Growing the Evidence through Innovation: Highlighting Programs that Involve Fathers

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Rigorous Research to Strengthen Families and Enhance Public Policy

Family Structure & Wellbeing

Fatherhood

Adolescent Health & Wellbeing

Early Childhood

Child Welfare
MIECHV Home Visiting in Texas

- Serving 21 Texas counties
- More than 7,200 families served to date (since 2012)
- Three evidence-based program models that target mostly mothers: NFP, PAT, HIPPY
- THV involved fathers from the beginning

- 23 out of every 1,000 children are abused
- 1 in 5 teen births is a repeat birth
- 1 in 6 births is preterm
- 44% of children live in poverty

1 in 6 births is preterm
Data Sources

27 home visiting programs
9 communities in Texas

FATHERS
7 focus groups with 40 fathers and father figures

MOTHERS
Survey of 1,390 mothers

HOME VISITORS
Survey of home 172 visitors
Interviews with 50+ home visitors

PROGRAM COORDINATORS
Interviews with 27 program coordinators

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATIVE DATA
Evaluation Findings of Innovative Efforts to Engage Fathers in Home Visiting

• Fathers participate in home visiting programs to enhance their child’s health (infants) and school readiness (toddlers)

• Over 1/3 of fathers attend at least one home visit; but fathers participate in ways we typically don’t measure

• Work schedules are the major barrier to father participation, but many fathers state they did not feel welcome

• If you want fathers to participate – ASK THEM
  – And schedule appointments when they can attend

• Father participation is associated with staying in the programs 7 months longer
Why do fathers participate in home visiting?

For Their Child

• Fathers care deeply about giving their child an advantage in life
• Fathers of infants (or with pregnant partners) stress the baby’s health as a major impetus for program participation
• Fathers of toddlers want their children to be ready for school

To Learn Parenting Skills

• Fathers want to learn less harsh discipline strategies than their fathers used on them
How do fathers participate in home visiting?

• Fathers participate in ways we typically don’t measure
• 37% of fathers attended at least one home visit
• 75% asked mom questions about the home visit
• 66% practiced home visiting lessons with children
• Of fathers who attend any home visit, they attend about 2 out of every 5 visits
Observable Father Participation

How often does your child's father engage in the home visiting activity described?

- Participates in home visits:
  - Always: 12%
  - Sometimes: 27%
  - Never: 61%
  - Unknown: 1%

- Attends social events:
  - Always: 11%
  - Sometimes: 22%
  - Never: 65%
  - Unknown: 3%

- Attends parent meetings:
  - Always: 10%
  - Sometimes: 22%
  - Never: 64%
  - Unknown: 4%

- Asks home visitor questions:
  - Always: 8%
  - Sometimes: 30%
  - Never: 60%
  - Unknown: 3%

Source: Mothers' Attitudes Survey (N=199)
Unobservable Father Participation

How often does your child's father engage in the home visiting activity described?

Asks mother questions about home visits
- Always: 41%
- Sometimes: 28%
- Never: 29%
- Unknown: 3%

Practices lessons with child
- Always: 14%
- Sometimes: 44%
- Never: 38%
- Unknown: 4%

Source: Mothers' Attitudes Survey (N=199)
What prevents father participation?

Work schedules are largest barrier

The majority of the time I am working. I have noticed, however, when I am at the house, my son will pull on me so that I can participate with him and my wife in the home visit. But, most of the time I am working.

—Father, Dallas

Fathers don’t believe the programs are for them

I have attended two of them (home visits). It was the main priority ones that involve the father, and all the other ones were more like for the mother. You know, like breastfeeding, and so on and so forth.

—Father, West Texas
How can states increase father participation?

• If you want fathers to participate – ASK THEM

• To get fathers to attend one home visit – schedule the visit to accommodate his work schedule

• To keep him coming back, communicate to him why he matters

• Deliberate strategies are most effective – and simple
  – Address program-related materials to both parents
  – Provide materials for fathers to review when he is absent from visit
  – Schedule visits when he can attend
Why should states encourage father participation?

• Two parents are invested in the program and the outcomes for their child
• On average, families stay in the home visiting programs 7 months longer if fathers participate in the program
• Greater retention means that families benefit more from programs
Families with participating fathers stay longer

![Graph showing the probability of retention over enrollment length (months) for families with fathers who never attend HV and those who attend HV. The graph illustrates that families with participating fathers tend to stay enrolled longer.](image)
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Other Studies of Fathers in Home Visiting


- Dads Matter Evaluation. Guterman and Bellamy

- Family Foundation for expectant couples. Feinberg and Ammerman
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