

Fathers' Involvement with Children: Perspectives from Developing Countries

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Fathers and men in families represent one of the most important—yet in many cases untapped—resources for children's well-being. In the U.S., we have seen a renewed interest in fathers. In many other parts of the world, however, social service programs continue to target mothers and children, ignoring the role of men in the lives of children. A new movement led by agencies such as UNICEF, the Population Council, and the Consultative Group for Early Childhood Care and Development is attempting to rectify this situation with conferences, publications, and program initiatives to include men, but these efforts are small and are often perceived as threatening by groups who have struggled long and hard to bring women's issues to the forefront (Engle, 1995a; Engle & Alatorre Rico, 1994; Evans, 1995; Richardson, 1995).

Whereas a wealth of research on fathers' involvement with children has appeared in the U.S. in the past 20 years, literature from developing countries is much more limited. Why might Americans find it important to understand the role and influence of fathers in other cultures? If we are concerned about the welfare

of children in general, we must recognize that in the next decade, 95% of births will be to families in the developing world (United Nations ACC/SCN, 1992). In the U.S., the proportion of children from ethnically diverse populations is increasing, at least in selected states, such as California. Some of these groups, particularly those who are recent immigrants, will have different views of the appropriate role and behavior of fathers than the majority culture. Services directed toward families would benefit from a greater understanding of these conceptions of fatherhood and how they vary according to level of acculturation, socioeconomic status, and cultural background. As experts in developmental psychology and related disciplines, we can make

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a significant contribution to research in this area, and it may be our responsibility to do so. As has been argued, a high percentage of the professional resources in psychology are in the U.S., where the problems facing children may be less daunting than in other parts of the world (Nsamenang, 1992a).

In discussing fathers, cross-culturally, it is necessary to expand the concept to men as they function within families. Although the father role (*Pater*) is recognized in all cultures, the person who plays this role may or may not be the biological father. Responsibility for children may fall to the mother's brother (Townsend, in press, in Botswana); or be taken or shared by older male kin such as the grandfather (Richardson, 1995, in Vietnam). A "social father" may take responsibility for all of the children a woman has, even though some were biologically the children of another man.

Current economic instability in both developed and developing parts of the world and the inability of institutions and families of residence to increase their contributions to children's well-being have led some governments and representatives of national and international development agencies to a search for additional sources of support for children (Bruce, Lloyd, & Leonard, with Engle & Duffy, 1995). Agencies have tried previously to improve the welfare of children by increasing male income, but changes in children's nutritional status and health were often far less than expected (Marek, 1992). Recently, agencies, recognizing that women are more likely than men to use their income to support children (e.g., Jackson, 1996), have sponsored income-generating projects for women, such as the Grameen Bank (Todd, 1996). This approach has many benefits for both women and children, but it may place too many expectations on already overburdened women, perhaps reducing their personal well-being or their ability to care for their children (McGuire & Popkin, 1990). Thus international agencies are

motivated to increase understanding of men's economic contribution to children.

Whether or not the father lives with the family does not always determine his economic contribution or involvement with children. In the Caribbean, for example, many men contribute to their children's support but have only visiting relationships with their children's mother (Brown, Bloomfield, & Ellis, 1994). On the other hand, fathers may be co-resident in the household but not provide economic support for the family due to poverty, lack of employment, or inappropriate spending patterns (e.g., alcoholism or drug addiction).

The topics discussed here represent those which are of interest to national and international development agencies. They are not always congruent with the concerns of the research community examining the effects of fathers on children or patterns of father involvement. This report cannot do justice to the complexity of many of the issues concerning the effects of fathers on children or variations in men's role as fathers; rather, it attempts to describe the major areas of concern of the development community and to suggest possible program strategies from both the U.S. literature and international perspectives, where available. Several reviews of fathering have appeared recently that discuss more extensively the effects of fathers on children (e.g., Lamb, 1997; Parke, 1995, 1996; Thompson & Calkins, 1996).

This report has four sections:

- (1) descriptions of the status of men in families from statistics and case studies;
- (2) analysis of some of the possible effects of fathers on young children;
- (3) some theoretical perspectives on variations in father involvement, both between and within cultures; and
- (4) examples of program options and recommendations.

Fathers around the World

THE STATUS OF FATHERS IN FAMILIES

More is known about where fathers don't live than where they in fact reside. Over the past decade the prevalence of female-headed households (primarily single-mother) have been tracked in a number of countries. As Table 1 shows, the percent of female-headed households in developing countries at any one time ranges from about 10% to 25% and has increased gradually over the last decade (Bruce et al., 1995). The highest rates of female headship are reported in the African countries of Botswana (46%), Swaziland (40%), Zimbabwe (33%), and the Caribbean countries such as Barbados (44%) and Grenada (43%). Some rates in the developed countries are equally high, ranging from 38% in Norway, 30% in Germany, and 32% in the United States (United Nations, 1995). Significant ethnic group differences are reported within the U.S., with 23% of Latino families, 13% of Anglo families, and 44% of African American families headed by women (Perez & Duany, 1992).

Table 1

Trends in percent of households headed by women *de jure* (usual) from census data

REGION/COUNTRY	EARLIER DATE	PERCENT	LATER DATE	PERCENT
Asia				
Hong Kong	1971	23.5	1991	25.7
Indonesia	1971	16.3	1980	14.2
Japan	1980	15.2	1990	17.0
Korea	1980	14.7	1990	15.7
Philippines	1970	10.8	1990	11.3
Latin America and the Caribbean				
Brazil	1980	14.4	1989	20.1
Costa Rica	1984	17.5	1992	20.0
Panama	1980	21.5	1990	22.3
Peru	1981	22.1	1991	17.3
Uruguay	1975	21.0	1985	23.0
Venezuela	1981	21.8	1990	21.3
Sub-Saharan Africa				
Burkina Faso	1975	5.1	1985	9.7
Cameroon	1976	13.8	1987	18.5
Mali	1976	15.1	1987	14.0

Source: Adapted from Bruce et al. (1995)

These statistics reflect, in some cases, different patterns of family formation than are found in the Western model of a nuclear family. In Botswana, which has a female headship rate among the highest in the world, mothers typically live with their natal families and do not form a household unit of their own until their partners are well into their forties. Even though support is provided according to custom by the mother's brother, these families are still reported as female-headed (Townsend, in press).

Two factors may influence both family formation and the role of men in families: (1) urbanization and (2) the employment of women and underemployment of men. Urbanization has consequences for family size and configuration and types of child care (Engle, Menon, Garrett, & Slack, 1997). It is a characteristic of industrialized regions, which are 77% to 78% urban. South America is as urban as the more industrialized regions, Northern Africa is about half urban, and the rest of Africa and Asia are between 28% and 33% urban (United Nations, 1995). Urban populations are growing in all areas, however, with the highest growth rates in sub-Saharan Africa (5%) and Asia (4%). Some sub-Saharan countries have urban growth rates of 6%, which would result in a doubling of the urban population every decade (United Nations, 1995).

The employment of women (aged 15 and older) in both urban and rural areas has increased in the past two decades in all areas except sub-Saharan Africa and eastern Asia (in the U.S. from 40% to 54%; in Latin America 22% to 34%; in Southern Asia 25% to 44%), whereas the employment of men (aged 15 and older) has declined significantly everywhere, except in central Asia (e.g., in the U.S. from 81% to 75%, in Latin America 85% to 82%, in Southern Asia 88% to 78% [United Nations, 1995]). Table 2 shows examples of these changes in other countries (United Nations, 1995). The changing gender composition of the workforce is likely to have significant effects for both men's and women's roles in developing countries (Evans, 1995).

Table 2

Economic activity rates of persons aged 15 and over, each sex, 1970–1990 (Percent of adults who are active)

	1970		1990	
	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN
Developed Regions				
Eastern Europe	56	79	58	74
Western Europe	37	78	51	72
Other developed	40	81	54	75
Africa				
Northern Africa	8	82	21	75
Sub-Saharan Africa	57	90	53	83
Latin America and Caribbean				
Latin America	22	85	34	82
Caribbean	38	81	49	72
Asia and the Pacific				
Eastern Asia	57	86	56	80
South-eastern Asia	49	87	54	81
Southern Asia	25	88	44	78
Central Asia	55	76	58	79
Western Asia	22	83	30	77
Oceania	47	88	48	76

Source: Adapted from United Nations (1995).

FATHERS IN FOUR CULTURES:

EXAMPLES OF TRADITION AND CHANGE

“Father” encompasses a variety of beliefs and behaviors in different cultures. To illustrate this point, we describe four patterns of fathering: in West Africa, in China, hunter-gatherers in the Central African Republic, and Latinos in Mexico and in the U.S. These cases were selected in part because of the availability of good descriptive data. They represent a range of cultures and economic conditions, family types, and fathering behaviors. In three of these cases, the conception of fatherhood is changing, resulting in new behaviors and sometimes new confusion.

West Africa. Nsamenang (1987, 1992b) describes the beliefs and behaviors of fathers in Cameroon, which he feels characterize fathers in many rural agricultural areas of West Africa (about 80% of the population). The study of fathers has been neglected here, he claims—as in many other parts of the world.

Children are reared in large extended families, with a clan-based kinship centered around a polygynous headman who has tremendous

power. The West African father has great social status and presence in the family, but he has little parental involvement. Nonetheless, his role is extremely important. He is the person who confers on his children social connections with the clan. The society is characterized by strict gender rules whereby authority is vested in the parents, particularly the father, and women hold a subordinate position in the society (Nsamenang, 1992a).

Children are wished for with a passion. They are the father’s guarantee of a lineage succession and they are his wealth. Children are seen as belonging to the kin group, however, not simply to the mother and father. They are like flowers planted in a field and are to be watched over and raised by all. Therefore, there is a long tradition of child fostering in which some children are given to other members of the kin group to raise. After weaning, the parents play a smaller role, and multiple caregivers may play a major role in bringing up the child (Nsamenang, 1992a).

The responsibility for feeding the children rests with the children’s mother. Speaking of his own group, Nsamenang (1992a) comments, “Because tradition places the responsibility to feed the family on mothers, the Nso father is not, and has never been, the sole provider. As a result, the Nso mothers . . . do not expect nor wish to be totally maintained by their husbands. It is not that husbands are uninterested in the welfare of their families, but that they are not socially held responsible for the family’s daily food security” (p. 329). Not only do fathers not support their children, they try to monitor and claim the income of their wives. Traditionally, men have complete control of the family, of their wives and their earnings. In fact, men increase their wealth by having more wives, who are “both a sign of wealth and the main means (labor) for generating it” (Nsamenang, 1987, p. 284).

Fathers have little to do with very young children. In fact, taboos prevent fathers from frequent contacts with infants. Fathers rarely show nurturance toward children. Their primary role

is as disciplinarian. It is believed that children have evil tendencies and that they must be punished in order to keep them from disgracing the family (Nsamenang, 1987). When children are old enough to communicate verbally, fathers may tell folktales around the fire to them. Later, the boys learn from their fathers through shared work. Mothers compete for the father's favor on their children's behalf. The mother is the main child rearer; the father's role is to provide advice and discipline in difficult situations.

This pattern is changing, however. With the influx of Western values, particularly in urban areas, men are pursuing success and spending almost no time with their children (Nsamenang, 1987). This is not because they don't love them, but "because they are uncertain how to father" (p. 287). Therefore they are not able to do the kinds of things that they "had been expected to do as guides, companions, and models for their children" (p. 287).

A similar concern about the effects of urbanization applies in Botswana (Townsend, in press). The more traditional Botswanan pattern of support for children was that the elder men in the woman's family would demand the labor of the children's father for family support, and they would then use the fruits of the labor to support the children of these younger men. When men move to cities, they establish families that are less controlled by elders and are less likely to provide labor to their wives' families and to the elder men. As this pattern of labor and income allocation changes, it is unclear how much urbanized men will take on the responsibility for supporting their own children.

Urban China: Inner Mongolia Huhot. Jankowiak (1992) describes the traditional pattern of fathering in this part of China and the changes which have occurred with urbanization. In traditional families fathers were stern and distant. They were responsible for the discipline and for the economic support of the child, but not for the nurturance. Mothers were emotionally nurturant and they bound their children to them as a protection against the power of the mother-in-

law. The strongest bond was the mother-child connection; children respected fathers, but adored their mothers. Although fathers loved their children, they believed that a circumscribed role was necessary.

Observations of father-child interactions among a sample of urban men revealed almost no father-holding in the first 6 months and little interaction in the first year. Men whose wives worked were more active, although not willingly. Both men and women believed that men were incapable of handling infants. The few men observed to hold an infant appeared to be uncomfortable. By the time the child was 13 to 36 months old, more interaction between father and child was observed, particularly conversation. In all cases, the mother was the primary caregiver, and the father would do child care only if the mother was not present. Wives complained about the lack of husband support in housework but not in child care (Jankowiak, 1992).

Urbanization in China has changed some of these expectations. Fathers, particularly college-educated men, see a new importance in intimate relations between father and child. Many express the desire to be a friend of the child rather than a stern moral authority to be feared. Influencing these changes are the increase in women's work outside the home, small living spaces (very small apartments), and a cultural shift toward valuing the closeness of father and son (Jankowiak, 1992).

This research was undertaken before the institution of China's one-child policy—a decree whose effects are more apparent in urban than in rural areas. Nevertheless, the one-child policy has brought about dramatic differences in the attitudes of all family members toward children. One witnesses fathers in urban areas deeply involved with their single offspring, holding and caring for them with pride and affection (C. Breaux, personal communication, 1993).

Aka Pygmies. Hewlett (1987, 1992) has made famous the most nurturant fathers yet observed. "Aka fathers provide more direct infant care than fathers in any other known society"

(1992, p. 169). The Aka are hunter-gatherer-traders living in the tropical forest regions of the southern Central African Republic and the northern People's Republic of the Congo. Although this is a small and probably declining population, they represent one end of the dimension of fathering behavior, thus providing a perspective in evaluating fathering in other societies.

Observations of the pattern of interactions between 15 fathers and their infants were made over an extended period (Hewlett, 1987). In camp, fathers were observed to be holding their infants 20% of the time. They were observed to hug, kiss, nuzzle, clean, and gently play with the infants. These patterns differ from other hunter-gatherer societies, in which fathers have been observed to hold their infants only 3% to 4% of the time (e.g., observations by Hamilton, 1981, of Australian aborigines; Hewlett, 1987; West & Konner, 1986, of Kalahari Desert foragers [!Kung]), although this rate is higher than in many agricultural communities (Munroe & Munroe, 1992).

Interviews with Aka adolescents suggested that the mother is viewed as the primary caregiver, but that there is no difference in amount of nurturance or emotional support received from mothers and fathers. In fact, adolescents tended to report that the mother was more likely to be punitive than the father (Hewlett, 1987). These findings contrast with research on American adolescents, who report much more punitive and restrictive behavior from fathers than mothers (Hewlett, 1987).

Latino families. The more traditional view of the Mexican American family has been of the authoritarian man and the dependent, submissive woman (Bozett & Hanson, 1991), determined by the machismo values of the man's strength, independence, virility, and dominance. According to this *traditional model*, "the father is the ultimate authority figure who avoids intimacy with other family members to maintain their respect. His primary responsibilities are to provide for his family, act as a strict disciplinarian of his children, and represent the family in activi-

ties with the outside world" (Kiselica, 1995, p. 260). His wife's role is to be submissive and to provide for the needs of the children and for their warmth and affection (Mirande, 1988).

A similar definition of fatherhood and masculinity emerged from a study of young men in the favelas, or squatter settlements, in Brazil (Barker, Loewenstein, & Ribeiro, 1995). Fatherhood is defined as financial provision, and there is little acceptance of the more "feminine" roles of nurturance and expression of emotion; in fact, these are associated with homosexuality and are eschewed. With manhood comes respect, learning to win and lose with dignity, supporting a family, sexual conquest, and fearlessness. These ideals may be impossible for young men to realize, given the high rate of unemployment and lack of opportunities.

It has been suggested that the traditional model of Latino families is not as universal as often thought, particularly in the face of urbanization and increased acculturation. An *emergent model* (Mirande, 1988) describes the family as more egalitarian and the power of the man as less absolute. Fathers may be more nurturant than expected. In one study of urban Mexican parents, mothers and fathers were observed interacting with their school-aged children, with warmth, affection, and explaining behavior; in fact, fathers were more playful and companionable than mothers. However, they were much more likely to attend to boys than girls (Bronstein, 1984). Other observers have reported changes in the family's external orientation toward increased independence and active recreation, whereas the internal functioning (moral-religious emphasis) was less likely to change (Rueschenberg & Buriel, 1995).

Effects of Fathers on Children

Three of the contributions men can make to children which are recognized by development agencies are (1) building a caring relationship with children, (2) taking economic respon-

sibility for children, and (3) reducing the chances of fathering a child outside a partnership with the child's mother.

BUILDING A CARING RELATIONSHIP

Fathers' involvement. "Father involvement" commonly refers to the establishment of "warm and close" relationships with children, which can be accomplished with relatively little time investment. The key ingredient appears to be positive emotion and attention toward children. The three components of fathering considered to be of crucial importance are interaction, availability to children, and taking responsibility for children (Lamb, Pleck, Carnov, & Levine, 1987). Although infants show preferences for mothers over fathers, whether fathers are involved in caretaking or not, infants do become attached to their fathers by the end of the first year of life, even if the father spends relatively little time with them (Cox, Owen, & Henderson, 1992).

In the U.S. and Europe, studies have reported that fathers who were involved with their children contribute much to their children's intellectual, social, and emotional development (Clarke-Stewart, 1978, 1980; Lamb, 1997). The quality of the interaction (the father's sensitivity to the toddler's needs) was found to be a better predictor of children's cognitive performance than the overall amount of time spent with the child (Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1985). Attachment to the father can have substantial benefits for children. Children who were securely attached to at least one parent (mother or father) were more socially responsive than those not attached to either (Main & Weston, 1981). A secure attachment to the father can contribute to the child's emotional and social well-being and can even offset a poor attachment to the mother.

There is a need for similar studies from developing countries. For men in many parts of the world, this "caring relationship" with an infant or young child is a novel expectation. One conclusion, for example, from a seminar in Lesotho in 1991 was that interactions of African

men with their infants are rare, accidental, and considered to be of little importance (van Leer, 1992). On the other hand, fathers and grandfathers do interact with older sons for training. Fathers in Zimbabwe were surprised when they were told that they "should" play with their children from birth onward to ensure balanced development; the fathers expected to wait until the children could talk (van Leer, 1992). No evidence to support this recommendation for Zimbabwe was provided.

Fathers' time in infant and young child care. Fathers spend significantly less time in child care than mothers over a wide age range (1 month to 16 years) and on a large number of measures (basic care, holding, reading, verbal interactions) in a variety of cultures (Collins & Russell, 1991; Coltrane, 1996; Russell & Russell, 1987). A summary of ethnographic reports from 186 cultures concluded that the percent of cultures in which fathers had "regular, close relationships" with infants was 2%, and with young children 5%. Yet fathers in many more cultures (32% for infants, 52% for young children) were in frequent close proximity with their children (Barry & Paxson, 1971).

Mother-child and father-child contact has been observed in four cultures: Black Caribs in Belize, Logoli in Kenya, Newar in Nepal, and Samoans in American Samoa (Munroe & Munroe, 1992). Father care of infants was relatively uncommon; on average, fathers were present in 11% of the observations of the infant and they held the children in 1% of the observations. Fathers were relatively uninvolved in caregiving and tended to maintain physical distance. Even where child care is shared, as among the Efe of Zaire, the mother is still the major caregiver (Tronick, Morelli, & Ivey, 1992). Similar differences have been reported in many countries (Bruce et al., 1995).

Although such gender differences in time allocation to child care are common, it is important to note that fathers are spending time in child care—in some cases, substantial time. In squatter settlements in Karachi, Pakistan, for

example, in 75% of observations of children being carried, the man was the carrier, even when the woman was present (Jahn & Aslam, 1995). How these patterns change with urbanization and increased maternal employment (and decreased paternal employment) will be important to investigate; it is likely that new expectations for father involvement will emerge as alternate child caregivers are unavailable and the need for ongoing child care for older children increase. Moreover, time spent in child care may not necessarily be a good indicator of investment or involvement by fathers.

Father absence. Frequency of father absence varies considerably among cultural groups (Coltrane, 1988). In the study described above (Munroe & Munroe, 1992), for two of the societies, between 30% and 50% of the fathers of children under age 5 were absent, compared to only 4% and 15% absence in the other two cultures. In Nicaragua 50% of low-income urban mothers of children 12 to 18 months reported that the child's father did not live with them full time (Engle, 1995b), and half of those reported no contact with the father. On the other hand, in urban and rural Guatemala in three different samples, about 15% of mothers of young children were unpartnered (Engle, 1991; Engle & Pederson, 1989; Engle & Smidt, 1996). Some of the factors influencing these patterns are discussed in the next section.

If they have contact with their children, even nonresident fathers contribute to positive outcomes for children under some conditions. Children in American low-income urban black families who have a father or father substitute either within or outside the home differ consistently from children in father-absent families (Furstenberg, 1976). The children who had father contact had fewer behavioral problems, more sense of their ability to do things, and higher self-esteem. Father contact also had a positive effect on cognitive development, especially in boys. Even carrying the father's name, if the parents were unmarried, was associated with higher levels of cognitive development

(Furstenberg & Talvitie, 1979). Similarly, in a study of the 8-year-old children of 333 adolescent mothers in Barbados, children rated as performing better in school had more involved fathers. This relationship held even among nonresident fathers (Russell-Brown, Engle, & Townsend, 1992).

One effect of father absence on boys may be the cognitive concept of sex-role that typically forms in adolescence (Munroe & Munroe, 1992). If the adolescent boy, in developing his construct of masculinity and fatherhood, does not have the opportunity to observe a man or father on a daily basis, his definition may be limited to a few visible characteristics such as appear in sources like the media, rather than the more complex concept he would have developed with more exposure. Unfortunately, because physical prowess and aggressiveness are the common visible attributes of men, these characteristics may come to define masculinity for father-absent boys.

It is important to note that father presence is not always the optimum situation for children. Certainly in the case where the father is the perpetrator of family violence, his presence has an emotionally detrimental rather than positive effect (see below on the possible cost of father presence).

PROVIDING ECONOMIC SUPPORT

Female-headed households. Fathers' material support of their children constitutes a second contribution to their development. Many households, however, are female-headed, and the significance of this for children's well-being has been debated in the literature. The general conclusion has been that the presence of the father's income tends to be associated with improved child status (Population Council/ICRW, 1990); and female-headed households with children are generally poorer. There is considerable variation, however, depending on the social and economic circumstance of the female head—i.e., whether her status is the result of abandonment, male migration, unpartnered childbearing, etc. [Quisumbing, 1995]). Children in female-head-

ed households are not always more poorly nourished than those in male-headed households. In urban Guatemala, for example, children in female-headed households (a small percent) were found to be better nourished than those in families in which both biological parents were in the home (Engle, 1995b). And in a low-income urban setting in Nicaragua, although there was a positive effect of father's income on child nutrition status, this effect was not significant when house quality and mother's education were taken into account.

Data from Latin America and Africa seem to reflect these different patterns. Demographic and health surveys in three Latin American and three West African countries were used to compare the effects of mothers' and fathers' incomes on child nutritional status (Desai, 1991). In the three Latin American countries, children of single mothers were more likely to be malnourished than those of mothers with partners, but when differences in socioeconomic status were controlled for, this difference disappeared. Children born to mothers in consensual unions were more undernourished than those born in formal marriages, even controlling for socioeconomic factors—a difference that was particularly marked in urban areas.

In contrast, in the West Africa countries, the mother's marital status had little impact on the child's nutritional status (Desai, 1991). In several cultures children in single-parent, female-headed households appeared to be advantaged compared to those where both parents were present. In Kenya and Malawi, despite lower incomes, a smaller percentage of children in female-headed households were malnourished than in male-headed households (Kennedy & Peters, 1992). In Botswana, children in female-headed households received more education than children in male-headed households (Kossoudji & Mueller, 1983). These results from Africa are consistent with an observation in Cameroon, that it is the mother, not the father, who is held responsible for feeding and caring for the children (Nsamenang, 1992b). Overall,

in Asian and African samples, a relationship between female-headship and poverty was not supported (Quisumbing, 1995).

Male and female income shares. A few studies have illustrated the positive effect of the father's occupation and income on children. In Saudi Arabia, for example, lower father occupation was related to higher diarrheal rates (Al-Mazrou, Aziz, & Khalil, 1991). In contrast to most studies, diarrheal rate was not related to mother's literacy. In Guatemala, men's education was associated with more gender-equitable food-sharing (Engle & Nieves, 1993); in Pakistan to better health for children (Jahn & Aslam, 1995).

A number of studies have shown that although the father's income may have a positive effect on food expenditure and child well-being, the effect may be smaller than it would be were the income under the mother's control (Buvinic, Valenzuela, Molina, & Gonzales, 1992, in Chile; Engle, 1993, in Guatemala; Hoddinott & Haddad, 1995, in Cote d'Ivoire; Thomas, 1990, in Brazil). It has been suggested that women may be more likely to perceive children's needs and to develop stronger attachment to the child; moreover, social practice may dictate that women are responsible for purchasing or obtaining food for children (Engle, 1990).

Even within a culture fathers may vary in their contribution to the household. In Guatemala in two-parent families, for example, it was the percent of father income, not the absolute amount, that was positively associated with child nutritional status (Engle, 1993). A father who contributes a high percent of his income for household food expenses may have a larger commitment to his children.

Possible cost of father presence. As noted above, father presence is not always a positive force in either women's or children's lives. Violence against women affects one in four women in Latin America (Larrain & Rodriguez, 1993). In a collection of studies from around the world, domestic violence rates ranged from 20% to 60% (Heise, Pitanguy, & Germain, 1994). It is possible that abuse of the child will be more com-

mon if a man is present in the family (e.g., Parke & Neville 1987). Women may choose poverty over a dangerous living situation; by forming a female-headed household they may improve both their lot and that of their children.

In addition, the father's consumption of food and resources may drain the family budget, particularly if he spends the family's funds for personal items, like alcohol or cigarettes (e.g., Hoddinott & Haddad, 1995). Such practices may even increase women's workload (Engle, Hurtado, & Ruel, 1997). In Nicaragua, noncontributing men may be asked to leave a household (Loftin, 1993).

AVOIDING UNPARTNERED FERTILITY

A third contribution that fathers can make to their children is to avoid fathering a child outside a partnership with the child's mother. Several studies in developing countries have suggested that, as in the U.S., unpartnered relationships resulting in childbearing, particularly among younger women, tend not to persist. In Chile, for example, a study found that 42% of fathers of babies born to adolescent women were no longer providing child support of any kind six years after the child's birth (Buvinic et al., 1992). In Barbados, 77% of a sample of adolescent mothers were not living with the child's father eight years after the child's birth, and 50% of the children's fathers no longer contributed to the child's support (Russell-Brown et al., 1992).

Whereas less traditional cultures encourage use of contraception and provide sex education to prevent unpartnered childbearing, more traditional cultures attempt to protect young women through a combination of strict religious constraints on sexuality, as in Latino societies (Abrahamse, Morrison, & Waite, 1988; Mirande, 1988) and very early marriage, as in South Asia (Richardson, 1995). When pregnancies do occur, families in Latino families put great pressure on the couple to form a relationship (DeAnda & Becerra, 1989). However, increased urbanization and changes in acculturation may undermine these supports. In a rural Guatemalan communi-

ty, the rate of unpartnered fertility has doubled in the past decade—from 6% to 12% (Engle & Smidt, 1996). In the U.S., among teen mothers, 67% of traditional Latinos were married, compared to only 44% of nontraditional Latinos (DeAnda & Becerra, 1989).

Theories of Father Involvement: Why Are Some Men More Responsible Than Others?

Various theories have been proposed to explain differences in men's willingness to support their children emotionally and economically. Four such theoretical perspectives can be distinguished:

- (1) evolutionary-biological,
- (2) economic,
- (3) ecological, and
- (4) cultural and religious.

THE EVOLUTIONARY-BIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Evolutionary biologists examine how individuals in any species adapt to their environment. And the success of that adaptation is measured by reproductive success, i.e., the number of offspring (Hewlett, 1992). For humans, reproductive success includes finding and keeping a spouse, having children, and rearing them to reproductive maturity. Social scientists, who recognize the importance of biological and cultural interactions, label their approach "biosocial," in contrast to the purely biological explanations proposed by socio-biology (Daly & Wilson, 1988).

This theoretical perspective yields two testable hypotheses: (1) "Since there is a higher cost for female reproduction than male, females are predicted to invest more in parental effort than are males. Males on the other hand tend to invest more time in mating effort, and therefore compete with other males over available females" (Hewlett, 1992, p. xvi). Some males

therefore have several wives, whereas others have none. (2) The closer the father perceives his children to be to him genetically or the more certain he is that he is the biological father, the greater his investment.

A number of studies on various human groups and one primate study provided tests of these hypotheses (Hewlett, 1992). Neither received unequivocal support. For example, men with power and resources spent more time both mating and parenting than those with fewer resources among the Ifaluk (Betzig & Turke, 1992).

And in a test of the paternal certainty hypothesis using data from primates, Smuts and Gubernick (1992) compared the degree to which male primates held and touched infants as a function of the degree of monogamy of the species. A monogamous pattern would result in a closer genetic relation between the male and the infant than a multiple partner pattern. No significant differences in degree of male holding were found between nonmonogamous and monogamous groups, suggesting that at least for primates, paternal certainty (as would be found in the monogamous groups) was unrelated to involvement with the infant. On the other hand, Keddy Hector, Seyfarth, and Raleigh (1989) demonstrated among vervets that males increase their attention to infants when the infant's mother could observe them. They suggest that in this group, males cared for infants in order to enhance their chances of mating with the infant's mother.

AN ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

An economic perspective may also help explain father investment. In Chile, for example, a father was 5 times more likely to support his child if he worked (Buvinic et al., 1992). Further, economic contribution appears to be linked to marital stability. For example, in the same Chilean study, a father was 17 times more likely to contribute to his child's maintenance if he was married to the mother. This appears to be a reciprocal relationship because both men and women are more likely to stay married if the

father generates income (Buvinic et al., 1992).

Lack of sufficient earnings to support the family was found to increase family abandonment in other low-income Latin American settings (Kaztman, 1992). In a pilot study in Jamaica, the Caribbean Child Development Center concluded that men are absent, in part, because they cannot provide, owing to poor job opportunities (Brown et al., 1994). And the only other acceptable role is as disciplinarian, nurturance being culturally unacceptable. When the father can't support his children, the mother may become unhappy; he may then leave the household and only contribute sporadically, initiating a visiting relationship (Brown et al., 1994).

AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

Hewlett (1992) has proposed a model to explain the high rate of father-infant interaction observed among the Aka pygmies and, more generally, other cross-cultural differences. He hypothesized that as the number, frequency, and cooperative nature of the activities that husband and wife participate in together increases, the level of father involvement in the care of young children increases. Husband and wife are predicted to share and help each other more when they spend a lot of time together, cooperate in their subsistence activities, and do many different kinds of activities together. For example, one major source of food among the Aka is a small animal which is caught in a net. To catch the animal, husband and wife must cooperate and communicate effectively. This cooperative subsistence activity may result in increased sharing of infant care.

Relatively high rates of father involvement in infant care are also found among Batek foragers in Malaysia, where mothers and fathers play a role in both hunting and gathering (Endicott, 1992). A summary of data from 80 preindustrial societies linked the amount of mother's contribution to the subsistence of the family with greater father-infant proximity (Katz & Konner, 1981). Yet in other societies in which

women contribute to subsistence, but do not work with husbands to do so, fathers do not help with infant care (e.g., Griffin & Griffin, 1992). Shared subsistence work is not enough; these data suggest that cooperative and communicative activity is necessary for the role sharing to occur. In sum, the nature of the mother-father relationship must be examined in order to understand the father's involvement in child care and support.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS VALUES

Finally, cultural values and religious traditions serve to define masculinity and the role of men and fathers in the society. More traditional Latino culture, for example, supports male authority in the home, with women being the emotional center, a value supported by the major institutions of the Church and the political structure.

The cultural and religious views of Islam and Muslims toward the status of women has received an enormous amount of attention by Westerners (Denny, 1993). Practices in many Muslim societies limit women's exposure through veiling and, in the most traditional societies, separates them from men in the school, mosque, and workplace. As Denny notes, "Westerners are often very critical of Islam for its treatment of women. This is often deeply resented by Muslims as meddling, hypocritical . . . Males and females, according to Muslim teaching, are of equal status before God and enjoy equal religious duties and privileges" (1993, p. 352). Denny concludes that "there is no question that females around the world, and in different societies and cultures, have most often occupied positions of inferior status and been made objects of abuse at the hands of males and male-dominated institutions. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, each in their own ways, have sorry records on treatment of and attitudes toward females" (1993, p. 352). Major differences within religious and cultural traditions exist in the treatment of women and in the defi-

inition of men and masculinity. Whereas the treatment of women has received considerable attention, the latter has rarely been explored.

But a decline in authority of lower-class fathers has been observed in Latin America in the past decade (Kaztman, 1992). Prior to the 1980s men typically worked on farms or in family-run businesses where they held power. They likewise tended to have dominion within the home; male supremacy was an unquestioned value (Kaztman, 1992). This power has been undermined by a combination of forces: First, women have entered the labor force; one study revealed that in six large Latin American cities up to 60% of women were working. Second, men now tend to work away from the family, often in poorly paid jobs with little prestige and power. Third, in urban areas with mass media exposure, children may come to hold values different from those of their father and may wish for status symbols that the father cannot provide. The consequence of this erosion of male authority in the home is social anomie, an imbalance between the goals of the prevailing culture and the means for fulfilling them. The result is a retreat from family obligations in these groups; men have less to gain from and less to give to their families. This change has come about so rapidly that adaptation has been difficult.

Program Implications

Finally, we describe some of the possible program directions being considered to address the four areas of men's role in families.

INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY

International aid programs aimed in the last several decades at improving the survival, growth, and development of children have paid surprisingly little attention to the role of men as fathers. Perhaps following a Western model, the focus has been on the mother-child dyad, even in societies in which the father plays a major role in decision-making. International conferences,

such as UNICEF's Innocenti Global Seminar (1995) and the Population Council's Taller Para Padres Responsables (1993 Workshop on Responsible Fatherhood) are opening the debate (Engle & Alatorre Rico, 1994). The Cairo International Conference on Population and Development has laid the groundwork for including men in reproductive health programs (Richardson, 1995). Now a few organizations are including men-as-fathers in their plans.

Much of the advocacy work on fathers has included a concern for gender equity. Advocates envision a new cultural form in which family roles are "democratic"; greater attention to the role of the father in children's welfare is not intended to be a return to male authority in the home. These views are held by Western as well as non-Western advocates for children (Richardson, 1995). Some of the strongest movements in support of women's rights are coming from the South, the developing countries. In addressing this issue, the tension between respect for cultural patterns and the emerging view of greater gender equity and equality will continue to be seen.

Recent work linking women's status and men's patriarchal control to children's malnutrition provides an example of the concern for gender equity. When men have an excessive amount of authority and decision-making power in the home, domestic violence rates may be higher or opportunities for women more restricted. Patriarchal control is often associated with low rates of schooling for girls, low status of women, early age of marriage, and high rates of malnutrition for children (Ramalingaswami, Jonsson, & Rodhe, 1996). For example, despite similar levels of income and health care services in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, rates of malnutrition in South Asia are almost twice as high as the latter. This "Asian enigma" may be a consequence of the subordination of women in South Asia and lack of gender equity in the home. "Judgment and self-expression and independence largely denied, millions of women in South Asia have neither the knowledge nor the

means nor the freedom to act in their own and their children's best interests" (p. 15).

PROGRAM APPROACHES TO BUILDING A CARING RELATIONSHIP

Fatherhood education and development. The Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project in six U.S. cities includes a component labeled the Fatherhood Development Curriculum (Watson, 1992). Once a week the men in the project meet to discuss issues of manhood and fatherhood; they do lessons and exercises which encourage them to consider the mother's perspective. An evaluation showed that most (91%) felt that the fatherhood curriculum was helpful in teaching them parenting skills and improving their relationship with their children. There are no data, however, from the men who did not continue in the program, and it is unclear what percent of those initially recruited failed to complete the program.

A community-based effort has been remarkably successful in the Caribbean. The Caribbean Child Development Center initiated the establishment of father groups, which led to groups of men forming an organization, "Fathers, INC." In Jamaica and other Caribbean islands, such as Trinidad and Tobago, groups of fathers, often those not residing in the family household, are following a curriculum focused on how to father—the Serval project. A culturally appropriate curriculum lists activities designed to facilitate discussion on fathering. One reason for the groups' success is held to be that they are for men only and arise from men's interest in their children (Brown et al., 1994).

A second strategy involves bringing fathers into the schools and day care centers their children attend to help with child care. To be effective at relationship building, these programs are designed to increase the father-child interaction, not simply have men build or paint. One such project, "Father/Child Nights" at a day care center in New Mexico (U.S.), had fathers begin by making toys with their children; gradually they began to play with their children at the child's own level. Program success was attributed to

balancing discussion with activities, inviting participants to meet face to face, having a male staff member, and making a formal contract with the fathers to attend (Kavanaugh, 1992). The program assisted the fathers in developing new roles with their children. A similar project with Latino fathers in Los Angeles attributes success to several factors: combining wife/spouse groups, presenting information on how to bridge Mexican and U.S. cultures, and reducing the feminine-oriented meeting style (Powell, 1995). A useful manual on how to encourage male involvement (of fathers or father substitutes) has been prepared for Head Start programs in the U.S. It offers suggestions that could apply in other regions of the world (Levine, Murphy, & Wilson, 1993).

Three experimental studies have evaluated the effects of education on parenting among married partners. Results show promise for replication. In a study in Cameroon, male and female adolescents were divided into two groups. One group of fathers received 3 weeks of orientation about their father role, while the other did not. After the intervention, interviews with the adolescents suggested that their attitudes had changed (Nsamenang, 1992b). In a U.S. study, one group of fathers-to-be received child development information, while a matched group received none (Parke, Hymel, Power, & Tinsley, 1979). At 3 months postpartum, the informed group were significantly more involved with their children than the control group. In the third study, 30 U.S. middle-class fathers and preschool children underwent a parent support program; they met for 2 hours each on 10 consecutive Saturday mornings—for group discussion on parenting skills and child development knowledge and active play with children. Following treatment, these fathers, compared with 30 other father-child pairs who were waiting for the program, perceived themselves to be more competent and reported spending more time with children interacting and being accessible. Most important, these fathers reported feeling more responsible for

daily decisions about their children, the kind of child involvement which men are least likely to achieve (McBride, 1991).

Educating children in broader gender roles. Preventative education of children is yet another approach, one perhaps with a lower price tag. The Fatherhood Project at Bank Street College in New York uses three educational strategies to increase boys' awareness of the responsibilities of fatherhood and to enhance their skills in dealing with children (Klinman, 1986). One was to give future fathers hands-on experience during junior high and high school with children in preschool programs. Relatively few males enrolled, but for those who did, a large benefit in skills and confidence was seen. These programs could help young men separate out the reality of family life from fantasy (Furstenberg, 1991).

What such programs might accomplish in developing countries remains to be seen. In some societies young men, as well as young women, are used as child care providers, whereas in others boys are never asked to take on this role. It will be important to determine how these distinct experiences affect later sense of responsibility for children and fathering behavior. Programs could also incorporate media techniques and public images of fathers in more caring roles with their children.

Paternity leave and flexible time for fathers at childbirth and postpartum. Another strategy to increase father involvement is to provide them child care leave, either paid or unpaid, and more flexible work hours. Fathers can then have more contact with infants. Even when such opportunities are made available, however, only about 10% of fathers (in the U.S. and Sweden) used them (Pleck, 1985). However, usage is increasing (Parke, 1996). The low usage of paternal child care leave may be due to prejudice by employers, the desire of the wife to stay home, or the loss of income for the father if leave is unpaid. Men tended to take short leaves at the birth of the child, although some took more time when the child was older. Flexible work hours were also not frequently used by fathers.

The increased use reflects changes in societal norms for greater shared child care.

A Save the Children project in Vietnam took another approach to help young mothers (Woodhouse in Richardson, 1995). Husbands in communes were told that they could reduce the health care costs for their children if their wives were to work less during pregnancy and immediately postpartum. In the communes which received the messages, women had significantly more rest days while pregnant and higher birth-weight babies; and men felt more empowered to help their wives.

Social service and health systems. Much of the health and social services literature focuses on mothers and children, to the exclusion of fathers. The social service field in the U.S. views men as either providers (i.e., the good guys) or nonproviders (i.e., manipulators or malingerers [Bolton, 1986]). There is little awareness that some men may choose the nontraditional role of staying home to take care of children; or they may be unable to work due to lack of job, lack of training, or a disability such as mental illness. Social services must recognize that many fathers are trying to meet their obligations; few are mindfully negligent. They themselves may be in need of assistance. At some point, aid to indigent fathers who are willing to stay with their children could be instituted.

To optimize health care services, we must understand better and acknowledge the role of the father in his particular culture. If he is a major opinion leader in the household or is in charge of finances, he must be involved in any medical decisions. His role may be much larger than recognized, although behind the scenes. In the U.S., for example, the father's opinion was one of the most important indicators of whether a mother went for prenatal care (Sable, Stockbauer, Schramm, & Land, 1990) or breastfed her child (Littman, Medendorp, & Goldfarb, 1982). Some work in Pakistan recommends a two-pronged approach to health care that adds a separate outreach component for men (Jahn & Aslam, 1995).

PROGRAM APPROACHES TO INCREASING MEN'S ECONOMIC SUPPORT

Legal protection for children of absent fathers. The legal protection of children of absent fathers may be adequate (Folbre, 1997), but enforcing such protection can be quite difficult. The law in Mexico, for example, fails to provide for sufficient protection (Brachet-Marquez, 1992): Desertion is a prerequisite to seeking a child support award, but father absence is not recognized by law as desertion as long as the husband returns within 6 months. Thus a man can come and go at will for years as long as he spends one night every 6 months at home. Women can opt for divorce, but they seldom do. Divorce usually occurs only when there is child abuse or when the woman is educated and therefore capable of economic self-sufficiency. For the uneducated woman, divorce always represents a trade-off—a freedom often offset by the sacrifice of rent-free lodging and child support. It is also easy for a man in Mexico to avoid paying child support. If a husband stops payment, the burden of initiating legal procedures falls to the wife. And in response to legal proceedings, many husbands simply claim insolvency (Brachet-Marquez, 1992). Monitoring the nonpaying father's income is extremely difficult; with the scarcity of employment in Mexico, more and more of men's earnings are untraceable, nonwage, and non-salaried. Other countries experience similar problems.

Increasing men's ability to support their children. Simply increasing men's income without encouraging them to increase expenditures on children has had limited or no effect on their children (e.g., Immink, Kennedy, Sibrian, & Hahn, 1994; Berhman, 1995). But programs in the U.S. have attempted to increase low-income unwed fathers' payment of child support through combined job training, job placement, child support payment enforcement, and fatherhood education projects (e.g., Achatz & MacAllum, 1994; Family Impact Seminar, 1995; Watson, 1992, reporting on the Public/Private Ventures Project). Despite great difficulties in

recruiting fathers into such programs, results have been somewhat encouraging in increasing child support payments.

We found no similar approach in a developing country, but combining income-generation projects for men with fatherhood information would seem a reasonable course to pursue. A further problem which has received almost no attention is fathers' spending on nonessentials such as alcohol and cigarettes; it is thought the cost may be staggering.

AVOIDING UNPARTNERED FERTILITY

Reproductive health programs have begun to target sex education messages to men as well as to women, following recommendations of the Cairo conference. There is also a growing attempt to establish paternity at the time of a child's birth. In the U.S., legal efforts have resulted in a significant increase in paternal identification of children born outside marriages—from 19% in 1979 to 28% in 1986 (Nichols-Casebolt & Garfinkel, 1991). In one successful example in the U.S., almost two thirds of unmarried parents, when given the opportunity during the first few days postpartum, voluntarily acknowledged paternity (Department of Health and Human Services/OCSE, as cited in Family Impact Seminar, 1995). Paternity establishment procedures should be examined in other countries as well.

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE HOME

Women's enhanced education and related income-earning has been found to be the strongest predictor of improved gender equity in the home (Blumberg, 1988; Richardson, 1995). Thus the movement to increase access to education for girls in all settings has been a major focus of international pressure. In South Asia, women's combined disadvantage of lack of education, dowry requirement (that parents of the bride pay the parents of the groom), and young age at marriage (aged 10 to 14) result in their very low status in the family. In Rajasthan, India, a UNICEF project involved families (men and women) in

offering girls more education and delaying the age at which they are required to marry. As a result of 2- to 3-day visits and awareness-raising by a team of five women, who met with male village leaders and went house to house, the number of young adolescent girls in school increased and the number of early marriages decreased (Gururaja, in Richardson, 1995).

UNIFEM and the Bahai church were able to change men's and women's views about traditional male and female roles in Malaysia, Bolivia, and Cameroon through the use of drama and song and consultation. Three major problems were addressed: in each case, the low literacy rates of women, the mismanagement of household finances by men, and the heavy workload of women. Men were helped to understand the disproportionate burden of women. As a result of these exchanges, spouse abuse and alcoholism have declined, and men and women are more aware of how their actions and perceptions contribute to these problems (Richardson, 1995).

Conclusions

This report has focused on patterns of fatherhood in different cultures, the effects of fathering on children, and theories of fatherhood. Until recently, little attention has been paid to the role of the father. Given rapid economic and social changes, increases in women's work for family subsistence, and the inundation of Western messages, new expectations of fathers are emerging. At the same time, the number of children being reared without the support of their father's income appears to be increasing. Some women (and men) are asking, "Why are fathers so irresponsible?" (Kaztman, 1992). From men's perspective, the question may be, "What can I possibly contribute that is unique as a father?" (Nsamenang, 1987), or, after a marital separation, "Why should I pay if my wife won't let me see my kid when I want to?" (Furstenberg, 1991).

The institution of the family seems to be changing. These changes are part of a global pat-

tern of industrialization, urbanization, and feminization of labor. In some areas change is occurring so rapidly that people may be unprepared and unable to adapt. We also know that fatherhood is in a period of significant change throughout the developing world as well as in the U.S. Demands that men become “new fathers,” that they combine both their traditional economic role with a new nurturing role, may leave both men and women confused.

There appear to be some models of successful transition, but they are few. These promote sufficient income and education and provide extensive experience in caring for young children. They also involve women in the changes in gender roles—a crucial element. We have models of nurturant, egalitarian relations from some of the most ancient societies, the hunter-gatherers. Ironically, this oldest form of human organization results in higher levels of father-infant contact and marital cooperation than do modern patterns.

Families are the basic human structure that meets the care needs of children and more generally the emotional needs of all community members. But family life can also be a tyranny, which can be seen in unequal gender relations, violence against women, and child abuse and neglect. The changes described in this report stand to bring benefits in terms of more openness to new roles, to a more flexible definition of “family” (e.g., one-parent, blended, extended, same-sex), to a wider range of human expression, and to greater equality between the genders.

There are opportunities for new models of the family structure to develop. Perhaps serial fatherhood in which men invest in both biological and step children will become the most adaptive model. More “absent fathers” express concern and interest in their children than women have expected; perhaps the involvement of this growing group of fathers will increase. The increasing acceptability of nurturing by fathers is expanding their role with their younger children. This is a novel idea to men in many parts of the world. Greater contact with their children has been

shown to have positive effects on fathers (Parke, 1996), giving them new satisfactions and skills, and their children, in turn, benefit through increased father investment. We also have evidence that men who perform more child care report more marital satisfaction.

Each of the four theoretical perspectives discussed contributes to our understanding of the factors that are associated with a father’s involvement and investment in his children. From this discussion, one might predict that a father might be more involved with his child if he

- (1) lives in a culture that supports gender equality and father nurturance,
- (2) is co-resident with his wife and child,
- (3) has a harmonious relationship with the child’s mother who encourages his involvement,
- (4) is part of an economic system with enough resources that he can support his children in line with society’s expectations, and
- (5) works in a cooperative way with his wife to provide sustenance for the family.

A father can have both a direct effect on his child, through increased caregiving, and indirect effects through financial support of the child and emotional support to the child’s mother. At times it would seem that we have noticed fathers more for their absence (e.g., our concern with female-headed households) than for their presence. Much remains to be learned from other cultures about men as fathers as they undergo transitions—often in parallel to transitions experienced in the U.S.

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U.S. Policy Initiative on Fathering

Editor

MOST PUBLICIZED U.S. POLICY ON fathering in recent years has revolved around holding fathers financially responsible for their children, through paternity establishment and child support enforcement. But federal policies on fathers are rapidly evolving far beyond this as the sole concern into a broad effort to foster a more encompassing view of the father's place in the family. Vice President Gore, in concluding remarks to a federal conference, pointed out, "Dads mean more than dollars. . . . Every institution in America must begin formally to see fathers as more than just a paycheck or a child-support payment" (NCOFF, 1997, p. 49).

On July 16, 1995, President Clinton issued a one-page memorandum on "Supporting the Role of Fathers in Families," which began:

I am firm in my belief that the future of our Republic depends on strong families and that committed fathers are essential to those families. I am also aware that strengthening fathers' involvement with their children cannot be accomplished by the Federal Government alone; the solutions lie in the hearts and consciences of individual fathers and the support of the families and communities in which they live. However, there are ways for a flexible, responsive Government to help support men in their roles as fathers. (Clinton, as cited in NCOFF, 1997, p. 45)

The memorandum went on to direct all federal departments and agencies to review their policies with an eye to (1) engaging and including fathers in programs and initiatives and (2) explicitly strengthening fathers' involvement with their children. Of special interest to researchers, the memorandum also instructed

that (3) evidence of father involvement and participation be used in judging program success and that (4) fathers be incorporated in government-initiated research on children and their families.

In October of that year, the Department of Health and Human Services issued a report in response to the president's initiative (DHHS, 1995) which laid out five "principles" embracing a new focus on fathers:

- All fathers can be important contributors to the well-being of their children.
- Parents are partners in raising their children, even when they do not live in the same household.
- The roles fathers play in families are diverse and related to cultural and community norms.
- Men should receive the education and support necessary to prepare them for the responsibility of parenthood.
- Government can encourage and promote father involvement through its programs and through its own workforce policies.

In this report and a subsequent one (Work Group on Targets of Opportunity and Trade-offs, 1997) it is acknowledged that families can take varied forms; also that any discussion of "fathering" should be broadly conceived, to include male fertility, family formation, and fathering.

The following spring (May 3, 1996), DHHS, along with the National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF), the Domestic Policy Council (of the president's office), and the National Performance Review (of the vice president's office) hosted a conference of practitioners, leaders of nonprofits, and government staff; the latter came from across the spectrum—the

departments of Defense, Commerce, Education, Energy, Labor, and Transportation and, within DHHS, the Children's Bureau, Head Start, the Office of Child Support Enforcement, and more. Fourteen workshop sessions covered a wide range of topics related to fathering, including adolescent preparation for parenting, father involvement with child care, the impact of non-residential fathers, domestic violence, and work and family policy.

One key strategy involves encouraging interagency and departmental collaborations with state and local communities. This measure has produced a boom of programmatic and policy response. Results are far-ranging—including everything from local projects within Head Start aimed at involving fathers in center governance and teaching them about immunization to state waivers within welfare reform to promote outreach to two-parent families and expanded Medicaid eligibility.

What the effects of these many efforts are remains to be seen—which is where research comes into play. A centerpiece of the DHHS strategy has been the creation of the Federal Interagency Forum which is charged with assessing the strengths and limits of data collection on fathers and generating studies of fathers and their effects on children. Just a few examples: The Centers for Disease Control is evaluating violence prevention programs; the Administration on Children and Families is conducting a review of "father-friendly" practice in 17 program sites; the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation is examining the interaction of child support, parent earnings, and welfare dynamics in Texas (DHHS, 1997). The research effort is extensive and stands to advance understanding of the father role and possible programmatic responses.

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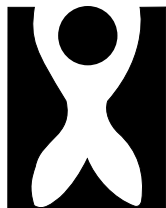
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