


# Silberman School of Social Work



## Module One Historical Overview of Fatherhood



**Department of  
Social Services**

Human Resources Administration  
Department of Homeless Services

Office of Child  
Support Services

**HUNTER**  
The City University of New York

# Learning Objectives

- Describe how the role of the father has evolved in the 21st century.
- Explain how social policy impacts the role of the father.
- Identify how Michael Lamb and Joseph Pleck's components of father involvement are reflected in policy.
- Explain the role of the father in child development.

# Preliminary Discussion Questions

- What are some of the assumptions society makes about fathers?
- How have those assumptions influenced policy and practice concerning father involvement and engagement?
- In your work in the field, how have you seen policy influence practice?

# Initial Interest in Fatherhood

- New ideas about gender roles and family structure, emerging from the women's movement and from expanding females labor force participation.
- Recent research on child development challenging earlier assumptions that father's influence on child well-being was peripheral to mothers.
- Adverse outcome for many children in families where one parent is absent from a child's life.

# 1935: Aid to Families with Dependent Children

- Established under the Social Security Act to provide cash assistance to families with needy children “deprived of parental support or care because their father or mother was absent from the home, incapacitated, deceased, or unemployed.”
- Single women with children were typically qualified for ADFC with its design and specific criteria.
- Limited eligibility requirements:
  - contributed to the view that family is defined as mother and child (a view that is often still held today)
  - discouraged fathers from living with their children

# 1970: The Uniform Marriage and Divorce Act

- First established a gender-neutral “best interests” standard in regards to child custody hearings.
- Held that maternal custody ensured the best interests of a child and was given preference even in the event that both parents appeared equal (Hall, Pulver, & Cooley, 1996).

# 1975: Social Security Act

The child support program was established by Congress in 1975 as Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. Title IV of the Act mandates “Grants to States for Aid and Services to Needy Families with Children and for Child Welfare Services” and Part D focused on child support and the establishment of paternity.



## Social Security Act (cont.)

- Title IV-D requires all states to enact laws and to implement procedures for paternity establishment; and for the establishment, enforcement, and collection of child support. In other words, Title IV-D requires all states to have a child support enforcement program.
- This program is amongst the strongest anti-poverty initiatives in the nation. When combined with work and other work supports, child support lifts millions of children out of poverty.
- The child support program has evolved over time. Unlike the early years of the program, when the caseload was almost exclusively cash assistance families, today over 80% of the OCSS caseload are families no longer receiving, or never having received, cash assistance. This can be attributed, in large part, to the effectiveness of both the cash assistance and the child support programs in helping families gain financial independence.





# 1984: Congress and Paternity

- In 1984, Congress initially required that court suits be filed (paternity actions) for paternity establishment. Children's rights to public benefits (e.g. health care, education, survivors' insurance, workers' compensation) are ensured by establishing paternity (Curran, 2003).
- During the mid-1990s, parents were provided the opportunity for paternity establishment of their children at birth through state-mandated in-hospital paternity acknowledgment programs (Roberts, 2004).

# 1993: Family Leave and Medical Act (FMLA)

- Provides job protection to individuals in the event of leave from work due to new parenting (both mothers and fathers for birth or adoption of a child), long-term illness, or illness of family members.
- Prior to FMLA, this type of protection was not available. Up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave may be taken without penalty (Wisensale, 2003).

## Family Leave and Medical Act (cont.)

Most Americans, in particular low-income and under-employed individuals, face barriers to utilizing the parental leave policy due to various circumstances including:

- Unaffordable or unavailable infant child care (Phillips, 2004)
- The belief by some men that taking time off to care for/be with their children could adversely affect their careers (Levine & Pittinsky, 1997)

## Family Leave and Medical Act (cont.)

Family medical leave policies also limit use by low-income and under-employed individuals:

- Part-time employees are not eligible for family medical leave
- Companies with less than 50 employees not required to provide family medical leave unless mandated by the state
- Workers must be employed for at least a year before taking leave

# 1996: Welfare Reform and provisions

Reforms in welfare law in 1996 established four interrelated goals:

1. Enable children to stay with their families,
2. Encourage work and marriage
3. Prevent and reduce pregnancies that occurred outside of marriage
4. Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families (with emphasis on promoting marriage)

These reforms emphasized the promotion of father involvement, the prevention of “father-absent” families, and increased support for nonresident fathers, with the goal of responsible fatherhood.

# Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

- Aimed at encouraging employment for mothers, was created in 1996 and replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).
- Individuals receiving cash assistance for more than two years must meet workforce requirements and are eligible for assistance for up to a five-year lifetime limit. By law, welfare officials are required to seek reimbursement for TANF payments for children from fathers.

# 1997: Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)

- Focused achieving safety, permanency, and well-being for children involved in the child welfare system.
- Emphasis on the promotion of adoption and reforms to the foster care system.
- Certain provisions of ASFA provided avenues through which greater involvement of fathers was possible, such as in case planning for their children.



## 2002: Promotion of “responsible fatherhood”

- A \$320 million package of initiatives focused on “responsible fatherhood” was unveiled by President George W. Bush in 2002, leading to the establishment of numerous fatherhood programs aimed at increasing father involvement (Curran, 2003).
- Programs to reduce non-marital child bearing were federally funded, including family planning, teen programs, and male involvement programs (The Future of Children, 2002).



## 2002: Promotion of “responsible fatherhood” (cont.)

Additionally, federal funding was provided for various programs focused on:

- Greater father involvement
- Increasing employment opportunities, higher earnings, and ability to pay child support by low-income noncustodial parents (Johnson, Levine, & Doolittle, 1999).
- Parenting skills and accessibility to children (The Future of Children, 2002)
- Improving opportunities for young, unmarried fathers to emotionally and financially support their children (US DHHS, 2002)

# 2005: Deficit Reduction Act of 2005

- The Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) initiative was originally authorized under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, providing funding for responsible fatherhood activities.
- The Act also reauthorized TANF block grants through 2010 and included a provision funding the new Healthy Marriage Promotion and Responsible Fatherhood grants program.

# 2008: Fostering Connections Act

- Promoted permanency for children involved in out-of-home placement, recognizing the importance of permanent families, including involvement of fathers and paternal relatives.
- Required that “due diligence” be exercised in identifying and notifying adult relatives when children are placed in foster care.



## 2010: President Obama launches interagency working group

The Responsible Fatherhood Working Group is led by the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, the Office of Public Engagement, and the Domestic Policy Council. The Working Group coordinates policy, programmatic activities, and engagement efforts on fatherhood across federal agencies. The overarching goal of the Working Group is to encourage fathers to take responsibility for the intellectual, emotional and financial well-being of their children.



# 2010: President Obama launches interagency working group (cont.)

The Working Group's goals included:

- Promoting and creating positive opportunities for fathers to engage in the intellectual, emotional and financial well-being of their children.
- Supporting and sustaining stable and healthy environments for children and parents, particularly by strengthening the economic stability of low-income fathers and supporting healthy relationships between parents.
- Strengthening and solidifying relationships among fathers, children, and families early in a child's life.
- Supporting and encouraging disconnected fathers to reconnect with their children and families.
- Promoting the identification and use of evidence-based practices, as well as fostering high-quality research on fathers and fathering to support policy and program development.

# 2010: President Obama launches interagency working group (cont.)

Strategies to accomplish the Working Group's goals:

- Implement policies and activities that promote healthy, ongoing relationships among fathers, families, and children.
- Use the Administration's convening power to coordinate communication and high-impact engagement efforts that promote a positive culture shift around fatherhood.
- Pursue public-private partnerships that leverage outside resources to further promote positive outcomes for fathers and their children.

# 2010: President Obama launches Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative

- President Obama launched the Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative in June 2010 in an effort to “promote responsible fatherhood and encourage positive role models through partnerships with fatherhood and family-serving groups around the country.”
- The initiative both encouraged fathers to support their own children, while recognizing the important role of mentors and role models in supporting children and families.

## 2010: Claims Resolution Act

Under this Act enacted December 2010, The Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) initiative was reauthorized. Twenty-eight state grants were awarded to fund responsible fatherhood programs (RFPs), with a total of 55 programs and organizations awarded funding by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) for three years for RFPs.





## 2010: Claims Resolution Act (cont.)

The act specified that federally-funded programs must target three Responsible Fatherhood goals of improving men's:

1. positive parenting skills and father involvement
2. relationship with the mothers of their children
3. economic self-sufficiency and financial support of their children.

## Discussion Questions

- What are the goals of each specific policy (implicit and explicit)?
- What policies and practices facilitate or inhibit father engagement?

# Video: What Does it Mean to be a Dad?



# Video: What Does it Mean to be a Dad?

- When the fathers talk about their dads what are some of the common themes?
- What are some of the themes associated with being a father?

# Michael Lamb's 3 Components of Father Involvement

1. Engagement – Lamb defined engagement as fathers' direct interactions with children during all time spent with them
2. Accessibility
3. Responsibility – role father takes in making sure that the child is taken care of and arranging for resources to be available of the child.

\*Lamb's research is based on a two-parent family.

# Joseph Pleck: Three Core Components of Engagement

1. Positive Engagement Activities - Most studies on positive engagement activities focus on three common types of activities of fathers with children: care giving, play, and teaching with the focus on the more intensive kind likely to promote development.
2. Warmth and Responsiveness
3. Control (parental monitoring – knowing whereabouts of child and decision making) This component equates to the responsibility component

## Discussion Questions

- How have the changing roles of fathers impacted positive engagement activities?
- How has Lamb and Pleck's conceptualization of father involvement affected policy and practice?

# Four possible theories: Influence on developmental outcomes in children

1. Attachment Theory
2. Parental Style Research
3. Bronfenbrenner's Concept of "Proximal Process"
4. Social Capital Theory – James Coleman
5. Heuristic Model



# Father Involvement in Child Development

How does a father's presence or absence affect the development of his children?



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# Benjamin's Digital Story



## Benjamin's Digital Story (cont.)

- How did Benjamin use symbols in his story? How do the symbols help us understand his relationship with his father?
- What symbols resonated the most with you?
- How do you think the absence of his father impacted his development?
- What issues does Benjamin's story reveal about the relationship between father and son?
- In what way were you moved by the story and why? What did you take away from the story?

# Positive Impact of Fathers/Father Figures

According to Farrel (2015), children with involved, caring fathers:

- achieve better educational outcomes
- are more confident and emotionally secure
- have higher level cognitive and social skills
- have better self-control and improved self-esteem
- are less likely to experience depression
- have a greater capacity for empathy and experience more positive interactions with siblings
- are less likely to become involved in delinquent or criminal activity or substance use
- are more curious and secure, exhibiting positive gains in early language, exploratory behavior and problem solving skills.

# Positive Impact of Fathers/Father Figures (cont.)

- Fathers, more so than mothers, tend to engage with their children in physical, stimulating, playful activities.
  - such interactions teach children to regulate their feelings and behavior
  - the “roughhousing” that children engage in with their fathers teaches them how to manage aggression and physical contact, while still maintaining emotional control.
  - this roughhousing helps children to develop skills that are important throughout childhood and into adulthood – skills such as independence and risk taking.
- Positive father involvement in the family serves to improve the family’s financial status and self-sufficiency.
- In cases of maltreatment or CPS involvement, children with involved fathers experience shorter stays in foster care.

## Discussion Questions

- Do any of the impacts fathers have on their children surprise you?
- Which evidence would resonate best with the families and fathers you work with?

# Diversity of Fathers

- Racial and ethnic backgrounds
- Sexual orientations
- Mirrors increasingly multi-racial and multi-ethnic society
- Fathers of color
- Gay fathers

## Discussion Questions

- What experience have you had in working with gay fathers and fathers of color?
- How have you developed relationships with this population?
- What experience have you had in working with single fathers or young fathers?
- How have you engaged these fathers?