



Fatherhood
Research
& Practice
Network

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**Findings from FRPN-Funded Projects 3:
Engaging Mothers in Coparenting
Interventions: Challenges, Characteristics of
Mothers Who Engage, Outcomes
September 17, 2019**

Who is FRPN?



Jay Fagan, Ph.D.
Temple University
FRPN Co-Director



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What is FRPN?

- Six-year, \$4.8 million cooperative agreement to Temple U & CPR
- Funding by U.S. DHHS, ACF, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, 2013-2019
- Targets fatherhood researchers & programs serving low-income fathers



Fatherhood Research And Practice Network

#1

Promote
Rigorous
Evaluation

#2

Build
Evaluation
Capacity

#3

Disseminate
Information



Why Focus on Engaging Mothers in Coparenting?



- Dramatic increase in nonmarital births
- Growing number of unmarried, nonresident fathers
- Drop off in unmarried father involvement soon after birth of their children
- Desire of many low-income nonresident fathers to be more involved with their children
- Low level of nonresident father involvement associated with negative child outcomes
- Some negative effects can be countered by greater positive father engagement with children
- The coparenting relationship is vital to the involvement of nonresident fathers; bad relationships reduce father-child contact
- PACT evaluation found father-only interventions had no impact on coparenting
- Coparenting interventions might be more effective if both mothers and fathers are involved
- The coparenting relationship is challenging to improve and getting mothers to participate is hard

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Featured Studies

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“Evaluating Mother and Nonresidential
Father Engagement in Coparenting
Services in a Fatherhood Program”



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“Fatherhood and Coparenting”



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“Mothers Engagement in
Coparenting and Coparenting
Intervention Outcomes for
Mothers and Fathers”



Discussant

Jeffrey M. Johnson, Ph.D.,
President and CEO, National
Partnership for Community
Leadership



Evaluating Mother and Nonresidential Father Engagement in Coparenting Services in a Fatherhood Program



Sarah Whitton, PhD

University of Cincinnati, Department of Psychology

Kimberly Sperber, PhD

Center for Health and Human Services Research,
Talbert House

Overarching Aim and Setting

Ultimate Goal: Increase mothers' involvement in coparenting services with nonresidential fathers

Fatherhood Project

- Services funded by Ohio Commission on Fatherhood
- Coparenting offered:
 - By Male Coparenting Coach
 - Invited Mother to meet, have a joint coparenting session



Building a Stronger Community...
One Life at a Time.

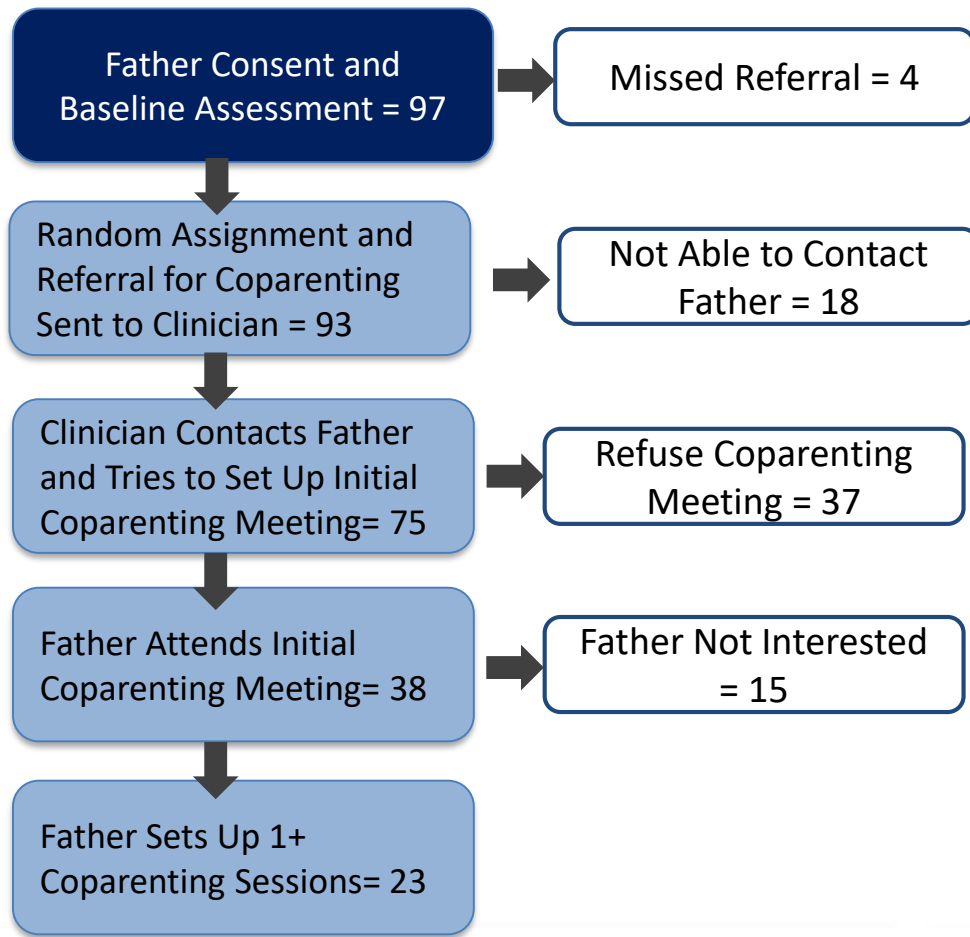
Cincinnati, Ohio

Original Study Aims and Design

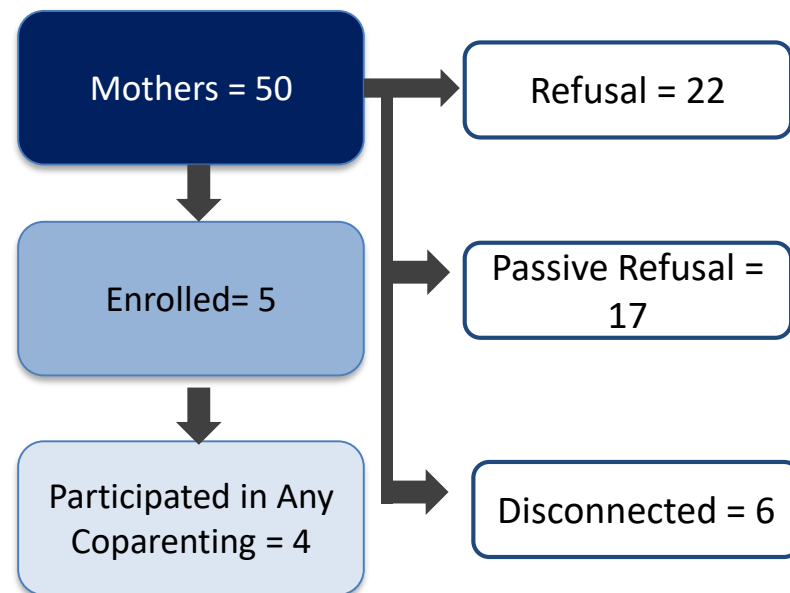
- Aim: Test if can improve mother & father engagement, participation, and satisfaction with dyadic coparenting services by offering “enhanced service”:
 - Female coparenting coach who invites mother personally
 - Mothers’ groups- support, addressing “gatekeeping”
 - Then, dyadic coparenting skills training to mother & father with male & female coparenting coaches
- Design: RCT to compare enhanced coparenting services to standard coparenting services

Recruitment Challenges

Father Participation in Coparenting Services



Mothers' Recruitment into Study/Services





Revised Study Aims and Design

- Aim: Explore why it is so difficult to recruit fathers or mothers into coparenting services, generate ideas for improving recruitment rates.
- Design: Qualitative Interviews with 30 nonresidential fathers, 16 mothers focused on:
 - Barriers to engagement in coparenting services
 - Suggestions for improving engagement
 - Supplemented by quantitative items (Barriers to Treatment Participation Scale)

Themes of Barriers to Participation (Fathers)



1. Time Constraints (83%)

- Too busy
- Employment: work hours, job seeking, want job before start services



2. Unwilling mother (58%)

- Only 2 reported mother refusal; the rest assumed



3. Communication challenges with staff (42%)

- Inadequate follow-up by case managers
- Not able to reach staff
- Inconsistent messages from staff

Themes of Barriers to Participation (Mothers)

1. Mother distrust of Fatherhood Program

- Skepticism that a program designed to serve fathers could be trusted to represent the mother's interests
- “ *the program had already been working with my child's father and in my and my attorney's opinion, he already had a relationship with program staff and I didn't...* ”

2. Frustration with father (inconsistent parenting; anger issues)

- “ *... I know how closed minded he is and don't see that changing. He's the fun time dad. But if she's sick and needs medicine and I can't afford it, then he doesn't want to help. I can count on one hand how many times I ask him for help with something like that and then he doesn't want to do that or understand why he should have to help with that.* ”

Themes of Barriers to Participation (Mothers)

3. Safety concerns

- 3 (18.8%): current or past protection orders against the father
- Ongoing concerns related to their child's safety as primary barriers to participation in coparenting services

““ We are divorced now. It just became final two weeks ago. He's a very abusive person. He was in a standoff with the SWAT team, 16 hours in <city>. He pulled a gun on me and the police officer.””

4. Logistical Barriers

- Inconvenient location, difficult to get to
- Other family responsibilities: childcare, caring for sick or aging relatives

Quantitative Results (Mothers)

- **Top 3 “Big” Reasons for Declining to Participate**
 - Inconvenient location (42.9%)
 - Too busy (35.7%)
 - No contact with child’s father (35.7%)
- **Top 3 Reasons for Declining to Participate (“big reason” and “small reason” combined)**
 - Too busy (71.4%)
 - Angry at father for things he has done to the mother in the past (60%)
 - Not wanting contact with father (55.2%)

Themes for Improvement (Fathers)

1

Marketing

- Insufficient information in community
- More effective methods: Facebook, social media, flyers, fathers sharing stories

2

Improve Staff Communication

- Be more aggressive, consistent, and persistent in outreach
- Close the loop
- Make selves available, be responsive to fathers who leave messages

3

More meaningful inclusion of mothers

- Child activities both parents can attend
- Mother only groups
- Individual services to mother and fathers before dyadic sessions
- Offer moms gift cards

Themes for Improvement (Mothers)

1

Desire for services focused on improving the communication skills of the parents

- Agreement among mothers that parents should participate in individual services prior to participating in joint services
 - “Best thing, depends on the age of the child, is if each parent does individual counseling first, then come together for counseling, and then involve the child last. Adult issues should not be discussed with the child.”*

2

Improving service equity for mothers

- Perception program was for primary benefit of the father
- Desire for same practical assistance offered to the fathers rather than coparenting services only
 - food, housing, legal assistance, childcare and activities for the children, gift cards, and household supplies

Implications for Practitioners

- Lack of perceived need for help was *not* a key reason for non-participation
- Low perceived value of services was *not* a driver of non-participation
- Primary drivers of low engagement were:
 - Relationship difficulties combined with low levels of contact between the mother and father at time of recruitment
 - Mother distrust of the program
 - Practical barriers (e.g., transportation, childcare)
 - Lack of formalized outreach protocols for staff
 - Lack of experienced staff with accountability for recruitment and enrollment activities

Recommendations

- Offer interventions that improve basic communication between coparents to reduce undermining behaviors and to improve the coparenting alliance
- May need to alter the focus of existing fatherhood programs to be more inclusive of the family in order to engage women
 - This may provide women with their own reasons to come to the program other than to supplement the father's programming.
- Programs that have traditionally only, or primarily, served fathers will need to provide comprehensive and ongoing training to staff about the differences in working with mothers and families rather than fathers only if they seek to offer coparenting services

Recommendations

- Programs need structured, communication/outreach protocols for staff to use when engaging clients in coparenting services
- Standardized processes for follow-up and reminder calls are necessary to ensure appropriate amount and type of outreach to potential participants.
 - Protocols should acknowledge and accommodate the fragile nature of the relationships between many of the mothers and fathers so as to avoid further harm to the coparenting relationship.

Fatherhood and Co-parenting

Armon R. Perry, Ph.D., MSW

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Background and Purpose

- The *4 Your Child* project was awarded a New Pathways for Fathers grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources (US DHHS) Office of Family Assistance (OFA).
- However, this award prohibits the use of grant funds to engage or collect data from mothers, limiting *4 Your Child* participants' ability to apply the skills they have learned in the program.
- Therefore, the proposed study was an exploratory extension of the program that aimed to educate mothers on the skills that fathers are learning in *4 Your Child*.








Research Questions

- How does providing custodial mothers with co-parenting education impact mothers' report of co-parenting relationship quality?
- How does providing custodial mothers with co-parenting education impact mothers' report of non-resident fathers' engagement with their children?
- How does providing custodial mothers with co-parenting education impact mothers' report of conflict resolution skills?

4 Your Child

Program Description

-  • Parent education and case management intervention
-  • Non-resident fathers, ages 16+ with no reported open DV cases
-  • 28 hours of parent education (24/7 Dad and selected modules from Together We Can)
-  • 6 months of solution focused case management services
-  • 4 sites across Kentucky



FRPN Co-parenting Study

- Selected modules from 24/7 Dad and Together We Can that focused on co-parenting, communication, and conflict resolution
- Single 2-hour session
 - Balloon activity, family wheel, hopes and dreams (TWC)
 - What it means to be a man, family history (24/7 Dad)
 - Showing and handling feelings, grief and loss (24/7 Dad)
 - Communication (24/7 Dad)
 - Getting involved and parenting time (24/7 Dad)
 - Working with mom (24/7 Dad)
- Immediate post workshop focus group
- Invitation for no-cost mediation



Methods

- Experimental design
- Sample 153 (84 control, 69 intervention) custodial mothers
- Inclusion criteria = 16+ & child's father was a participant in 4 Your Child



Sample Demographics

Variable	N	M	SD
Age	153	34.75	8.09
Income	123	23,303.94	17,500.17
Total children	153	2.61	1.28
Childbearing partners	153	1.83	.94

Sample Frequency Distributions

Variable	Category	N	%
Race			
	White	67	44.6
	Black	72	48.0
	Biracial	8	5.3
	Other	2	1.3
Employment Status			
	Full time	78	52.0
	Part time	21	14.0
	Unemployed	50	33.3
Education			
	Less than GED/HS diploma	14	9.3
	GED/HS diploma	73	48.7
	College degree	63	42.0
Relationship Status			
	Not married or dating	70	46.7
	Married or dating focal father	42	28.0
	Married or dating someone other than focal father	34	22.7
Multiple Childbearing Partners			
	Yes	61	40.7
	No	86	57.3

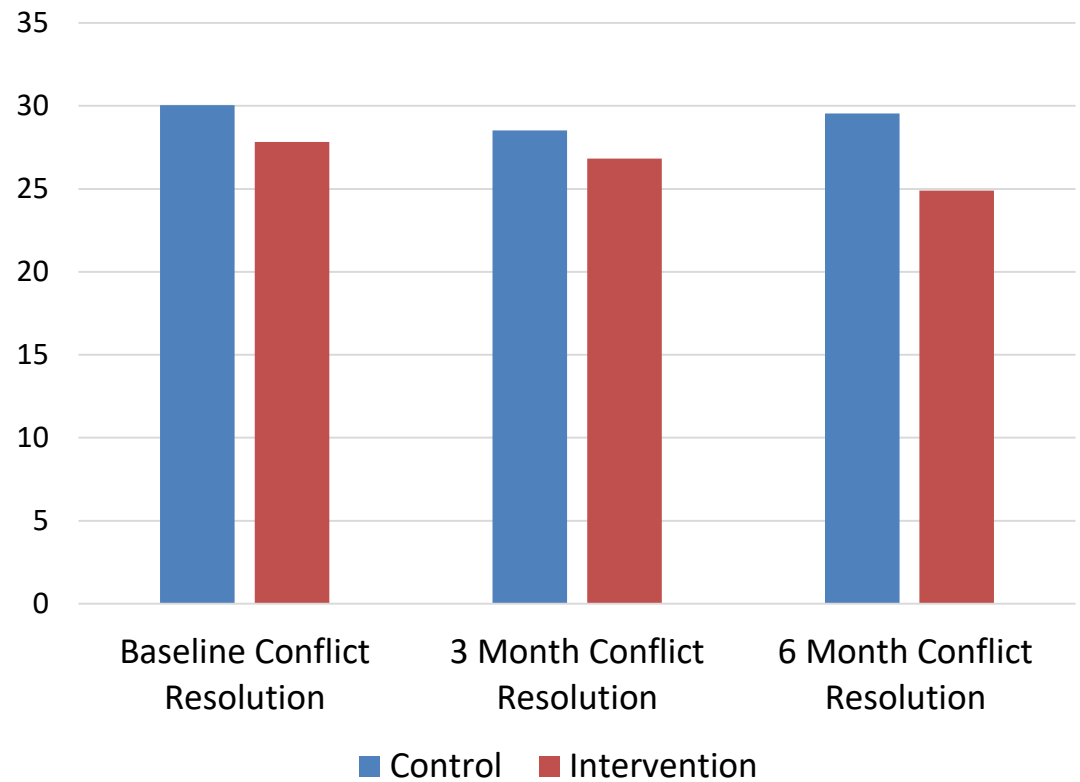
Measures

- **Conflict Resolution Skills.** Relationship Dynamics Scale (Renick et al, 1992), 12 items, Cronbach's Alpha for the current study was .76.
- **Co-Parenting Relationship Quality.** Co-parenting Questionnaire (CQ, Margolis, Gordis, & John, 2001), 14-items, Cronbach's Alpha for the current study was .89.
- **Fathers' Parenting Behavior.** Index of Father Involvement (Hawkins et al., 2002), 26 items, Cronbach's Alpha for the current study was .97.

$F(2, 147) = 4.656, p < .01$

Quantitative Results

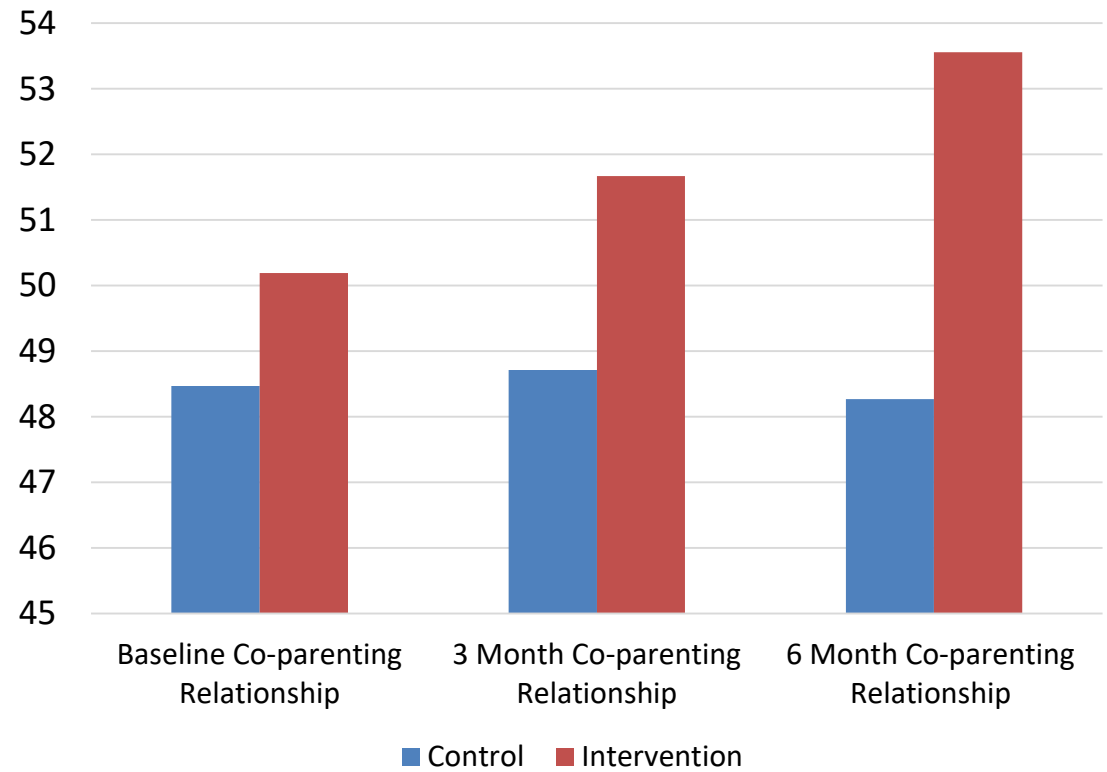
Conflict Resolution Skills



$F(2, 147) = 3.739, p < .05$

Quantitative Results

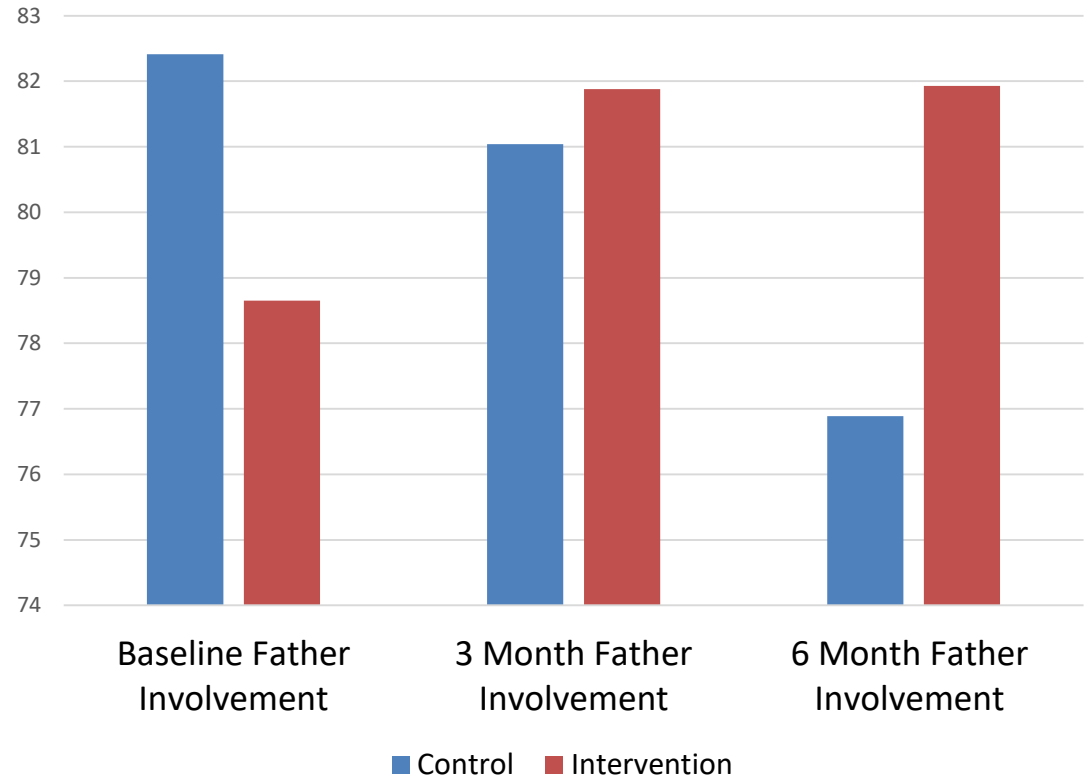
Co-parenting Relationship Quality



$F(2, 147) = 1.683, p = .506$

Quantitative Results

Mothers' Report of Father Involvement



Qualitative Findings

- Immediate post intervention focus groups with mothers participating in workshops
- Emergent themes:
 - What makes a good dad?
 - Co-parenting outlook
 - Co-parenting challenges
 - Mom's advice for dads
 - Props to the program
 - Mothers' reflections



Discussion

- Messaging in recruiting mothers into co-parenting and/or fatherhood interventions is important
- Although some mothers questioned fathers' motives for enrolling in *4 Your Child*, most mothers commended fathers for their effort and became more receptive to co-parenting (many mothers reporting trying to facilitate co-parenting on their own in the past)
- Exposing mothers to what fathers were learning prompted them to think about what parenting looks like from a non-resident, non-custodial (oftentimes disenfranchised) father's perspective
- Engaging mothers in fatherhood interventions can produce positive results for paternal involvement and co-parenting outcomes

Implications for Practice and Future Research

- Mediation invitations did not fully materialize (although many of the participants, mothers and fathers, talked about its importance and requested it at follow up)
- Fatherhood and co-parenting interventions need to emphasize empathy and early(ier) intervention is preferable
- Mothers wanted to know more about what fathers were learning and made requests for combined sessions, observational analyses, and extended support/resources to combat disengagement after the intervention
- Follow up study of unmarried, non-romantically involved effective co-parents is currently underway

Acknowledgements

- Funding for the current project was provided by the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network under grant #90PR0006 from the US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Planning Research and Evaluation to Temple University and the Center for Policy Research.
- Funding for the *4 Your Child* project was provided by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, grant number 90FK0074-01-00. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

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Mothers Engagement in Coparenting and Coparenting Intervention Outcomes for Mothers and Fathers

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Jessica Pearson, PhD

Rebecca Kaufman, MA, MSW

Background

- Low-income, nonresident fathers' strained relationships with the child's mother is a primary reason for not being involved with children (Friend et al., 2016)
- Research has found that help with coparenting is one of the main reasons that fathers enroll in RFPs



Background

- Coparenting interventions would be more effective if both mothers and fathers were involved in the intervention (Fagan, 2008)
 - 3 out of 4 fatherhood programs participating in the PACT evaluation encouraged current or past partners to join relationship workshops either with the father or by participating in a separate workshop for female partners (Dion, Zaveri, & Holcomb, 2015)
- Few mothers participated





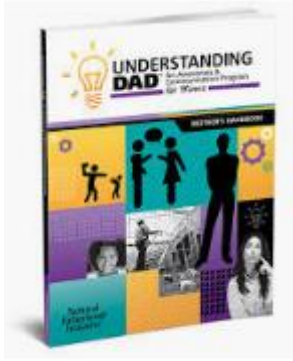
Research Questions

The current study sought to determine:

- Are mothers (whose child's father attends a fatherhood program [FP] interested in participating in a coparenting intervention?
- What are the predictors of mothers' interest in participation?
- What is the effect of mothers' participation on coparenting and father-child contact?

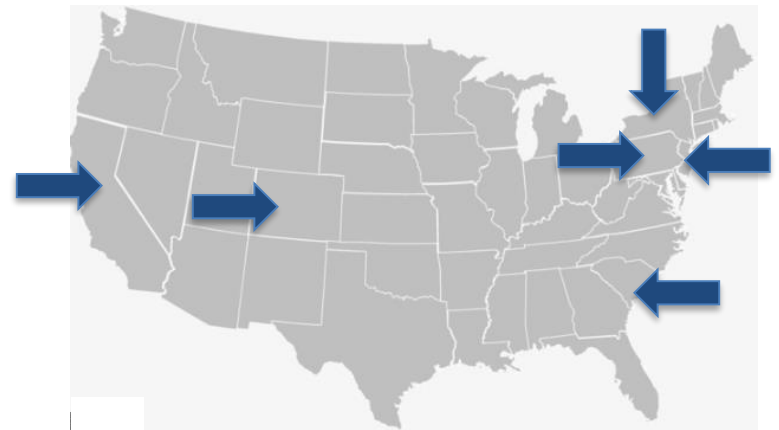
Curriculum: National Fatherhood Institute's Understanding Dads™

- Awareness and communication program for mothers so they can more effectively coparent with the fathers of their children
- Helps mothers
 - Understand why father involvement is important
 - Improves mothers' awareness of how her relationship with her own father impacts her relationship with the father of her child
 - Improves communication between the coparents
 - Increases mothers' confidence in coparenting with father



Study Design

- Pretest/posttest/follow-up design (there was no control or comparison group) with a total of 22 cohorts across 6 urban social service agency sites
- Cohorts took place
 - 8 in South Carolina
 - 7 in California
 - 2 in New York City
 - 2 in Pennsylvania
 - 2 in New Jersey and
 - 1 in Colorado



Recruitment

Mothers were recruited in one of three ways:



1. Father was recruited at FP and provided contact information for the mother



2. Mother was recruited through advertisements in local and online mothering groups



3. Mother reached out to the coordinator after hearing of the class from a previous participant

Criteria for Participation

- First 9 cohorts
 - Mothers and fathers lived separately
 - Had a child 19 years or younger who lived mainly with the mother
 - Felt safe working together
 - Father was an active participant in FP
- Next 14 cohorts held the same eligibility requirements +
 - Coparents could live together (only 17 couples cohabited)
 - Fathers expressed interest in participating in FP but were not actively involved at the time of recruitment

Mothers' Interest in Program

Of 277 mothers who were contacted for this study:



- 153 (55%) were interested in participating in the coparenting program



- 111 were disinterested
- 13 were ineligible for various reasons



Predictors of Interest (Logistic Regression)



- Each additional level of **education** completed by fathers increased the odds that mothers were interested by 33%
- **Each additional child** shared by mothers and fathers increased the chances that mothers were interested by 54%
- Each one-unit increase in **relationship quality** increased the odds of interest by 54%
- Fathers' **incarceration** increased the odds of interest by 118%
- **Co-residing** with the father decreased the chances of interest by 70%

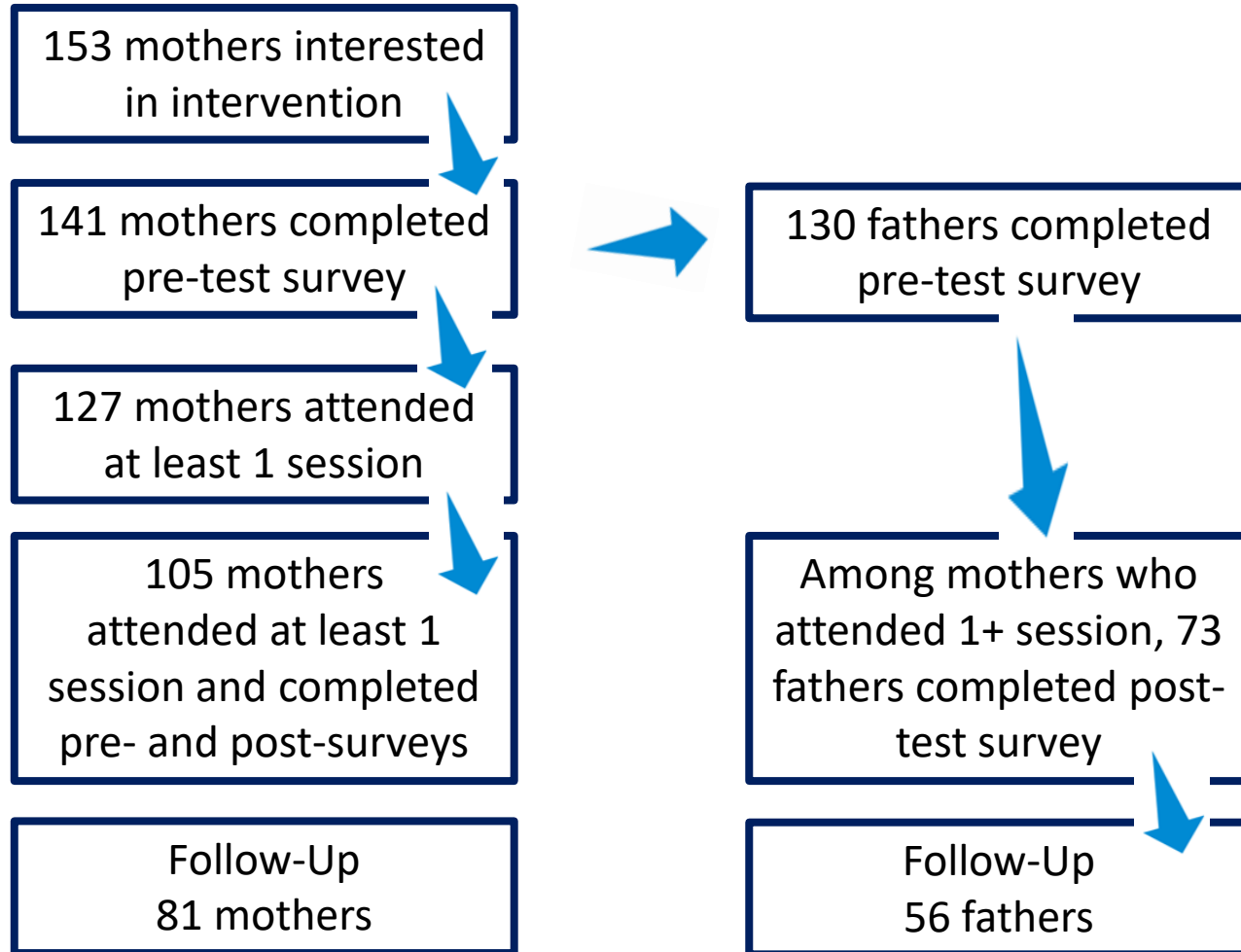


Predictors of Interest

- When fathers perceived moderate levels (versus high or low levels) of **undermining**, mothers were more interested



Flow Chart for Sample of Participants





Measures

- **Coparenting Confidence:** 12 items assessing mother's confidence in her ability to coparent with the father
- **FRPN Coparenting Scale:** 5 items assessing coparenting alliance, 3 items assessing maternal undermining
- **Coparenting Conflict:** 9 items assessing disagreements mother and father have over child care and child rearing (e.g., how to set limits and discipline)
- **Father-Child Contact:** 1 item assessing how often father saw the child in the past month

Bias Analyses

Mothers who participated in the intervention had more coparenting challenges than mothers who did not participate



Results: Effects of Intervention (Pre to Post)

Repeated measure ANOVAs showed significant main effects for time (within-subjects effects) for:

- Mothers' reports of **confidence** –
 $F(1,103) = 7.20^{**}$ $\eta^2 = .07$
- Mothers' reports of **disagreements** –
 $F(1,92) = 7.55^{***}$ $\eta^2 = .08$
- Fathers' reports of **undermining** –
 $F(1, 69) = 5.32^*$ $\eta^2 = .07$

Results: Effects of Intervention (Pre, Post, Follow-up)

Repeated measure ANOVAs showed significant main effects for time (within-subjects effects) for:

Mothers' reports of **confidence** –
 $F(1,103) = 19.99^{***}$ $\eta^2 = .23$ $1,2 < 3$

Mothers' reports of **disagreements** –
 $F(1,92) = 21.09^{***}$ $\eta^2 = .23$ $1,2 > 3$

Mothers' reports of **undermining** –
 $F = 16.01^{***}$ $\eta^2 = .17$ $1,2 > 3$

Fathers' reports of **undermining** –
 $F(1, 69) = 7.61^*$ $\eta^2 = .13$ $1 > 3$

Quotes From Mothers Regarding Lower Conflict

As one mother put it

“I don’t jump the gun or bust at him anymore”

Another mother credited the class with helping her

“not to get mad about things”

A third maintained that she no longer

“stops texting or hangs up the phone on him...and actually listens to what he says”

A fourth mother said she was trying not to

“ruminate on situations or being (them) back up to get control over it”

Conclusions

- Because only ½ of mothers are interested in a coparenting intervention, it may be challenging to form mothers' coparenting groups in smaller programs serving fathers
- There is an inverted "U" shaped relationship between coparenting and interest in the program

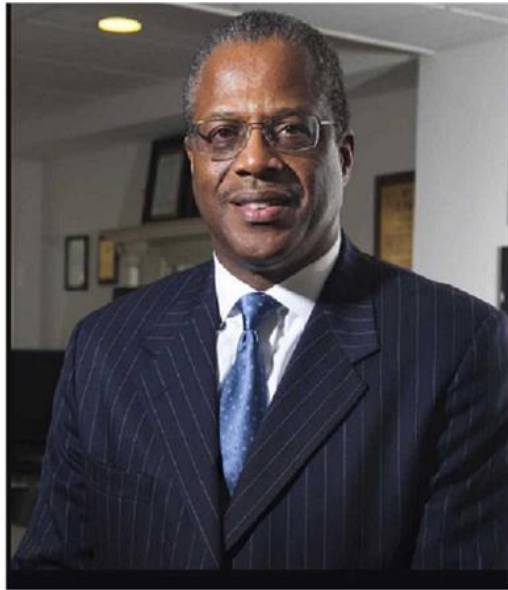
Best prospects for engaging mothers:

- - When they do not reside together
 - When father has been incarcerated in past year
 - When the relationship is of moderate quality and
 - When they share more together (multiple children)

Conclusions

- Understanding Dads™ is associated with greater maternal confidence in ability to coparent and lower self-perceived conflict
- Even though fathers were not involved in classes, they also perceived less conflict, as shown in their reports that mothers undermined them less
 - ➔ Caution: it is not clear whether fathers' perception of change resulted from involvement in FP or mothers' involvement in Understanding Dads
 - ➔ Caution: As there was no control group, not possible to say that improved coparenting was caused by intervention

Discussion



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President and CEO of the National Partnership for Community Leadership



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