

FAMILIES IN SOCIETY

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The Case for Teen and Adult Unmarried Fathers

Social workers have not often been among those in the forefront of helping nonresidential fathers. Our assessments and interventions can become much more sensitive, inclusive, and responsive to the father's importance in family systems. This is particularly the case when these fathers are not as visible or readily accessible as the mother, and when they appear less prepared and motivated to be parents. Nonresidential fathers have reported that they perceive social institutions such as schools, hospitals, family courts, and social service agencies to have a preferential bias in favor of the biological mother. Social workers employed in all these social institutions can be a positive influence in overcoming this apparent bias and low priority. Knowing how important fathers are to their children's well-being can help in motivating us to overcome this bias in favor of a preference for active involvement by both parents.

Efforts have been made to design and offer several types of policies and programs for divorced fathers over the last two decades that are also relevant for unmarried fathers. These interventions include:

Exploring joint custody options. There is growing evidence suggesting that nonresidential fathers with joint custodial status are more likely to become and remain more involved with their children, and are more likely to pay regular child support. Options can be implemented in various ways based on the age and developmental needs of the children and the specific circumstances of the family, such as geographic distance between the parents and the family's religious and child discipline preferences.

Educational programs for fathers. Parenting skills, for example, can be a basic focus of programs for young men who have had little opportunity to learn empathy for others, supportive and collaborative skills, a capacity to listen, and other qualities inherent in effective parenting. They could also benefit from parenting programs focusing on child development and child care skills.

Family mediation. This has become increasingly the preferred approach of many court systems, particularly in determining custody issues. Interventions that focus on the extended family system

have been found to be more effective in sustaining the parental role than those that focus only on the father.

Child support and father visitation policies. Child support is a necessary intervention in helping nonresidential fathers and their families that needs to be strictly enforced. Further, many visitation demonstration programs have been found to increase the frequency and quality of the father's involvement and his payment of child support, especially when intense therapeutic interventions were also employed.

Helping fathers become effective economic providers. Numerous studies have found that minority and low income nonresidential fathers with jobs and formal education are more likely to be involved with their children. Child support enforcement agencies are increasingly considering alternative arrangements like reduced and delayed child support, job preparation, training, and other supports to strengthen the provider role.

(Excerpted from "Helping Nonresidential Fathers: The Case for Teen and Adult Unmarried Fathers" by James R. Dudley. Families in Society © 2007.)

Click on the article titles in this newsletter to open the online links.

Featured Topic: Fathering and Fatherhood

Further Reading

Exploring Fathering Roles in Low-Income Families: The Influence of Intergenerational Transmission (2006)

Black Single Custodial Fathers: Factors Influencing the Decision to Parent (2003)

Adult Men's Self-Esteem: The Relationship With the Father (2005)

Parental Custody Negotiations and Health Insurance Access for Children (2003)

The Function of Fathers: What Poor Men Say About Fatherhood (2001)

Interpreting the Data on Father Involvement: Implications for Parenting Programs for Men (1995)

The Father-Son Project (1993)

The Birth Father: A Neglected Element in the Adoption Equation (1991)



Policy Focus

Fathers in the Social Work Literature: Policy and Practice Implications
(CE Course #100662) (2003)

The number of single and noncustodial fathers is on the rise, and social workers will have increased contact with these men in the future. It is important for social work professionals to learn more about fatherhood, given the growing relevance of this topic. In this article, the authors examine how the social work literature describes fathers, especially noncustodial fathers. They note gaps in information about fatherhood in this literature and discuss policy and practice issues related to fathers.

Gaining Access to One's Children: An Evaluation of a Visitation Program for Noncustodial Parents
(2002)

To address the often infrequent and limited interaction between children and their noncustodial father, programs have been developed at the federal and state level that attempt to improve the access of these parents to their natural children. This report provides an overview of the Child Visitation Project, a program that assists noncustodial parents in establishing an access agreement with the custodial parent and in pursuing the establishment of their legal parental rights. This report discusses the background for these types of interventions, the implementation of the Child Visitation Project, the families served, and the observed legal service and visitation outcomes.

Involving Fathers in Head Start: A Framework for Public Policy and Program Development
(1993)

Head Start, the nation's most politically successful program for young children has discovered men. The U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services is using Head Start as the centerpiece of its "male initiative" to increase the involvement of fathers and other males in the lives of young children. This review offers a set of guidelines that policymakers can use to increase the likelihood that male initiatives at the national or local level will be politically as well as programmatically successful.

Practice Focus

Faces of Fatherhood: African American Young Adults View the Paternal Role
(2006)

Sixty-four young adults were interviewed about whether there was a relationship with their biological father and, if so, how involved he was, how they viewed the father, and what roles a father should play. Generally, this group of African American young adults believed that biological fathers should give children personal presence, material support, counsel, and guidance. Noncustodial fathers should be allowed and encouraged to be more actively involved with their children and supportive of them in various ways. This article contains implications for practitioners and service providers working with African American children, families, and communities.

Juvenile Offenders as Fathers: Perceptions of Fatherhood, Crime and Becoming an Adult
(CE Course #101110) (2007)

The significant number of teen fathers who are incarcerated poses concerns to their children as well as to the offenders' potential to successfully transition to adult roles and responsibilities and desist from criminal activity. Among the teen fathers interviewed in this study, most express a strong desire to be involved with their child as a positive father figure. Many named school, work, and child care as central to their strategy to avoid recidivism. The authors recommend a three-pronged approach to help these fathers fulfill their positive intentions.

Nonmarital Co-parenting: Knowledge Building for Practice
(1998)

The number of children born in the U.S. to nonmarried parents is increasing, and these children are at risk of deleterious outcomes. Based on theoretical framework, a practice model is proposed that identifies 12 key factors for further knowledge-development. Implications for multilevel approaches to social work practice include needed interventions at both macro and micro levels that address poverty, housing and neighborhood stabilization, employment, child care, human capital development, health and mental health services, family and individual counseling, and parenting skills.

Reflections on an Outreach Program for Fathers

In the last decade, there has been a growing awareness that services to men need to be improved, particularly those for separated/divorced fathers who are not disengaged as fathers but who are involved in trying to put their lives back on track. Observations are provided by participants in an outreach program for single, noncustodial fathers aged 15–28 and who were either unemployed or had low-paying jobs. Included were men referred by various agencies as well as men who were actively looking for services for fathers, the latter expressing frustration that many services existed in their city, but practically none were for men.

The men gave several reasons for joining the outreach program: getting access to their children, getting support for when they had to go to court to gain that access, learning from the experiences of other fathers, and for counseling and emotional support (“I felt lost, nowhere to go, seemed that all my avenues were closed”; “the divorce really crushed my self-esteem”).

The benefits to having joined the program gave rise to four subthemes: 1) sharing with other men, 2) helping others dealing with their problems, 3) emotional support, and 4) parenting support.

The fathers were very positive in acclaiming the benefits they felt they were receiving from the program in each of these areas. The act of sharing with other men proved very empowering because they said it helped them under-

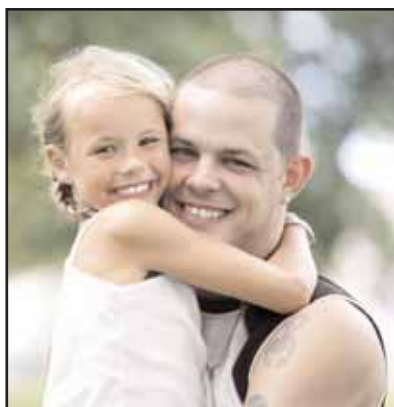
stand their own experiences more, gave them a feeling that they were supported, and gave them courage to continue in their commitment to their children. They also reported that listening to other men gave them more understanding and respect for relationships as well as a better understanding of how to more effectively handle their own problems.

The fathers also indicated that this program helped them develop a more positive and optimistic outlook, helped them get in touch with their feelings, helped them keep their focus on their children, and, overall, increased their self-esteem. Many said that prior to the program they were good fathers but not necessarily good husbands, but the program

changed their opinions of themselves: One father said: “I sit here at our meetings and think, I wish they had told me to come to a program like this before my son was born...not 4 years after, and he’s gone out of my life, almost.”

These men say they need to receive positive messages that they, as fathers, are valued, and that their children benefit from their involvement. Programs could be developed that reach out to fathers, that go out and search for them rather than waiting for them to come forward. These proactive efforts may prove more effective than traditional means in helping men get back into positive fathering and positive parenting.

(Excerpted from “The Psychological and Emotional Impact of Divorce: The Noncustodial Fathers’ Perspective” by Ron Lehr and Peter MacMillan. Families in Society © 2001.)



Further Reading

Working With Noncustodial Mothers (1997)

The Responsibilities of Fatherhood As Perceived by African American Teenage Fathers (1996)

The Paternal Presence (1993)

Lingering Sadness: Young Adults’ Response to Parental Divorce (1989)

Reinventing Fatherhood (1993)

Services for At-Risk, Pregnant, And Parenting Teenagers: A Consortium Approach (1993)

Unwed Teenage Pregnancy: Family Relationships with the Father of the Baby (1991)

Co-Parent Adoptions by Same-Sex Couples: From Loophole to Law (1999)

Total Force and the New American Military Family: Implications for Social Work Practice (1997)

Noncustodial Fathers’ Involvement With Their Children: A Right or a Privilege? (2006)

Assessing Children’s Visitation Needs With Divorced Noncustodial Fathers (1995)



Working But Poor: Next Steps for Social Work Strategies and Collaborations

Vol. 88, No. 3 (July-September 2007)



Many low-income working individuals and families increasingly confront significant challenges in their ability to remain economically self-sufficient. A substantial portion of these individuals, referred to as “working but poor,” or “the working poor,” rotate in and out of social service agencies seeking assistance in coping with everyday challenges emerging from insufficient social and/or financial capital.

**Publication Date
September 10, 2007**

For this special issue, *Families in Society* collected manuscripts, essays, and case studies containing research, policy recommendations, and practice interventions relating to individuals and families. Practitioner challenges and agency strategies to work with service requests from affected consumers are included, as are empirical research and program evaluation reports.

Available in print, CD-ROM, and print/CD combined, this article collection offers a breadth of topics and a well-rounded exposure to emerging models in services for working poor families.



For additional information on this unique anthology, visit:

www.familiesinsociety.org/new/workingpoor.htm



Agency Resources

Webinar Archive: Incarceration and Reentry

Families in Society and its publisher, the Alliance for Children and Families, present the Hot Topic Webinar and teleconference series. Interactive presentations with nationally-recognized experts focus on topics relating to practice, education, and policy within social services.

Incarceration and Reentry: The Impact on Women Offenders and Their Families

Women remain less than ten percent of those who are incarcerated; however they constitute the fastest growing population in prison, surpassing the growth rate of the male population in every state.

Improving outcomes for released female offenders and their families entails examining practices that affect women's entry into prison, their treatment while in prison, and their access to services after release from prison. This Webinar provides an overview of the impact on families and communities, the systems and people involved in reentry, points of intervention, and policy reforms and recommendations.



For more information, visit:
www.familiesinsociety.org/new/Teleconf/register031607.htm.

Conferences and Networking

2007 Senior Leadership Conference

The Alliance for Children and Families' 39th Annual Senior Leadership Conference, "Valuing the Past and Looking to the Future", provided participants with three developmental tracks: programmatic, leadership, and organizational. Browse the online post-conference materials for sessions like "A Platform for Strengthening Families", "Developing a Political Advocacy Strategy", and "Maintaining an Energized Workforce Requires Creativity and Innovation".

Learn more about this collection, visit: www.alliance1.org/conferences/SLC07/index.htm

Call for Book Reviewers

Families in Society is currently adding individuals to our consulting editors forum who would serve as reviewers of new books and other educational materials for the field.

If you would like to review books on behalf of *Families in Society*, please visit: www.familiesinsociety.org/reviewing.asp, or e-mail FIS staff at info@familiesinsociety.org for more information.



At a time when budgets are tight and dwindling, you may find your options for staff training and development becoming more limited. The Alliance for Children and Families recognizes this dilemma and continually works to provide quality and cost-effective resources.

As part of that effort, the Alliance's continuing education program, **CE4Alliance**, can help you and your staff keep up-to-date, learn from the innovators, and earn credits. Add this program opportunity to an online subscription with the *Families in Society* research and practice archive (www.familiesinsociety.org) and your agency will have powerful tools to compliment staff development and quality improvement (QI) efforts. The flexibility and affordability are additional advantages to a program that provides competent, consistent, and interdisciplinary learning.

Add your agency's staff training or QI coordinator to our mailing list and don't miss out on new program features, added courses, and surveys. Sign up at www.familiesinsociety.org/new/Membership/ceu.asp.



www.ce4alliance.com

For more information on agency resources, visit www.alliance1.org.

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Alliance for Children and Families
11700 W. Lake Park Drive
Milwaukee, WI 53224