


Silberman School of Social Work



Module Five

Engaging Nonresident Fathers: Benefits and Barriers



**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

- Explain how nonresident fathers' involvement affects child well-being
- Describe the barriers to engaging nonresident fathers
- Explain theoretical perspectives for understanding nonresident father involvement.
- Describe how the life course perspective can be used to engage nonresident fathers.
- Describe practices for engaging nonresident fathers.

Current Research on Nonresident Fathers



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Never Married Nonresident Fathers

- Are less likely to pay child support
- Participate in visitation
- Take part in decision making process after separation from the child's mother when compared divorced fathers
- Carve involvement and identity with their children
- See their child(ren) as a source of pride and accomplishment
- See child(ren) as a medium for receiving and giving love
- Exhibit past stability in familial relationships

Benefits of Involvement in Child Well-being

- Father involvement linked to increased levels of child's social emotional well-being
- Academic achievement
- Behavioral adjustment
- Pro-social behavior

Theoretical Perspectives

- Bio-ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner)
- Systems approach – mapping interactions through systems approach that models nonresident involvement as a factor in shifting family feedback and boundary maintenance issues.
- Social Capital Theory
- Life Course Perspective

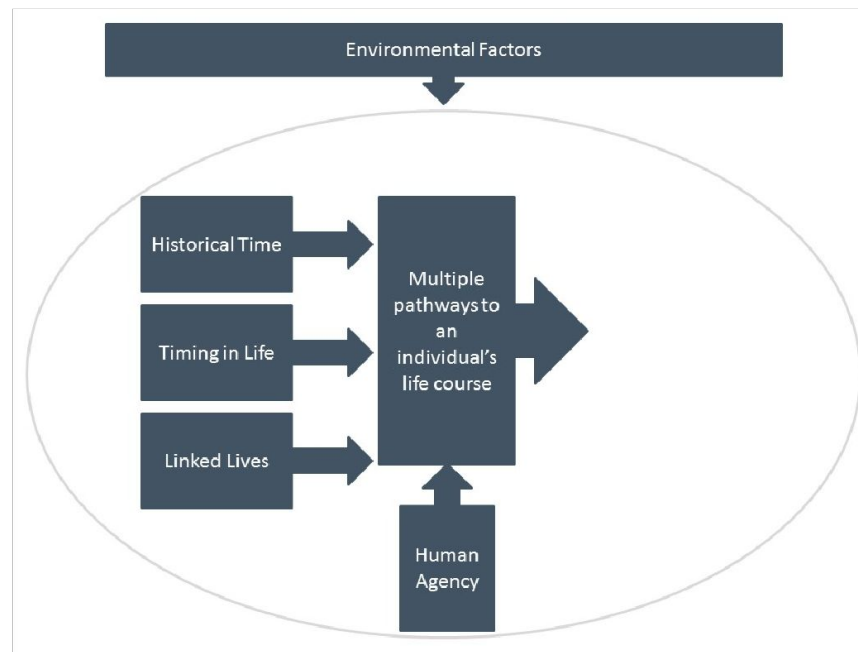
Life Course Perspective

- How do individuals change in a changing world?
- How do social events affect lives, and how do those individuals remake their worlds?

Life Course Perspective- Four Concepts

1. Human Agency
2. Linked Lives
3. Historical Time
4. Timing in Life

Life Course Perspective- Father Involvement



Source: Gomez, R. & Ryan, T. (2016). A developmental theory perspective on the child welfare system. [White paper]. Austin, TX: Upbring.

Jaydell's Digital Story



Jaydell's Digital Story- Group Discussion



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Life Course Perspective & Implications for Social Work Practice

- Help clients make sense of their unique life's journeys and to use that understanding to improve their current situations. Where appropriate, help them to construct a lifeline of interlocking trajectories.
- Try to understand the historical contexts of clients' lives and the ways that important historical events have influenced their behavior.
- Where appropriate, use life event inventories to get a sense of the level of stress in a client's life.



Life Course Perspective & Implications for Social Work Practice (cont.)

- Be aware of the potential to develop social work interventions that can serve as turning points that help individuals, families, communities, and organizations to get back on track.
- Recognize the ways that the lives of family members are linked across generations and the impact of circumstances in one generation on other generations.
- Recognize the ways lives are linked in the global economy.
- Use existing research on risk, protection, and resilience to develop prevention programs.
- When working with recent immigrant and refugee families, be aware of the age norms in their countries of origin.
- Be aware of the unique systems of support developed by members of various cultural groups, and encourage the use of those supports in times of crisis.
- Support and help to develop clients' sense of personal competence for making life choices.

Barriers to Engaging Non-Resident Fathers

- Poverty and limited financial means
- Social script of father as breadwinner and further reinforcement of this by public policy viewing fathers as primarily financial providers through Child Support Enforcement
- Failing to pay child support
- Interparental conflict between custodial mother and never married, nonresident father (Mother is “gatekeeper” – in some instances of child safety concerns or perception of father as incompetent, retaliation for nonpayment of child support, dissolution of romantic relationship)
- Living long distances away from children
- Limited access to social networks and paternal role models
- Mothers’ and fathers’ new romantic partners
- Multiple partner fertility

Barriers for Incarcerated Fathers

- Limitations on involvement with their children due to the nature of their incarceration
- Father has little choice regarding frequency of seeing chi(dren)
- Custodial mother may prevent children from visiting
- Mother may not be able to afford costs associated with visitation (i.e. transportation expenses, lodging, potential missed days of work which may result in lost wages)

Current Directions in Practice

- Engagement
- Assessment
- Intervention
- Termination
- Evaluation



Conceptualizing Fathering as Process

Figure 1.1 Transforming Expectations for Current Fathering Policies and Programs

	Conventional Approach	Progressive Approach
	Breadwinning and Marriage (Material Expectations)	Nurturance (Relational Expectations)
↑ Provider fathers (family men, married and residential)	Lack of current policies	Nurturance and healthy relationships as direct goals
⋮ Nonresident provider fathers	Single targeted policy to secure financial support	Nurturance, financial support, and healthy relationships as direct goals
⋮ Nonprovider fathers (unmarried, nonresident fathers, tangential links to jobs)	Multiple targeted policies to encourage employment and marriage	Nurturance, employment, and healthy relationships as direct goals
↓		

Source: Authors' figure.

Source: Marsiglio, W., & Roy, K. (2012). Nurturing dads: Social initiatives for contemporary fatherhood. American Sociological Association's Rose Series in Sociology. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.