

Fatherhood

Tanya M. Coakley

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to define and discuss aspects of fatherhood in order to emphasize the importance of fathers' involvement in the development and overall well-being of children and youth in the child welfare system. A historical perspective on the legislation concerning fathers is provided, as well as trends in various agency policies and practices to effectively identify, locate, and engage fathers to become positive and permanent parents in their children's lives. The experiences of fathers with children and youth served by child welfare agencies are described and illustrated with excerpts of interview responses from a qualitative study that the author conducted with fathers about their perceptions of agency factors that facilitate and inhibit their child welfare involvement. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the implications of father involvement research, public policy, and child welfare policy and practice discussed in this chapter. This chapter is not intended as a comprehensive review of the literature. Instead, the most salient work on fathers' involvement with the child welfare system is discussed.

Who is Considered a Father?

A man who is responsible for providing paternal care to a child is considered to be a father. In our society, those who assume the role of father may or may not be related to the child biologically, may or may not be the primary caregiver of the child or custodian, and may or may not reside in the same household as the child (i.e., nonresident father) (Palkovitz 2002). A noncustodial father refers to a father who does not have physical custody of his child; but, he may have child visitation rights and be legally responsible for child support payments. In this

instance, it is possible for the child's mother, relative, or the child welfare agency to have legal custody or legal guardianship instead of the child's father.

Whether resident or nonresident, a father who has been married to the child's mother since the child was born automatically has full legal paternal rights over his child. A paternity test is not required to establish his paternal rights. On the other hand, an unmarried father must first establish his paternity rights through a DNA test before a court will declare him to be the legal father. Although, legally, a father is recognized as legal, biological, or adoptive, child welfare agency social workers understand that a non-relative male might assume the role of father. For instance, a step-father or a mother's long-term, live-in boyfriend who is the father of his and her biological children may act as the father for children in the household who are unrelated to him. Both a step-father and a live-in boyfriend are welcome to participate a child's case planning meetings. However, neither has legal parental rights unless he becomes the child's adoptive father.

Finally, a putative father is one who is presumed to be the biological father because he has been named as such by the biological mother. Child welfare agencies recognize these men as the putative father until paternity is definitively established through a voluntary or court-ordered DNA test for paternity. Social workers work diligently to establish paternity of children and youth and to involve fathers in case planning as swiftly as possible in order to prevent a child from entering into the foster care system altogether and, if the child is placed in out-home care, to reduce the child's length of stay in care..

Fathers' Involvement Defined

There has been an evolving definition of fathers' involvement with children and youth who are at risk for placement in legal custody or who have been placed in legal custody that includes

important constructs relevant to the current multidisciplinary understanding about fathers' contributions and to growing expectations about how fathers will shape children's lives. Therefore, a broad definition of fathers' involvement for the twenty-first century is offered based on the collective contributions of previous research (Hodgins 2007). Fathers' involvement refers to the positive direct and indirect involvement that a father has with his children (Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda 2004) that involves reciprocal emotional and behavioral dimensions and cognitive elements (Marsiglio & Cohan 2000) and is likely to vary across time, developmental periods of both parents and children, and in relation to other components of the social ecology and life circumstances of the child and the child's family (Marsiglio & Cohan 2000; Palkovitz 1997: 213; Toth & Xu 1999). Fathers' involvement occurs under many conditions and in many family contexts, depending on a father's characteristics, such as age, race or ethnicity, and sexual orientation. As it relates to children and youth in foster care, a father's involvement may be specifically outlined, such as a plan for a father's visits with his children and his financial and/or non-financial support of their children (Malm, Zielewski, & Chen 2008). The latter part of the definition suffices to explain what it is that fathers must do to meet child welfare agency expectations regarding fathers' willingness and ability to promote their children's development and overall well-being while the children are care for in safe, stable, and potentially permanent families.

Men's Conceptualization of Fatherhood

The following has been helpful to researchers in understanding how fathers develop their foundation about fathering and conceptualize themselves as fathers. According to Marsiglio (2004), men experience an abstract quest for philosophy, intentions, and vision about fathering; this quest is influenced by processes related to their individual development and gendered

experiences. There are developmental and motivational components that inspire some men to not only want to produce children, but want to nurture them as well (Marsiglio). Marsiglio refers to this as fatherhood readiness, which has to do with how prepared men feel they are to become fathers.

Before they become fathers, men base their ideas of fathering on the way their fathers parented them (Lamb 2010; Marsiglio 2004). They either want to emulate their fathers' parenting because they admire their fathers and the way their fathers parented them or to parent their children differently because of negative experiences with their fathers during childhood. However, once men become fathers, their perspective on fathering and fatherhood is influenced by their distinctive, personal experience, which includes their relationships with their children and/or the children's mothers. If fathers do not have positive examples or references for successful parenting, then they may follow their fathers' example of poor involvement and/or a cycle of absenteeism.

Men who are already fathers have visions that incorporate their children. Those who are nonresident fathers may visit and revisit their abstract visions about what kind of father they would like to be since they are not carrying out the role that they once envisioned. Fathers can experience grief, regret, and guilt about their negative fathering experiences with their children. This may influence their future behavior as it relates to their parenting; men's feelings about their negative fathering experience may also influence their decisions about having more children. For some men, these reflections might be the impetus for them to become a more responsible father or family man (Marsiglio 2004). Men who assume the role of father to a non-biological child (e.g., step-child or girlfriend's child) can also use their visions of fathering to self-evaluate and aim for self-improvement. Taking an active role in developing and maintaining

relationships with their biological and non-biological children helps men form their identity and perceptions about presently being fathers. The relationship between fathers and their children may deteriorate over time; fathers may choose to no longer be a part of their children's lives. They can, however, later reestablish their role as a father who will actively and positively be involved with his child(ren) (Marsiglio).

A man also will form his identity as either a co-parent or a solo parent. He might identify as a father in a good relationship with the children's mother and jointly raise their children. Or he may identify as a father who will necessarily embrace unconventional parenting strategies as a nonresident father. These varied conceptualizations of father involvement help us understand the lives of fathers and the nuances regarding their involvement with their children (Marsiglio 2004:68).

Benefits of Father Involvement

Generally, fathers who are highly involved in raising their children make significant contributions that support their children's overall development and well-being. When children have a secure, supportive, sensitive, warm, and reciprocal relationship with their father it leads to them being well-adjusted (Lamb 2010). Research has found that involved fathers influence children's cognitive ability, social behavior, (Pruett 2000; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera 2002); psychological well-being (Cryer & Washington 2011),; and educational achievement (Rosenberg, Jeffrey, Wilcox, & Bradford 2006; Washington 2011). Some research suggests that fathers' involvement in nurturing and playful activities with their infants is associated with their children's high IQs and better language and cognitive capacities (Pruett 2000). Additionally, highly involved fathers' toddlers begin school with higher levels of academic readiness; highly involved fathers' children are more patient and deal with school stressors better than children

with fathers who are less involved (Pruett 2000). Adolescents with highly involved fathers have better verbal skills, intellectual functioning, and academic achievement than youth with less involved fathers. Children and youth with highly involved fathers are more likely to be emotionally secure, form more secure attachments, be confident to explore their surroundings, and have better social connections with peers later in life. They also are less likely to get in trouble at home, at school, or in their neighborhood (Gable, Crnic, & Belsky 1994; Harris & Marmer 1996; Pleck 2010; Yeung, Duncan, & Hill 2000)

Scope of Father Absence

One of the most critical societal problems that child welfare agencies and their staff must contend with is fathers whose involvement with their children are inadequate as well as those fathers who are altogether absent from their children's lives. Father absence is a national phenomenon that refers to men not being a part of the family household and not contributing financially or emotionally to any aspects of child-rearing. *The One Hundred Billion Dollar Man* is a National Fatherhood Initiative study that has investigated the impact of fathers' absence on the well-being of children (Nock & Einolf 2008). The study has found that the federal government spends \$100 billion each year to sustain families when the children's fathers are absent. The government assists families with absent fathers and who are in need through thirteen means-tested antipoverty programs and child support enforcement. These include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food and nutrition programs such as Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), public housing programs, Medicaid, the Earned Income Tax Credit, the State Children's Health Insurance Plan (SCHIP), and child support enforcement (Nock & Einolf).

According to the Census Bureau, there are about 24 million children (1 out of 3) who grow up without their biological fathers. The impact is more profound for African American families where 2 out of 3 children are affected (Rosenberg & Wilcox 2006). Fathers who are uninvolved or absent contribute to deleterious effects on their children's psychosocial development (Flouri 2005). These children are more likely to live in poverty, drop out of school, and engage in risky behaviors like using illicit drugs, alcohol, and tobacco (Nock & Einolf 2008; Rosenberg & Wilcox). Children of absent father families also use mental health services at a higher rate than children of two-parent families. Compared to their two-parent counterparts, they do not perform as well academically and they have more behavior problems at school. Additionally, they are more likely to enter the juvenile justice system and more likely to be incarcerated later in life (Flouri 2005; Nock & Einolf).

According to a study for the Urban Institute, Malm (2003) found that in 2003 Only 54 percent of children in foster care had contact with their fathers in the past year compared to 72 percent of children in the general population (Malm 2003). The reasons for father absence can be attributed to a number of issues including divorce, out-of-wedlock births, and incarceration. Research shows that incarcerated fathers are more likely to lose contact with their children or passively withdraw from their lives, despite their desire for continued relationships (Center for Research on Child Well-Being 2007). There are also instances where the father is not involved because he cannot be located. This may be because the father is unknown, the mother and father had conflict and consequently distanced themselves from each other, or the father might be deceased. Although fathers' personal problems might keep them from being involved in their child's life, there are still additional problems that lead to father absence for fathers whose children are in the child welfare system.

Because in many of these families the father is often an absent parent, partner, and positive role model, there has been a tendency in permanency planning meetings not to see the father as a positive factor for reducing children's out-of-home stays or providing permanent homes for them. This issue is of utmost concern because if fathers are not full participants in the permanency planning process, then they are deemed by the child welfare system as noncompliant, disinterested in participating in the lives of their children, or unsuitable as a permanent placement option; thus jeopardizing their parental rights to raise their children and preserve their family heritage. For those fathers, if it is determined by the child welfare agency that they are not going to be capable of safely raising their child, then they will be asked to relinquish their parental rights or the court may order their rights terminated based on the recommendation of the child welfare agency.

<A>Barriers to Child Welfare Involvement

Fathers' Personal Challenges

Fathers' personal challenges can serve as a barrier to initial or ongoing involvement with their children. There might be mental health issues, alcohol and substance issues, or domestic violence issues that they must resolve or managed. Additionally, fathers' adherence to traditional mother/father roles in their family and their feelings of inadequacy as fathers are other factors that influence their lack of participating in various family-based programs and services. Fathers do not participate because they are not used to talking about problems and accepting parenting suggestions from outsiders. On a deeper level, it is problematic for them to admit that their families have problems. Having to accept help from professionals makes them feel embarrassed, uncomfortable, weak, or like they are failures. They also do not want to be scrutinized because they receive outside help for family problems (Shock & Gavazzi 2004).

A father's lack of involvement with programs such as CPS and foster care when abuse or neglect is involved has irrevocable consequences on his ever having future contact with his child(ren). Therefore, fathers who want to have involvement—and the child welfare agency agrees that it is safe for the children — must successfully deal with their own set of issues during a given time frame to secure children's permanence.

Under the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P. L. No. 105-89), fathers risk losing their parental rights when they do not comply with case plan goals that are designed to facilitate a relatively short stay in foster care for children. The rationale behind this policy is to motivate parents to act responsibly and swiftly, removing any and all identified challenges in their lives that put children at risk so that their children can have safe, stable, permanent families. However, this policy might also encourage biased practices that promote adoption over placement with fathers. For instance, prospective adoptive parents are screened, evaluated, trained, and monitored to ensure safety and quality before social workers consider placing children in their homes. As a result, adoptive parents present fewer problems to deal with than birth families. This makes placement with them easier and faster, thus more conducive to achieving the 12-month permanency plan mandated by the ASFA.

In contrast, the issues that birth parents must rectify before their children can be reunited or placed with them are usually severe and often time-consuming. Treatment and recovery for drug addiction is a lengthy process. Yet, this and other serious problems typically must be resolved or sufficiently managed within 12 months or else the plan moves towards relinquishment or termination of parental rights.

Research suggests that fathers' challenges influence social workers' views about involving them in permanency planning efforts (O'Donnell 1999). O'Donnell (1999) conducted

interviews with social workers from two child welfare agencies to assess the involvement of 74 African American fathers who had a total of 100 children placed in kinship homes. The social workers reported various challenges when they attempted to involve fathers, including that 49 of the 74 fathers (66%) experienced specific problems that impacted their ability to care for their children. The most common problems included drug abuse or alcoholism (55%), incarceration (26%), not cooperating with the agency (14%), inadequate housing (12%), and lack of interest in the child (12%). If left unresolved, such challenges are likely to threaten any relationships with their children that fathers might have expected to establish or hoped to rekindle.

Mother-Father Conflict

Positive relationships between mothers and fathers lead to greater child involvement from fathers (Curran 2003; Johnson 2002), not only when their children are young but throughout their lives (Coley & Chase-Lansdale 1999). When a marriage or intimate relationship ends between a mother and father, it is important for them to maintain a cordial relationship with each other for the children's sakes. Research has shown that children are more likely to be anxious, withdrawn, or antisocial when their fathers display anger towards their mothers or refuse to cooperate or communicate with them (Gable et al. 1994; Rosenberg & Wilcox 1996).

It is imperative that fathers interact with mothers amicably because they are considered to be the "gatekeepers" in child-rearing (Allen & Hawkins 1999; Marsiglio 2004; 68). Mothers have the power to control the overall manner in which children are raised, including the amount of contact they receive from their fathers. According to the Center for Research on Child Well-Being (2007), mothers' perceptions of fathers' trustworthiness influenced fathers' involvement with their children. Fathers deemed untrustworthy to care for their children by the mother were less engaged in activities with their children than fathers who were considered trustworthy.

Additionally, to a great extent, mothers shape children's feelings about their fathers. For example, a child's view of his or her father is formed by whether or not the father is at home, as well as the context of why he is or is not at home. But, if the child witnesses the mother expressing negative or hostile feelings towards the father regarding the amount of time he spends with his child, then the child will perceive those scenarios to be negative and internalize them (Marsiglio 2004).

Mothers also have a great deal of influence over the manner in which governmental agencies view fathers. Fathers often times find themselves in predicaments where they have to explain themselves to authorities of the court, police department, or the child welfare agency because their children's mothers have alleged—sometimes falsely—that they have perpetrated violence against them or some form of abuse on their children. They might give a false—or accurate, but retaliatory—report that they are not paying adequate child support or that they are wanted for an outstanding warrant of some kind. Fathers with presumed indiscretions will have a more difficult time convincing the court that they deserve the custodial rights or visiting rights they seek to have with their children.

Child Welfare Agency Issues

There is no doubt that the lack of fathers' involvement with their children is largely a function of the fathers' actions. However, there are institutional obstacles that also contribute to fathers' lack of involvement in their children's lives once the children are in the child welfare system. Child welfare agencies present obstacles for fathers to become involved. Agencies' policies and practices convey how open they are to working with fathers, and fathers form their perceptions based on that. For example, O'Donnell (1999) found that social workers were unprepared to work with African American fathers because agencies were not set up to include

them in a useful way during the intake, assessment, and case planning. As a result, social workers did not regularly see fathers in person or make follow-up phone calls to them; they actually had more contact with fathers' families than with fathers. In another study, O'Donnell (2001) examined social services agency case records representing 132 single and multiple father households. His findings indicated that the majority of fathers (70%) had never participated in case planning activities, and more than two-thirds (67%) had never had a discussion with the social worker about obtaining custody of their children. Additionally, only 14% of the fathers actually took part in developing the case plan goals.

Similar issues were found in another study. In their survey of 53 child welfare administrators and 1,222 caseworkers regarding 1,958 foster children, Malm et al. (2006) studied nonresident fathers' involvement with child welfare agencies and their children across four different states from 2004 to 2005. Their findings show that overall, 70 percent of caseworkers said they had received some training on how to identify, locate, or engage fathers. Few caseworkers (32%) reported having received training on how to refer cases to Child Support Enforcement to get assistance with locating the father. Some caseworkers reported having received training on father engagement, referring a case to Child Support Enforcement for assistance locating the father, and on father engagement or child support. Significant differences were found between cases involving workers who did and did not report having received training about working with fathers. Those with training were more likely to share the case plan with fathers; their agencies were more likely to consider the fathers as possible placements for the children; and the fathers on their caseloads were more likely to express interest in having their children live with them.

Of the 1,958 eligible cases for eligible for analysis, caseworkers reported that 1,721 (88%) fathers had been identified, and 1,071 (55%) fathers had been contacted by the caseworkers or agencies at least once. Most caseworkers (86%) reported asking the children's mother how to locate fathers. Caseworkers reported that 40% of the mothers who were asked provided information about the fathers' whereabouts. They also asked other caseworkers (40%), mothers' relatives (33%), and the children (34%). Paternal relatives were the most helpful resources to obtain information concerning where the fathers were. Sixty (60) percent of the time they knew the father's whereabouts. However, the paternal relatives were only utilized as a resource to locate children's fathers by 20 percent of caseworkers.

Malm et al. (2006) also found that 72 percent of the caseworkers believed that children's well-being is enhanced when fathers are involved; they reported contacting more than 90% of nonresident fathers and informed them of the out-of-home placement and case plan. However, only 53% of them believed nonresident fathers were interested in participating in the decision-making process regarding their children's permanency.

In an effort to address the disproportionate numbers of children of color in foster care (Hill 2006), Annie E. Casey partnered with a North Carolina County child welfare agency to investigate how fathers' involvement influences children's permanency outcomes. Coakley (2009) conducted a secondary data analysis study of 116 randomly selected case records of children from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. The sample consisted of 54 (47%) Child Protective Services (CPS) and 62 (53%) foster care case records. The findings showed that the majority of fathers (biological and non-biological) did not sign the case plan to enter into an agreement to complete case plan goals. Of the 19 who did sign the case plan, less than half (8) actually complied with and completed the case plan goals. The children whose fathers complied

with the case plan had shorter lengths of stay in foster care than the children whose fathers did not comply. When fathers were involved versus when they were not involved, the length of stay in foster care decreased by more than half (12 months vs. 26 months).

There also was a significant relationship between fathers' compliance with the case plan and where children were placed after their discharge from foster care. For those fathers who successfully completed case plan goals, their children were placed more often with a parent or relative than with a non-relative or in other types of placements; 37% of the children were reunited with one or both of the parents; 28% were placed with a relative; and 23% were placed with a non-relative. Seven percent were placed in other types of placements that were not specified, but could include emancipation, run-away status, or aged out of foster care.

The findings from the studies described above strongly suggest that by enhancing child welfare agencies' policies and practice efforts to increase fathers' involvement, permanency outcomes for children would be improved. However, prospective research on the involvement of custodial and noncustodial fathers from the point that cases are opened to when they are closed is needed. The following father interviews from the author's qualitative study provide insight regarding factors that facilitate and inhibit fathers' involvement with the child welfare agency.

<A>Fathers' Perspectives and Experiences with Child Welfare Agencies

Using a qualitative research design, the author interviewed fathers about about what influences their involvement or lack thereof. The study findings are organized as follows. First, for each of the two start list categories— facilitated involvement and inhibited involvement— themes from the fathers' interviews are identified. Selected quotations from the transcribed interviews specify the context of the themes. Only particularly salient and unique excerpts from the interviews are included.

What Helps Fathers Stay Involved?

Eight themes emerged from fathers' perceptions of factors that facilitated their involvement.

These include:

- social workers' helping skills;
- workers' understanding and compassion;
- workers' openness and honesty in telling fathers exactly what is expected and how to get it done;
- resources/ providing assistance that helps fathers help their children;
- workers' availability to meet with fathers and answer their questions;
- realistic/ appropriate case plan goals;
- fathers' confidence as a parent; and
- fathers' mothers' guidance and support.

These fathers' comments are illustrative of these themes regarding caseworkers' helpfulness :

The first time I've ever dealt with them [DSS] they was... they did everything that I needed done. At the time of my son's situation, they didn't give me a hard time about me being a man and not being a woman. And I like the way they made me feel comfortable. I could call her at anytime and tell her I needed to talk to her and ... this young lady she was... she put an effort. I mean, she wasn't like somebody "well let me check into it, see if I can do it," she never said that. She would say " well let me get involved, let me get in touch with you tomorrow." And she... she helped me out a lot. A lot!

The most comfortable thing about it was like having that support that didn't frown on you, you know? Having my immediate case worker[']s support. Yes, she would call us at

I'd say probably anywhere from two or three times a week, 8 o'clock in the morning...
"look you need to do this, I left you some paperwork on my way home last night. That is the paperwork sitting in your mailbox. Fill that out. We'll get this started for you. We'll get that started for you. Let me know if there is anything you need." I mean [the social worker] she was just basically— I mean, once DSS actually got into our lives— she did everything she possibly could to get them [the children] right back out. I mean without a shadow of a doubt she was a lifesaver there.

So I mean like I said that right there, that right there could definitely be one of the best things about DSS is that they make you focus on your goals and, you know what I'm saying, they make you like set them. They make you set them and they help you meet them. They make you set the goals. But, you have to meet the goals. They don't give you any outside help unless you absolutely, positively need it. You know they want you to do pretty much everything on your own. That way not only are you proving to DSS that you got this when it comes to those kids, but you are proving to whoever keeps calling on you like look that they got this, leave them alone... And my goal was basically to get— because I had a b.s. job—my goal was basically to get a job to where I could actually support my children. You know what I'm saying, and things of that nature.

They make you do things sometimes that you don't really wanna do. But when you do them ,after awhile you learn that you know you will see why they ask you to do them so. You know what I mean?

I had to go through certain steps as far as taking classes—parenting classes—and they had to come do a home evaluation and stuff like that so I could get my son. But some of the classes though, I did felt like, you know, why did I have to do it or whatever. But you know, I had to make some sacrifices to get my son, so... It wasn't no big deal to meet her but it was uncomfortable for me to go to different meetings and I had to take drug tests and stuff like that. And I felt like, I don't know. I mean I'm gonna do it anyway because no child should be in foster care if they got parents, you know, living or family around. You know, foster care taking care of the child is nothing like family.

[Regarding a support group he was referred to] It's a support group. Men talk about what can we do to help, you know, do better with your kid. What can we do to help benefit... to, you know, to be able to talk and not have problems. 'Cause it's not easy.

What Hinders Fathers' Involvement?

Ten themes emerged that fathers perceived as factors that inhibited their involvement. Included were: workers' negativity; dismissive towards father, ignores or does not value fathers' presence; lack of understanding regarding fathers' discipline style; unfair policies/practices; children's mothers' negativity and noncompliance; fathers' negativity; economic difficulties/inability to find a job; jail/criminal history; too frequent visits from social workers; and stereotypes of Black men.

The following are fathers' accounts about the unprofessional manner in which the child welfare agency personnel (not necessarily the social worker) conducts business with them.

I'd say the most interference that we really had was when, it was the most uncomfortable situation I'd say was probably the very first time we met [the employee]— and basically she played off almost your basic stereotype—"I got a title I gotta place so I'm gonna be an [expletive]"... excuse my language... "But, I'm gonna be an [expletive] just because I can."

That's how they look at you. They see the color of your skin. People go off of stereotypes. They think that all black men are bad people because we don't have anything good going on for us right now.

Oh basically, yes the questioning, the body language. I mean it's like everybody is quick to say it's not what you say but, how you say it? You know, like it's not really so much how you say it, but how you act. I mean she was straight forward with her questions and what not, but when, if we said something that she didn't believe — even though it was proven — it was a roll of the eye or a smack of the teeth... But everybody I talk to basically looks at my wife and holds conversations with my wife when it's me. You know what I'm saying? I am the one who took the initiative to come here. I took the initiative, swallow my pride and say, hey look I need some help. My wife didn't. It was me. You know? But, I mean it's like social services is very female--oriented there. They want to help the female. I mean they say they want to help the children. But in my personal opinion it is more about how many females, how many single mothers they can help.

It's really a two-sided opinion 'cause on one side, theirs is to do a job, which is to help out the less fortunate and to get certain opportunities to mothers and fathers that are there... On the other hand, I feel a little disrespected because a lot of times if you are sitting there with your girls and your kid they ,they really not really paying attention to you. They asking her questions then a lot of things I found out, they didn't see the father. I feel a little disrespected actually... Like I wasn't even there. They really didn't pay me any mind. They seen me, they spoke to me, and that was it. Then to go so far as to ask to see the father without... I mean they should have presented the question in a better way and not just say, "well, is he the father?" Like every black male don't take care of his kid when there are some out here who does. Who is there every day, day in and day out from day one beginning to end.

They rather talk to my wife about me even though I'm sitting right there beside her. They seem timid. They don't want to talk to me directly.

... you got people in there they look at every guy that walks in there like, okay well he can't take care of his family. That may not be the issue, you know, that may not be the case. I mean just because we are at Social Services there could be other things like you know where I have a wife and two children at home, I work at a fast food restaurant. I mean ends don't meet like they are supposed to. So, I mean, I go and get a little bit of help...

Oh, but no offense but I think they lean more towards the mother than they do fathers on everything, just because... I know they carry the baby and everything but you know you got single fathers out here that are willing to be a mother, too.

Me personally, I think that the majority of social services pretty much cater to the women more than the men because a lot of women show up more than men and I'm not saying it's because of the male ego or anything like that. I just feel that social services cater towards women than they do men... and any type of service that a man looks for is very limited... Uh well before my kids' mother left she was involved with DSS and anything and everything she asked for she got. Uh, me in terms of custody in turn, the mother has left the house and I'm taking care of the kids. I got full custody of 'em and the things that I can ask for I have pretty much gotten but I haven't [gotten things] to the full extent like the mother of my kids have.

Well with everything that they want me to do and require me to do, and when I try to do it, they should give me an opportunity to see my kids. And they should give me a chance to have a family... I want them to stop not letting the kids be with their families. I want them to be with [their] families... Yes, any opportunity, I would like to be with them [children]. But they do not give me a choice. How many jobs are they going to require [of] me to see my kids?

The findings from the above study illustrate various obstacles and facilitators towards fathers' involvement. Fathers feel that the child welfare policies favor mothers over fathers. They do not believe that the child welfare agency considers fathers for provisions and services

that they need to support their children. The findings also indicate that fathers perceive social workers as effective when they demonstrate that they can treat fathers respectfully and compassionately. If fathers do not feel comfortable, respected, or valued in their dealings with the child welfare system, then they might not choose to work with social workers towards permanency (O'Donnell, Johnson, D'Aunno, & Thornton 2005).

Father Responsibility Legislation

From a historical perspective, social welfare policy in the United States has been predicated on providing financial assistance to children seriously affected by poverty. Eventually, public assistance was extended to their custodial parents who were at or below the poverty level. The extent to which fathers have been included in social welfare policy has entailed holding them accountable for financially supporting their children. Societal expectations for men have always been that they will assume the role as the provider and work to financially support themselves and their families (Harris & Marmer 1996). This principle plays out in the way that many public policies are designed. Men who are custodial parents typically are not eligible for the types of government assistance programs that are available to mothers with children. Instead, TANF, signed into law by President Clinton in 1996, placed emphasis on identifying the fathers of children receiving public assistance, establishing their legal paternity, and, perhaps most critically, establishing and enforcing the payment of child support orders. So although the explicit goal is for men to act responsibly, the implicit goal is to reduce their families' public welfare dependency (Day & Lamb 2004).

For the past 15 years the legislative focus has remained steadfastly on responsible fatherhood. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 generated considerable discussion about the role of divorced or unmarried low-income fathers in

the lives of children. The policy approaches have been described as emerging from a deficit model of fathers where fathers are considered to be problematic. Therefore, programs and initiatives have been developed to promote “responsible fatherhood” with those from low-income and marginalized backgrounds (Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera 1999). Even though no association has been found between the level of socio-economic status and parents' love and acceptance of responsibility for their children, the government dedicated resources and energy to educate low-income parents about their parental responsibility (CFPP 2011:1).

Trends in Child Welfare Policy and Practice

There are several important trends in child welfare policy and practices that have the potential to affect the involvement of fathers. Namely, there is a renewed focus on permanency planning as stipulated in the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997. Moreover, there is a national movement towards Family Group Decision-Making (FGDM), concurrent case planning, kin connections, and kin support in case planning. To date, there is no evidentiary support that these trends lead to significant results regarding identifying, locating, and engaging fathers (Malm et al. 2006). However, they have potential to influence fathers' involvement.

Strategies to Identify and Locate Fathers

Research shows that overall, the child welfare system has not done an effective job with involving fathers (Malm et al. 2006). This is partly due to the difficulty social workers have trying to establish the identity of children or youths' biological fathers and then attempting to locate them (Malm et al., 2006). However, there are a number of efforts being implemented nationally that should improve child welfare agencies' ability to identify, locate, and engage fathers.

Some fathers are not involved initially because they may not know that they had fathered a child or are not aware of the issues regarding their children's safety and care. Other fathers may not understand how their involvement could be beneficial to their children and therefore do not make themselves available to child welfare agency personnel.

There has been a shift in legislation that permits agencies to strengthen their efforts to engage fathers in planning for their children's safety, well-being, and permanence.. Federal legislation now gives child welfare agencies access to records and services to locate fathers (Malm et al. 2006; Social Security Act). The Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS) is an assembly of systems operated by the Office of Child Support Enforcement to assist states in locating noncustodial parents, putative fathers, and custodial parties for the establishment of parentage, and child support and for enforcement of custody, support, and visiting orders. Various records, such as law enforcement records, bankruptcy records, credit bureaus, and putative father registries, may be accessed by social workers to locate fathers. Many public records can be accessed online, making searches quicker and easier.

Additionally, the information sharing between child welfare social workers and social services benefits workers is another a strategy used by some social services agencies. There is a possibility that public aid files or child support files could contain a name or address of a father or his relatives that was not disclosed during the child abuse or neglect investigation or foster care placement. Additionally, the child welfare social worker may have information about the noncustodial father or mother that would be helpful to the child support office or economic services unit. Over a decade ago, in their searches for fathers, it was commonplace for social workers to rely heavily on the use of family and friends, the telephone directory, and placing newspaper ads summoning fathers to contact the child welfare agency (Malm et al. 2006).

However, these leads frequently contained inaccurate information and consequently, many fathers were not located.

Although family and friends continue to be an invaluable resource to identify and locate fathers; however, with current advances in technology, such as the internet and social networking sites like *Facebook* (where users openly share pictures and information about their family members), child welfare agency personnel have more reliable, speedy methods to verify information about the whereabouts of children's fathers received from family and friends to locate children's and youths' fathers.

The recent legislative focus on connecting and supporting kin caregivers, when combined with technological advances should also assist child welfare agencies in identifying and locating children's fathers. Even if these activities fail to result in a child's temporary or permanent placement his or her biological father, they may assist in identifying the father's relatives. They may be potential kin caregivers for his children.

Father Involvement Assessments and Interventions

Assessments

The nature and extent of fathers' involvement has only recently begun to receive national attention. The social sciences have developed method to measure family process by mother-child interaction, but father-child interaction and the construct "father's involvement" has not received the same attention (Day & Lamb 2004).

There are a number of measures used with the general population that assess fathers' financial support, engagement, accessibility, social and emotional support, and cognitive activities like planning and monitoring their children (Pasley & Braver 2004). There are a few untested tools that focus on the levels of involvement of fathers whose children have been placed

in foster care or at risk of entering the child welfare system (Coakley 2009). However, there is a lack of evidenced-based assessment resources to explore or study fathers' involvement with the child welfare system around the needs of their children and adolescents.

Interventions

The Federal government and national organizations have sponsored various programs that address the critical role that fathers have in strengthening their families and successfully meeting children's needs. In the U.S. Deficit Reduction Act of 2006, policy-makers allocated one third of the \$150 million annual budget for family support to programs that promote fathers' involvement with their children. This was noted as an unprecedented demonstration of commitment to providing father-focused services for families (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, & Wong 2009). As a result, there are several innovative, collaborative, and comprehensive programs in the U. S. that have evaluate their effectiveness on father engagement and children's safety, permanence, and well-being outcomes. Four such programs have been recommended as models for future program development nationwide (National Quality Improvement Center on Nonresident Fathers [QIC-NRF] 2010).

In Indianapolis, Indiana, the Fathers and Families Center, Indiana Department of Child Services, Indiana University School of Social Work, and community organizations are collaborating to study non-resident father engagement. One group of nonresident fathers—the control group— will participate in a 20-week peer-led support group and are supported to obtain their GED if desired. An intervention group of non-resident fathers will receive enhanced supports to address areas identified in the fatherhood literature as barriers to father involvement. The intervention group will participate in the peer-led support group mentioned above, but also will be offered legal support and advocacy letters to the courts, legal fees, transportation or

reinstatement of a driver's license, car repair, bus tickets, assistance in finding housing, child care, clothing, food, education, technical training, and mental health and other referrals. The Indiana University School of Social Work will manage and evaluate this project.

In the state of Washington, the Fathers Engagement Project is offered by the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS), a division of the Department of Social and Health Services for the State of Washington: Region IV, King County. DCFS is collaborating with a local fatherhood program, the University of Washington School of Social Work, the Fatherhood Advisory Group, child welfare professionals, consumers, advocates, and decision-makers in order to make systems changes that promote justice and improve outcomes for all children and families in the child welfare system. The Fathers Engagement Project offers services for non-resident fathers that include fatherhood support groups, child support management, parent involvement (visiting, parenting plans), reunification services, parenting training, and case management. University of Washington School of Social work will provide project management and evaluation.

The El Paso County Department of Human Services in Colorado Springs will work with partners from various sites on developing a non-resident fathers curriculum developed under the auspices of the Non-Resident Fathers Supplemental Grant. The project offers a variety of services for fathers that include child support services, diligent searches for absent parents, establishing paternity, case management, mediation, dispute resolution, employment and job readiness services, father groups, tips for educational and fun activities to do with their children, parenting classes, and a dads as mentors program. The Center for Policy Research in Denver will be the evaluator of this project.

Finally, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), Child Protective Services Division will partner with members of the Tarrant County Fatherhood Coalition to provide a model intervention program to non-resident fathers. The purpose of the program is to examine the influence of non-resident father involvement on the outcomes for children in DFPS custody. The Tarrant County Fatherhood Coalition consists of about 40 organizations that work to promote responsible fatherhood. The program will offer peer-led support groups, job resources and job readiness information, affordable housing, financial education workshops, support in the areas of tax and financial planning, and educational and employment opportunities. Child Trends, based in Washington, D.C., will establish an experimental research design for a comprehensive evaluation of this project.

Discussion and Conclusion

Future Research

Aside from financial support, policy-makers have not placed much value on the important contributions that fathers are capable of making towards the development and support of their children. However, because of the relatively recent federal allocations towards innovative nonresident fatherhood programs, a number of evidence-based studies have been launched to assess whether, over time, fathers are better able to successfully support their families and parent their children with temporary assistance from the government and various community organizations.

Additional research that focuses on both resident and nonresident fathers of children and youth in foster care and their involvement with the child welfare system. The lack of empirical knowledge concerning fathers' involvement with the child welfare system limits the development of evidence-based policies, programs, and practice (Courtney, Barth, Berrick, Brooks, Needell,

& Park 1996). Future prospective studies are needed to examine all dimensions of fathers' involvement; the availability and equity of government provisions and services for fathers; training of social workers and other professionals regarding the engagement of fathers as partners in planning and caring for their children, the assessment of father-child relationships, interventions and programs to strengthen these relationships, and social workers' attitudes towards working with fathers.

Child Welfare Agency Policy and Practice

It is widely acknowledged and documented that child welfare agency policies and practices have failed to achieve the engagement of fathers in fully becoming involved with the child welfare system. In order to facilitate fathers' initial and ongoing involvement, child welfare agencies must enhance the knowledge and skills of agency staff concerning engagement of fathers in planning for their children and providing services to fathers, whose needs and issues are very often different than those of children's mothers. In addition, child welfare agencies must assess the ways in which those serving children, including frontline staff, supervisors, resource parents, and others convey to fathers that they are not considered a viable resource for permanency.

Specifically, comprehensive training is needed and can be implemented to help social workers: (a) learn innovative ways, such as the ones discussed above, to identify, locate, and engage fathers as early as possible; (b) recognize the benefits of involving fathers in the permanency planning process; (c) understand the special issues that fathers experience while working with the child welfare system; (d) learn to communicate effectively with and welcome men with minority racial and ethnic backgrounds and fathers with low-income; (e) connect fathers to services that will enhance their parenting and relationship skills; (f) link fathers with

services that promote education, employment, and job skills; (g) ensure that fathers receive counseling and support services to deal with alcohol, substance abuse, and mental health issues; and (h) empower fathers to stay involved so that they can support their children during and after the period at which the child welfare agency intervened.

In terms of their policies, child welfare agencies can reevaluate how fathers could receive financial assistance and supportive services that are equitable to those that mothers receive. Temporary public assistance and nutritional programs would benefit poor and hungry children who happened to be cared for by their fathers with low-income in the same way as they would children who are raised by mothers in similar situations. Additionally, more lenient child support policies will allow fathers opportunities to establish and maintain financial stability and eventually to be able to adequately support their children. Fathers should not have to relinquish their parental rights in order to escape the financial burden of insurmountable child support demands or the threat of being jailed if they cannot pay. Helpful policies could take into consideration those fathers who are indeed in the child's life, but who are not able to contribute financially to the extent the government mandates.

It is imperative that child welfare social workers understand how public policy affects fathering and understand what the literature on fathers' involvement entails so that they can ensure that the most effective case plans implemented include fathers (Rosenberg & Wilcox 2006) who want their children to thrive. So while they must work quickly to identify, locate, and engage fathers, child welfare social workers also should exercise caution in their practice to ensure that fathers are not losing their parental rights because of factors beyond their control. Fathers can be allies to child welfare agencies to keep their children safe and well (Rosenberg &

Wilcox 2006) regardless of fathers' living arrangements, marital status, socioeconomic status, or other demographics.

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