

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Father Involvement Support Program

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Social Work

By

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in collaboration with
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Dedication

First and foremost, this dedication goes to all the fathers who participated in the *Dads Matter* program, without them this research would not have been possible. An enormous gratitude is due to Nick Mazzeo, Program Coordinator of the *Dads Matter* program in Anaheim and Santa Ana, for his support and enthusiasm. Most importantly, a special appreciation to Professor Judith DeBonis for all the late night support and guidance, as well as Professor Jose Ramos for his thorough research and information.

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Abstract

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By

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Master of Social Work

The purpose of our study was to examine a father support program, called *Dads Matter* and evaluate its effectiveness. Specifically, this study answered the following question: Does participation in the *Dads Matter* program improve parenting and co-parenting (parenting skills, time with child, relationship with child), economic stability (paying child care, keeping current with bills), relationship/marriage with partner, and personal development (housing, employment). Data analysis was conducted using secondary data from participants' pre/post surveys who participated in the *Dads Matter* program using the *Supporting Father Involvement (SFI)* intervention. There were a total of 312 pre-surveys and 89 post surveys. Results showed that there was a statistical significant change in economic stability and personal development; there was improvement over time among the fathers. Given this preliminary analysis, further research is critical in order to understand the effectiveness of the *SFI* intervention.

Introduction

Fathers play a crucial role in the development of their children's lives. Research states that about 36% of children in the US do not live with their fathers, and about half of American children will spend part of their childhood in a single-parent family (Debell, 2008). Children in father-absent homes are four times more likely to live in poverty, seven times the rate of teen pregnancy (Wilson, 2015) and at risk for cognitive, social, and emotional difficulties (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, & Wong, 2009). In addition, children with absent fathers are associated with a reduced well-being; a decline in health, academic achievement, educational experiences, and less parental involvement in school activities. A father's role in a child's life makes it reasonable to ask whether living without a resident or involved father puts children at a disadvantage (Debell, 2008). Therefore, it is important to understand how the presence of a father impacts their children and the family dynamic. The present study will analyze secondary data to determine if participation at a prevention intervention improves a father's relationship with their child, relationship with the co-parent or partner, economic stability, and personal development.

Literature review.

There are many challenges that fathers encounter; such challenges include unemployment, insufficient funds, and/or physical health problems. As a result, fathers with too many issues of their own find it difficult to become involved in their children's lives thus impacting the likelihood that they will maintain and keep a positive relationship with their children (Fagan & Kaufman,

2015; Osborne, Dillon, Craver, & Hovey, 2016). Although mothers are capable of moderating the effects of a father's absence for their children, they are at a disadvantage when taking on different parental gender roles (Sieber, 2008). Each one parent makes a unique contribution to the child's development. Fathers model different drives and roles than that of a mother-- thus the presence of a father is equally important (Debell, 2008; Sieber, 2008).

Relationship with Partner and Co-Parenting

When parents cooperate together and the quality of their romantic relationship remains healthy, the quantity and quality of father involvement are higher (Osborne et al., 2016), resulting in healthier families and healthier parent/child relationships (Panter-Brick et al., 2014; Scott, Hickman, Brown, & Faccio, 2015; Threlfall & Kohl, 2015). Studies show that a father's level of involvement with his children is associated with the mother's view of his caregiving abilities and whether she feels that the father can have a positive effect on the child (Sieber, 2008; Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). Regardless of the rising divorce rate and a large number of couples transitioning to non-cohabiting relationships within just a few years, their ability to cooperate and engage in positive co-parenting can have a strong influence within parent-child relationships (Osborne et al., 2016).

However, when fathers start to procreate with new partners, their resources and involvement shifts to their new children than their prior children (Osborne et al., 2016). As fatherlessness becomes pervasive in nuclear family dynamics due to a decline in family values, there comes a lack of motivation in

men to maintain a healthy relationship with the co-parent and child (Cowan et al., 2009). As a result, the concept of “the breadwinner” is seen as a father’s only sole function for father involvement instead of an equal co-parent (Sieber, 2008; Osborne et al., 2016).

Economic Stability

Many young fathers are eager to be active in their children’s lives (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, & Pruett, 2005) but lack the experience, job skills, or support that is needed to transition themselves into parenthood (Cowan et al., 2005; Fagan, Bernd, & Whiteman, 2007). As men become fathers, barriers and challenges do arise. In particular, unemployment presented frequent challenges reported by fathers as unable to effectively make ends meet (Bronte-Tinkew, Horowitz, & Carrano, 2010; Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). According to Fagan and Kaufman (2015), 64.8% of fathers were absent in their children’s lives due to insufficient funds, 35.2% due to inability to pay for child support, 32.4% had difficulty keeping employment, and 30.4% were unable to pay bills.

According to Bronte-Tinkew et al. (2010), during times of economic hardship, fathers reported a strain in the co-parental relationship as their conversations revolved around money and disagreements regarding the children. Young mothers encourage father involvement when the father was seen as a sufficient provider (Fagan et al., 2007). However, father engagement declined when the father’s income was less than \$25,000 yearly as opposed to making over \$75,000 a year (Debell, 2008). The family role of the father devalued when unemployment surfaced (Fagan et al., 2007) causing poverty thus creating conflict within the family dynamic and increasing family instability (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, & Pruett, 2007).

Personal Development

High stress may be another contributor to the father's perceptions of their competence in parenting and a lack of involvement with their children (Sieber, 2008; Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010). It has been suggested that men are more prone to spillover negative moods than women (Fagan et al., 2007); about one-fifth reported having anger management issues, accusations of partner/spouse abuse, and substance abuse problems (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). Multiple stresses can cause negative moods, and if around children, can be harmful to the child's emotional and behavioral development during the first 3 years of life (Fagan et al., 2007). In addition, multiple stresses can lead to energy depletion, causing fathers to withdraw from family interaction or any caregiving duties (Fagan et al., 2007). There is research that suggests that without interventions to counteract these negative behaviors, they are more likely to be repeated one generation after another (Cowan et al., 2005).

Fathers are more likely to be active in their child's life when they feel confident and positive about themselves, have a healthy relationship with the child's mother, support from family and friends, and are able to provide economically (Cowan et al., 2005). However, evidence suggests a vast amount of young fathers are instead treated with hostility, or have a family landscape of mother-oriented and father-absent or father-punitive (Fagan et al., 2007). This further perpetuates the belief of disengaging fathers as secondary importance in their children's lives (Cowan et al., 2005). With lack of resources or guidance, there is little to no motivation in fathers to engage in fatherhood (Sieber, 2008; Cowan et al., 2009).

Supporting Father Involvement (SFI)

In order to promote father involvement where men can discuss and seek guidance on how to overcome motivational and societal barriers (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, & Gillete, 2014), fatherhood programs are essential. Research shows that fathers who participate in father involvement programs have a positive outcome of building stronger communication with their partners and benefit the wellbeing of their children (Osborne et al., 2016). Additional studies have shown significant improvements for participating fathers with less negative effects regarding co-parenting, reduced stress and anxiety, and improved levels of support (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2010). Programs that attempt to improve father involvement address concerning factors in order to assist fathers to become the parents they desire to be (Osborne et al., 2016).

An intervention that addresses these concerns is called the *Supporting Father Involvement (SFI)*. *SFI* is an evidence based prevention intervention that focuses on five domains. These domains include individual characteristics of the parent, parent-child relationship quality, co-parenting relationship quality, family patterns, and life stress with social support (Cowan et al., 2009). *SFI* uses 3 randomized clinical trials: two 16-week programs (fathers and couples) and one single session control group. After the 16-week program, a follow-up is conducted, and data is collected and analyzed using pretests and posttests. Overall findings have revealed that participants in the *SFI* had showed an increase in father involvement with their children and stronger relationships with their children's mother. (Cowan et al., 2005; Cowan et al., 2007; Pruett, Cowan, Cowan, & Pruett, 2009).

Aims and objectives.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of this intervention, a father involvement program based in Orange County and funded by Children's Bureau of Southern California, called *Dads Matter* was examined. The program focuses on creating an environment for fathers and families in which connections are enriched, economic stability is supported and individuals discover the value of involvement. The program includes several workshops and series that include a Dad's Club, Couple's Club, peer mentoring, child care, case management, father/child events and activities. The Dad's Club (also known as *Responsible Fatherhood Program*) and Couple's Club is a 16-week series that uses the evidence-based prevention intervention, *Supporting Father Involvement (SFI)*. *Dads Matter* support fathers in training and building appropriate and healthy communication with their co-parents, engage in healthy dialogue about their perspectives of fatherhood, while developing parenting practices to utilize within their family dynamics.

This study will examine secondary data (pre and post surveys) of participants in the Dad's Club (*Responsible Fatherhood Program*) that used *SFI*. The principal objective is to examine whether there were changes between the responses of the participants before and after the *SFI* intervention. Specifically, to identify if the dad's participation while using the *SFI* made an impact that showed improvement in four areas:

1. Parenting and Co-Parenting (parenting skills, time with child, relationship with child)
2. Economic Stability (paying child care, keeping current with bills)
3. Relationship/Marriage with Partner

4. Personal Development (housing, employment)

Methodology

For the present study, secondary data was utilized and examined through the *Dads Matter* program, funded by Children's Bureau. Approval was obtained by the agency, California State University Northridge (CSUN), and Institutional Review Board (IRB). Permission to receive dataset through the agency was discussed and approved by Program Director. Additional information about the program, location, population was provided to the researchers.

Design

Secondary data analysis was conducted using data from participants in the Dad's Club (also known as *Responsible Fatherhood Program*). The study analyzed the father's pre and post surveys to measure changes in parenting/co-parenting, economic stability, relationships, and personal development using the *Supporting Father Involvement (SFI)* intervention. The data set contained 312 entry surveys and 89 exit surveys. For this study, only 89 surveys (pretest and posttest) were utilized for a preliminary analysis.

Sample

Participants were recruited through a convenient sampling that included fathers from the community and young fathers (18 +). Sample characteristics from the secondary dataset included gender, age, ethnicity, educational level, income, family status, and well-being and health conditions.

Survey Description

The participants from the *Dads Matter* program were divided into 3 programs: Responsible Fatherhood, Healthy Marriage, and ReFORM. Survey questions measured

pre and post scores in four areas: (1) parenting and co-parenting; (2) economic stability; (3) relationships/marriage; and (4) personal development.

The surveys used close ended questions to gather demographics to understand the time, intensity, and frequency of the father's circumstances. For this study, specific questions from the survey were analyzed from the data set to answer the following research questions. Questions asked about the father's quality of time with their child, resolution in relational conflicts with partner, relationship status, employment status, paying bills and emotional stability and well-being.

Analysis

The data was analyzed using a statistical software package SPSS. A descriptive analysis was conducted to understand participant characteristics in the study. Next, a parametric t-Test was conducted using the specific questions from the survey on both the pre and post surveys to examine changes in the father's parenting/co-parenting, relationships/marriages, economic stability, and personal development. Then, a non-parametric McNemar's test was conducted to examine changes in the father's partner status and employment status.

Results

A paired samples t-test was conducted to examine changes in the responses of the participants before and after the *SFI* intervention. There were no statistical differences among the father's responses in pretest and posttest regarding parenting skills in spending time with the child, eating with the child, taking the child to places, helping the child with bedtime routines and talking about the child's interest. For co-parenting, there were no statistical differences in conflict satisfaction between the father's responses in the pre and post surveys.

Father's responses in economic stability showed a statistically significant decrease in scores related to the challenges of paying their bills from the pretest ($M=2.44$, $SD=.91$) and posttest ($M=2.14$, $SD=.82$); $t(76) = 2.99$, $p < .005$ (two-tailed). The mean difference of the response scores was .29 with 95% confidence interval ranging from .10 to .49. There were no statistical changes among the father's employment status.

In the personal development, there were no statistically significant differences in the father's response between the pretest and posttest. However, there was a statistically significant in the father's personal development in feeling overwhelmed [pretest ($M=2.28$, $SD=1.07$), posttest ($M=2.00$, $SD=.96$)]; hopeless [pretest ($M=2.00$, $SD=1.12$), posttest ($M=1.50$, $SD=.78$)]; depressed [pretest ($M=1.72$, $SD=.83$), posttest ($M=1.50$, $SD=.73$)]; and feeling that everything was an effort [pretest ($M=2.63$, $SD=1.27$), posttest ($M=2.21$, $SD=1.18$)]. All the p-values were less than .05 with a confidence level of 95% ranging from (.10 to .743). Finally, among the partner status, results showed that there were no statistical significance in the relationship status among the fathers and their partner remained stable.

Discussion

Using the *SFI* intervention in the *Dad's Matter* program, findings revealed a relationship between economic stability and personal development, as fathers improved their economic stability, their personal development increased. Suggesting that fathers who felt better about themselves were able to more effectively manage their finances. There were no significant differences on parenting/co-parenting or relationship with partner. Most of the participants were already married and custodial parents, in which, did not affect their parenting skills or relationship status. This indicated that the program did not affect the participants in a negative way, their relationships remained stable throughout the 16-week course.

Limitations

This study provides useful information about the association between a father's well-being and the use of a preventative fatherhood program. However, this study has a number of limitations due to the surveys utilized, participants, and sample size. First, majority of the scales on the surveys used ranged from 1 to 4 with 1 being never and 4 being often or every day, leaving no room for a greater improvement within each of the domains. Secondly, a large amount of fathers who were placed in the fatherhood program were already motivated and trying to seek services. Therefore, participants who were already doing well within their family dynamic slightly improved. Thirdly, not all the questions on the survey applied to all the participants, a high number of participants were custodial parents and married. Therefore, not all participants would follow through the completion of the survey and left some questions unanswered. This significantly reduced the sample size and reduced the variation within the study to better analyze the strength

of the use of the *SFI* intervention.

In conclusion, the data analyzed does not reflect the whole study but only gives a glimpse of a preliminary analysis to a larger more comprehensive study. As additional data is collected there is an opportunity for further evaluation. For future research, the study can focus on fathers who are unemployed or severely struggling financially, divorced, and assess fathers using a standardize mood scale to measure their emotional stability and well-being. The study can also extend the scaling of the survey tools to measure and highlight the participants' improvements. These suggestions can aid the study to better understand how the *SFI* intervention shapes father involvement and to recognize the need for more fatherhood intervention programs. Overall, the program did have some positive results that aided the fathers towards their journey of self-improvement and involvement with their children through the use of the intervention.

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Appendix A: Addendum

ADDENDUM – Father Involvement Support Program

Father Involvement Support Program is a joint graduate project between **Nora Azmitia** and **Jasmine Terry**. This document will explain the division of responsibilities between the two parties. Any additional information can be included in a separate document attached to this Addendum page.

Nora Azmitia is responsible for all the following tasks/document sections:

- Drafted dedication to collaborators of the research.
- Drafted introduction and literature review using previous research to combine various articles together for a solid foundation for the research.
- Compiled findings from the results and graphs.
- Drafted discussion section to interpret the findings and answer our research question

Jasmine Terry is responsible for all the following tasks/document sections:

- Drafted abstract and compiled research on *SFI Intervention Model* along with drafting aims and objective of the research.
- Drafted method section to analyze the secondary data from Dads Matter program.
- Drafted results section using SPSS system and excel to generate graphs.
- Interpreted results from the data.

Both parties shared responsibilities for the following tasks/document sections:

- Researched articles with background information about fatherhood, co-parenting/parenting, and relationships.
- Combined references and engaged in dialogue regarding sources of references.
- Complete and revised IRB, submitted and approved.
- Revised and discussed drafts for possible revisions/changes for all sections.
- Analysis of Data
- Collaborated on poster content and speaker notes.
- Collaborated on final edits of paper and reference list in the finalization process.

Nora Azmitia

Date

Jasmine Terry

Date

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