Fatherhood, Gender Equality, and Violence Prevention: Examining Data and Exploring Possibilities for Practice & Paradigms

BWJP 2015 Webinar Series: Researcher/Practitioner Discourse
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Presenters (alphabetically)

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Topics for Webinar

- Framing the conversation
- Gender-based violence – what is it?
- Conceptualizing “primary prevention”
- Fatherhood: A place for primary prevention work
- First study: Transition to fatherhood
- Second study: “Give Love, Get Love”
- Practical implications for organizations
- Applications for practitioners
- Questions as we look ahead
Gender-Based Violence

+ Defining Terms

- Gender
- Violence against women
- Gender-based violence
- "a wide range of human rights violations, including sexual abuse of children, rape, domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment, trafficking of women and girls and several harmful traditional practices"
  
Conceptualizing Prevention

Focusing in on "primary prevention"

Continuum of Approaches to Respond to Gender-based Violence

Promoting girls and women's rights

- Change social norms
- Increase Gender equality
- Men/boys change agents
- Bystander Intervention

Provide Services to Survivors (women/girls)
Criminalize behaviors
Batterer Intervention

Prevention  Intervention

"Levels of Prevention" Public Health Framework

Primary Prevention
- Efforts to prevent violence before it occurs by removing cause.

Secondary Prevention
- Efforts to identify early signs of violence (or "risk factors") and take action to eliminate them.

Tertiary Prevention
- Efforts to intervene after violence has already occurred, to prevent recurrence.
Fatherhood: A place for primary prevention work

Why fatherhood?

First Study: Transition to Fatherhood

Time of risk and time of potential

Figure 1. Physical violence predicted means for victimized and comparison women.

First-time Father Studies

Carlson, J., Kendall, A., & Edleson (under review). Becoming a good father: The developmental engine of first-time fatherhood.

Figure 2. Psychological violence predicted means for victimized and comparison women.

Figure 3. Sexual violence predicted means for victimized and comparison women.
Transition to Fatherhood

(Condon, J. T., Boyce, P. A, & Corkindale, C. J., 2006; Enders, 2007; Easterbrooks, et al., 2007; Finnbogadottir et al., 2003; Leite, 2007; Matthews et al., 2007; Rasmussen & Kramer, 2007; Wells & Sarkadi, 2012)

First Time Fathers Project

Community Consultations with Practitioners

Focus groups with fathers & mothers

Build knowledge to develop prevention intervention

Transition to Fatherhood Study: Formal and Informal Support

The two-fold purpose of this study is to explore:

- how formal supports do and do not support new and expectant fathers, and
- how, from the perspective of fathers and mothers, a specific first-time father prevention intervention could meet the needs for formal support.
Study Sample

- General Demographics:
  - African American, White, Native American, Asian American
  - Ages: 21-45
- Father Focus Groups (n=6)
  - N=47
  - Relationship Status
    - Single - 14%
    - Married/Partnered - 83%
    - Stay at home, working & under employed and unemployed
- Mother Focus Groups (n=2)
  - N=10
  - All married or partnered

Formal Support Themes from father, mother & practitioner data

- The value and limitation of childbirth classes for fathers;
- Health care providers can be helpful, but system is not father friendly;
- Father-centered programmatic support;
- Family leave;
- Overall limitations of and barriers to formal support

Health care providers can be helpful, but system is not father friendly

- every time they come in to check on my wife if she was asleep, even though she told me what to tell them, the ignored me and woke her up. It was like I really didn’t need to be there. In fact, they really didn’t want me there, but everything in society says I’m the worse parent in the world, if I’m not there. That was the hardest struggle for me, so far.
+ Father-centered programmatic support: A mother’s perspective

- When he was here, he felt like everybody knew him and everybody was supportive of him. He felt like he was showing his kids off and he was going to visit people even though he wasn’t going anywhere…. It gives them a sense of family; a lot of them don’t have family. They don’t have that type of family support and friend support and they do that here. A lot of them have family and friends but they can’t even talk to them.

+ Formal Support Programs Wanted

- Interest in father-centered support programs
- Father-to-father peer support
- Help to “become dads” not only a focus on being a financial provider (i.e. employment or child support payments)
- Mothers’ perspectives:
  - “My kids need fathers, not ATM machines”
  - Appreciated programs that included mothers

+ Voices of fathers:
  Father-to-father peer support

- …having guys in a similar situations and be able to vent out what’s been going on and getting feedback and instructional classes that we exercise in groups and this is what we’re going to do for an hour with our kids. You, know how we’re going to prepare for an outing and so on and so forth. In empowerment groups, how to stop and think before you get in certain situations. That type of stuff is really helpful.
Findings from father data:
Men want to be “good fathers”

Desire and Motivation
- Complex understanding of being a financial provider
- Value of learning caregiving skills

Starts prenatal
Chage is a process
Break the cycle

Fathers’ desire to “break the cycle”

Break From:
- Violence
- Absent fathering

Become:
- Present
- “good father”
Voices of fathers:
desire to “break the cycle”

[F1] The lack of having a father figure...
[F2] That changed how you wanted...
[F3] Yes. It’s a big motivation and you almost learn from it where you learn not to do that.

[F1] Exactly. It’s like you learn what NOT to do, based on what happened to you. It’s just… I got a lot of people who repeated - without trying to repeat - the same cycle and they don’t even realize they’re repeating it until it’s too late and they want to change it.

Voices of fathers:
Change is a process

[F1] It’s my responsibility now that I got to take care of my daughter. It woke me up a lot. I wasn’t in the streets doing stuff I wasn’t supposed to be doing. You know, that right there, I wanted to change my life and do better for my daughter. It changed me a lot.

[F2] It’s a process though.
[F3] Yeah

[F2] You don’t change over night.
[F1] Yeah.
[F2] It’s a process. It takes time.

Implications

Future Research
- Current study: Directly exploring fathers’ with histories of Violence experiences becoming fathers
- Testing conceptual leap
- Formal and increased informal social support reduce Child exposure to domestic violence?
- Social location matters
- Race, SES, neighborhood access and social capital, relationship with mother

Practice
- Need for father-focused prevention initiatives
- Home visiting, health care, breast-feeding education, early childhood education
- Need for culturally and generally competent work with fathers
- Have social justice framework
- Critically examine gender norms
- Clarity of the feminist rationale for work
References


Second Study:
“Give Love, Get Love”
Saskatoon, Canada, Ontario
Give Love Get Love: Engaging Fathers to Promote Gender Equality

Humberto Carolo
Director of Programs, White Ribbon, Canada

Ian DeGeer
Researcher, Ph.D. candidate, Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada

The White Ribbon:
A man’s pledge to never commit, condone, or remain silent about men’s violence against women.

White Ribbon Campaign | Our Future Has No Violence Against Women

www.whiteribbon.ca

GIVE LOVE GET LOVE
Led by White Ribbon in collaboration with Dad Central Ontario
Exploring positive roles fatherhood plays promoting gender equality, healthy, equal relationships and ending gender-based violence

www.whiteribbon.ca/give-love-get-love/
An opening thought...

But it’s amazing, that if you just exist as a dad in public, you are either a babysitter or superstar. (Participant)

Previous fatherhood research

- A great deal of research has been conducted into the concept of fathering
- Abusive fathers
- Absent fathers
- Fathers and criminal justice system/child welfare system
- Impact of fathers on the developmental stages of children

Previous research linking I.F. and gender equity

- Fatherhood as transformational
- Generative fathering (Snarey, 1993)
- Familial economics
- Role of relationship with mother
- Parental leave policies
- Developmental stages of fathers
Method

- 53 fathers participated from communities across Ontario
- Recruitment was done in partnership with Dadcentral.ca
- Specific communities were targeted that had pre-existing fathering programs
- Also interest in experiences of black fathers, LGBTQ fathers, aboriginal fathers

Defining Involved Fatherhood

- There is no concrete definition of an involved father
- For the purposes of this study, involved fatherhood was defined by the participants and actively constructed throughout the research process
- It was a point of contention at times – involved vs. active father

Findings: Defining Involved fatherhood

- Quantity of time
- Being active in the life of the child
- Generative fathering – being different than their father
- Involved father as provider
- Gender equality – an extension of a healthy relationship
- A contested idea
Voices of fathers

You know, we’re expected to be out making money, the breadwinner, et cetera, and an involved father is what I learned is somebody that actually sits down, listens to their partner, listens to the needs of the family and works with the family, not independently. (Participant)

Stay at home fathers

- The decision is often made jointly prior to the arrival of the child
- Often involves consideration of finances
- Is seen as a unique opportunity
- Is beginning to be more normative for some men
- It results in increased understanding but is isolating

Voices of fathers

I mean, for me, I leave my work to take care of my children and my wife stayed working and I was the one cooking, doing laundry, teaching them, taking them to school and all that. (Participant)

My experience, when I was home with my daughter for five weeks, I felt like I was the only guy doing it. I didn’t see any guys at any of the groups. I Googled it and I didn’t find any groups for dads. (Participant)
Importance of other fathers

- Importance of dedicated groups for fathers
- Father to father communication and support
- It’s not easy meeting other fathers

Generative fathering

- Fathers indicated that their involvement is in stark contrast to their own lived experiences
- Many participants talked about having absentee fathers
- Fatherhood is seen as an opportunity to change the pattern of non-involvement
- Participants were conscious of the decision to be different than their father

Voice of a father

I think somewhere deep down in my subconscious they are linked, because I have always ... growing up and not having a dad, I made one promise to myself, that if I ever had a kid I wouldn’t want them to miss me being there. (Participant)
Experiences of Aboriginal fathers

- The experiences of Aboriginal fathers expanded the ideas related to involved fathering
- There was increased emphasis on the importance of community in the parenting process

Experiences of Aboriginal fathers

- There was acknowledgement that colonization had forced many aboriginal fathers away from traditional practices – being an involved father was an opportunity to teach traditions
- Culturally defined roles of mothers and fathers

Voices of Aboriginal fathers

Traditionally, as aboriginal people, that is how that learning was always taught by the whole community. (Participant)

And that is that holistic balance of the community helping to raise that child, and not just the one parent. Everybody was an auntie or an uncle… because they were taking the best qualities of themselves, and in that situation with that child at that time, that helped them further along in that community to be a better child. (Participant)
LGBTQ communities

- Preliminary exploration of the experiences
- Involved might be a redundant term for these parents
- The importance of language
- Actively confronting gender constructions

Voices of LGBTQ parents

So the child, we talk about he has a spuncle. He has a Spuncle [name of uncle], and Spuncle [name of uncle] brought the sperm and I brought the egg and papa brought the love and we put it all together and we got a [name of child]. (Participant)

Voices of LGBTQ parents

I'm a walking through Saint Lawrence Market [with my baby] and its – Hey, Mr. Mom! Or, I was standing in Starbucks [with my baby] and I heard – That must be keeping you out of trouble. And I just ignored it, because I had no idea what this person was talking about. And this older man came over and said – Did your wife tell you [the baby is] yours for the next nine months? And, I didn't know how to respond. I just turned around and said – I don't have a wife. (Participant)
What about gender equality?

- Fathers are actively teaching their children that all children are equal
- Under the age of 5, gender constructions seem to matter less, but are much more influential with older children
- Role-modeling gender equality – extension of their relationship
- Tasks in their homes are shared, not along gender lines

What about gender equality?

- Being involved creates empathy regarding the role of mothers
- It affords her the opportunity to care for herself
- Fathers talked about parenting together – suggesting increased partnership and improved relationships

Final Thoughts

- Fatherhood is a transformational time for many men
- There appears to be a link between involvement and improved gender equality
- There is a need to support fathers as they enter the parenting process and fathering groups appear to have many benefits
- There is also a need to engage fathers early on during pregnancy to ensure their continued involvement well after the arrival of the child
Practical implications for organizations

- Early engagement of fathers
- Targeted and inclusive services needed
- Help build empathy and break the cycle of violence among fathers
- View and use fatherhood as an important entry point for violence prevention with men and boys
**Practical Implications**

- Focus on strength, resiliency, role modeling of fatherhood experience
- Use inspiring narratives to motivate change
- Address and acknowledge diversity of men's experience in fatherhood (indigenous, LGBT, newcomer, cultural, young fathers, kinship, father figures, etc)

**Applications for practitioners and Questions as we look ahead**