Father Engagement

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Today

- Introductions
- Father Engagement
- Fathers in your Organizations
- What is working in Father Engagement

Fathers in the U.S.

- 72.2 Million
  - Estimated fathers in the U.S.
- 24.6 Million
  - Child <18 in married residential
- 2.0 Million single fathers
  - (17% of single parents)
- 29.2 Million
  - Also grandfathers

Fathers as Primary Caregiver

- Increase in stay at home dads
  - Doubling to 2 million from 1989 to present
  - Steady increase, but recession bump as well
- Increase in single father households
  - 8% of households with minor children vs less than 1% in 1960

Father Roles and Culture Changes

- Societal Views of Fathers
  - Added value beyond bread winner;
    Not only noted when absent
- Fathers’ views of their role as a parent
  - Reframing success as a parent

Father Involvement and Engagement

- Terms interchanged often in literature
- Today:
  - Involvement – related to children/families
  - Engagement – integrating into programs/services
Understanding Fathering

- Pre-90s research on parenting
  - Parenting-child effects: Mothers
  - Most studies didn’t ask for direct father input
- 90s – 00s
  - Reconceptualizing father involvement
  - Explosion in research focusing on fathering
  - Beginning to understand fathers, as parents, in services


Involving and Measuring Fathers

- No clear framework until early 2000
- Measurement became key
- Quantitative vs Qualitative
  - Counting involvement
  - Understanding involvement
- Evolving concept shaped policy and engagement

Father Involvement: Evolving Concept

- Quantifying Involvement
- Number of Interactions
  - One dimensional – Yet illustrated “more involvement”
- Comparing Parenting
  - Mothers vs Fathers – Showed expected
- Diverging Measures
  - Separate constructs to show differences


Father Involvement: Evolving Concept

- Roles and Functions
  - More specified
  - Began linking child development outcomes
- Task Sharing
  - Family systems perspective
  - Co-parenting: share of responsibilities

Father Involvement: Evolving Concept

- What was missing?
- Context
  - Variations and subtle variations
  - Culture and Unique Attitudes
  - Unique Behaviors and Components of Parenting
- Bias
  - From research/researchers, policy, and other sources

Father Involvement: Evolving Concept

• Benefits
  – Better understanding
  – Father motivations and attitudes
  – Barriers to parenting for fathers
    • Youth particularly
    • Systems and organizational barriers
  – Engagement important

Father Involvement Measured

• Generally: Increasing
• Amount of time
• Numbers of dads
• Providing
  – Not only financial but other unique contributions

Child

• Development – direct effects
  – Academic achievement
  – Lower aggression and other bad behaviors
  – Fewer instances of depression and anxiety
  – Education/SES of father -> Education outcomes
  – Supportive Father -> Social Competent behaviors
• Indirect Effects
  – Well-being and environment; Family Stress

Mother

• Mother:
  – Improved Mother-Child Attachment
  – Decreased Perinatal Anxiety and Stress
  – Protective effect of maternal depression

Identified Risks

• Maltreatment and Overrepresentation in Severe Child Maltreatment
• Exposure of child to Intimate Partner Violence
• Antisocial father behavior and conduct

Risks in Services

• Domestic violence moderates impact of Nurse-Family Partnership
• Low father involvement -> Lower retention and Drop-out
• Interventions designed to improve social network inversely impacted by father involvement

U.S. Census Bureau (2018)
Eckenrode et al., (2000) Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect with a Program of Nurse Home Visitation
Guterman et al., (2013) Examining the Effectiveness of Home-Based Parent Aide Services to Reduce Risk for Physical Child Abuse and Neglect.
Challenges to Fathering

• Gatekeeping
  – Mothers
  – Intergenerational Families
  – Effects on Father’s Parenting Quality
  – “Professional Gatekeeping”

• Service Systems
  – Unclear: access, timing, lack of tracking

Motivations to Parent

• Innovative Strategy
• Neuroscience Research
  – Very similar brain response btw parents: Motivation to Parent when seeing the infant
  – Primary vs Secondary Caregiver: very similar responses in neuroplasticity (change); fathers as primary vs secondary had greater effects
  – Early parenting: important time for establishing this change

Policy Driving Fathers

• Child Support and Enforcement
  – Social Security Acts – 50s, 60s, 70s
• “Responsible Fatherhood” Initiatives of 90s
• Family and Medical Leave Act (93’)
• U.S. Deficit Reduction Act (06’): father involvement and engagement promoting

Processes for Organizations

• All Staff
  – Consider own attitudes and biases
  – View process through lens of fathers
  – View organization through lens of fathers
  – Find gatekeepers and Gatekeeping processes
    • Ask fathers!
  – Consider what possible changes to processes could help make change
  – Envision what the possible change could be

Your Organizations

Activity

• Group by organization type if at all possible; but interdisciplinary, great!
• Handout
Feedback & Brainstorm

In Healthcare Settings

• Recommendations
  – Reciprocal engagement
  – Encourage Early Father Child Care
  – Facilitate Cooperative Care
  – Healthy Relationships
  – Address Parent Health


What engagement strategies work?

• Outcomes: fathers, children, families, and mothers
• Organizations
• Study Lessons

--Break--

Dads Matter: Flexible, Modular-Based Services

• Dads Matter designed as a flexibly delivered “modular” enhancement to existing services
  – Tested in: Parents As Teachers, Early Head Start (home-based option), Healthy Families America
• Service Goals: (in modules)
  – Assess father’s role in the family
  – Engage fathers
  – Support the co-parenting team
  – Provide direct support to specific parent issues

Dads Matter: Critical Process Strategies

• Engage everyone in the organization
• Creative Assessment
  – Questions that give dad access to visit
• Preparation
  – Ask to join
  – Invite
  – Call/Confirm
  – Leave things (bring a copy)
What happens when it works?

• Within Organizations
• Worker Perceptions
• Outcomes for Fathers
• *Study Lessons

Dads Matter

Pilot
• Many positive findings across domains (1)

Randomized Trial
• Home Visiting Services
  – Increased activities with fathers. Positive attitudes toward home visitors, no harm done to mother vs home visitor relationship
  – Fathers
    – Perceptions of their contributions to child’s life higher, increased attendance in home visits
  – Mothers
    – Stability of relationship with home visitor, improved perceptions of fathers’ contributions to child’s lives
  – Children
    – Processing findings

Organizations

• Feasibility: It’s doable!
  – Fairly low impact intervention can influence rates (1)
• Interventions Can Increase Father Involvement (2,3)
• Father Impact on Services
  – Prior studies showed retention in services (2)
  – Current showing no change in mother attitudes toward services
  – Cost and Time? Resources; Staff time (e.g. supervision)

Worker Perceptions

• When fathers present, workers positive about experience (1)
• Workers able to use specific strategies but support needed (2)
• Workers need to know what “success” looks like (1)

Fathers

• Workers in early parent programs across the country report father access/attendance (1)
• Most fathers report some sort of attendance at prenatal visits (2)
• Early engagement in prenatal visits -> More Feelings of Attachment (2)

Dads Matter: Lessons Learned

• Staff attitudes and resulting behaviors
  – Biggest influence on engagement rates and implementing new engagement activities
• Professional Gatekeepers
  – Those messaging overtly or subtly
• Organizational Culture
  – Should continue to be explored
• Staff creative strategies important!
Thank you!

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References


Next Steps: Online

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