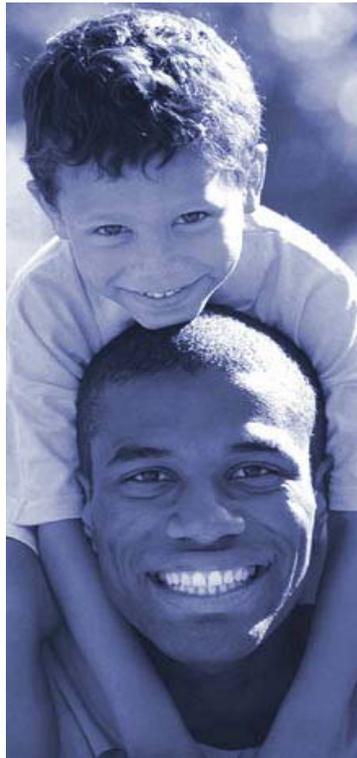


The Maryland Responsible Fatherhood Demonstration Program Final Evaluation Report

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this final report is to delineate the activities undertaken by the University of Maryland's Department of Family Studies in evaluating the Maryland Responsible Fatherhood (RF) Demonstration Program. This report includes a summary of the data collected from focus groups with participants in the Baltimore City Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers Program; a detailed presentation of the quantitative data collected from both the Baltimore City and Charles County sites at the time fathers became involved with the RF programs,¹ and an overview of the longitudinal follow-up with a small group of participants from the Baltimore City site.



GOALS OF THE EVALUATION

This project included both process and outcome evaluations. For the process evaluation, the evaluators first documented participants' perceptions of program's benefits and barriers to program involvement. Second, many demographic, psychological, and relational characteristics of the participants were reported. For the outcome evaluation, the evaluators followed a small group of participants over time to assess whether or not their attitudes and behaviors changed subsequent to their participation in the RF Demonstration Program.

Objective #1

- **To document participants' perceptions of program's benefits and barriers to program involvement.**

In order to provide insight into program implementation, focus groups with participants in Baltimore City's Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers (YFRF) program were conducted.² Because little is known about low-income fathers' perceptions of RF programs, focus groups were believed to be useful in investigating the degrees to which men had similar or divergent perspectives about the program and in providing detailed information about the experiences and beliefs upon which their opinions were based. The focus groups were designed to address the following topics:

¹ The project was originally funded to be completed between October 1997 and September 2000. Due to a late start-up time and initial evaluation results, the project received a no-cost extension until March 2002.

² The Baltimore City Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers program has been in existence since 1993, although no evaluation of its services had occurred at the time the focus groups were conducted.

- How did the Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers Program benefit program participants, their relationships with their children, and their ability to overcome challenges attributable to economic and other potential barriers?
- How would program participants like to see the Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers program changed to better meet their needs and the needs of their families?

Participants

Twenty fathers participated in four focus groups held between May and October 1999. The 20 participants had various levels of involvement with the Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers program. Eight participants were at the entry level of the program, 5 were currently enrolled in the fathers' groups, and 7 had "graduated" from the program and were involved in ongoing support groups.

The fathers who participated in this phase of the evaluation ranged in age from 17 - 48 ($M = 31.2$, $SD = 9.19$), with 72% in their 20s and 30s. Most of the fathers were African American (95%) and never-married (75%). All fathers reported either having their names on their children's birth certificates or having established legal paternity, and 50% were the custodial parent of at least one of their children. In terms of employment, 60% currently held jobs, and nearly all of the fathers had been employed at some point in their lives. The number of years of education ranged from 9 - 15, with 65% having graduated high school or obtained a GED.

Procedure

The four focus groups were held at the program site. Three co-facilitators led the groups. Once the participants had been greeted and informed consent obtained, they were asked a series of questions using a focus group guide developed by the research team with input from Kenneth Hunt, father advocate, and Anthony Williams, Program Supervisor of the Baltimore City Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers Program. The questions pertained to the fathers' attitudes about and experiences of becoming fathers, involvement in the program, current financial and emotional involvement with their children, challenges in supporting their children, and impressions of the program and child support laws. Focus groups lasted approximately two hours and were audiotaped for transcription. Trained research assistants also recorded participant responses and noted fathers' nonverbal communication to further enrich and validate the transcription. All participants were compensated \$40 for their involvement.

Results

The evaluators identified three general themes that described what participants perceived to be the benefits and limitations of the program. Specifically, these themes included participants:

- perceived individual, relational, and contextual benefits of the program
- perceived barriers to remaining involved
- suggestions for program improvement

Benefits of Program

Fathers identified several benefits to the program. These benefits were individual, relational, and contextual in nature, specifically involving the fathers' relationships with their children, the mothers of their children, and their interactions with larger social systems.

Individual benefits: Various benefits were identified at the individual level. One father noted that the program "helped me learn about myself and [about] being a man." Other fathers stated that the program "helped me become less egocentric" or "built up my, uh, confidence within myself, and, um, it motivated me a lot." One participant shared how simply discovering the program made him feel more optimistic:

When I first heard about a [YF/RF] Program...I considered it a blessing because when I got [custody of] my second son, it was a very scary feeling to me...I didn't know nothin' about parenting. Didn't know how to be a parent. Wasn't sure if I was grown up enough—man enough to handle it. I came down to this building here...and talked to one of the coordinators...and I was really choked up. I felt like I had some hope then.

The program also benefited fathers by providing them with emotional support. As one father stated, "The best thing is really being heard. Being able to voice my opinion about how I feel about certain things and knowing that someone is listening and understandin' where I'm comin' from." Thinking about how the program influenced him, another father reflected:

I was shown love, I was shown support. I was shown unity. And they let me know that if I needed help with anything, if I just needed just to talk—if there was just something on my mind—that they were willin' to help. They were willing to, you know, lead me in the right direction and also give me advice on, you know, certain things.

Fathers discussed how the program recognized the complex array of issues confronting them and assisted them with substance abuse problems, legal troubles, and

employment concerns. For example, one father who had never had a job prior to his involvement in the program noted that the program “helped me get a coupla jobs.” He went on to say that “[the YF/RF counselor was] right there with me going on the job interview with me, you know, supporting me.” Another father stated:

...this program gave me something more valuable than getting me a job. They gave me information on how to keep a job...how to work along with other people in my work area and [develop] good relations with these people and *respect* for my supervisor...Because I always could get a job. I had many jobs over the years, but for some reason I always ended up losing `em. And I learned...that nobody every fires you...you fire yourself.

Relational benefits. Many of the participants noted the impact of the program on their relationships with their children and their children’s mothers. For example, one father said that the program “helped me show my love and appreciation for my child.” Other fathers mentioned that the program helped them better understand their children and taught them how to engage in different activities with them. As one father stated:

[The YF/RF program] taught me more to listen to my kids and pay more attention to them and play with them when they wanna be played with—even if I didn’t feel like it. So, it helped me change my attitude towards them.

Not only did the program appear to help the fathers improve their relationships with their children, several fathers noted that the program also helped them improve their relationship with their children’s mothers. As one father noted, “...my daughter’s mother [and I]...actually developed a *closer* relationship since I been *in* the program [emphasis in original].” Another participant stated that he had learned that, “...it’s not about me and her [the child’s mother], it’s about the baby. And I know this, and I learned this in this program. We gotta find a way to get along.”

Contextual benefits. Participants additionally shared how the program had helped them navigate larger social systems, discussing how the program had offered them assistance with custody, visitation, and child support issues. For example, one father related that the program “helped me try to get my kids back.” Another participant said the program “supported me with visitation issues.” Several other fathers mentioned how the program helped them understand the child support system.

Other participants identified greater community involvement as a contextual benefit. For example, one father discussed how the program helped him help others by facilitating “several outings...the most memorable one was volunteering for the homeless shelter.” He later added, “that [outing] really did—it really did something to me.”

To summarize, the benefits of the Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers Program identified by the fathers included benefits to:

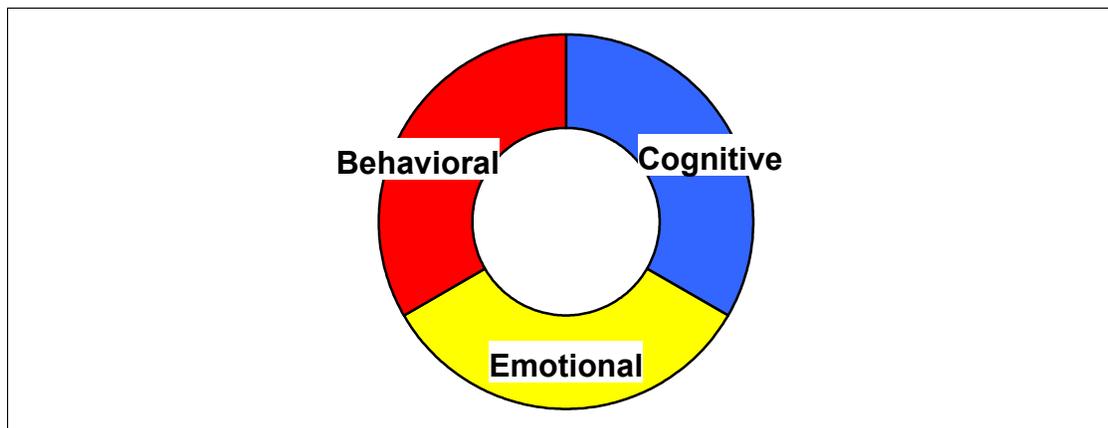
- themselves
- their children and their relationships with their children’s mothers
- their interactions with social services and their communities

Additionally, the identified benefits were (see Figure 1):

- cognitive
- emotional
- behavioral

Cognitive benefits included new insights into their own and their children’s behavior and increased knowledge of available resources. Emotional benefits included emotional support and the development of new “emotion” skills (e.g., listening, empathy). Behavioral benefits included increased involvement in their community.

Figure 1: Benefits of the Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers Program



Barriers to Program Involvement

Although the program offered fathers many benefits by their own reports, fathers also acknowledged that there were barriers to remaining involved at both the individual and contextual levels. Due to personal characteristics and contextual realities, many of the fathers had a difficult time staying connected with the program.

Individual barriers. Several participants shared how they felt generally reluctant or fearful when joining the program. One father noted that, “your own ego” might get in the way or “your own inability to communicate with other men.” Other fathers stated that men might have a “fear of opening up in group” or “fear that the brothers will think you’re emotional.” Not only were the perceptions of others possible barriers to program

participation, but as one father noted, many fathers “may have other pressing unresolved issues and simply not be ready to deal with them yet.”

Other fathers discussed how they had preconceived notions about the program that made them more hesitant to participate. For example, one young father stated, “I thought [the YF/RF program] would all be a bunch of, uh, BS at first.” Another father shared his initial expectations about the program:

Well, when I first heard about the program...I thought it was gonna be where we all sit in the classroom and somebody stands up in front of the class saying, “well, do this, you do this with your child, you do that.” But when I got here, it was a totally different atmosphere than what I thought...

Several fathers also noted that the program often competed with the instant gratification of “hustling on the street.” One father asked, “If you can make \$1500 a day dealing drugs on the street, why would you choose to work for minimum wage?” Other fathers noted that many young men “don’t see immediate gratification” from the program and “don’t get immediate help with finances or child support.”

Contextual barriers. Many of the participants noted barriers to program participation that resulted from larger contextual issues, such as limited time, family responsibilities, and a lack of education. For example, several fathers discussed the challenges that arose from participating in the program while continuing to meet work and family responsibilities. One father provided an example of this perspective when he stated:

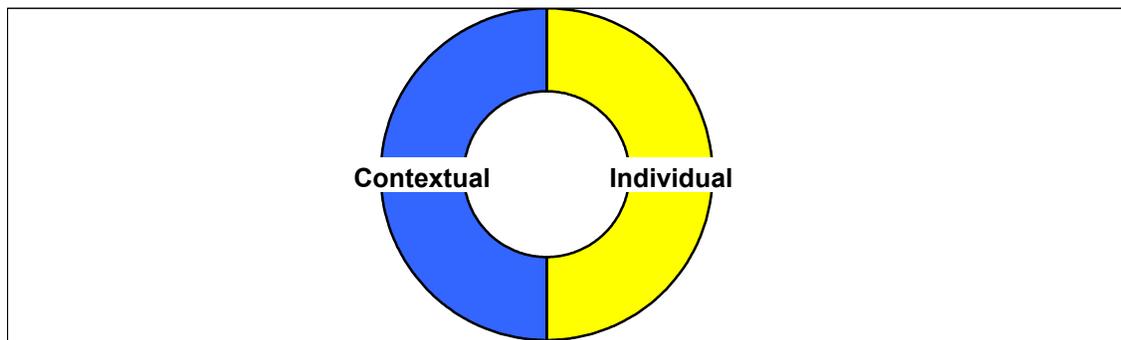
I think a lot of the problems that keep young fathers from continuing to come to meetings...is that most of us aren’t really well-educated. Very few of us have college degrees. So the type of employment we have to find, like this brother here said he had to get two jobs. So we’re talking ‘bout two jobs of physically demanding work that takes a lot out of you. And then you gotta go home and raise your family...So that leaves very little time for clear thinking or just, you know, down time, relaxation, sleep. And even though this program offers great benefits, it’s one more thing thrown into the mix. And it tends to be put aside.

Some fathers identified their jobs as barriers to participation, noting that their hours of employment clashed with the program hours and made it difficult for them to consistently attend meetings. Other participants noted that men might be reluctant to join because they associate the program with the child support agency. For example, one father shared, “...there is still something about the child support issue that upsets me...they don’t understand nothing. They don’t come and ask questions...[they just say] ‘give me the money’...and they take it.” Another father revealed this perspective when he discussed his uncertainty about child support issues:

Well, actually, I've always paid child support since my child was born. Now, I had switched jobs before I came into the program. And I think it might've lapsed like a—like a month, might've been like a month behind. Okay, now they saying that I owe. Which means since I started up my job, my child support payments—my child support payments went up. But they wind up taking my taxes. And I—I'm still working on that—trying to get that straightened out. I don't understand that.

In summary, barriers to staying with the Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers Program were both individual and contextual (See Figure 2). Individual barriers included fathers' own ego or inability to communicate with others or their fears of opening up to others. In contrast, contextual barriers included the time challenge of balancing work, family and program demands and employment hours that clashed with program hours.

Figure 2: Barriers to Involvement with the Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers Program



Suggestions for Program Improvement

Once the focus group participants identified many of the benefits of the YF/RF program and the barriers to sticking with the program, the facilitators then asked the fathers to suggest ways to improve the program. The fathers identified the following as potential points for improvement:

- do more outreach with men out on the street
- more visibly promote the program
- clarify compliance requirements
- reassess the linkage between compliance and providing a stipend
- have graduates conduct the initial assessments
- better address multiple needs of participants simultaneously
- identify a specific need of a participant immediately during the assessment and start addressing that issue at the outset (e.g., show them how they could take care of their child support or get back their pulled license)

- hold groups for guys similar in age and then share information between the age groups
- hold meetings at least 5 days a week

Recommendations for Program and Policy

The results of these focus groups suggest several directions for programmatic initiatives and larger social policies. Many of the programmatic implications of this evaluation pertain to outreach. For example, some potential participants' distrust of social services and the allure of "hustling on the street" reveals how program administrators would be wise to invest heavily in outreach efforts and employ staff members who relate well to the intended clientele (e.g., individuals who resemble participants in terms of their age, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds; have similar parenting experiences; and perhaps have even participated in a comparable fatherhood program). Moreover, these outreach challenges speak to the more general need for human service providers—particularly male providers who could be viewed as role models—who are qualified to work with this specialized population. Programs also must offer fathers concrete incentives for their participation and provide them with individually targeted immediate assistance (e.g., helping fathers obtain driver's licenses, job interviews, or child visitation rights; offering organized father-child events or activities; providing intermittent stipends for program attendance). Because "responsible fathering" is likely to remain a prominent policy issue, academic training programs for human service professionals (e.g., family science, social work, counseling, psychology) should find ways to attract more male students and build connections with local Responsible Fatherhood programs to assist them in meeting outreach goals.

To summarize, the focus groups with Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers Program participants suggested the following recommendations for program and policy:

- **"Act quick"** (get fathers in the program on the spot)
- **"Be legit"** (have those who are "legit" with a group try to recruit that group (e.g., have teens talk to teens; employ male program staff to whom potential participants can relate)
- **"Know the rules"** (have recruiters adapt to the fathers' environment and know the mores or unspoken rules of a given street or neighborhood)
- **"Be convincing"** (give a hard sell and offer concrete incentives to counteract the seductiveness of selling drugs)
- **"Work with others"** (human service professionals should establish connections with RF programs)



Objective #2

- **To document demographic, psychological, and relational characteristics of the participants at the time they became involved with the RF Demonstration programs in Baltimore City or Charles County.**

In order to describe the population of men who are eligible for RF programs, the evaluators gathered data on factors that would describe participants' lives—their challenges and barriers they face. Some of these factors (e.g., employment, paternity establishment, child support history) had previously been identified as being pressing issues for low-income, non-residential fathers, whereas others (e.g., mental health and social support) were identified by the evaluators as additional topics of importance.

Participants

This sample consisted of 127 non-residential fathers, 96 of whom lived in Baltimore City and 31 of whom resided in Charles County. All of the fathers were participants in either the Baltimore City Responsible Father Demonstration Program or the Charles County Dad Power Demonstration Program, to which they were each referred as a nonresidential parent of a minor. Further participatory qualifications required the father to be at risk of being financially unable to meet child support obligations, needing to establish paternity, and/or cooperating with Child Support Enforcement services. Fathers were predominantly African American, single, with a mean age of 32.1 years and an average of two children (see Figures 3-8).

Most of the fathers lived within close proximity of their children (median = 1 mile). Whereas nearly 50% of fathers reported earning a high school diploma or a GED, an additional 45% reported holding no degree. Fathers' mean level of education was 10.7 years. There was no significant difference between the demographic profiles of the fathers in Charles County and the fathers in Baltimore City on race, age, marital status, highest grade completed, and number of children under the age of 18.

Procedure

Written consent was obtained from each father or, from a legal guardian for those fathers under the age of eighteen, to participate in the evaluation project. Any questions or concerns expressed by the fathers were addressed by the interviewers during the interview session. The data were collected by African American, male social services staff members of either the Responsible Fathers Demonstration Program or the Dads Power Demonstration Program, who individually interviewed the fathers. Each interview lasted approximately one and one-half hours. All data gathered from the interviews were stored in locked file cabinets, and were analyzed using SPSS for Windows, a statistical package for the social sciences.

Figure 3: Participants' Employment Status

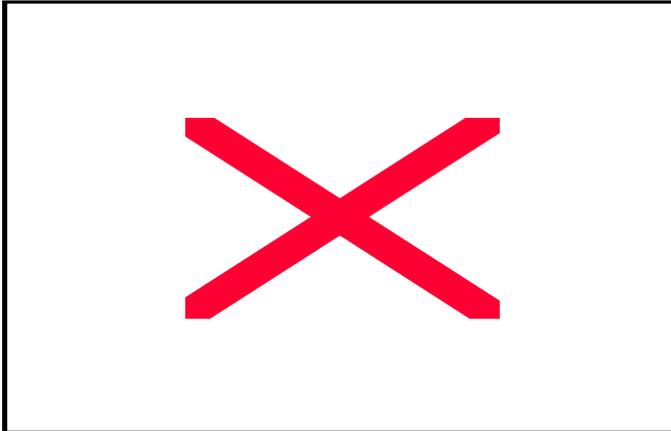


Figure 4: Participants' Educational Attainment

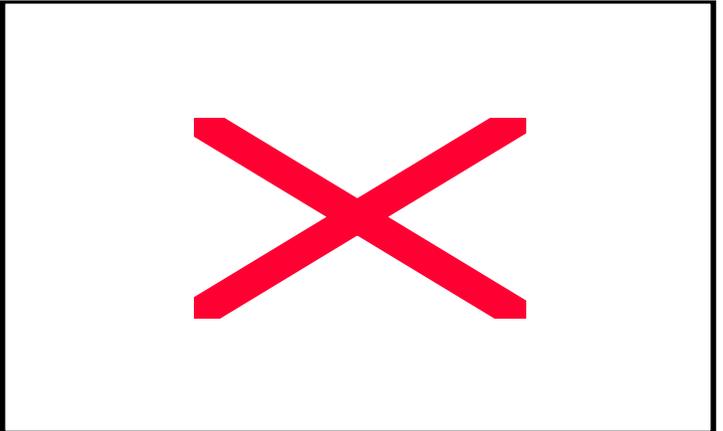


Figure 5: Participants' Ethnicity

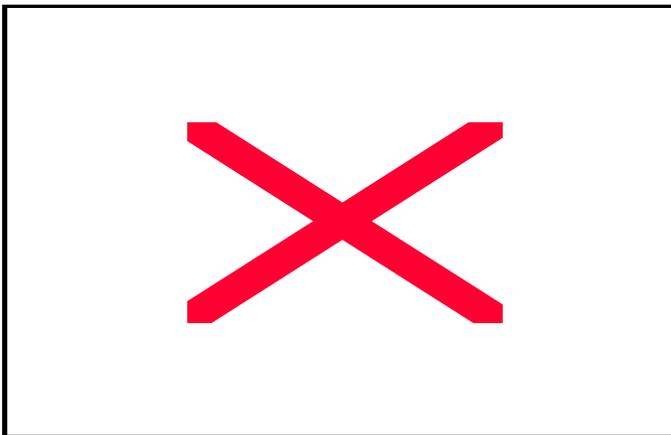


Figure 6: Participants' Marital Status

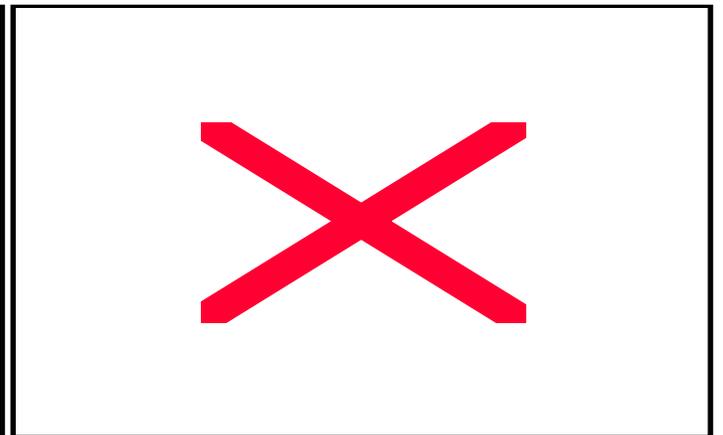
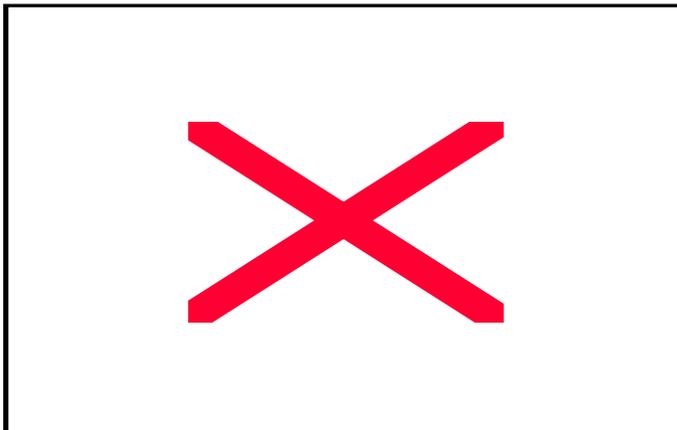


Figure 7: Participants' Number of Children



Results

Employment, Paternity Establishment, and Child Support

Analyses were conducted to address the outcomes identified in the RF Demonstration Program proposal. The results are presented separately for each of the two RF program sites.

Baltimore City

- 45% of fathers were employed
- 50% of fathers reported that their income covers their household/family financial obligations fairly or very well
- 12% of fathers were living with the mothers of their children
- 85% of fathers reported establishing paternity for at least one child
- 56% of fathers reported having joint or sole legal or physical custody
- 40% of fathers reported having a legal order to pay child support
- Of those fathers who had a legal order, 41% reported having been able to pay the full amount in the past 6 months

Charles County

- 36% of fathers were employed
- 0% of fathers reported that their income covers their household/family financial obligations fairly or very well³
- 23% of fathers were living with the mothers of their children
- 93% of fathers reported establishing paternity for at least one child
- 84% of fathers reported having joint or sole legal or physical custody
- 86% of fathers reported having a legal order to pay child support
- Of those fathers who had a legal order, 16% reported having been able to pay the full amount in the past 6 months

Father Involvement

Analyses were conducted to assess the degree to which fathers were involved in their children's lives and their attitudes about fathering.

Baltimore City

- 80% of fathers reported seeing their children at least once a month; 59% of fathers reported seeing their children at least once a week

³ This figure is based on data collected from 10 of the 30 participants in the Charles County RF program.

- 78% of fathers reported *not* having a court order mandating that they can spend time with their children
- 93% of fathers reported *not* having a court order placing restrictions on their contact with their children
- 77% of fathers reported having some or a great deal of influence in making major decisions for their children (e.g., education, child care, religion, health, etc.)
- 99% of fathers reported holding more “child-oriented” (versus “traditional”) attitudes toward fathering

Charles County

- 56% of fathers reported seeing their children at least once a month; 37% of fathers reported seeing their children at least once a week
- 11% of fathers reported *not* having a court order mandating that they can spend time with their children
- 86% of fathers reported *not* having a court order placing restrictions on their contact with their children
- 39% of fathers reported having some or a great deal of influence in making major decisions for their children (e.g., education, child care, religion, health, etc.)
- 97% fathers reported holding more “child-oriented” (versus “traditional”) attitudes toward fathering

Coparental Relationship

Analyses were conducted to assess the nature and quality of the fathers’ relationships *with the mothers of their children*.

Baltimore City

- 38% of fathers reported having some or a great deal of conflict *with the mothers of their children* over who has custody of the children
- 35% of fathers reported having some or a great deal of conflict over where the children live
- 51% of fathers reported having some or a great deal of conflict over how the child is raised
- 44% of fathers reported having some or a great deal of conflict over the amount or frequency of child support payments
- 48% of fathers reported having some or a great deal of conflict over when and how often they visit their children
- 28% of fathers reported having some or a great deal of conflict over what they do when they visit their children

- 35% of fathers reported having some or a great deal of conflict over the children's education and health
- 59% of fathers reported arguing, yelling, or shouting at *the mothers of their children* when they had a serious disagreement with each other
- 13% of fathers reported hitting or throwing things at *the mothers of their children* when they had a serious disagreement with each other

Charles County

- 30% of fathers reported having some or a great deal of conflict with *the mothers of their children* over who has custody of the children
- 20% of fathers reported having some or a great deal of conflict over where the children live
- 43% of fathers reported having some or a great deal of conflict over how the child is raised
- 38% of fathers reported having some or a great deal of conflict over the amount or frequency of child support payments
- 47% of fathers reported having some or a great deal of conflict over when and how often they visit their children
- 40% of fathers reported having some or a great deal of conflict over what they do when they visit their children
- 40% of fathers reported having some or a great deal of conflict over the children's education and health
- 63% of fathers reported arguing, yelling, or shouting at *the mothers of their children* when they had a serious disagreement with each other
- 3% of fathers reported hitting or throwing things at *the mothers of their children* when they had a serious disagreement with each other

Other Factors Affecting Father Involvement (Mental Health, Social Support, and Other Resource Challenges)

To date, variables that might mediate this link between fathers' economic contributions and emotional involvement with their children have received scant attention. The current evaluation project recognized the need to identify factors related to fathers' abilities to communicate and form close attachments. Consequently, mental health, social support, and other resource challenges (i.e., access to transportation, housing, substance issues, and criminal conviction history) were added to the RF program assessment. The lack of research on men's mental health, social relationships, and resource challenges is problematic because a heightened understanding of these issues could greatly enhance policy and programmatic interventions on behalf of low-income fathers and their families.

Father's psychological well-being was measured using the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) (Radloff, 1977). The scale is a short, 20-item, self-report measure specifically constructed to study depressive symptomatology in the general population. Scores of 16 or higher indicate cause for clinical concern. Fathers' social support was assessed using a modified version of the Family Support Scale (FSS) (Dunst, Jenkins, & Trivette, 1984). The FSS is an 18-item measure designed to assess the degree to which different sources of support are helpful to families raising young children. Information about non-residential fathers' mental health, social support, and unique resource and personal hardships is presented as follows (See Figures 9-14).

- 56% of the fathers reported depressive symptoms that indicated cause for clinical concern (CES-D scores of 16 or higher).
- The fathers' average score on the CES-D was 16.3, above the national average of 8.7 and the cut-off score for clinical concern (Baltimore City = 14.5; Charles County = 21.7).
- As fathers' levels of social support increased, their levels of depression also increased ($r = .30$; $p < .01$).
- 40.5% of fathers reported having a criminal record (Baltimore City = 38%; Charles County = 47%).
- 22.1% of fathers reported problems with alcohol or illicit drugs (Baltimore City = 28%; Charles County = 7%). There was a statistically significant difference in the rates of substance abuse between fathers in the two sites ($t = -2.48$; $p < .05$).
- Nearly half of fathers (42.2%) reported limited access to transportation (Baltimore City = 43.8%; Charles County = 32.3%)
- 24.2% of fathers acknowledged having no permanent place to live (Baltimore City = 26.9%; Charles County = 16.1%)
- 11.9% of fathers reported having health problems or a disability (Baltimore City = 9.5%; Charles County = 19.4%)
- On average, fathers reported an average of 2.1 "challenges."

Figure 8: Fathers' Levels of Depression
(National Average = 8.7; Clinical cut-off = 16)

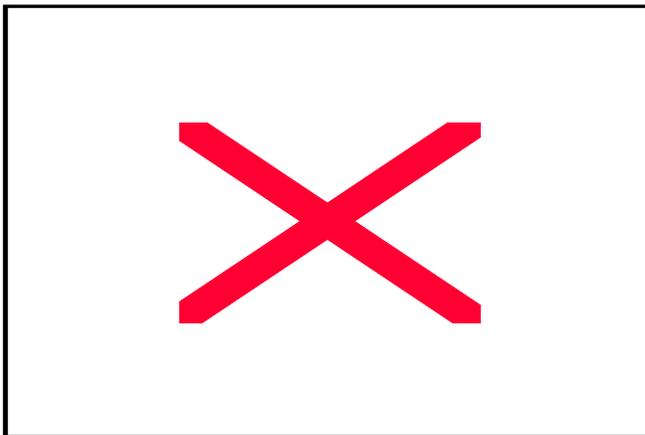


Figure 9: Percentage of Fathers Convicted of Crimes

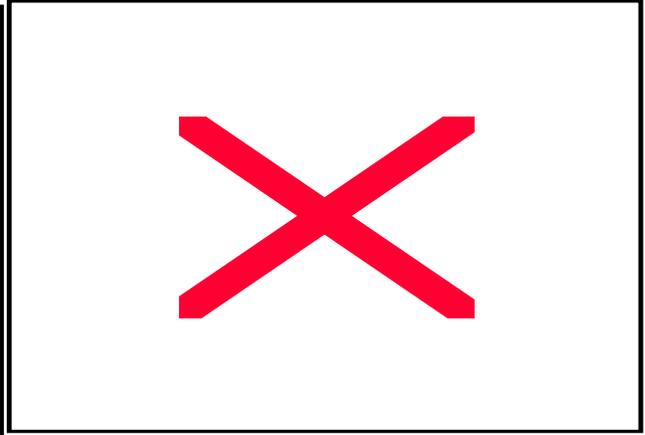


Figure 11: Percentage of Fathers Reporting Alcohol or Drug Problems

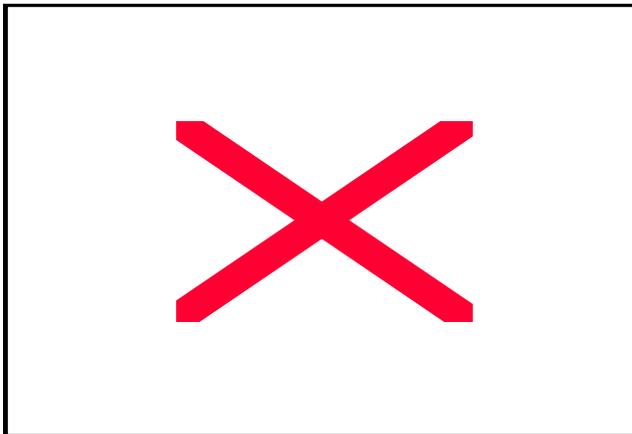


Figure 12: Percentage of Fathers Reporting Co-parental Conflict

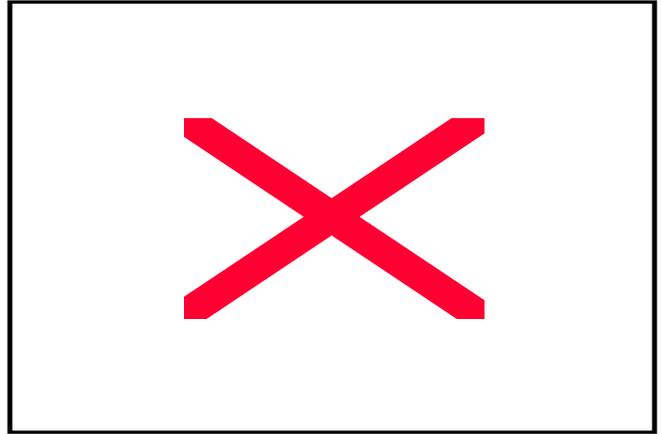


Figure 13: Percentage of Fathers Reporting No Access To Reliable Transportation

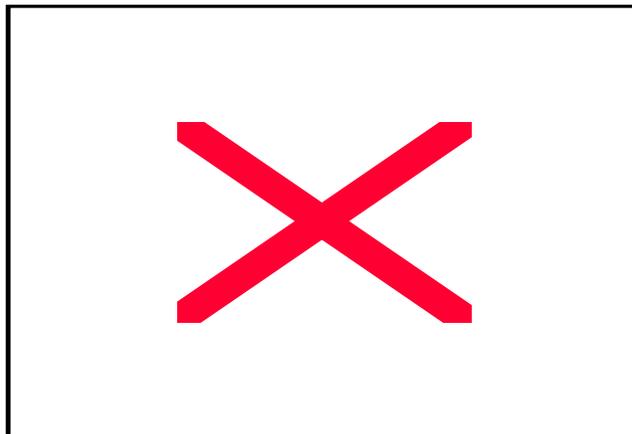
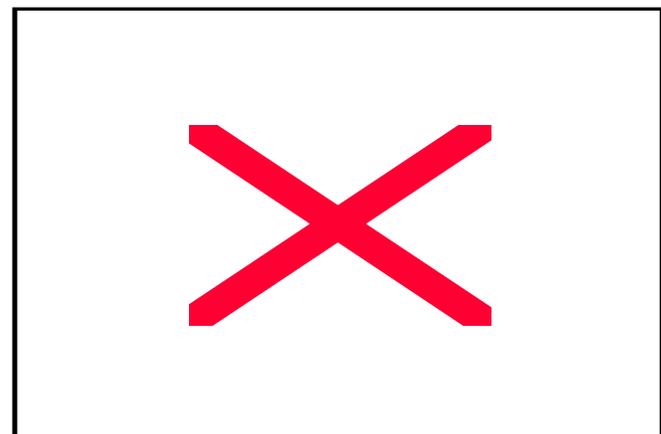


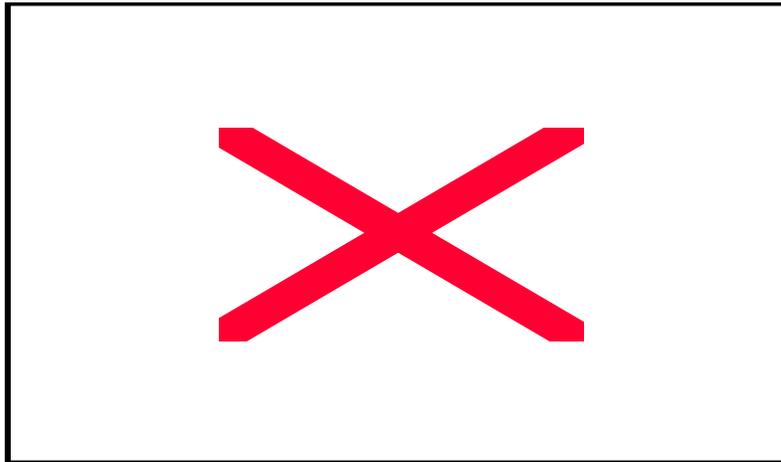
Figure 14: Percentage of Fathers Reporting No Permanent Housing



In order to determine the “best” predictors of paternal depression, additional analyses were conducted. As presented in Figure 15, fathers’ resource challenges, county of residence (Baltimore City or Charles County), and social support contributed significantly to fathers’ depression ($R^2 = 25.8\%$ of the variance).

- Fathers’ resource challenges (unemployment, inability to pay child support, limited access to transportation, lack of housing, substance abuse problems, health problems/disability, and a criminal conviction history) were the strongest predictor of depression scores, accounting for 8.5% of the variance. As the number of challenges increased, fathers’ depression scores also increased.
- Fathers’ residence (Baltimore City versus Charles County) was the next strongest predictor, accounting for 8.2% of the variance. Fathers from Charles County were more likely to score higher on the depression inventory than fathers from the urban site.
- Fathers’ level of social support was also a significant contributor, accounting for 8% of the variance. Contrary to expectations, as fathers’ perceptions of the helpfulness of their social network increased, their depression scores also increased.

Figure 15: Factors Contributing to Fathers’ Depression



Recommendations for Programs and Policy

Given the increased recognition of depression and its negative effects on parenting, programmatic initiatives for fathers must address depression and related issues. Fathers are unlikely to achieve economic and emotional responsibility for their children unless the relationship between depression and life stressors such as inadequate transportation and housing, substance abuse, unemployment, criminal conviction history, social support and geographic location is addressed. Programs targeting non-residential fathers should therefore:

- **Address psychological well-being in their staff trainings.** Specifically, program staff working with this population need to be knowledgeable about the symptoms that typically mask men's depression, such as substance abuse, anger, aggression, reckless behavior, physical health problems, or accidental injuries.
- **Be prepared to offer mental health services to RF program clientele or refer clients to existing physical and mental health service providers.** For example, local health clinics could work with RF programs to serve as an initial point of contact and conduct mental health assessments for program participants.
- **Better understand the role social support plays for rural low-income fathers.** For fathers who struggle with substance abuse issues or who have limited economic means, negative social support networks could impede emotional well-being. RF programs should help fathers to develop positive social support networks.
- **Address conflict and violence between co-parents.** Such interactions endanger the lives of mothers and children and frequently serve as obstacles for fathers' involvement with their children.
- **Alert agencies with authority over public transportation to the unique needs of low-income, non-residential fathers.** Low-income fathers frequently travel long distances and work irregular and non-typical hours of employment while simultaneously attempting to meet their family responsibilities and be involved in their children's lives. Such transportation issues are paramount for fathers in rural areas, where employment sites are typically located far away from housing and public transportation runs sporadically, if at all.
- **Make educational access a central component in RF programs.** Lack of education is a chronic barrier to fathers' economic self-sufficiency and abilities to support their families.
- **Conduct outreach with various community partners in business and local government.** Potential employers should be encouraged to consider hiring fathers with criminal conviction histories or even to provide work training or mentoring opportunities in order to smooth the transition between incarceration and paid employment.
- **Address the community context in which fathers reside.** Programming should be tailored to address issues unique to rural and urban settings. This evaluation noted several points of distinction between fathers who participated in the Baltimore City and Charles County sites. Further attention should be given to the unique needs of fathers in these different communities.



Objective #3

- **To track changes in demographic, psychological, and relational characteristics of a small group of participants from the Baltimore City RF Program one year post-program graduation.**

In order to assess changes that have occurred after participants completed the RF program, the evaluators interviewed five fathers from the Baltimore City RF program. These interviews were conducted at the RF program site by two African American graduate students in human services and covered issues such as fathers' employment, paternity establishment, child support payment, level of and barriers to involvement with their children, coparental relationship, mental health, social support, and personal challenges, and the nature of RF program services received.

Participants

This sample consisted of five non-residential fathers, all of whom lived in Baltimore City. Sixty percent of fathers (n=3) were African American, whereas 40% (n=2) were non-Hispanic White. At the time they entered the RF program, none of the participants were married, and none reported having married one year later.

At the time they entered the program, fathers reported having an average of three children. *At the time of follow-up*, one father reported having a new baby in the prior year. Most of the fathers lived within close proximity of their children (average = 4 miles), and two of the fathers reported having their children come live with them during the time they completed the RF program.

Sixty percent (n=3) of fathers reported earning a high school diploma or a GED at the time of intake. *At the time of follow-up*, the two fathers who did not have a GED or high school degree reported having earned a GED. The fathers' average age was 41.5 when they entered the program.

Results

Employment, Paternity Establishment, and Child Support

Analyses were conducted to determine if there had been any changes in terms of participants' employment, paternity establishment, and child support payment. These results are presented as follows:

- At both Time I and Time II, 60% (n=3) of participants were employed; at Time II, an additional participant reporting picking up occasional or temporary work.

- At both Time I and Time II, 40% (n=2) of participants reported that their salaries covered their financial needs fairly well, whereas 60% (n=3) reported that their salaries did not adequately cover their financial needs.
- At Time I, all fathers reported having established paternity for their children; at Time II, one father reported having established paternity for an additional child.
- At Time I, one father reported having a child living with him; the other fathers reported that their children lived with the other parent or another relative. At Time II, three fathers reported having received help from the RF program in changing their custody arrangement. All of these fathers reported that such services were very helpful to them. Two of the fathers also reported having received help from the RF program in setting up or changing their visitation plan and that such services were very helpful to them.
- At Time I and Time II, 40% of fathers (n=2) reported having court orders to pay child support. At Time II, two respondents reported having received help either setting up or changing their child support order. The same two participants also reported having received help with their child support debt. Similarly, two fathers reported that they felt they were getting their child support situation "under control."
- At Time I, one respondent reported being able to pay the full amount of their child support orders; at Time II, two respondents reported paying 100% of their child support orders.

Father Involvement

Analyses were conducted to determine if there had been any changes in terms of participants' involvement with their children. These results are presented as follows:

- At Time I, 100% (n=5) of fathers reported seeing their children at least once a month, and 80% (n=4) reported seeing their children at least once a week. At Time II, two fathers reported seeing their children *more often* than they did the year before. These two fathers reported that they were seeing their children more often because their relationships with both their children and their children's mothers had improved, they had more time, made more of an effort, and were more determined to be a good parent. One of these two fathers reported that he saw his children more often because the visitation order had changed. In contrast, one father reported seeing his children *less often* than he had the year before. That father reported that he sees his children less often because of transportation difficulties and because the other parent either did not want him to see the children or had denied him access to the children.
- At Time I, 80% reported having some or a great deal of influence in making major decisions for their children (e.g., education, child care, religion, health, etc.). At Time II, one father reported having about the same amount of

- influence in making major decisions for the children, whereas two fathers reported having less influence than they had a year before.
- At Time II, all five respondents reported having received help building better relationships with their children and that the assistance they received was very helpful.

Coparental Relationship

Analyses were conducted to determine if there had been any changes in terms of the nature and quality of the fathers' relationships *with the mothers of their children*. These results are presented as follows:

- At Time I, 60% of fathers (n=3) reported having very friendly relationships with *the mothers of their children*, 1 reported having a neutral relationship, and 1 reported having a somewhat hostile relationship with the mother of his children. At Time II, one father reported getting along better with the mother of his children whereas the other four fathers reported getting along the same. Four fathers reported having received help in building a better relationship with the mothers of their children.
- At Time I, 60% of fathers reported arguing, yelling, or shouting at *the mothers of their children* but none reported hitting or throwing things when they had a serious disagreement with each other. At Time II, two fathers received services related to partner abuse, and three fathers reported having received anger management services. However, one father also reported having had a restraining order taken out against him in the previous year.

Other Factors Affecting Father Involvement (Mental Health, Social Support, and Other Resource Challenges)

Analyses were conducted to determine if there had been any changes in terms of the fathers' mental health, social support, and unique resource and personal challenges. Fathers' depression was again assessed using the CES-D, whereas fathers' levels of social support were assessed using the FSS. These results are presented as follows:

- At Time I, these five fathers' average score on the CES-D was 14.4, above the national average of 8.7. At Time II, the fathers' average depression score was 17.2, which is above the cut-off score of 16 that indicates cause for clinical concern.
- At Time I, the fathers' average score on the FSS was 24.6; at Time II, the average score was 44.4. Scores on the FSS can range from 0 to 96, with higher scores indicating that an individual perceives a greater number of people in their social network as being helpful to them. At Time II, fathers perceived their family members, friends, and professionals as being more helpful to them than they had at Time I.

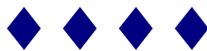
- At Time I, one father reported having a criminal record. At Time II, none of the fathers reported having been arrested, spending time in jail, or going to court in the previous year.
- At Time I, one father reported having problems with alcohol or illicit drugs. At Time II, none of the fathers reported having substance abuse problems, but one father reported having attended drug or alcohol treatment in the previous year.
- At Time I, one father reported not having access to reliable transportation. At the time of follow-up, two fathers reported having serious transportation problems.
- At Time I, one father reported not having a permanent place to live. At Time II, one father reported having stayed in a shelter, rooming house, or other temporary housing in the past year. One father also reported having moved three or four times in the previous year.
- At Time I, one father reported having a serious health problem or disability. At Time II, one father also reported suffering a serious illness, disability, or injury in the previous year.

Recommendations for Programs and Policy

The follow-up results suggested directions for RF programs in areas such as fathers' employment, education, involvement with their children, co-parental relationships with the mothers of their children, mental health, social support, and resource challenges. Based on these follow-up data, programs targeting non-residential fathers should:

- **Address mental health issues.** The results from the follow-up interviews further revealed the need for RF programmatic initiatives to address fathers' mental health. The five fathers who participated in these interviews reported having higher levels of depression at the one-year follow-up than they had at the time of their initial involvement in the RF program. Further, none of the fathers reported having received mental health services from the RF program. It is critical that RF programs include mental health issues in their father support group and develop collaborative relationships with community mental health service providers (see Most, 2001 for examples of how RF programs can better address mental health issues).
- **Continue to enhance fathers' involvement with their children.** All of the fathers who participated in the follow-up evaluation reported having received very helpful services in building better relationships with their children, and a majority reported that their relationships with their children had improved in the previous year. Because research has revealed that fathers who are emotionally involved with their children are more likely to pay child support, it is imperative that RF programs continue to make parenting and child development education a central component of their program services.

- **Increase efforts to improve fathers' relationships with their children's mothers.** The majority of the fathers who participated in the follow-up evaluation reported receiving some services that helped them build better coparental relationships. Although some of the fathers reported improved relationships with their children's mothers, the data also indicated that fathers may require continued services for issues such as partner abuse and anger management.
- **Make securing a livable wage the RF program's employment goal.** Such an emphasis may require RF programs to expand their focus from GED training to educational and job training opportunities that would help fathers attain long-term economic self-sufficiency. By Time II, all of the fathers who participated in the evaluation reported having obtained either a GED or a high school diploma, but few had income that could adequately cover their families' financial needs. Consequently, fathers will likely require continued assistance in developing skills that will help them secure well-paying jobs.
- **Help fathers establish strong social networks.** Fathers who participated in the follow-up evaluation reported increased support from family, friends, and professionals, which could be attributable to the fact that RF programs typically deliver services in a group format and provide fathers with skills necessary for accessing employment opportunities and maintaining supportive relationships with their children. The benefits of this group approach are considerable, for they enhance fathers' abilities to connect with others. This sense of connection could then, in turn, lead to other positive psychological and emotional outcomes, such as hope, responsibility, and a desire to lead a more productive life.
- **Provide fathers with long-term support.** A prior evaluation of RF program services (Most, 2001) found that the fathers who continued in the RF maintenance groups the longest made the biggest improvements in their education, employment, relationships with their children and partners, and community involvement. The fathers who participated in the follow-up evaluation indicated similar improvements in many of these domains, suggesting that an extended intervention as short as a one-year period could help fathers sustain the progress they have made and buffer them from the many challenges that confront low-income fathers.



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