TRANSITION TO FATHERHOOD: A HOPEFUL APPROACH TO ENGAGEMENT

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Urban Research Outreach-Engagement Center, Minneapolis, MN
First Time Fathers Study

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A Research Story
Research Lens

• Transition to First Time Fatherhood
  – Recognize transitions “within” fathering
    (Palkovitz & Palm, 2009)

• Hopeful or Strengths based approach
  – Engaging men in violence prevention study
    (Carlson et al. under review)

• Prevention Focus (Macy et al., 2007)
Transition to Fatherhood

Fathers excluded

Relationship to Mother of child

Value of fatherhood

Stressful transition

(Condon, J. T., Boyce, P., & Corkindale, C. J., 2004; DeKlyen, 2007; Easterbrook, et al., 2007; Finnbogadottir et al., 2003; Leite, 2007; McMahon et al., 2007; Shannon & Abrams, 2007; Wells & Sarkadi, 2012)
First Time Fathers Project

- Community Consultations with Practitioners
- Focus groups with fathers & mothers

Build knowledge to develop prevention intervention
COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS
Practitioners: Medical Service Providers

- Mostly prenatal care
- Mother is “client” or “patient” – billing
- Lack of father involvement
- Very little information available for fathers
- Screening for
  - Domestic violence – limited
  - Depression
Practitioners: Community-based & father-focused

- Mother and father specific programs
  - Father – some court ordered—reactive to court involvement

- Tend to serve new fathers or fathers of older children, not expectant

- One stop service is desired by men: parenting education, empowerment, leadership development, work training, and child support
## Parents Engaged

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectant Parents</th>
<th>New Parents</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Medical Practitioners -</td>
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<td>for fathers</td>
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PARENT FOCUS GROUPS
First Time Fathers

- First Time Fathers Study
  - Assess Available Formal and Informal Supports for Fathers
    - What are Barriers to Obtaining Support
    - What interventions would be desired
  - Arizona Social Support Interview Schedule
    - Measure of Social Support
      - Available & Utilized Network Size
      - Support Satisfaction
      - Support Need
Sample

- **Father Focus Groups**
  (6 groups, 47 dads)
  - Recruited from Four Father Serving Programs
  - Marital Status
    - Single - 14%
    - Married/Partnered – 83%

- **Mother Focus Groups**
  (2 groups, 10 moms)
Findings From Focus Groups

• Fathers Trying to Understand their Role as Fathers
• Central Importance of a Father’s Family Network
• Maintaining a Healthy Relationship with Parenting Partners
• Fathers Supporting Fathers
• Social Gatekeeping and the Construction of Dads
Fathers Trying to Understand their Role as Fathers

• Transition to Fatherhood complex experience

• Father as provider of what?
  – Income and financial matters often mentioned as primary challenge for fathers.
  – Caring role important– mothers’ perspective
    • Father not an ATM

• Wanting to be a good example/be a good father
  – “I was excited about it because, like I said, if it’s something I can take care of… you know, like I said, every time I was nervous, I was like, “man am I going to set a good example? Am I going to be able to provide for her like she needs?” It had me really worried, but I had a lot of people there to help me out; mom, her whole family, a friend that I had up here…I didn’t want to turn to nobody and ask for nothing. But, it was like, ok, I got a child. I’m going to have to let that pride down a little and start asking for help and start asking for advice and whatnot.”
Fathers Trying to Understand...

• Unsure of where to go and/or what to do
  – “And us, as young men, we might not have all the knowledge that you might not know where to reach out to. Just think about if you’re just starting out, like damn, I can’t see my son at all. Where can I go to find my rights? Or my baby momma moved out of town. What am I to do?”
  – “Mine is having a role model. It’s hard for me to be a good dad. You don’t know what it is. You’re just learning day by day.”
  – “I gotta get passed the fact that my dad wasn’t around at all. Men who are good dads had their dad around when they were younger. Mom giving me advise, setting me up for manhood, telling me about the challenges that are out here when you’re a man, when you’re no longer living at home.”
Central Importance of Fathers’ Family Network

• Family support is key and most important
  – “Family ain’t never gonna leave you out there like that. But, you might have to jump over a few hurdles to get stuff that you need, like seek it out. You might have to call your distant auntie, or something... your uncle you ain’t saw in a while, or something. Never know. I mean, immediate family, I would think they would always be there to help like that.”
Maintaining a Healthy Relationship with Parenting Partners

- **Challenges & maintenance of relationship with mother of child**
  - “I mean, because when you’re in a relationship with your girlfriend and ya’ll got the kid, there are certain things that’s gonna come up that might make you argue, but ya’ll have to see it eye to eye and try to... most people, they try to stick it together with their girl. But, you can only do that so much, though...So like when something comes up, it’s pulling ya’ll apart. And it’s a challenge ’cause you wanna be there, but it’s like “man, I ain’t f------ with her. And when you do that, they get spiteful and take control with the child. Yeah, you can’t see the kid. It’s a pawn.”
  - “And then I had...keeping relationship with spouse healthy; not always a lot of time with each other. I remember one time, a parent, when I was a new parent, said something to me that... having kids in a lot of ways sort of deprives the things that can make for a healthy relationship. You know, time together, time apart. So, that’s been a big challenge. Just keep that relationship healthy so that it’s not just the two of us raising kids, but that we’re still in a loving relationship.”

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Fathers Supporting Fathers

• Fathers Supporting Fathers
  – Time with other fathers (Formal and Informal Settings)
    • “Having other parents that are going through the same thing at the same time. Like I ask my mom ‘what’d you do when this happened?’ [and] She’s like ‘Well that was thirty some years ago.’ She either doesn’t remember or she’s got rose-colored glasses on. So it’s just nice to have someone [say to me] ‘yeah, I did this last year with my three year old.’ Honestly, it’s not even just other parents, it’s guys who are parents”

  – Limited availability of and/or access to formal supports with father specific programming.
    • “Basically the same thing. I mean, not probably exact the same thing, but, being able to reach a goal to where we’re trying to reach being a father, and somebody there that can help us get to that point. As long as that’s there, you gonna get more people drawn in. There really ain’t a program like that out there. You can only go certain places.”
Social Gatekeeping and the Construction of Dads

• Social Norms/Expectations
  – “Seems like they [women groups] just form naturally and the dad groups, it takes them effort. And then, just the societal expectations. It’s kind of a double-edged sword. It’s kind of nice that both, women don’t yell at me when my child’s screaming in the grocery store because I’m doing it wrong, because they’re just happy to see a dad with a child. But, at the same time, at the park, going out trying to make friends and getting some of that societal pressure and it’s just not quite the norm yet or accepted as the norm…”
Social Gatekeeping and the Construction of Dads

- **Negative Perceptions of Men/Fathers**
  - “I find that it’s really annoying and frustrating to have basically alienation from other groups. So, basically, if you go to meetup.com or something like that, you’ll see it’s like “book clubs. Women only” or “St. Paul Moms…” or something like that. You’ll see ton of moms groups and some of them are fine with having guys in them but, then, there’s a whole bunch of them that’ll say “no guys” or whatever. Things like that. Come to find out, I’ve heard through groups that it’s nothing but like husband-bashing at most of those, anyways, from other people whose wives are in there. The other thing that annoys me is that- I think this is somewhat in general- but there’s a lot of stigma behind… not just stay-at-home dad, but dads in general that “hey, you got dead-beat dad here” and you’ll see these billboards driving down the highway that’ll say “be a father.” Things like this. And I think it gives people a bad rap and I think it’s just a lot of it is just more… I think there’s a lot of people that don’t realize that there are dads that stay at home and take care of kids, too. You know, it’s not just stay-at-home mom, or as some people call it Suzie-soccer-mom. There’s a lot of dads that do it and I think there’s a lot of people out there that don’t realize that... “
“A lot of hands need to help…”

- **Implications**
  - Fathers perceive formal support as inaccessible and inadequate due to lack of services, unfamiliarity with available services, or father disinterest in available services.
  - Informal supports are key but formal programmatic support is an important safety net.
  - Connecting fathers with peers seems to be a core desire for men.
  - Support for developing and maintaining healthy co-parenting relationships should be emphasis.
Ideas for Transition to Fatherhood Program

**RESIDENTIAL & NON/PROGRAM-ENGAGED FATHERS**

- "Being a Dad" classes
- more than Child Support/Employment classes
- child development
- co-parenting
- early literacy
- Recreate the program they are engaged in
  - Time with other fathers
  - Get support
  - Find out about resources

**MOTHERS**

**NON-RESIDENTIAL/NON-PROGRAM ENGAGED FATHERS**

- Budgeting
- Activities to do with child
- "Knowledge"
- Education
- Job research
Implications for Practitioners & Programs

- Messages to expectant and new fathers
- Individual/Staff underlying beliefs and experiences
- Balance outreach and care to mothers and fathers
- Additional dialogue & training

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Overall Implications

• Social Change
• Engage fathers & mothers as co-creators
• Hopeful approach
• Multi-level approach
Spectrum of Prevention

- Influencing Policy and Legislation
- Changing Organizational Practices
- Fostering Coalitions and Networks
- Educating Providers
- Promoting Community Education
- Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills
Thank you!!

• All community partners, community consultants and the fathers and mothers who participated in the study.
References


