

Executive Summary: Responsible Fatherhood Groups and Domestic Violence Education: An Exploratory Study of Current Practices, Barriers, and Opportunities

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Domestic violence (DV), or intimate partner violence, is a pervasive social problem that disproportionality affects low-income communities and communities of color. Responsible Fatherhood Groups (RFGs), which are evidence-informed interventions that foster positive parenting and other life skills, were developed to serve the very fathers who comprise these communities. Although there is increasing recognition that the unique features of RFGs make them a potentially powerful venue for selective and universal DV prevention, the few studies on this topic suggest that addressing DV in RFGs is neither widespread nor standardized. In addition, there is a paucity of literature on what actions are necessary to move RFGs and the Responsible Fatherhood Field toward greater adoption of DV education and prevention.

Informed by an "adaptive challenge" institutional change framework, which posits that sustainable change must begin with a critical analysis of a system's landscape, the purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which RFGs are addressing DV and identify the barriers and supports that influence their ability to do so. Specifically, the aims were to explore 1) to what extent and how RFGs are addressing DV in their curricula; 2) factors at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy levels that act as barriers and supports to addressing DV and incorporating DV content into RFGs; and 3) strategies and approaches for incorporating DV into RFGs in ways that support fathers' educational and other needs.

To address these aims, this study used a qualitative design and a practice-research engagement approach to conduct a content analysis of curricula used in RFGs (core curricula [n = 4] and DV supplement [n = 1]) and interviews with individuals who work in or with agencies that provide RFGs as one of their core services (n = 40). These individuals consisted of three groups: leaders in the Responsible Fatherhood Field (n = 10), RFG facilitators (n = 20), and DV advocates who have experience collaborating with an RFG to develop or deliver DV content. Data from the content review and interviews were analyzed using directed and conventional content analysis to allow for both deductive and inductive coding.

The content analysis (aim 1) revealed that none of the four core curricula addressed DV explicitly; however, each covered content and concepts that could be used as windows into addressing DV. In addition, three of the four core curricula had

accompanying supplemental content that specifically addressed DV. Whether the supplemental content is used in RFGs, however, is totally at the discretion of individual RFG facilitators.

Participants described a range of barriers and supports that influence RFGs' willingness and ability to address DV with fathers (aim 2). The following categories and subcategories of barriers and supports emerged. Please note that supports are listed in *italics*.

Table 2: Barriers and Supports to Addressing Domestic Violence within Responsible Fatherhood Groups

Level	Categories and Subcategories
Intrapersonal Level (i.e., the experiences, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of RFG fathers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing DV as normalized behavior • Dealing with the stress and trauma of "low-income living" • Struggling to identify and manage trauma triggers • Possessing a limited understanding of DV <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Different forms of DV - How DV affects children - Recognizing that men can experience DV
Interpersonal Level (i.e., the family and friends of RFG fathers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social networks that promote internalization of and adherence to hypermasculinity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Views of women as subservient and DV as acceptable - Refusal to show vulnerability - Unwilling to disclose being a victim of DV
Organizational Level (i.e., the staff, practices, and policies within programs that serve RFG fathers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Increased willingness to embrace DV as a core concern for fatherhood work</i> • <i>A holistic approach to DV requires resources in addition to commitment</i> • <i>Be clear about the purpose of RFGs in relation to DV</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>RFGs are not Batterer Intervention Programs</i> - <i>DV should not eclipse other necessary RFG content areas</i> • <i>Utilize the "right people" to provide DV education and support</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Engage in reflective and appropriate use of self</i> - <i>Convey a common bond</i> - <i>Be tuned into father's needs and situations</i> - <i>Possess a nuanced understanding of DV</i>
Community Level (i.e., interactions between the agencies that serve RFG fathers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Framework tensions" impede collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Differing approaches to men who use DV - Challenges related to "comparing oppressions" • <i>Overcoming framework tensions is possible and ongoing</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Finding areas of common ground</i> - <i>Building personal relationships</i> - <i>Engaging in mutual education</i>
Policy Level (i.e., national, state, local, and program policies that affect RFG fathers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding priorities influence capacity and collaboration • <i>Policy mandates related to DV have the potential to lead to adaptive change</i>

Four strategies emerged as effective ways to meet fathers' educational and other needs related to DV (aim 3): combining cognitive and affective educational strategies to change norms, attitudes, and behaviors; embracing a framework that balances empathy and accountability; providing a safe space for DV discussion and disclosure; and harnessing men's desire to be a good father. Each of these strategies highlights the importance of being profoundly aware of fathers' lived experiences and intersectional identities.

Taken together, study findings indicate that there has been considerable progress among many RFGs regarding their attitudes, norms, and innovative practices related to addressing the issue of DV. Nevertheless, ensuring that this shift continues will require substantially more financial resources as well as mutual education and relationship-building between the Responsible Fatherhood and Domestic Violence fields.

