

MODULE FIVE: ENGAGING NONRESIDENT FATHERS: BENEFITS AND BARRIERS

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.

Time: 4 hours

Materials:

Digital Story

Jaydell: https://youtu.be/37e4b5_ia28

PowerPoint

Recommended Textbook:

Cabrera, N.J., & Tamis-LeMonda, C.S. (Eds). (2013). *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives 2nd Edition*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Supplemental Resource:

Mazza, C., & Perry, A.R. (Eds.). (2017). *Fatherhood in America: Social work perspectives on a changing society*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.

Readings:

Perry, A.R., Lewis, S.N., & Langley, C. (2017). Never married, nonresident fathers. In Mazza, C., & Perry, A.R. (Eds.). *Fatherhood in America: Social work perspectives on a changing society* (pp. 91-107). Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.

Roy, K., & Smith, J. (2013). Nonresident fathers, kin and intergenerational parenting. In Cabrera, N.J., & Tamis-LeMonda, C.S. (Eds.), *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives 2nd Edition* (pp. 320-337). New York, NY: Routledge.

<p>Current Research on Nonresident Fathers</p>	<p>Review the following:</p> <p>Currently, there are large numbers of fathers that do not reside with their children. According to Roy & Smith (2013), the 2010 U.S. Census reported that 26% of all fathers did not reside with their children; however, today's nonresident fathers are more involved with their children than their counterparts twenty to thirty years ago.</p> <p>According to Perry, Lewis, & Langley (2017), never married, nonresident fathers tend to be younger, less educated, and less likely to have secure attachments to the labor market. They struggle with their paternal identity and roles as well as lack control over decisions that affect their child. Their parenting style is more permissive than authoritative. The current landscape describes nonresident fathers with limited resources, struggling to achieve self-sufficiency. The expectations for nonresident fathers are often unclear.</p> <p>Research shows that never married nonresident fathers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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 <p>Fathers with functional or warm co-parenting relationships with their children's mothers have been linked to greater levels of involvement. Their increased involvement is linked to healthy psychosocial functioning for both the father and their children.</p>
<p>Benefits of Involvement on Child Well-being</p>	<p>Benefits on the well-being and development of children when there is nonresident father involvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Father involvement linked to increased levels of child's social emotional well-being ▪ Academic achievement ▪ Behavioral adjustment ▪ Pro-social behavior

Theoretical Perspectives

It is not the quantity, but rather the quality of fatherhood involvement that is important. Positive parenting activities (e.g., reading, playing games, singing songs, etc.), as well as child support payments can benefit their children's developmental outcomes.

According to Brito, Barr, Rodriguez, & Schauffer (2012), poor developmental outcomes in children, including poor achievement in school, impaired cognitive function, aggression, and delinquency are linked to the absence of a father figure.

Introduce exploring nonresident fathers through their participation in their maternal and paternal kin networks, as well as close friends to help them secure support for their involvement in their children's lives.

Range of theories:

- 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

Discuss Life Course Perspective as a way in which nonresident fathers lives both shape and are shaped by social structure over time. Discuss the use of genograms as a visual tool to understand fathers' family history and relational dynamics.

Life Course is one of the few theoretical approaches that can address the experiences of individuals in families within the context of societal change.

Life Course theory emerged in the 1970's as researchers from various disciplines confronted major questions that continued to challenge social science. (Roy, 2014)

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

Introduce the Four Concepts of the Life Course Perspective:

1. Human Agency: How an individual reacts to an event will impact his development.

2. **Linked Lives:** Who is in the father's life will impact how he develops.
3. **Historical Time:** When in history a person lives will impact their developmental course.
4. **Timing in Life:** What age an event occurs during a person's life impacts their development.

Life Course Perspective - Four Concepts

1. **Human/Personal Agency:** Men demonstrate personal agency to make critical decisions to act as fathers and to navigate family relationships, through direct interaction, responsibility as providers or caregivers, or indirect access through communication.

Human agency involves the individual's choices about how they will respond to the environment and how they will use the resources available to them. Human agency is connected to competence both in the concrete way it is measured (i.e. outcomes, mental health, education, etc.) and in the developmental definition that defines competence as the ability to utilize resources in order to obtain a positive developmental outcome. Human agency determines one's ability to utilize these resources. (Roy, 2013)

Nonresident fathers need to negotiate even basic guidelines for contact and interaction. They have to more proactive in securing their father role.

Racial and Ethnic differences: In active nonresidential parenting, African American and Latino men are more engaged outside of shared residence than White men.

2. **Linked Lives:** Fathering is not an individual enterprise; it rests on a web of social arrangements.

One of the central propositions of the life course perspective is that of linked lives—that is, that people in salient relationships with each other, such as parents and children, occupy mutually influential interlocking developmental trajectories that extend throughout their lives (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003).

Negotiation with mothers is a key process by which nonresidential fathers can become involved and influence their children's well-being. Mothers act in a gate-keeping role.

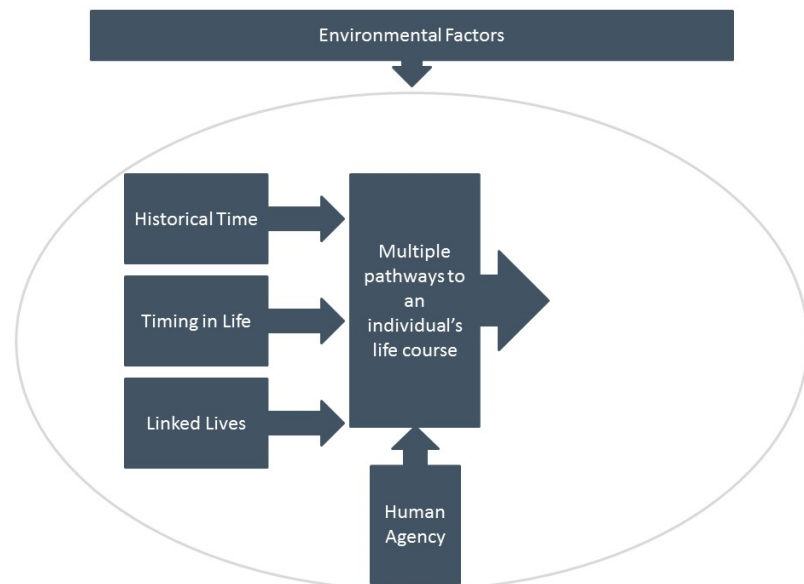
3. Historical Time/ Multiple Notions of Time: Fathers individual paths of development are wrapped in movement through historical time.

They are also linked to across generations to children, parents and grandparents. Family members tailor commitments from kin systems to developmental needs of both children and fathers.

4. Timing in Life/Context and Place: The timing of when a life event happens is important and influences the developmental path the individual takes (Elder, 1998).

Fathers and their kin and peer network may confront the difficulties of incarceration, unemployment or under employment, attendance at school, immigration to the United States, intervention of child support or paternity establishment through the courts. For disadvantaged fathers, the ecological constraints of local neighborhoods can directly shape relationships in kin systems. Each of these contextual challenges may appear as individual problems, but they also affect the ability of kin systems to function over time. (Roy, 2013)

The life course perspective focuses on how father involvement changes within the lives of the individual father.



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

**Group Discussion
& Digital Story:
Jaydell**

Show Jaydell's Digital Story. Divide students into pairs and ask them to think Jaydell in relation to the four concepts of the life course perspective.

Human/personal agency

- What has Jaydell shared in relation to the concept of human/personal agency? How has he been able to use resources?
- If you were working with Jaydell, what other questions might you ask to understand his relationships with his children's mothers?

Linked lives

- What do you know about Jaydell's salient relationships? What relationships were missing for him?
- If you were working with Jaydell, what other questions might you ask to understand his relationships with other people in his life? (e.g., length, stability, and disruption of these relationships)

Historical Time/Multiple Notions of Time

- What do family and formal systems provide support for Jaydell?
- What influence do you think critical life events have affected Jaydell?
- What questions might you ask to understand his relationships across time?

Time in Life/Context and place

- How do think you think having children at a young age has affected Jaydell?
- What questions might you ask to understand the life events that have influenced Jaydell's developmental path?

According to Hutchinson (2007), the life course perspective has many implications for social work practice, including the following:

- 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.

Barriers to Engaging Non-Resident Fathers

- 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.
- 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.

Due to the physical separation of fathers from their children, nonresident fathers are especially vulnerable to parental disengagement because they face a number of risk factors and challenges. (Perry, Lewis, & Langley, 2017). Nonresident fathers are in a position where staying involved with their children and in particular, having face-to-face contact with them, requires a greater amount of effort in comparison to resident fathers. (Berger & Langton, 2011).

Barriers to active involvement of nonresident fathers with their children (Perry, Lewis, & Langley, 2017):

- 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

<p>Current Directions in Practices to Engage Nonresident Fathers</p>	<p>instances of child safety concerns or perception of father as incompetent, retaliation for nonpayment of child support, dissolution of romantic relationship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living long distances away from children • Limited access to social networks and paternal role models • Mothers’ and fathers’ new romantic partners • Multiple partner fertility <p>According to Allen & Daly (2007), research has consistently indicated that the quality of the relationship between nonresident fathers and mother and child is “the most crucial mediating variable for child development... (Amato, 1998; Kelly, 2000; Marsiglio et al., 2000)” (p. 17). It is also important to note that the quality of the relationship between nonresident father and the mother, as well as the mother-child relationship, is related to the quality of the child-father relationship.</p> <p>Incarcerated fathers, in particular, face barriers specific to the limitations of their circumstances. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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) <p>Barriers inhibiting at-risk fathers’ involvement in programs span across public housing assistance, labor opportunities and training programs, and child support (Brown & Manning, 2012).</p> <p>Perry, Lewis, & Langley (2017) provide recommendations for working with nonresident fathers:</p> <p>Engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire and train facilitators with a passion for working with fathers and demonstrate buy-in • Recruit and retain fathers into parenting, co-parenting, and family strengthening programs by spending time to develop recruitment strategies to identify and mitigate potential obstacles before enrolling fathers
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- Engage in active recruiting and provide recruiting incentives if possible. Follow up immediately with interested potential participants.
- Connect with fathers who are difficult to reach by utilizing interpersonal exchanges through key informants, word of mouth, and community-based programs
- Appropriately balance the length and intensity of pilot programs against potential for attrition

Assessment:

- Collect data at the individual (assessing fathers’ parental capacity—for nonresident fathers, it’s important that practitioners that physical separation from children is likely to limit engagement opportunities by nonresident fathers) and organizational level
- Assessments should consider co-parenting expectations of mother and father and investigate presence of other adult caregivers in the child’s life
- Organizations that offer services to fathers should assess for their father friendliness.

Intervention

- Including fathers in family strengthening and parent training efforts
- Incorporate appropriate population-specific teaching methods and materials in programmatic interventions
- Tailor intervention efforts to meet specific cultural, social, and familial needs of those being served
- Integrate content and activities to improve fathers’ economic standing, understanding, and empathy
- Find ways to minimize interparental conflict by teaching ways for fathers to effectively resolve disagreements and exhibit warmth and support for children and mothers
- Train fathers in age-appropriate child development and authoritative, generative parenting to encourage fathers to become more involved in activities with their children and nurture their relationships

Termination

- Provide opportunities for expression of emotions regarding end of intervention and assist fathers in managing their emotions
- Reinforce gains that fathers make during intervention
- Practitioners and program administrators are recommended to partner with local human services organizations and businesses

to establish collaborative relationships that will serve as referral resources to enhance fathers' parenting capacity

Evaluation

- Adhere to intervention protocols, employ experimental research designs featuring large samples to achieve desired level of statistical power, utilizing valid and reliable measures
- Conduct evaluations by independent external evaluation

According to a May 23-24, 2012 (Brown & Manning, 2012) panel from the national conference “Fathers and Fathering in Contemporary Contexts,” there is a need to expand definitions of fatherhood and conceptualize fathering as a process.

Figure 1.1 Transforming Expectations for Current Fathering Policies and Programs

	Conventional Approach	Progressive Approach
	Breadwinning and Marriage (Material Expectations)	Nurturance (Relational Expectations)
<p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Provider fathers (family men, married and residential)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	Lack of current policies	Nurturance and healthy relationships as direct goals
<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Nonresident provider fathers</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	Single targeted policy to secure financial support	Nurturance, financial support, and healthy relationships as direct goals
<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Nonprovider fathers (unmarried, nonresident fathers, tangential links to jobs)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	Multiple targeted policies to encourage employment and marriage	Nurturance, employment, and healthy relationships as direct goals

Source: Authors' figure.

**Overview of
Module Six**

**Engaging Fathers
Involved in the
Child Welfare
System**

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.

Moving forward, there needs to be a reframing of expectations of fathering policies and programs. Shifting from material expectations to relational expectations requires looking at:

- Nurturance and healthy relationships as direct goals
- Nurturance, financial support, and healthy relationships as direct goals
- Nurturance, employment, and healthy relationships direct goals.

Digital Story

Carlos Boyet:

http://www.nrcpfc.org/nrcpfc/digital_stories/PP_Boyet_C/index.htm

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Berger, L.M. & Langton, C.E. (2011). Young disadvantaged men as fathers. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 635(1), 56–75. doi: /10.1177/0002716210393648

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