

DYNAMICS OF ATLANTA BLACK DADS

Unpacking the Myths and Realities of Nonresident Fatherhood in Fulton County

Dr. Jeffery Shears | Dr. Cassandra Bolar | Dr. Lorenzo Hopper | Dr. Matisa Wilbon | Dr. David Miller



**A DEEP DIVE into the Local Struggles
and Strengths of Black Fathers**



Moynihan Institute
FOR FATHERHOOD RESEARCH AND POLICY



**FATHERS
INCORPORATED**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent decades, there has been a pivotal shift in the societal perception of fatherhood, particularly acknowledging the crucial role fathers play in child development. This evolution is marked by an uptick in father-focused initiatives such as conferences, training, and an increased emphasis on paternal engagement in schools and childcare institutions. Historically sidelined, fathers, especially Black fathers and fathers of color, are now recognized as indispensable caregivers within family structures. Yet, there remains a significant gap in research that offers an accurate portrayal of these fathers' involvement in their families, signaling a need for more inclusive narratives.

Contemporary American society witnesses an unprecedented celebration of fatherhood, with leading campaigns like "Dove Men Care" and the emergence of social media platforms in the past five years that uplift the image of Black fathers. These platforms serve as virtual support networks, providing guidance and encouragement on complex issues such as mental health, co-parenting, and navigating child support.

This study delves into the barriers and facilitators of paternal engagement, with a focus on the unique challenges faced by Black fathers. The high incidence of out-of-wedlock births in the Black community and the consequent prevalence of mother-headed households highlight the necessity of supporting these men in fulfilling their paternal roles. The findings reveal that these young fathers often feel unsupported by community services that traditionally cater to mothers and children, encounter co-parenting challenges, and lack fathering role models, impacting their parental self-efficacy. Despite these challenges, community programs dedicated to fathers are viewed as a ray of hope, indicating an opportunity for more effective father engagement.

The insights from this study illuminate a need for clear direction, instruction, and support for fathers who are motivated to play an impactful role in their children's lives. Engaging fathers through community events and providing meaningful services can leverage this moment of heightened paternal awareness to forge a more supportive environment for fathers, enabling them to be the effective and influential parents they aspire to be.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



THE REALITY OF SINGLE FATHERHOOD: The Reality of Single Fatherhood: Think single fathers are rare? Think again. In the U.S., 3.3 million children live with their fathers alone. If you're a single father, you're not alone in this journey. *(Introduction, page 3)*



CO-PARENTING CHALLENGES: The research highlights that a strained or hostile co-parenting relationship, especially when parents are not in a romantic relationship, can significantly deter a father's involvement in his child's life. *(Co-Parenting, page 5)*



LACK OF SUPPORT FOR FATHERS: Lack of Support for Fathers: The report underscores the need for more father-friendly support from community agencies, as many fathers feel that these agencies are not equipped to address their specific needs. *(A Dearth of Community Supports for Fathers, page 6)*



INTRODUCTION

Studies consistently show the importance of fathers' engaged presence in the lives of their children, noting that fathers provide invaluable and distinctive contributions and experiences to children and families (Shears et al., 2020). Although fathers and mothers often exhibit different parenting behaviors, such variation is beneficial to children's cognitive and emotional well-being. As we seek to learn more about the experiences of fathers and their families, it is important to explore sub-populations of fathers and the variety of their fatherhood experiences.

In 2021, the U.S. Census Bureau reported about 73 million children under age 18 living in the United States, and each of these children has a biological father. As most readers would correctly surmise, the vast majority of children under 18 years old in this country do not reside in a single-parent home with their father alone: of the 73 million, only 5.97 million children reside with their father an increase from 0.8 million

from 1968. Of the children residing in single father headed households, nearly half (47.8%) are White and 13.6% are Black (Census, 2021). Additionally, data suggest that only 43% of Black children reside with both parents suggesting a high number of Black children are being reared in single-mother-headed households (OJJDP, 2023). From this we can deduce that numerous Black fathers either do not currently reside with their child or else live in traditional two-parent households. Given the importance of fathers in the lives of children and the unfortunately large number of fathers who do not live with their children, it is important that we understand these men's fathering experiences. Importantly, at this stage we know too little about the existing facilitators or barriers for this population that have an impact on parental engagement—what might hinder single or co-parenting Black fathers from being present and engaged in their children's lives, and what might assist them.

LITERATURE REVIEW



There is an abundance of child development research that focuses on mothers as the primary influential parents (Kissman, 1998; Coakley et al., 2014; Allport et al., 2018). Historically, fathers have received less attention from researchers and academics, despite the known benefits of paternal involvement in children's lives; that fathers create advantages for children and that their parenting styles may look very different from mothers' is evident (Parke, 2014; Shears et al., 2008). Positive paternal involvement may include direct interaction with children through caregiving and shared activities; the fathers' direct contact; and fathers taking responsibility in ensuring that children are cared for, which would include arranging for appropriate resources (Parke, 2014; Allen & Daly, 2007; Allport et al., 2018). Early fatherhood research asserts that successful models of co-parenting and the father's financial and emotional support are essential for children's well-being (Kissman, 1998; Amato & Gilbreth, 1999).

Much of the historical research on the benefits of paternal involvement is conveyed in the literature examining children's development, where paternal involvement has been shown to have a significant impact on children's academic achievement (Jeynes, 2015; Baker, 2013; Varghese & Wachen, 2016) as well as on their mental and physical health (Allen & Daly, 2007; Baker, 2013). These studies suggest that children enjoy higher levels of sustained attention and display fewer negative behaviors when they are afforded positive paternal engagement. There is evidence to support that fathers, even when experiencing challenges, do desire to be involved fathers and to create benefits for their children: Summers et al. (2006) revealed that fathers define "good fatherhood" as providing a stable environment, teaching, physical interaction, and emotional support for their children. Lemay et al. (2010) also found that the low-income fathers in their study had similar definitions of good fathering; further, they expressed their desire to provide financial support and assume responsibility for their child. These studies suggest that fathers can and do think critically about fatherhood and how they want to impact their children. However, as much as fathers desire to be impactful in their fathering roles, there are often barriers that inhibit men from fulfilling their desired goal of being good dads to their children.

CO-PARENTING

One of the biggest influences on a father's involvement with his child is his relationship with the child's mother (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015; Akande & Heath, 2019). An ideal situation for children would consist of a cohabitating mother and father involved in a supportive and romantic relationship, as numerous studies suggest that a positive loving relationship between parents is ideal for children's development and is the most influential indicator of the likelihood of positive father involvement and increased paternal engagement (Anderson, 2014; Herrero et al., 2020). However, these favorable environments for children are much less likely to occur in the Black community, where the high divorce rate is double that of Anglo couples (30.8% versus 15.1%, respectively) (Bieber & Ramirez, 2023), and the high incidences of out-of-wedlock births to Black mothers at 70.1% (National Vital Statistics Report Centers for Disease Control) have led to children not being reared in an environment that promotes and supports positive and engaging paternal involvement. A relationship between a father and a co-parenting mother that is uncongenial, negative, or distant has been shown to be a potential barrier to paternal involvement. Indeed, when the co-parent relationship is argumentative, competitive, and not collaborative, fathers are less likely to be involved with their children (Pruett et al., 2017). In toxic co-parenting relationships i.e., parents who are not married or in a romantic relationship, men report that mothers undermine their

fathering roles and often prevent them from visiting their children. Any number of co-parenting conflicts, including the problems that arise when parents have different definitions of paternal support i.e., financial, child rearing responsibilities, can cause relational tension between mothers and fathers that result in additional potential hurdles to paternal involvement (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015; Friend et al., 2016).

An effective co-parenting relationship, on the other hand, may be a protective and ameliorative factor for fathers and children. Maintaining positive elements of the co-parent relationship is important, as research shows that a strong parenting alliance, where mothers and fathers support one another and mothers facilitate paternal involvement, are noteworthy elements of co-parenting that researchers and organizations should explore and support (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015; Akande & Heath, 2019). Additionally, fathers have been observed to have higher levels of parenting self-efficacy when they received more co-parenting support during the mother's first pregnancy trimester (Pinto et al., 2016). Self-efficacy and co-parent relationships have empirical connections to paternal involvement, and it would be of great benefit to entire families if family-oriented organizations were to help fathers develop a higher sense of self-efficacy and if more collaborative co-parenting could be encouraged and supported in the families they serve.



A DEARTH OF COMMUNITY SUPPORTS FOR FATHERS

Governmental and community agencies,

who have a charge to support families and children, have often been viewed as presenting barriers to paternal involvement, rather than providing father-friendly support. Indeed, research has shown that agency policy and culture may present barriers that can prevent fathers from completely fulfilling their parental and familial duty (Shears et al., 2019; Coakley et al., 2014). For example, the United States court system's historical pattern of favoring mothers in custody cases may contribute, albeit indirectly and unconsciously, to a societal idea that fathers do not serve an important role in children's lives (Marczak et al., 2015). Inefficient social welfare agency policies that inhibit the engagement of nonresident fathers in their children's lives because, lacking information on fathers these agencies solely rely on information from mothers, reinforce fathers' noninvolvement (Coakley et al., 2014). Additionally, staffing at family-oriented social service and community agencies is overwhelmingly female and these agencies rarely employ men, leading to situations where fathers may feel reluctant to engage with social service agencies. Indeed, research indicates that paternal engagement with agencies is higher when the father's initial contact is with a male employee (Shears et al., 2019; Sandstrom et al., 2015; Stahlschmidt et al., 2013). An additional barrier is that many social service agencies have neither the skills nor the desire to engage and support fathers in the families they serve (Bayley et al., 2009). Prioritizing fathers is a goal that these agencies do not seem to consider.

Parenting agencies and programs can develop better practices for working with fathers. Building a rapport with fathers before and during service delivery can make men feel welcome, important, and confident as parents. Studies have shown a benefit when agencies are intentional in engaging fathers (Bayley et al., 2009). Phares et al. (2006) reports that fathers describe favorable experiences when family-serving agencies offer fatherhood services such as peer support, parenting advice, and advocacy. Such supports can assist fathers in contributing to their children's well-being beyond financial obligations and supporting fathers in being involved in their children's lives in meaningful ways is valuable for fathers and children (Coakley et al., 2014; Allport et al., 2018; Randles, 2020).





INTERGENERATIONAL FATHERING

Parental modeling can have an impact on paternal involvement from one generation to the next, as the father-child relationship can be passed down or replicated, with this transmission having a significant impact on the next generation's paternal engagement (Jessee & Adamsons, 2018). Men who report not having positive relationships with their own fathers often react by using that experience as a motivator to fulfill the role of the dad they did not have, but wished to have (Shears et al., 2020; Lemay et al. 2010). It is important to understand that the development of paternal attitudes and behaviors does not occur in isolation: paternal attitudes are highly impacted by the familial relationships that existed in a father's family of origin, the family in which he was raised. One barrier to acting as an involved father may have begun in childhood due to the relationship with one's own parents. Men who, as children, had less-involved fathers are less likely to view fathering as an important source of direct care and financial

support for their children and family (Guzzo, 2011). Conversely, Jessee and Adamsons' (2018) research indicates that when men had positive relationships with their fathers, the likelihood increases that these men will have positive relationships with their own children in the future suggesting that representation and modeling are important.

Fathers often use their own parents, their spouses, in-laws, and peers as parenting role models. When these role models are positive, they can be highly impactful on fathering attitudes and engagement: fathers who are able to be in familial environments that are encouraging and supportive can observe, learn, and incorporate responsibility, good values, patience, and positive child rearing behaviors in their own lives as fathers (Hurt et al, 2017; Masciadrelli et al., 2006). Agencies and programs would do well to support the inclusion of role models and peer support opportunities for fathers of children involved in their programs.

BLACK FATHERS

Many men experience barriers

to being good fathers. Given the socioeconomic conditions of many Black men, the hurdles they experience on the way to becoming successful and engaged fathers may be even more pronounced when compared to Anglo fathers. In addition to the societal impediments faced by Black men, being a nonresident father may be an additional obstacle to paternal involvement. Ransaw (2014) found that Black fathers experience legal challenges, feelings of helplessness, and being Black in America as stumbling blocks and obstacles to raising their children. A nonresidential father who must co-parent with the mother may experience a unique set of challenges as he seeks to fulfill his role as a dad. Roberts et al. (2014) identify numerous issues with nonresidential Black fathers including economic challenges, mothers who prevent father-child interactions, custody issues, negative perceptions by others of the father's ability to parent, fathers not having had positive parenting role models themselves, and otherwise poor co-parenting relationships.

Despite the obstacles faced by Black dads, research suggests that they desire to be involved in their children's lives and they may do so in unappreciated ways, while facing numerous barriers to providing traditional support (Shears et al., 2016; Ransaw, 2014; Coakley et al., 2014). Research on both residential and nonresidential Black fathers reveals that fathers recognize the value being a good father, seek affinity with their children, appreciate the opportunity to develop their involvement goals, and express happiness, love, and joy regarding their children (Ransaw, 2014). Nonresident Black fathers believe they make an impact on their children emotionally and financially by helping them grow into successful adults, by sharing parenting responsibilities with the co-parenting mother, by being role models, and by protecting their children (Roberts et al., 2014).

This research asserts that Black fathers desire and perceive the many benefits of involvement in their children's lives.

Given the household composition of Black families, we can expect a high incidence of co-parenting and blended families within the Black community. The data show that in 2022, 45.6% of Black children resided only with their mother, compared to 16.7% of Anglo children. (U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2023) suggesting that co-parenting and single parent mother headed households may be the norm in Black communities.

Social and emotional support that specifically focuses on Black fathers may be beneficial to combat the challenges they experience. Among nonresidential, low-income Black fathers, high levels of psychological well-being, social support, and positive co-parenting relationship quality are significantly associated with paternal involvement. Additionally, social support moderates the relationship between psychological well-being and paternal involvement when controlling for the father's age, employment status, education, and socioeconomic status (Coates & Phares, 2014), suggesting that a father's psychological well-being is a significant predictor for his involvement with his children. Nonresident Black fathers report that having early and appropriate guidance about fatherhood, emotional support, a good relationship with the children's mother, caretaking help, effective co-parenting strategies, spiritual guidance, and economic assistance all help them be good fathers to their children (Roberts et al., 2014). Lastly, concerning efforts to increase paternal involvement of fathers in unmarried Black co-parenting couples, McHale et al. (2023) found that co-parenting consultations aimed at providing education and skill-building to both fathers and mothers led to significant effects on the co-parenting relationship, interparental



psychological aggression, and their infants' emotional adjustment, and indicates that successful co-parenting relationships can be a significant part of children's development. One suggestion arising from these studies is that Black fathers—and given the ripple effects, their children, as well as the children's mothers—could benefit from community mentors who would make efforts to increase successful co-parenting within the Black community.

Given the plethora of research that highlights the importance of fathers to children, it is important to better understand barriers for Black fathers, and what gets in their way of providing engaged parenting. These fathers, particularly ones who co-parent and are not in a romantic relationship with their child's mother, experience specific stressors that may prevent them from supporting their children and families in a "traditional" manner. Exploratory research is warranted for a comprehensive understanding of

Black fathers in nontraditional and noncommitted relationships, given fathers' importance to their children's growth and development. Thus, our current exploratory study aims to explore the lived experiences of self-identified Black fathers in Fulton County, Georgia, and focuses on barriers to paternal involvement, co-parenting relationships, and the social and the perceived community support that might

enable Black fathers to be the type of father they desire to be.

CURRENT STUDY



The current study focuses specifically on Black fathers affiliated with Fulton County, Georgia, as they may have unique fathering experiences and perspectives; the geographical location of Atlanta Georgia comprises the second highest population of Blacks in the US. Secondly, co-parenting and nonresidential fathers are more common within Black communities as compared to other groups. This study explores the experiences of fathering in the context of co-parenting, father identity and self-efficacy. We also explore the contextual barriers that may impede fathers' engagement with their children and identify factors that may promote paternal engagement and accessibility within a highly concentrated community of Blacks. By addressing these issues, this work aims to help improve our understanding of the factors that influence Black fathers' ability to co-parent, their self-efficacy, and ultimately their ability to positively engage with their children.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study explores the lived experiences of Black fathers with a focus on barriers to paternal involvement, co-parenting relationships, and the social and perceived community support (i.e., facilitators) afforded to Black fathers, to help them be the type of father they desire to be. Using a qualitative approach, we conducted semi-structured interviews with Black fathers to gain an understanding of their experience. The following research questions guided our study:

1. How does a healthy co-parenting relationship form and impact fatherhood?

2. What are some of the interpersonal and community supports available (and are needed) to help fathers?

- *Design*
- *Sample*
- *Recruitment*
- *Data Collection*
- *Analysis*
- *Ethical Concerns*
- *Results*
- *Challenges: Co-Parenting & Legitimation*
- *Father Identity & Father Efficacy*
- *Barriers to Paternal Involvement*
- *Factors That May Promote Paternal Engagement & Accessibility*

DESIGN

A phenomenological approach was used to explore the personal experiences of Black fathers, their perceptions of the barriers to their paternal engagement, and the support they needed in order to be the type of father they wished to be. This kind of approach allows for a deeper understanding of an individual's lived experiences, as well as insights into what their experiences mean to them (Meaney et al., 2017). Fathers were recruited using purposive sampling based on the study eligibility requirements.

Prospective participants were informed about the study and provided an online link to express their interest in participating. Semi-structured, individual, in-depth interviews and focus groups were then

conducted via webcam (i.e., Zoom) within a few weeks after fathers expressed interest in participating. The semi-structured interview format was selected due to the sensitive nature of the research subject. This approach enabled the research team to explore in-depth experiences and to help make sure that when the sessions deviated too much from the study at hand, the conversations could be brought back on track. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed in full, and analyzed using Smith's interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), which particularly helps us to understand the significance and meaning that experiences have (and had) for the individuals who were recounting them (Smith et al., 2009).

SAMPLE

Twelve self-identified Black fathers participated in either an individual interview or a focus group, with some participating in both. The group was drawn from fathers who self-identified as Black; who lived, worked, or played in Fulton County, Georgia; and who had a child under the age of 18. Purposive sampling was used to identify fathers who met the criteria and data were collected until saturation within the findings was met. Table 1 provides further self-reported racial and ethnic affiliation. Fathers were between 27 and 41 years of age with a mean age of 33.5 years and a

standard deviation of 4.56 years. Men reported being the fathers of between 1 and 7 children, with a mean of 2.33 children; in this group, the oldest child of the fathers ranged from 1 to 19 years of age, and the youngest child of any of the fathers were reported as being between 1 and 11 years old.

TABLE 1

RACE / ETHNICITY OF THE 12 BLACK FATHERS PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY	
African American	7
Caribbean	3
Afro-Latino	1
Other Black	1
TOTAL	12



RECRUITMENT

In the fall of 2022, participant recruitment was conducted using information from the Fathers Incorporated, a not for profit in Atlanta Georgia, working to build stronger families and communities one father at a time with a mission to engage, equip and empower a community network of fathers and families by creating an environment of support, parental education and positive societal narratives). Utilizing their recruitment database, we contacted via email and informed of the research study. Through this email men were also provided an electronic survey link where they could express their interest in participation, provide some basic demographic information, and indicate the most convenient times for the research team to contact them to schedule an interview. The screener asked respondents if they identified as Black, how many children they had, the ages of each of their children, and also the ages of their youngest and oldest children. Prospective study

participants were called and texted via cell phone and introduced to the study requirements; if respondents indicated continued interest, an individual interview date was scheduled.

The research team consisted of four people: two men and two women, all Black college-educated fatherhood scholars. It should be noted that 83.3% of the individual interviews and the two focus groups were conducted by a male researcher. Men were informed of the research protocols, read the consent form, and their consent to participate was recorded via Zoom. Participants were permitted to decline use of the camera on their end of the Zoom if they wished for a further level of privacy during their interview.

Fathers were asked the open-ended questions listed in the interview guide during their individual semi-structured interviews.



TABLE 2

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

1- ICEBREAKER QUESTIONS

Please tell us your name and a little bit about your children.

What has been your most memorable and/or important fatherhood moment?

What has been the most challenging fatherhood moment?

2- CO-PARENTING QUESTIONS

What does healthy co-parenting look like to you?

Based on your answer, do you have a healthy co-parenting relationship with the mother of your child(ren)? Why or why not?

How do you think the co-parenting dynamics with the mother of your children impact you as a father?

How might improving co-parenting dynamics positively impact your relationship with your child(ren)?

3- FATHER IDENTITY AND EFFICACY QUESTIONS

What does being a father mean to you?

What are the qualities of a good father (an ideal father)?

What was your reaction when you learned that you would be a father (feelings and emotions experienced)?

Do you believe that your relationship with your own father influences your relationship with your children? How?

What would your children say about you as a father?

What do you like best about being a father?

What challenges do you have as a father?

4- CONTEXTUAL BARRIERS THAT MAY IMPEDE PATERNAL ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONS

What do men need to be an impactful father?

What are things that have limited your ability to fulfill your role as a father?

What gets in the way of accessing services and support you may need as a father?

5- FACTORS THAT MAY PROMOTE PATERNAL ENGAGEMENT AND ACCESSIBILITY QUESTIONS

What community support is available to help you do or navigate your role as a father?

What has been something that has enhanced your ability to fulfill your role as a father?

When you have doubts and/or worries in relation to your role as a father, who can you count on (family, friends, services, others)?

What additional community support is needed for fathers?

DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected between December 2022 and July 2023. Twelve semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted, which focused on the interviewee's thoughts about co-parenting dynamics, their concept of themselves as fathers and what that identity meant to them, their feelings about their efficacy as fathers, contextual factors that they felt impeded paternal engagement, and their thoughts about what factors could promote paternal engagement and accessibility. Additionally, two follow-up focus groups, one with seven fathers and one with four participants, were conducted to present initial findings to study participants and verify the accuracy and interpretative credibility of the initial results. Interviews and focus groups were conducted via Zoom. A total of 12 fathers participated in the current study. Participants each received \$75 for their individual interview and \$50 each if they participated in a focus group.

During individual interviews as well as focus groups, interviewers were encouraged to ask follow-up questions for clarity and depth of discussion, particularly if additional information was warranted. All interviews were conducted via Zoom and each interview was recorded. After completion of the individual interviews, the audio files of the Zoom recordings were transcribed using a third-party transcription service and transcripts were shared with the research team for data analysis.

Following the completion of individual interviews, fathers were contacted to participate in a focus group. Each of the men who participated in a focus group had also participated in an individual interview. The focus group allowed fathers to discuss parenting issues that might not have been brought up in the individual interviews and allowed participants to expound on their own fathering experiences, as other fathers raised and addressed particular concerns. The focus groups were an important part of the interview and data collection process as they added more depth to the discussion. Focus group data were also transcribed and shared with the data analysis team for examination.

Once the individual and focus group data were analyzed, we shared the findings and analyses with the men who had participated in the interviews and/or focus groups to validate and add more depth to the first two rounds of data collection. Beyond sharing the findings with the participants, the final dissemination of the results of the data served to increase “trustworthiness” in the research findings.



ANALYSIS

Three members of the research team conducted analyses to create investigator triangulation (Braun & Clarke, 2006), using thematic and IPA analysis to determine consistent patterns of themes in the data. IPA relies on and identifies how respondents make sense of their realities, and by pulling themes

and subthemes from the data, helped provide an understanding as participants recognized and discussed their fathering experiences (Smith et al., 2009). The resultant themes surfaced by coders were reviewed to ensure consensus.

ETHICAL CONCERNS

The research study's protocol and consent to participate was approved by the Morehouse School of Medicine Internal Review Board. Data were de-identified using pseudonyms for participants during all stages of analysis and reporting. Lastly, informed

consent was collected upon recruitment, wherein participants were informed about the study's purpose and requirements, as well as the plans for publication and dissemination of the study.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to build theory for future research regarding paternal experiences of Black men in co-parenting relationships, and the following analyses are exploratory. These fathers may not be representative of Black fathers in Fulton County, Georgia, but they might represent a shared experience with other Black fathers and may raise additional areas of focus for the expansion of fatherhood research.

To engage in general conversation with participants and start off on a positive note, an initial "icebreaker" question was posed: "What has been your most memorable or important fatherhood moment?" The most common response fathers gave was the witnessing of their child's birth. Fathers particularly highlighted how life-changing it was to meet their children for the first time. Seeing their children come

into the world had a very profound impact on their lives, and it was often noted as an experience that helped them to see that their lives were changing in profound ways. One participant responded: "Receiving the child. I mean, just the fact that he's here in my arms now, just the blessing that he's here. Me and her tried to have children for five years prior to him being conceived."

Fathers were generally ecstatic as they reflected on these memories of the births of their children, even though some of these happy events had been a decade or more in the past: as the fathers were recalling their children's births, the youngest child of some of these fathers was already a pre-teen. It is easy to intuit that these men desired to be involved with their children, given how proud they were to be fathers from birth.

CHALLENGES: CO-PARENTING AND LEGITIMATION

Seeking fathers' thoughts and feelings about potential barriers to their involvement, we then asked: "What has been the most challenging fatherhood moment?" Most men responded with an answer that touched on the difficulty of getting along with the child's mother. Several fathers spoke about the tension that mounted when their romantic relationship with their child's mother ended and noted that finding common ground with their child's mother was an ongoing challenge. One participant said:

For me, I would say, for the past five-and-a-half years, it's just been difficult seeing eye to eye with my oldest son's mom. And at times, it was just she would give me issues, whether it would be seeing him, or . . . whether it would be seeing him, or maybe getting him or something.

A few fathers reflected that they had great co-parenting relationships with their child's mother, and others indicated that their relationship had improved over time. However, several fathers reported that their most significant hardships emerged from difficulties in dealing with the legal aspects of child support and the Georgia State legitimation policy (Wilbon, 2022). Many fathers reported unfair and/or antagonistic treatment by the legal system, illustrated by stories that indicated the system was biased against them. One participant shared:

The court dates, the appearances, [use of] the term of defendant versus respondent, and filing these suits and actually the legality of everything, man. I almost had [to] become a lawyer in the process of trying to see my kids . . . the anxiety of being in the courtroom and sometimes having no representation and having your life on the line, whether it be child support or whatever, or incarceration at the risk of not having the financial resources to provide child support—because they don't care what's going on with you.

It should be noted that the legitimation laws in Georgia are also viewed by many fatherhood advocates as controversial (Wilbon, 2022) and that this policy was

identified as perhaps the source of the most difficult experiences in their lives as fathers spoke volumes regarding how Black fathers experience gaining legal access to their children and the frustrations caused by this policy.

Co-Parenting Dynamics

Next, we asked fathers about the importance of the co-parenting relationship: "What does healthy co-parenting look like to you?" Men openly discussed their perceptions of an ideal situation with their child's mother, noting overwhelmingly that it would feature healthy and open communication between co-parents and that such communication would be central to a good co-parenting relationship. Fathers indicated that a healthy co-parenting relationship consisted of both parents openly sharing important information about the child in a healthy manner. One participant said:

To me, a healthy co-parenting relationship would be where both parents are able to vocalize their concerns or needs or anything, where everybody... at least it doesn't have to be get along completely, but for the most part, everybody's on the same page as far as for the best – their main concern being the best interest of the child.

The follow-up question was: "How do you think the co-parenting dynamics with the mother of your children impact you as a father?" In response, fathers often responded by talking about how the co-parenting relationship with the mother was a major source of emotional pain, anger, and frustration. For some, this led to more anger and frustration about how their co-parenting relationship was getting in the way of their father-child relationships. One father responded:

To be honest, it hurts, It hurts to be shut out. It hurts to be ostracized and basically excommunicated and have to go through a whole legal system that we know is broke to be able to fix something that shouldn't be broken in the first place.

Another father said:

So it really hurts you. But it bring you sometimes to a place of frustration and anger where you're just like, man, there are so many dudes out here who don't care about their children, who will shoot that money off and don't even think about it twice. And I'm sitting up here fighting every day. And I'm sitting up here trying to contact you and get this visitation with this child and see this child and impact their life.

Men clearly articulated the frustration of having to deal with “baby mama drama” and how their presence as a father was not always valued by their child’s mother. Men were frustrated with having to navigate the mother’s feelings about child-rearing preferences along with mothers being the gatekeeper or determining his access to his child while at the same time feeling the hopelessness of dealing with a mother whom they felt did not support their role as a father.



FATHER IDENTITY AND FATHER EFFICACY

Then we wanted to engage fathers on the question of their paternal identity and efficacy. We asked them: “What does being a father mean to you?” Several fathers indicated that as children themselves, they did not have close relationships with their own fathers, and these men stated that being a father served as an opportunity to be the father that they never had, whether they were referring to a father who had been lacking emotionally, financially, or spiritually, or whether they were referring to a father who had had no presence in their lives whatsoever. One father said:

Being a father means so much to me because I never had my father in my life. Just recently, I had a—well, I did some searching and I found a name and we talked and had a DNA test, but it came up that he wasn't the father.

Another father responded:

It's tough because I don't really have a foundation to see and to go off of as far as my venture of fatherhood, but I don't let it stop me. At the same time of it being challenging, it's my main focal point of motivation because it pushes me to not repeat the pattern.

Our follow-up question sought to engage fathers on their earliest feelings about and anticipation of

fatherhood: “What was your reaction when you learned that you would be a father (feelings and emotions experienced)?” Men shared that they had often been fearful of fatherhood due to feeling unprepared. This was particularly the case for young fathers who indicated they were afraid of becoming a father due to being so young and unready for just that reason. One dad indicated:

I was scared. In the beginning, I was really kind of running from being a father. It was kind of like, “Okay, I'm what? Nineteen, twenty years old about to have a kid.” I'm still a kid myself kind of because I don't even know how to take care of myself all the way and here I am having a little boy and...

Men articulated that they were not overly enthusiastic when they received the news that they were going to be a dad, mostly due to feelings of inadequacy and a fear of fatherhood. This is a sharp contrast to the feelings of euphoria and excitement that fathers subsequently experienced with their child’s birth.

To understand more about the participants’ self-efficacy as fathers, we asked: “What would your children say about you as a father?” Men highlighted typical children’s perceptions of their dads, consistent with other studies that have similar findings (Shears et

al. 2015). They shared that their children would say that their dad is fun-loving and playful, but that their dad has high standards for the children and themselves. Overall, data analysis showed that participants' children would describe their fathers as authoritative parents who would radiate a high level of warmth coupled with high standards for their children's behavior. One dad listed several of these qualities when he responded, "Daddy is silly, but daddy is also serious, goal-minded and driven individual. Daddy is very spiritual and has high standards."

Men were asked, "What do you like most about being a dad?" In response, they discussed being able to bond with their child over some shared interest. Often the experience of bonding over sports that held significance for fathers was a subject that they focused on, as sharing their passion for sports with their children served as a bonding opportunity. One dad said:

I love to play sports and everything like that. But I come across other kids who don't play sports or aren't into these things so with my oldest, he started it. He was into sports, heavy. So I'm out there teaching them how to run track. I'm teaching them how to shoot a ball, throw footballs, this and that, everything. And then with my youngest now, oh my God, it's a lot of the same. I had no idea. You don't know what you're going to get when you have a kid, right? You have no idea. And for my son to be developing how he is, from, you see him crawling

to walking. Now he's kicking a ball. Now he's playing baseball and he's three years old!

Fathers also discussed their children's responses when they see them, particularly the nonresidential father. Fathers delighted in the joy expressed by their children when the fathers arrived home or when the fathers came to pick their children up for scheduled visits. These were described in interviews as special times of bonding and excitement for both the child and father. One father said:

When I come, anytime I go over her house, it's the reaction that they come running, when they come running through the house. And they see me and they stop and they get a little smile and they grin and they run up and I hold them. That's the best feeling, even though I can have the most roughest day ever. And I could have been mad. I could have been over the top, but as soon as I see the children, all that go away. As soon as I see my daughter, as soon as I see her face, as soon as I see my son, I see how they happy and how energetic they are and how they run through the house. Even though they might be ten, also they might have made a whole mess, had toilet paper everywhere, open the refrigerator open gallons of milk and pour them. So, it do not matter what they do. As soon as I see their faces and we contact each other, I'm at ease with the world. I'm at peace with myself.

BARRIERS TO PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT

We next wanted to explore the contextual barriers, the types of situations that fathers feel may impede their paternal engagement. We asked the fathers, "What do men need to be an impactful father?" The interviewees' responses can be summed up in a phrase: intrinsic motivation. Participants agreed that in order to be good fathers, fathers must be internally motivated. Further, participants indicated that there is a certain level of personal responsibility and maturity that should serve to undergird the internal motivation to be involved in their children's life. One father said:

First, I really think that they—I really feel like they need to know that that's what they want . . . I come across guys, my sister's children's

father. He didn't care to be there. He was there, and then he'll be gone for years, and then he popped back up. So I think first and foremost, do you want to be there? You know what I mean? Is your mind made up that you want to be a part of your child's life and everything? I mean, once you make that decision, then it's just how far are you willing to go. What are you willing to do? Are you willing to take a fatherhood class? Are you willing to get them legitimized? Are you willing to go to do custody and everything? To me, it's more about your desire. It's limitless what a person will do. But do you have that desire, and will you actually put in the work?

Participants expressed their belief that oftentimes fathers are thrown into fatherhood without having adequate knowledge or without the necessary or helpful resources that would help them be good fathers. They suggested that education could be used to bridge that gap and expressed the need for leadership classes. One dad said, “I don’t think that some fathers should just be thrown into fatherhood unequipped.” Fathers suggested that additional knowledge to help prepare them, whether formal education or even in the form of leadership classes, could be used to bridge that gap.

We next asked, “What are things that have limited your ability to fulfill your role as a father?” The responses were varied, and among the topics men commonly focused on their economic situations, discrimination, and again, lack of a congenial co-parenting relationship.

Some men discussed financial hardship and economic instability by relating the difficulty they’ve had in maintaining consistent employment, which then led to financial instability. Participants indicated that these experiences negatively impacted their emotions and, especially, their ability to provide for themselves and their children. One participant said:

Stability. I don’t know if I’d be making the wrong decisions, and I don’t feel like I do, but work has been inconsistent. I’m a truck driver, but I always get a bad deal when I go to a company. I was good for three years, but then I moved, so I had to leave that job. And ever since I left that job, it’s been inconsistent to where I just found myself in these holes. I’m in one right now. And that’s what bothers me. That’s what kind of triggers a little bit of depression and everything, which I was diagnosed with when I went through the B.S. when he was first born, going through everything. Yeah, that’s a whole another topic. But so every once in a while, it’ll hit me when I feel like, “Oh, man. I might be back down to zero,” in a way. Like, “Oh man, I don’t know how I’m going to pay rent this month.” So the inconsistency of, basically, finances at times, and even relationships sometimes, it will get me down to where my attitude or whatever will reflect onto him. And I never want him to see me down or hurt or whatever. So I think that’s the main thing that really messes with me when it comes to being a father is just going through sometimes the waves of life and what

that may do to me emotionally when it comes to, oh, it’s my week to have my son, but I’m really down this week. I’m literally depressed. I need to take a pill this week. That’s the thing that gets me.

Another participant indicated that discrimination played a role in his difficulty in finding a job:

Even though I don’t got a long rap sheet, but certain jobs—I did want to try to go and work at the Delta airport at one time when they told me because really not really too much of my background, but sort of, and then with the tattoos, I kind of felt like that was discrimination. Because that would have put me at a good time to where I’m at right now. I was sponsored by that program. All I have to do is save my money, get a vehicle, pay my fine, I’ll get my license. But it kind of pushed you back whenever you try to go for energy, when you finally go in there, and they tell you are qualified, but you haven’t really been paid for two or three weeks. And it’s like now you have to find other means. So you might have to go find the plasma center and donate. You have to constantly come up with a backup plan if this don’t work. If this don’t work this time, this won’t work. This would be in every situation to come up. You can’t see the worry about it. You gotta critically think your way out of every situation instead of panic.

Maternal gatekeeping was another concern as fathers expressed a strong desire to see their nonresidential children; however, in some cases, the mother wouldn’t grant them access to their children. Some fathers expressed their sadness about not being able to see their children because of the child’s mother limiting or totally denying the father’s access. One father said:

And really there was a point in time where it was a year and a half where I hadn’t—where I had no contact with either with her or my son. I just kept applying pressure and emphasizing the fact that whatever situation is between us, that’s the least of my worries, my main concern is being there for my son. And the more that I—the more that I would emphasize that to her, it seems like she would—I don’t know, it just seems like over time she start that that’s literally all that I was concerned about doing because I used to walk almost three hours to go see her, or to go see him.

FACTORS PROMOTING PATERNAL ENGAGEMENT & ACCESSIBILITY

To better understand the range of supports that fathers have, or would like to have, we posed several relevant questions in the individual interviews. The first of these was, “What community support is available to help you do or navigate your role as a father?” Men overwhelmingly cited their involvement with Fathers Incorporated, indicating that Fathers Incorporated provided comprehensive resources that supported them as fathers, and not only helped with their child support responsibilities, but with the emotional and practical aspects of being a father as well. One participant said:

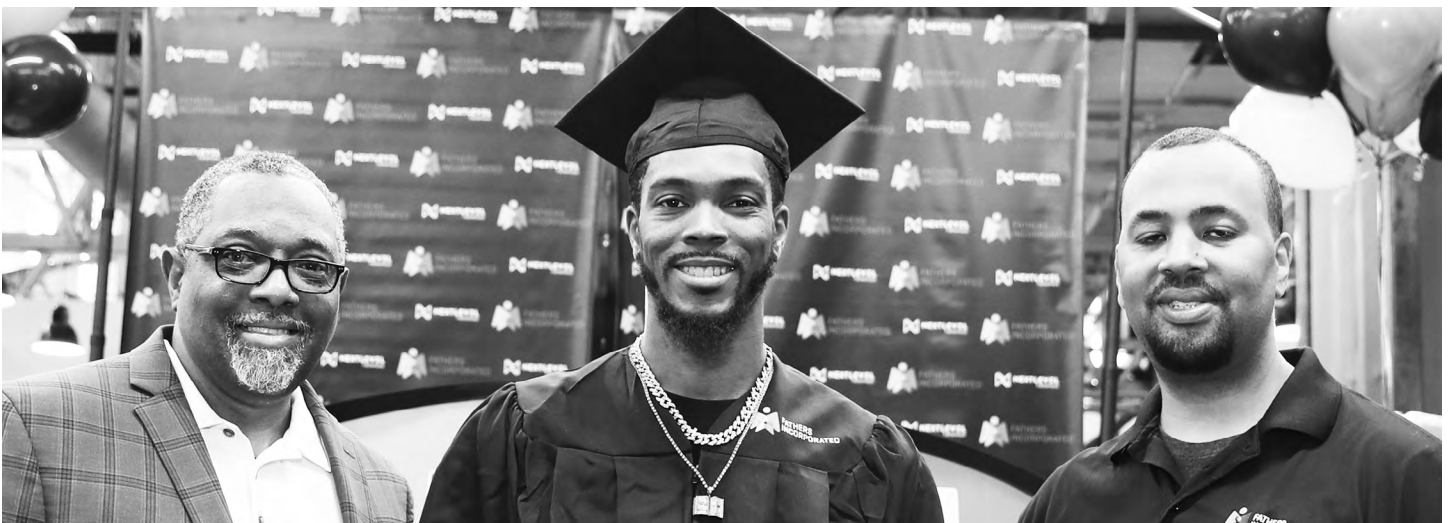
The Fathers Incorporated program has been the only community resource that’s actually been a real impact in fatherhood for me, not just on the court side but trying to actually see where we are mentally and how our dynamic is with our child’s moms and with our children. And they are just actually involved in trying to see a change in a positive way in our relationships.

Men shared that, except for Fathers Incorporated, there was no other community support program designed especially for fathers. In a follow-up focus group, one father commented that most parenting resources are geared toward mothers, and institutions fail to think about or incorporate fathers—even in areas that will have a direct impact on their children. Men agreed that, with so many dads in their

community, they were surprised that there is not a more concerted effort to support fathers.

The next question was asked in order to elicit the fathers’ ideas or suggestions regarding what further support would be useful or important for them: “What additional community support is needed for fathers?” One important observation was that there is a need for transition programs for or fathers who are transitioning from incarceration and are re-entering their communities” fathers especially indicated that resources to help these men secure housing and employment is essential. One participant shared the following:

Well, for me, clear criminal backgrounds, employment programs. Take a guy who’s willing to work, despite the past they have with the law. And I feel like they should have a program for family fathers who’s fresh out of jail and prison who’re just trying to get back in their shoes and life. They get themselves on they feet a lot faster. They have to take a McDonald’s job or something like that. I mean, yeah, I’m not saying there’s nothing wrong with a McDonald’s job because money is money. Employment is good to have as long as you have a job. What I’m saying is to have opportunities for somebody who want to make a little money. I feel like the community should have that for the fathers.



DISCUSSION

The current study explores the lived experiences of Black fathers, barriers Black fathers face as they seek to engage with their children, and ideas these fathers have about resources that would assist them in successfully navigating fatherhood. With consideration of Belsky's (1984) process model for parenting, contextual factors play a salient role in parenting outcomes. Findings from the current research study support this theoretical framework; dynamics related to the co-parenting relationship, access to community resources, financial well-being, and discrimination all play a significant role in the lived experiences of fathers who participated in this study.

Fathers in this study emphasized that the dynamics of the co-parenting relationship with their children's mothers greatly influenced access to their children, as well as the fathers' own mental health. If maternal gatekeeping was used to limit paternal access, a pattern described by Schoppe-Sullivan et al (2015), fathers made note of that and reported the negative impact it had on their mental health and the opportunities for paternal engagement. These findings corroborate previous research, which has found that a conflicted co-parenting relationship is associated with lower paternal engagement for nonresidential fathers (Waller, 2012). However, despite facing co-parenting and access challenges, fathers expressed their willingness to put forth considerable effort to see their children. Fathers also highlighted the characteristics of a healthy co-parenting relationship, in which open communication that centralized the well-being of the children was described as a critical characteristic.

Difficulty navigating legal issues related to child support and legitimation were also cited as important contextual factors that served as barriers to paternal engagement. The negative effects of these legal issues were further exacerbated by the reported levels of discrimination that fathers encountered while working with the court system. This finding highlights the lived experience of institutional racism within the justice system for fathers in this study.

Fathers enjoyed expressing numerous favorable experiences related to engaging with their children, with the birth of their children serving as one of their most memorable fatherhood experiences. With respect to their identity as fathers and fathering efficacy, participants stated that they viewed fatherhood as an opportunity

to be the father they never had, which would provide something deep and important to the fathers themselves, as well as to their children. This finding highlights the compensatory hypothesis for fatherhood (Guzzo, 2011), which states that fathers desire to compensate for the less-than-optimal experiences with their own father by serving as a positive example of fatherhood for their own children. Personal responsibility, maturity, and intrinsic motivation to serve as a good father were central characteristics that fathers highlighted as important for being a positive, impactful father.

When asked about fatherhood resources that were accessible in their community, most fathers referenced Fathers Incorporated. They emphasized their appreciation for the comprehensive level of support that Fathers Incorporated provided. They highlighted that other fatherhood programs were narrowly focused on child support, and outside of Fathers Incorporated, there were few or perhaps no broader fatherhood resources in their communities. Of critical importance to the study participants, programming provided by Fathers Incorporated addressed not only the financial aspects of fathering, but also supported these fathers emotionally and relationally, providing the fathers with educational tools to navigate their co-parenting relationships and teaching them valuable leadership skills. Fathers also highlighted another gap in programming resources for fathers, that of helping re-entry fathers reestablish themselves financially. Overall, fathers in our study were well-pleased with the programming provided by Fathers Incorporated.

In summary, the fathers in the current study expressed many highlights related to their fatherhood experiences, such as the memorable moments of being there for the births of their children or their desire to serve positive examples of fatherhood. Contextual factors such as co-parenting dynamics, institutional racism, financial well-being, and supportive fatherhood programs played a significant role in the lived experiences of Black fathers in the current study. Despite the unique challenges that fathers faced, they demonstrated resilience and persistence in working toward being a present and positively involved father. Fathers also provided direction and insight with respect to potential fatherhood programming that would be effective resources for fathers and their families.

LIMITATIONS

We acknowledge the qualitative limitations regarding generalization, however, there are many benefits to our approach of conducting semi-structured interviews and

focus groups (Adams, 2015). The ability to collect in-depth and illustrative data helps us to understand more complex and socially integrated issues, such as fatherhood.

STUDY IMPLICATIONS

This study emphasizes the importance of a healthy co-parenting relationship for father involvement, the value of which was easily recognized and commented on by the fathers involved. This study also serves as an important step toward further discussion of the many factors that influence father involvement and opens various directions for future research regarding Black fatherhood. This work has potential implications for policy, practice, and societal understanding for Black fathers in Fulton County, Georgia. By delving deeply into the perspectives of Black fathers, such research can provide valuable insights into the unique challenges they face in co-parenting and being engaged parents.

Specific and culturally sensitive interventions aimed at supporting Black fathers in overcoming the identified barriers are possible. Based on our findings, these

barriers include economic disparities, systemic inequalities, lack of programming that centers fathers, and issues related to legal and family structures. Additionally, our study can help to challenge the persistent and harmful rhetoric about the lack of Black father involvement. Greater empathy and understanding of the pressures that Black fathers face can ignite broader critical conversations about family dynamics. Finally, a better understanding of and support for the needs of Black fathers has implications for improving their mental health which may in-turn impact their physical and emotional well-being. We believe that more community support for Black fathers can lead to promoting positive change and will aid in creating more supportive environments to foster more engaged fathers.



REFERENCES

- ADAMS, W. (2015).**
Conducting semi-structured interviews. In K.E. Newcomer, H.P. Hatry & J.S. Wholey (Eds.), *Handbook of practical program evaluation* (4th ed., pp. 492-505). USA: John Wiley & Sons.
- AKANDE, K. A., & HEATH, C. J. (2019).**
Mediating effects of maternal gatekeeping on nonresident Black fathers' paternal stressors. In *Transitions into parenthood: Examining the complexities of childrearing* (Vol. 15, pp. 103-121). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- ALLPORT, B. S., JOHNSON, S., AQIL, A., LABRIQUE, A. B., NELSON, T., ANGELA, K. C., CARABAS, Y., & MARCELL, A. V. (2018).**
Promoting father involvement for child and family health. *Academic pediatrics*, 18(7), 746-753.
- AMATO, P. R. & GILBRETH, J. G. (1999).**
Nonresident fathers and children's well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 557-573.
- ANDERSON, J. (2014).**
The impact of family structure on the health of children: Effects of divorce. *The Linacre Quarterly*, 81(4), 378-387.
- BAKER, C. E. (2013).**
Fathers' and mothers' home literacy involvement and children's cognitive and social emotional development: Implications for family literacy programs. *Applied developmental science*, 17(4), 184-197.
- BAYLEY, J., WALLACE, L. M., & CHOUDHRY, K. (2009).**
Fathers and parenting programmes: Barriers and best practice. *Community Practitioner*, 82(4).
- BIEBER, C. & RAMIREZ, A. (2023).**
Revealing divorce statistics in 2023. Forbes Advisor https://www.forbes.com/advisor/legal/divorce/divorce-statistics/#divorce_rates_by_ethnicity_section
- BELSKY, J. (1984).**
The determinants of parenting: A process model. *Child Development*, 55, 83-96.
- BRAUN, V. & CLARKE, V. (2006).**
Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2):77-101. Center for Disease Control (2023). National Vital Statistics Reports, 72(1). <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr72/nvsr72-01.pdf>
- CLEGG, R. (2020).**
Percentage of Births to unmarried women. The Center for Equal Opportunity <https://www.ceousa.org/2020/02/26/percentage-of-births-to-unmarried-women/>
- COAKLEY, T. M., SHEARS, J. K., & RANDOLPH, S. D. (2014).**
Understanding key barriers to fathers' involvement in their children's lives. *Child & Youth Services*, 35(4), 343-364.
- COATES, E. E. & PHARES, V. (2014).**
Predictors of paternal involvement among nonresidential, Black fathers from low-income neighborhoods. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 15(2), 138.
- FAGAN, J. & KAUFMAN, R. (2015).**
Co-parenting relationships among low-income, unmarried parents: Perspectives of fathers in fatherhood programs. *Family Court Review*, 53(2), 304-316.
- FRIEND, D., MAX, J., HOLCOMB, P., EDIN, K., & DION, R. (2016).**
Fathers' views of co-parenting relationships: Findings from the PACT evaluation. *OPRE Report*, 60.
- GUZZO, K. B. (2011).**
New father's experiences with their own fathers and attitudes toward fathering. *Fathering*, 9(3), 268.
- HERRERO, M., MARTÍNEZ-PAMPLIEGA, A., & ALVAREZ, I. (2020).**
Family communication, adaptation to divorce and children's maladjustment: The moderating role of coparenting. *Journal of Family Communication*, 20(2), 114-128.
- HURT, T., SHEARS, J., O'CONNOR, M., & HODGE, S., (2017).**
Married Black men's observations of their fathers' teachings about husbandhood. *Personal Relationships*.10.1111/pere.12171
- JESSEE, V. & ADAMSONS, K. (2018).**
Father involvement and father-child relationship quality: An intergenerational perspective. *Parenting*, 18(1), 28-44.
- JEYNES, W. H. (2015).**
A meta-analysis: The relationship between father involvement and student academic achievement. *Urban Education*, 50(4), 387-423.
- KISSMAN, K. (1998).**
Noncustodial fatherhood: Research trends and issues. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 28(1-2), 77-88.
- LEMAY, C. A., CASHMAN, S. B., ELFENBEIN, D. S., & FELICE, M. E. (2010).**
A qualitative study of the meaning of fatherhood among young urban fathers. *Public health nursing*, 27(3), 221-231.
- MARCZAK, M. S., BECHER, E. H., HARDMAN, A. M., GALOS, D. L., & RUHLAND, E. (2015).**
Strengthening the role of unmarried fathers: Findings from the co-parent court project. *Family Process*, 54(4), 630-638.
- MASCIADRELLI, B. P., PLECK, J. H., & STUEVE, J. L. (2006).**
Fathers' role model perceptions: Themes and linkages with involvement. *Men and Masculinities*, 9(1), 23-34.
- MCMALE, J. P., STOVER, C., DUBE, C., SIROTKIN, Y., LEWIS, S., & MCKAY, K. (2023).**
Randomized controlled trial of a prenatal focused coparenting consultation for unmarried black fathers and mothers: One-year infant and family outcomes. *Infant mental health journal*, 44(1), 27-42.
- PARKE, R. D. (2014).**
Father involvement: A developmental psychological perspective. In H. E. Peters, R. D. Day, G. W. Peterson, S. Steinmetz (Eds.), *Fatherhood* (pp. 43-58). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203708347>
- PHARES, V., FIELDS, S., & BINITIE, I. (2006).**
Getting fathers involved in child-related therapy. *Cognitive and behavioral practice*, 13(1), 42-52.
- PINTO, T. M., FIGUEIREDO, B., PINHEIRO, L. L., & CANÁRIO, C. (2016).**
Fathers' parenting self-efficacy during the transition to parenthood. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 34(4), 343-355.
- PRUETT, M. K., PRUETT, K., COWAN, C. P., & COWAN, P. A. (2017).**
Enhancing father involvement in low-income families: A couples group approach to preventive intervention. *Child development*, 88(2), 398-407.
- RANDLES, J. (2020).**
The means to and meaning of "being there" in responsible fatherhood programming with low-income fathers. *Family Relations*, 69(1), 7-20.

RANSAW, T. (2014).

The good father: African American fathers who positively influence the educational outcomes of their children. *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men*, 2(2), 1-25.

ROBERTS, D., COAKLEY, T. M., WASHINGTON, T. J. & KELLEY, A. (2014).

Fathers' perspectives on supports and barriers that affect their fatherhood role. *Sage Open*, 4(1), 2158244014521818.

SANDSTROM, H., GEARING, M., PETERS, H. E., HELLER, C., HEALY, O., & PRATT, E. (2015).

Approaches to father engagement and fathers' experiences in home visiting programs. In *Policy File*. Urban Institute.

SCHOPPE-SULLIVAN, S. J., ALTENBURGER, L. E., LEE, M. A., BOWER, D. J., & KAMP DUSH, C. M. (2015).

Who are the Gatekeepers? Predictors of Maternal Gatekeeping. *Parenting, science and practice*, 15(3), 166-186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295192.2015.1053321>

SHEARS, J., KIM, S., KIRVEN, J. & COAKLEY, T. (2020).

Fathers' reflection of their fathers: The use of text mining to find meaning in narratives. In Fitzgerald, H. *Handbook on Fathers and Child Development: Prenatal to Preschool*. Springer International Publishing. Switzerland AG.

SHEARS, J., LYNCH, R., & KIRVEN, J. (2019).

A self-Assessment of a Philadelphia group of children, youth and family focused agencies on father friendliness: A descriptive study. *Journal of Social Science Research*, 14, 3017-3028.

SHEARS, J. & KIRVEN, J., COOK, S. (2016).

Examining Fatherhood in the African Community. In Smith-Ruiz, D., Clark, S. L., & Watson, M. (Eds). *Contemporary African American Families; Achievements, Challenges, and Empowerment Strategies in the twenty-First Century*. Routledge Publishing, NY.

SHEARS, J., KIRVEN, J., ROSS, T.C., COAKLEY, T., COOK, S. AND GRIMSLEY, K. (2015).

A message to dad! The value of a father: A qualitative analysis of children's essays about their father's contribution. *The Wheelock International Journal of Children, Families and Social Change*, 1(1),1-22

SHEARS, J., WHITESIDE-MANSELL, L., MCKELVEY, L., & SELIG, J. (2008).

Assessing mothers' and fathers' authoritarian attitudes: The psychometric properties of a brief survey. *Social Work Research* 32(3), 179-184.

SHONKOFF, J. P., SLOPEN, N., & WILLIAMS, D. R. (2021).

Early Childhood Adversity, Toxic Stress, and the Impacts of Racism on the Foundations of Health. *Annual review of public health*, 42, 115-134. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-090419-101940>

SMITH, J.A., FLOWERS, P., & LARKIN, M. (2009).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research. *QMIP Bulletin*.

STAHLSCHMIDT, M. J., THRELFALL, J., SEAY, K. D., LEWIS, E. M., & KOHL, P. L. (2013).

Recruiting fathers to parenting programs: Advice from dads and fatherhood program providers. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35(10), 1734-1741.

SUMMERS, J. A., BOLLER, K., SCHIFFMAN, R. F., & RAIKES, H. H. (2006).

The meaning of "good fatherhood:" Low-income fathers' social constructions of their roles. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 6(2-3), 145-165.

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU. (2021).

American Community Survey S0901: Children characteristics [Data set]. <https://data.census.gov/table?q=s0901>

U.S CENSUS BUREAU. (2021).

Number of children living only with their mothers has doubled in past 50 years <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/families/cps-2020.html>

U.S. OFFICE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION. (2023).

Living arrangements of children by race/ethnicity, 1970-2022. <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/population/qa01202.asp?qaDate=2022>

VARGHESE, C. & WACHEN, J. (2016).

The determinants of father involvement and connections to children's literacy and language outcomes: Review of the literature. *Marriage & Family Review*, 52(4), 331-359.

WALLER M. R. (2012).

Cooperation, conflict, or disengagement? Coparenting styles and father involvement in fragile families. *Family process*, 51(3), 325-342. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2012.01403.x>

WILBON, M. (2022).

State Legitimation, Father Engagement and Youth Academic Outcomes. [White Paper]. <https://fathersincorporated.com/moynihan-institute/educational-brief>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to our supporters who made this research project possible. First and foremost, we are immensely thankful to the Morehouse School of Medicine National African American Child and Family Research Center for their invaluable support through the Community Pilot Projects Program. Your backing played a pivotal role in the fruition of this research.

Additionally, we are grateful for the partial support provided by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). This project was financed under financial assistance award (Grant #: 90PH0031-01-00), amounting to a total of \$1.8 million, with 100 percent of the funding coming from ACF/HHS.

It is important to note that the contents presented in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, ACF/HHS, or the United States Government. For further details and policies related to this support, please refer to the ACF website under Administrative and National Policy Requirements.

Fathers Incorporated | Moynihan Institute for Fatherhood Research and Policy
2394 Mt. Vernon Road, Dunwoody, GA 30338
770.804.9800 | www.fathersincorporated.com | www.themoynihaninstitute.com