support. We know very little about the mechanisms within the program curriculum or policies that lead to changes in outcomes, and even less about the effect of these programs on a broader array of outcomes that measure the quality of father-child interaction. In the short-term, measuring changes in child outcomes that result from fatherhood programs may be challenging. For a program to be sustainable at the state or federal level, however, the program needs to demonstrate that it makes a difference to the child's life, in addition to the father's (currently, this is the standard for "mothering programs" such as home visiting programs). To this end, effective programs need to link the outcomes of the programs to proximate changes in child outcomes.

Relatedly, we lack evidence as to whether even our more effective programs can translate these benefits across a range of populations of fathers. For example, will the program outcomes be similar for fathers who are immigrants, incarcerated; have children across multiple households, or who do not live in their child's household? The FRPN may have the opportunity to fund extensions of current evaluations to determine if the programs have similar results across multiple populations and environmental contexts.

There is also a need to address concerns about the impact of increased parenting time for low-income fathers in never-married households on parental relationships, family safety, and child wellbeing. We lack research on whether safety is enhanced or imperiled by the development of parenting-time plans for this population, appropriate ways of identifying safety problems, and ways to establish parenting time with heightened attention to safety. The field also needs to test methods of engaging and serving custodial parents to elicit their participation in creating plans for fathers' involvement and improving relationships and co-parenting. The field needs to develop an "on-ramp" for never-married parents to acquire parenting

time and obtain help with developing a plan that spells out when the children will spend time with each parent. To date, we have not assessed the outcomes associated with the use of different forums (court, child support agency, fatherhood program), different timeframes (when paternity is established, when child support orders are established, when a parent files a motion for visitation), and different formats (facilitation/mediation, self-help forms, a statutory framework).

Another gap in knowledge has to do with perennial program implementation issues. Most programs have suffered from low participation and high attrition on the part of fathers. How do we get fathers involved in programs and have them stay in the program long enough for it to be effective? To this same point, is there a certain "dosage" or length of time in a program that is necessary to affect change? Can programs be implemented with fidelity and scaled up? These problems of implementation are not unique to fatherhood programs; nevertheless, these important issues reduce our ability to understand what works. The issues of recruitment, retention, and dosage may be important "first steps" that the Network can support.

At the core of many of the gaps in knowledge in this field is the absence of a theoretical framework that clearly links father involvement and support to child wellbeing. The theoretical models hypothesize that better co-parenting, higher levels of income, more time spent with the child, and higher "quality" of parenting lead to better child outcomes. Thus, programs often focus on increasing paternal employment (and child support payments among nonresident fathers), removing "gatekeeping" and establishing visitation agreements for nonresident fathers to see the child, improving co-parenting behaviors, and providing the father with parenting knowledge.[47] However, it is still not clear, for example, how income from the father matters differentially than income from another source; or what it is about quality engagement between father and child that really makes a difference; or how fathers influence child wellbeing independent of the mother's influence. The lack of a clear theoretical framework for whether and why fathers affect child wellbeing limits practitioners and the research field's ability to design effective programs, establish appropriate and valid measurements, and attract enough high-quality scholars to study fathers.

We need to develop a theoretical framework on par with (but perhaps different from or integrated with) the theoretical model linking mothering to child wellbeing. The theoretical framework for mothers is typically applied to all populations of mothers, regardless of socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, or immigrant status, and it generally assumes that the mother lives with child. For fathers, we may need a separate theoretical framework for resident and nonresident fathers, and possibly for various subpopulations (e.g. fathers with children across multiple households, incarcerated fathers, and immigrant fathers). Additionally, many practitioners and some researchers argue that fathers and mothers are fundamentally different and will have differential effects on child wellbeing. There is growing evidence, however, in research on mother-father co-residential families showing that children

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[47] Knox, V., Cowan, P. A., Cowan, C. P., & Bildner, E. (2011). Policies that strengthen fatherhood and family relationships: What do we know and what do we need to know? *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 635*(1), 216-239.

are similarly affected by the same types of paternal and maternal parenting behaviors.[48] Importantly, we need to rigorously test the causal pathways of any theoretical model that is developed – which is something the Network may have the opportunity to fund.

What Do We Need To Evaluate?

The FPRN workgroup on responsible fatherhood outlined several key areas that deserve further research and evaluation. We recognize the challenges involved in answering the following questions within a limited time frame and a limited budget. FRPN-funded activities, however, can leverage, expand, and build upon existing studies and provide substantial value to the research field. The following questions deserve priority in research and evaluation. Throughout, the focus is on low-income, never-married, and nonresident fathers who rarely have been the subject of research.

1. Do fatherhood programs produce positive changes in father engagement? Which of the core components of a fatherhood program are most effective? What is inside the "black box"? Is it the dosage, approach, service delivery strategy, curriculum? Are some program components more important than others?

2. Do fatherhood programs lead to changes in fathers' skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors? Are programs associated with changes in father-child contact? The quality of their involvement? Their knowledge of parenting and child development? Their behavior and the childrearing activities they engage in? Their support of the other parent and their co-parenting?

3. What level of program "dosage" is necessary to get impacts on father engagement and child wellbeing outcomes? Do the effects "stick" or do they fade out over time?

4. How do father engagement components of a program dovetail with other program components dealing with economic security and/or co-parenting? Are they complimentary? What type of sequencing is most advantageous?

5. What child support and visitation policies and programs best promote, and safely allow, never-married, nonresident fathers to be involved with their children?

6. How does program effectiveness differ for fathers with different socioeconomic and life circumstances?

7. How do programs more successfully recruit and retain low-income, nonresident, and never-married fathers into the programs? Can we infuse the program elements into our existing policy structures (e.g. schools, prisons, child support system) and communities?

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[48] Fagan, J., Day, R., Lamb, M., & Cabrera, N. (in press). Should researchers conceptualize fathering and mothering differently? *Journal of Family Theory and Review*.

8. Do the programs affect child wellbeing? If child outcomes cannot be measured in the short-term, what proximate outcomes can be linked to subsequent child outcomes? Relatedly, how does father engagement influence child wellbeing? What aspects of engagement are most important for child wellbeing? Does this differ for fathers with different socioeconomic and life circumstances such as race/ethnicity, immigrant status, age, and fathers who have been absent due to incarceration, military service, or abandonment? Fathers who have children across multiple households? What impact does this research have on our theoretical understanding of father engagement and child wellbeing? Is it different from the theoretical framework linking mothering to child wellbeing?

The workgroup outlined key criteria that should be considered when determining what outcomes should be measured in evaluation studies. Ideally, a common set of measures would be used across all programs and populations under study to allow for rich comparisons. The workgroup stresses the importance of moving beyond mere measures of fathers' attitudes and time that fathers spend with their children to more expansive measures of father behaviors and the quality of the interaction that fathers have with their children. The quality of the father-child interaction is particularly important in the context of nonresidential fathers who may have lower levels of involvement.

Outcome measures should be impactful and policy relevant; an analysis of cost effectiveness will increase policy buy-in and sustainability for the program. The measures should also link to child and maternal outcomes, if possible. As noted earlier, this may be difficult given the short time frame, but at the very least, FRPN-funded research should demonstrate how any measureable outcomes theoretically link to child and maternal outcomes, even if these cannot be measured. Priority should also be given to attempts to validate measures across populations. Finally, FRPN-funded research should balance measures that small evaluations can collect (more in-depth measures) with measures that are simple for all programs to capture, and use administrative records where possible.

The exact measures to capture in FRPN-funded research are difficult to identify, but the workgroup prioritized the following measures of responsible fatherhood: quality (across various context of quantity) of engagement; parenting in the context of multiple partner fertility; cultural differences in father engagement; child assessment of father engagement; prenatal father involvement; early maternal and child health outcomes; child support contributions; access and visitation agreements; father engagement behaviors; discipline techniques used by the father; family violence; and child outcomes.

Conclusion

We want to build the field of fatherhood research and identify effective programs that improve father engagement and support, and ultimately child wellbeing. To achieve this, scholars and practitioners will need to work together closely to build a stronger understanding of what the goals of the programs should be and how to best measure the program outcomes. We must also make better efforts to collect data from our fathers who are the hardest to serve. With more theoretical rigor and better data, more academics will turn to the field and our programs will continue to improve. The research of the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network can help facilitate this process.

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