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OVERVIEW OF FATHERHOOD RESEARCH

Changing Conception of Father Involvement

• Historically, social welfare programs have focused on mothers and children

• Programs for fathers have traditionally focused on increasing financial contributions to family

• Growing body of research supports the importance of father involvement in children’s lives

• Government funding for fatherhood programs has increased over the last two decades
Areas Addressed by Modern Fatherhood Programs

- Father involvement
- Economic stability
- Healthy relationships and co-parenting
- Child abuse and neglect prevention

There has been limited work to date on the effectiveness of these programs.

Programs have largely served resident fathers.

Father Involvement

- Using a variety of curricula, programs positively influenced outcomes such as:
  - Comfort with parental role
  - Perceptions of current and future relationship with child
  - Fathers’ share of parenting
  - Parental responsibility
  - Knowledge of child development
24/7 Dad Hawaii Evaluation

• Fathers receiving the program were more likely to read to children and help them with their homework than those not receiving services

• Fathers in the program were also more likely to be happy about being a parent and to have a higher quality relationship with first-born

Economic Stability

• Programs often include components such as mentoring or job search assistance

• Young Dads program provided tailored, comprehensive services to fathers
  – 97% receiving services employed 6 months after referral into program (compared to 31% of the control group)
Healthy Relationships

- Programs build on healthy marriage initiatives, but parents don’t have to be romantically involved
- Programs show improved outcomes in areas such as quality of relationship with the child’s mother, reduced stress, and levels of support

Dads for Life

- Ten sessions for recently divorced fathers aimed at improving their relationship with their child, decreasing parental conflict, and promoting co-parenting behaviors
- No effects on co-parenting, but former spouses more likely to report a positive post-divorce parenting relationship. Inter-parental conflict decreased over time for participants.
Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention

• Current emphasis on building protective factors, rather than identifying risk factors
  – Nurturing and attachment within families, knowledge of parenting and child development, connection to social support, etc.

• Typically parent-focused, rather than father or mother specific programs

Triple P Positive Parenting Practices

• Multilevel system of intervention focused on improving parenting skills, parents’ sense of competence as parents, couples’ communication, and reducing parenting stress

• An RCT in 18 U.S. counties reported large effect sizes for decreases in substantiated child maltreatment, child out-of-home placements, and child maltreatment injuries
Caring Dads: Helping Fathers Value Their Children

- Rare example of a father-specific program
- Targets fathers who have abused or neglected their children, exposed them to abuse of their mothers, or are considered to be high-risk for future maltreatment
- No rigorous evaluation yet conducted

More Evidence is Needed

- How do we effectively serve non-resident fathers?
- What is the best age for intervention?
- Do our findings generalize to other demographic and geographic contexts?
- How do we better retain our fathers?
- What is the right combination of services?
- Etc.
Current Federally-Funded Fatherhood Program Evaluations

• PACT
  – Impact and implementation studies (Mathematica)

• FaMILE
  – Research and evaluation support (Mathematica)

• Building Bridges and Bonds
  – Impact and process studies (MDRC)

• Fatherhood Research and Practice Network
  – Impact and implementation studies (four grantees)