



MARYLAND

FAMILY POLICY IMPACT SEMINAR

Responsible Fatherhood Policy Brief

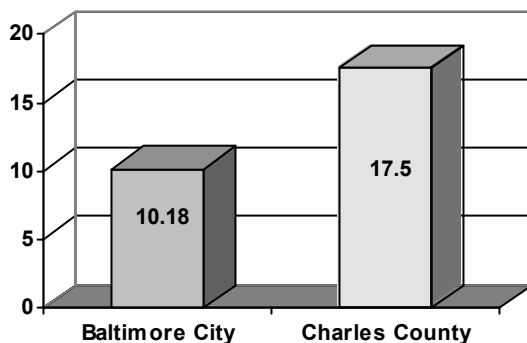
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Promoting father involvement is a key issue for Congress as it reconsiders reauthorization of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996. PRWORA reauthorization provides an excellent opportunity for Congress to examine how policies can support men as they perform their fathering roles.

Researchers at the University of Maryland have been conducting a three-year study of low-income, non-custodial fathers who participated in the Maryland Responsible Fatherhood Demonstration Program*, a program designed to help fathers become and remain financially and emotionally involved with their children. Central findings are presented here:

- **Mental health is an issue for these fathers, particularly for those residing in rural communities.** Levels of depressive symptoms were assessed using a standardized measure. Scores above a clinical cutoff point indicated risk for clinical depression. The average depression scores for fathers participating in this study were well above the national average. In Charles County, MD (a rural county), fathers' average depression scores exceeded the clinical cutoff.

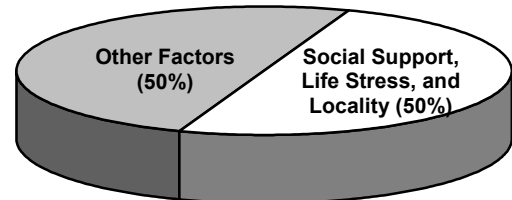
Fathers' Rates of Depression
(National Average=8.7; Clinical Cutoff=16)



* The Responsible Fatherhood Demonstration Program is funded by the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Children and Families and administered by the Maryland Department of Human Resources, Community Services, and Child Support Administration.

- **Fathers' personal challenges and limited resources place them at greater risk for poor mental health outcomes.** Factors such as fathers' employment status, ability to pay their child support order(s), housing status, alcohol and drug use, health, and criminal conviction history predict whether fathers will exhibit symptoms of clinical depression.

Predictors of Fathers' Depression



- **Before financial responsibility can be addressed, fathers' mental health needs must be assessed and appropriate services provided.** Such services are critical for fathers to obtain and maintain employment and be good parents.
- **A comprehensive approach is needed to address low-income fathers' multiple and complex needs.** Such an approach could involve expanding fatherhood programs to include physical and mental health initiatives as well as substance abuse services, parenting programs, education and job training programs, and criminal justice programs.

Data for Study

The sample for this study is comprised of 125 fathers who participated in two sites of the Maryland Responsible Fatherhood Demonstration program: Baltimore City and Charles County, Maryland. Fathers were predominantly (90%) African American and single, with an average age of 31 years.