

# Fatherhood in Foster Care

Research & Guidance on Working with Young Fathers

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# Topics Discussed

## Outline



- 1 Interest in Fathers in Care
- 2 Related Research on Fathers in Care
- 3 Direct Research on Fathers in Care
- 4 Working with Fathers in Care
- 5 Q & A

## Interest in Fathers in Care

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# Background

## Introduction



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## Personal

- Lived experience of child welfare system and fatherhood
- Involvement, practice, and research within Illinois' child welfare system

## Practice

- Foster care caseworker with young fathers on caseload
- Little research or practice guidance on serving them

## Research

- Left practice to pursue doctoral studies and research fathers in care
- Gained research experience on CalYOUTH and Dads Matter-HV studies

## Dissertation

- Studying young Black fathers in foster care in Chicago, IL
- Qualitative inquiry into fatherhood messages, experiences, and needs

# Related and Direct Research

## Research on Fathers in Foster Care



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## Two areas of research on fathers in foster care

- 1 Related: Research on populations that include fathers in care
- 2 Direct: Research solely on fathers in care

## Related Research on Fathers in Care

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# Fathers & Child Development

## Fatherhood Research



## Fathers have an important role to play in child development

- Positive benefits for children's social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes
- Positive involvement improves trajectory of children's development and life course
- Distinct style of father-child interactions, play, and communication shapes child development
- Reduces child maltreatment, domestic violence, and family separation
- Contributes to overall family well-being and safety

## Questions

- 1 Are we considering the roles that fathers in care play in their children's lives?
- 2 Should we engage fathers in care more given the positive effects of involvement?

Bellamy, 2009; Berger, 2004, 2006; Berger et al., 2009; Jeynes, 2017; Sarkadi et al., 2008; Yoon et al., 2018.

# Dimensions of Fatherhood I

## Fatherhood Research



## Father involvement theorized as three components

### 1 Engagement

#### ■ Direct interaction with the child

- Positive engagement (promotes child development); Routine (childcare); Developmental (teaching/playing)

### 2 Accessibility

#### ■ Making himself available to the child

- e.g. being in another room while child plays, answering child's phone calls

### 3 Responsibility

#### ■ Provision of resources for the child

- Formal (money provided through courts); Informal (money provided directly to child/mother); In-kind (non-cash goods to child/mother)

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Lamb, 2000; Sayer et al., 2004.



# Dimensions of Fatherhood II

## Fatherhood Research



## Involvement theorized as five key tasks

- 1 Positive engagement activities
  - Fathers' interactions with child to promote child development
- 2 Warmth and responsiveness
  - Fathers' ability to respond to children's needs with warmth
- 3 Control
  - Paternal monitoring
- 4 Indirect care
  - Fathers' activities undertaken for the child without interacting with the child
- 5 Process responsibility
  - Father taking initiative of tasks and monitoring child's needs

# Dimensions of Fatherhood III

## Fatherhood Research



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## Involvement theorized as roles

- The remote role: Disinterest in caregiving
- The provider role: Breadwinner
- The secondary parent role: Helping with caregiving
- The shared caregiver role: Equally sharing in coparenting
- The primary caregiver role: Principal caregiver
- Task based roles: Disciplinarian, nurturer, etc.

## Questions

- 1 Are we aware of the levels of involvement for fathers in care?
- 2 Do we know the involvement components, tasks, and roles of fathers in care?

Lamb, 2000.

# Fatherhood Contextual Factors

## Fatherhood Research



## Contextual factors influencing “responsible fathering”

### ① Father factors

- e.g., role, knowledge, skills, commitment, mental health, father relations, employment

### ② Mother factors

- e.g., attitude towards father, expectations of father, support, employment, mental health

### ③ Coparental factors

- e.g., custody, relationship status, cooperation, mutual support, conflict

### ④ Child factors

- e.g., attitude to father, behavior, temperament, gender, age, development

### ⑤ Contextual factors

- e.g., institutional practices, employment, economic, race/ethnicity, culture, social support

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Doherty et al., 1998.

# Fatherhood Expectations

## Fatherhood Research



## Common of expectations of a “responsible father”

- Waits to make baby until prepared emotionally and financially to support
- Establishes legal paternity if and when he does make a baby
- Actively shares with mother in the emotional and physical care child
- Shares with mother in the continuing financial support of child

## Questions

- 1 What expectations do we have of fathers in care?
- 2 How are we helping fathers meet these expectations?
- 3 Are we taking contexts of the father into account?

# Young Fathers

## Fatherhood Research



## Young fathers struggle to meet fatherhood expectations

- May not be emotionally prepared for fatherhood yet
- Likely not prepared to manage relationship with child's mother
- Delayed entry into the labor force
- Have not yet completed education or vocational training
- Most likely not financially prepared to support child

## Questions

- 1 Are we holding fathers in care to unrealistic expectations?
- 2 Are we preparing fathers in care to meet the same expectations we have of fathers in contact with the child welfare system?

# Racial/Ethnic Minority Fathers

## Fatherhood Research



## Racism and discrimination affect fatherhood

- Unequal access to quality education affects completion
- Exclusion from substantial labor market participation affects employment
- Higher rates of unemployment lead to poverty
- Housing segregation leads to concentrated poverty
- Social isolation due to economic and demographic shifts
- Effects of inequality are acute and intergenerational
- Welfare policies discourage involvement, blame the victim

## Questions

- 1 Are racial/ethnic minority fathers in care facing these same contextual factors?
- 2 If so, how are we helping to address each issue?

# Black, Mexican, and Latino Fathers

## Fatherhood Research



### Despite disadvantage and against odds ...

- Assume and fulfill fatherhood responsibilities
- Remain deeply involved (resident and nonresident)
- Adapt parenting to persistent challenges and difficult contexts
- Display resilience in keeping children safe from harm
- Positively redefining the narrative of racial/ethnic fatherhood
- Changing stereotypes and long-held beliefs

### Questions

- 1 Are the experiences of racial/ethnic fathers in care similar?
- 2 If not, can we leverage fathers in the paternal family for support?

Abdill, 2018; Hofferth, 2003; King et al., 2004; Parke et al., 2004.

# Fathers & Child Welfare System

## Child Welfare Research



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## Benefits of father engagement in child welfare services

- May decrease foster care placement, reduce time children spend in foster care if removed
- Increases likelihood of reunification and the likelihood of kinship care

## Child welfare agencies struggle to engage fathers in services

- Views of father engagement as not being beneficial to child welfare planning
- Racialized perceptions and racial bias against racial/ethnic minority fathers

## Questions

- 1 How can a system that struggles to serve fathers with children in foster care adequately serve fathers in foster care?
- 2 Can we work towards concurrently improving how we serve both groups of fathers?

Arroyo et al., 2019; Baum, 2017; Bellamy, 2009; Campbell et al., 2015; Coady et al., 2013; Coakley, 2013; D'Andrade, 2017; Gibson et al., 2020; Harris and Hackett, 2008; O'Donnell, 1999.



## Direct Research on Fathers in Care

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# Expectant & Parenting Foster Youth

## Child Welfare Research



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## Expectant outcomes

- Research focuses on females; difficulty with father reports (disputed or unknown paternity)
- More likely to experience early pregnancy/impregnation compared to non-foster care peers
- Some predictors include substance use, infrequent birth control use, placement instability

## Parenting outcomes

- Research focuses on females; difficulty with father reports (disputed or unknown paternity)
- Children of youth have higher rates of child welfare involvement
- Few studies explore parental involvement

## Preparedness for expectancy and parenthood

- May likely be developmentally and emotionally unprepared
- May experience low educational attainment, low employment, decreased wages if employed
- Often lack social support, prenatal support, parenting support, and appropriate childcare

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Connolly et al., 2012; Courtney et al., 2012; Dworsky, 2015; Eastman et al., 2019; Radey et al., 2016; Svoboda et al., 2012.

# Fathers in Foster Care

## Child Welfare Research



### **Expectant outcomes for males by age 21 (n = 240)<sup>1</sup>**

- ≈ 40% had ever gotten a female pregnant
- ≈ 20% had ever fathered a child
- At recent pregnancy (n = 35), ≈ 20% wanted partner to become pregnant at time of pregnancy
- At recent pregnancy (n = 35), ≈ 70% wanted to marry partner at time of pregnancy

### **Parenting outcomes for males by age 21 (n = 240)<sup>1</sup>**

- ≈ 15% had a living child
- Among fathers (n = 38), ≈ 80% had only one living child

### **Residency of children from parenting youth at age 21 (n = 261 children)<sup>1</sup>**

- Children of fathers less likely than children of mothers to live with respondent (61.3% vs 86.9%)

<sup>1</sup> Wave 3 CalYOUTH Study findings (n = 613)

Courtney et al., 2007; Courtney et al., 2018.

# My Current Research

## Scoping Review and Dissertation Studies



### Question

- 1 What have we learned about fathers in foster care?

### Scoping Review

- Review of 93 sources of evidence on fathers in foster care spanning 40 years
- Articles, reports, and guides cover research, legal, policy, and practice domains

### Question

- 2 What are the experiences of fathers in foster care?

### Dissertation Study

- Qualitative study of Black fathers in Illinois DCFS foster care
- Participants spread across state and placement type (during COVID and police killings)

# Findings Over 40 Years

## Scoping Review Study



## Findings across research, legal, practice, and policy literature

- Mothers in care are consistently the focus of expectant and parenting literature
- If fathers are included, findings/guidance often in aggregate “parents in care”
- When aggregated, content still focuses on mothers or female pronouns used
- Father exclusion rationale include lack of fathers, unreliable data, low attrition
- Research papers discuss need for future research to focus on fathers in care
- Practice papers often state that fathers in care have same rights as mothers
- Legal papers discuss paternity establishment and paternal rights
- Policy papers discuss improved data tracking and interventions for fathers

# Fatherhood Knowledge

## Dissertation Study



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## Who has taught you about fatherhood while you have been in care?

- Fathers first identify learning about fatherhood from themselves
- Fathers also identified mothers and paternal family members as sources
- Some fathers identified male friends and friends' family members
- Foster care staff talked to them about participating in parenting services
- Some foster care staff discussed the need for them to take care of children
- One male foster care staff not assigned to youth discussed fatherhood
- Some fathers reported that GALs/CASAs frequently asked them about children

# Fatherhood Support

## Dissertation Study



## What has fatherhood been like while you have been in care?

- Fathers discussed many obstacles in foster care that limited ability to father
  - Residential placements/group homes not conducive for children to visit
  - Placement rules prevented them from leaving to help coparent
  - Overnight restrictions prevented fathers from coparenting during mothers working hours
  - Foster parent disapproval created tension in home so fathers didn't bring children there
- Fathers reported COVID restrictions made it nearly impossible to see children
- Fathers shared fear of police killings and arrests on fatherhood or their children

# Fatherhood Needs

## Dissertation Study



### What do you need to raise your children while you are in care?

- Fear of child removal prevented them from engaging in services
- Parenting services seemed to focus on mothers
- Child-related developmental information helpful and interesting
- No services for coparenting, establishing paternity, or child support
- Desire for more flexible rules in placement to visit with children
- Need for education around their roles in their young children's lives
- Better services for education completion and employment to support children



# Summary

## Scoping Review and Dissertation Study



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## Main takeaways

- Corporate parenting needs to extend to corporate grandparenting for fathers and children
- Placements need to provide normalcy around young fatherhood and accommodate children
- Services around child safety are important, but useless if fathers cannot see children
- Agencies need to find better ways to track fathers in care and collect data on involvement
- Agencies should inquire into services fathers need and tailor services accordingly
- Father-focused collaboration is needed between agencies, providers, and courts
- Engaging fathers in care will take different approaches than engaging mothers in care
- Research needs to focus on the unique outcomes and experiences of fathers in care
- Paternity establishment retains paternal rights, but imposes child support complications
- Until more research is conducted on fathers in care, we must rely on related research

## Working with Fathers in Care

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# Tailor Case Management for Fathers

## Workers and Clinicians



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## Provide specialized case management for fathers in care

- Frequently check-in with male youth about sexual health, expectancy, and parenting
- Talk to fathers about pre-/postnatal health, pediatric child health, and safe and appropriate childcare
- Discuss services and supports for fathering youth designed to increase parenting skills, knowledge, and resources (including extended foster care if available)
- Connecting fathering youth with financial, emotional, mental health, social, and parenting support that will help improve parent- and child-related outcomes
- Understanding how young fatherhood may affect youths' ability to meet requirements of extended foster care (if available)
- Work with foster parents and placement staff to allow fathering youth to participate in normative activities that will help them develop as young parents
- Consider that the needs of fathers in care differ from mothers in care and tailor services for fathers appropriately

# Provide Father Focused Services

Workers and Clinicians



## Help fathers in care to be the fathers they aspire to be

- Understand experiences of racially and ethnically diverse fathers
- Be empathetic to fathers experiencing racial trauma
- Commit to the empowerment of marginalized fathers
- Be aware of personal assumptions, prejudices, and bias
- Engage him as early as possible
- Build a relationship with him based on trust and honesty
- Use a strengths based approach
- Manage father manage parental conflict
- Share parental tips with fathers
- Engage the father to be involved in lives of children

# Improve Father Engagement

## Workers and Clinicians



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## Engage fathers in care in services and connect to family supports

- Leverage national and local fatherhood programs
- Continue to seek out and engage fathers
- Check in fathers to monitor health and needs
- Ensure fathers are maintain self-care
- Connect fathers with employment supports
- Share resources to aid father involvement
- Help identify family/community supports
- Facilitate virtual father support groups

# Leverage Strengths of Fathers

## Workers and Clinicians



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### Utilize a strengths-based approach with fathers in care

- Fathers need to be specifically targeted and engaged
- Intervene early into men's transition to fatherhood
- Father-infant and -child relationships are central to fathering
- Target co-parenting and strengthen father-mother relationship
- Empower fathers to strengthen their skills and competence
- Fathers (and their kin) are seen as a potential source of support

# Address Fatherhood Barriers

## Workers and Clinicians



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### Help reduce barriers faced by fathers in care

- Gain deeper understanding of fathers we serve
- Determine factors that impair the ability of fathers to parent
- Obtain and use father reports (case, services, outcomes)
- Apply new and inclusive definitions of fatherhood
- Leverage effective and efficient collaborations with other systems
- Mitigate factors affecting fathers (and their children/mothers)

# Provide Knowledge About Fatherhood

Departments and Agencies



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## Trainings on fathers in care is needed

- Workers require knowledge about fathers and father
- A one-size-fits-all approach is not adequate for diverse fathers
- We need an approach that is inclusive to diverse fatherhood roles plus resident and non-resident fathers
- We need to hold expectations that match the age and developmental stage of fathers of different ages
- We need a wholistic approach must be used that takes into account individual, familial, and contextual factors



# Resources for Serving Fathers in Care

Websites, Guides, and Other Supports



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## Fatherhood Research & Practice Network ([frpn.org](http://frpn.org))

- Fatherhood trainings, webinars, measures to assess father engagement and related outcomes

## Child Welfare Information Gateway ([childwelfare.gov](http://childwelfare.gov))

- Search “fatherhood resources” for resources that can be adapted for fathers in care

## Annie E. Casey Foundation: Expectant and Parenting Youth Toolkit ([aecf.org](http://aecf.org))

- Provides questions to collect data on fathers in care

## Center for the Study of Social Policy: Connecting the Dots ([cssp.org](http://cssp.org))

- Provides an exhaustive list of father-focused evidence-informed and promising practices

## Children’s Defense Fund: Implementing Family First ([childrensdefense.org](http://childrensdefense.org))

- Provides policy guidance around the eligibility of fathers in care for Title IV-E

# Thank You!

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# Contact Information



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## Q & A

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