

# **Pathways-To-Outcomes: How Responsible Fatherhood Program Activities May Lead to Intended Outcomes**

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## OVERVIEW

Responsible Fatherhood (RF) programming has grown out of research demonstrating the importance of father involvement in family life in general, as well as increased attention to reducing child poverty specifically (Doherty et al. 1998; Martinson and Nightingale 2008). Presently, federal RF programming is funded by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). ACF-funded RF programs must provide services in three areas: parenting, healthy relationships, and economic stability (Solomon-Fears and Tollestrup 2018) in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). It is up to individual programs, however, to determine the structure, length, and intensity of their services, as well as the specific amount of content to provide and how to provide it. Programs address content in the three areas by implementing curricula, or providing specific instruction in addition to curricula. Instruction is supplemented with support services, especially case management. Programs often tailor that content and support services to the populations they serve and the contexts in which they operate.

### Components of each RF Pathways-to-Outcomes model

- **Hypothesis:** a summary statement that links key program activities to the intended outcomes.
- **Key program activities:** how grantees design, implement, and support the delivery of their services.
- **Intermediate participation output:** given that high participation is hypothesized to be necessary for fathers to experience benefits, each model includes increased participation as an intermediate output before describing the intended outcomes.
- **Outcomes:** represent the expected changes for fathers following program participation.
- **Influence factors:** define the broader context in which a program operates and underlie every other component of the model; they encompass both personal and environmental factors.

The Parents and Children Together (PACT) evaluation is the first evaluation of ACF-funded RF programs. It has studied the implementation and effectiveness of four programs that received RF grants in 2011, measuring impacts on parenting and father involvement, economic security, co-parenting and relationships, and father well-being. Four other large, random assignment evaluations have studied programs serving fathers, but not all of these programs provided the three types of services required by the ACF RF program or targeted all fathers (three focused on noncustodial parents). In light of the growing yet still limited body of research on

RF programs, ACF directed Mathematica to create a set of RF Pathways-to-Outcomes models, which visually depict how RF program activities may contribute to intended outcomes.

This report presents the four RF Pathways-to-Outcomes models, related to outcomes for which at least one program in the PACT evaluation had statistically significant impacts: (1) healthy relationships between co-parents, (2) father development and well-being, (3) consistent employment; and (4) parenting skills and father involvement. We developed the models using federal evaluation findings, discussions with practitioners and researchers, and a targeted literature search. The four hypotheses are:

- **Programs may improve fathers' co-parenting relationships by integrating personal development, parenting, and healthy relationships content in a group-based workshop, educating fathers about domestic violence, providing individual case management, and engaging co-parents.** Programs primarily address co-parenting through workshop content on personal development, parenting, and healthy relationships. When sequencing content, programs often offer personal development content, such as emotional well-being, goal setting, and personal accountability, before co-parenting content. Fathers also may have opportunities to discuss co-parenting issues and challenges one-on-one with a qualified case manager or other staff member. Programs can partner with community providers to educate fathers on domestic violence. Supplementary services that help fathers reduce barriers to child access and engage co-parents may further strengthen fathers' co-parenting relationships.
- **Programs may support father development and well-being by reducing their risk for depression or depressive symptoms and associated risk of substance use disorder.** To achieve this, programs can encourage peer interactions, hire staff with whom participants can identify, and partner with mental health and substance use disorder treatment programs to increase access to these services. Programs may need to include substantial personal development content in core workshops.
- **Programs may improve fathers' employment and economic stability by providing intensive and comprehensive work-related services.** Programs may implement core employment services in a way that requires daily attendance and with sufficient dosage of content focusing on skills needed to acquire and retain a job, as well as case management and job development services.

- **Programs may improve fathers' parenting skills and increase involvement in their children's lives by frontloading parenting content in a group-based workshop that covers the importance of father involvement, child development, and co-parenting.** Providing parenting services early in the program may engage fathers and increase the likelihood they receive parenting content. Programs may also need to help fathers reduce barriers to child access to increase effects on father involvement.

Although the models presented in this report do not provide causal evidence to link specific program activities to specific outcomes, they are intended to advance the field of RF programming and research by depicting evidence-informed hypotheses that can be used by practitioners and program developers as they design and implement programs. These models could also be used to design tests to examine the connections between specific program activities and their impact on participants. Findings from this research could inform practitioners about the effects of specific RF program activities.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Interest in responsible fatherhood programming among practitioners and researchers began to grow in the 1980s and 1990s. Emerging research at the time suggested the importance of father involvement in family life and a cultural shift in perspectives on fathers' roles in their families—from a traditional “breadwinner” to someone who was a nurturing presence in the family (Doherty et al. 1998). Specifically, a conceptualization of responsible fatherhood included values such as (1) waiting to become a father until a man is prepared to support a child emotionally and financially; (2) establishing legal paternity; and (3) sharing in the emotional, physical, and financial care of the child (Doherty et al. 1998).

As the debate around welfare reform intensified in the early 1990s, policymakers' interest in responsible fatherhood grew as a way to reduce child poverty, including increasing payment of child support by noncustodial parents (Martinson and Nightingale 2008).<sup>1</sup> The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA, or “welfare reform”) included several policies associated with increasing father involvement, enumerated in the four goals of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.<sup>2</sup> In addition to providing cash assistance to low-income families, the other three goals—promoting job preparation, reducing out-of-wedlock births, and encouraging two-parent families—aligned with the values associated with responsible fatherhood. PRWORA specified that states could spend TANF funds to help noncustodial parents find jobs, established grants for state child support enforcement agencies to help noncustodial parents increase access to their children, and mandated that states require noncustodial parents who were not paying child support to participate in work activities, such as employment and training programs (Martinson and Nightingale 2008).

Between 1991 and 2000, the federal government sponsored five separate demonstration projects to improve the employability and parenting skills of low-income fathers and noncustodial parents, funded variously by HHS, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture; private foundations also funded demonstrations (Martinson and Nightingale 2008).

Congress created a dedicated funding stream for Responsible Fatherhood (RF) programs with the passage of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, the

legislation that reauthorized TANF. From 2006 to 2011, the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) grant program funded \$50 million annually to 90 organizations to operate or support fatherhood programs and 13 organizations to implement services specifically for incarcerated and reentering fathers (Martinson and Nightingale 2008; Zaveri et al. 2015). The Claims Resolution Act of 2010 reauthorized the HMRF grant program and increased funding for RF programs to \$75 million annually, and grants to 55 RF programs and 5 RF reentry programs were funded from 2011 to 2015 (Zaveri et al. 2015). Another cohort of 36 RF programs and 5 RF reentry programs received funding from 2015 to 2020.

Federal RF programs funded by ACF must address parenting, healthy relationships, and economic stability (Solomon-Fears and Tollestrop 2018). Each individual program proposes the structure, length, and intensity of its services, as well as the specific amount of content to provide and how to provide it. Programs address content in the three areas by implementing curricula, or providing specific instruction in addition to curricula. Instruction is supplemented with support services, especially case management. Programs often tailor that content and support services to the populations they serve and the contexts in which they operate.

The Parents and Children Together (PACT) evaluation found positive program impacts from the RF programs, but was not designed to identify which program activities contributed to the impacts achieved.

In general, research on the effectiveness of programs serving fathers is limited, particularly for recent programs designed to serve low-income and minority fathers (Holmes et al. 2018). The Parents and Children Together (PACT) evaluation included implementation and impact evaluations of four federal RF programs that received grants in 2011, as well as a qualitative study featuring in-depth interviews with low-income fathers to learn about their upbringing, life experiences, and experiences in the RF programs. The evaluation found positive program impacts from the RF programs, but was not designed to identify which program activities contributed to the impacts achieved.

Aside from PACT, four other programs serving fathers have been studied through randomized trials (Table I.1). Most of the programs studied did not provide services in all three areas required in federal RF programs, and they served slightly different populations than those served in federal RF programs. One of the programs, the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED), served all noncustodial parents, though most of the participants were fathers. Two programs—Non-Custodial

Parent Choices PEER (NCPCP) and Parents' Fair Share (PFS)—served noncustodial fathers. One program, TYRO Dads, served fathers regardless of their custodial or residential status. As programs primarily focused on child support, increasing child support payments was a key goal of the CSPED, NCPCP, and PFS programs.

The rigorous research on federal RF and other fatherhood programs highlights favorable effects on parenting behaviors and attitudes.

The rigorous research on federal RF and other fatherhood programs—most of which was conducted in the past few years—highlights favorable effects on parenting behaviors and attitudes. These successes are notable because many fathers in RF programs do not live with their children and are no longer romantically involved with the children's mother (Avellar et al. 2018). Yet programs have been able to promote positive parenting—for example, fathers' nurturing behaviors are improved, as are their feelings of parenting efficacy and sense of responsibility for their children. These results suggest that RF parenting approaches can work as intended.

The RF evaluations, however, have shown limited or no effects in other areas, including economic stability, healthy relationships, and father development and well-being. In addition, although programs might ultimately strive to improve child well-being by working with fathers, children's outcomes have not been measured. Unlike parenting, which in many ways is controlled by the fathers directly, changes in other areas may involve participation of and cooperation from other people, such as an employer or the mother of the child. Thus, RF programs might need to consider different or expanded approaches to improve outcomes in other areas.

Aside from these large, randomized evaluations, the state of the research on responsible fatherhood programs—which mainly focus on parenting or economic stability—has been assessed in (1) the Strengthening Families Evidence review, sponsored by ACF (Avellar et al. 2011); (2) a literature review of RF programs for the Texas Department of Family Protective Services, conducted in 2016 by the Child and Family Research Partnership (Osborne et al. 2016); and (3) a meta-analysis of fatherhood program effectiveness sponsored by the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network (FRPN) (Holmes et al. 2018). Generally, the reviews found that studies tended to include follow-ups of less than a year, which meant that the studies could not answer questions about longer-term effects (Avellar et al. 2011; Osborne et al. 2016).

**Table I.1. Large, randomized controlled trials of programs serving low-income fathers**

Study	Study sample size and target population	Services	Length of follow-up	Impacts on:			
				Fathers' parenting and financial support	Co-parenting	Economic stability	Fathers' development and well-being
Parents and Children Together (Avellar et al. 2018)	5,522 fathers	Group workshops and individualized support covering parenting, healthy relationships and co-parenting, and economic stability	About one year after random assignment	Favorable impacts on self-reported nurturing behavior and engagement in age-appropriate activities with children; no effect on in-person contact or financial support	No impact on quality of the co-parenting relationship	No impact on earnings during three months prior to follow-up survey; favorable impact on number of consecutive quarters employed in year after study enrollment	No impact on depressive symptoms, moderate or high risk of depression, or feelings of external control
Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (Cancian et al. 2019)	10,161 noncustodial parents	Enhanced child support services, employment services, and parenting classes	12 and 24 months after random assignment	Small negative impact on average child support paid; positive impact on father's sense of responsibility for children	Not examined	No impact on hours worked in the year after random assignment; small positive impact on earnings in first year after random assignment; no earnings impact in second year	No impact on emotional well-being
TYRO Dads (Kim and Joon Jang 2018)	469 fathers	Workshop focused on father identity and responsibility	3 months after end of program	No impact on parenting satisfaction and father-child activities; positive impact on parenting efficacy; no impact on parenting role identity or perceived challenges of parenting	Favorable impact on quality of relationship with child's mother	Not examined	Not examined
Non-Custodial Parent Choices PEER (Schroeder et al. 2011)	330 low-income, noncustodial fathers	Job search assistance, education and training, group session on parenting and co-parenting, and other supports	About one year (varied by outcome)	Positive impact on whether any child support paid and consistency of payments	Not examined	Positive impact on amount of time employed; no impact on average quarterly earnings	Not examined
Parents' Fair Share (Knox and Redcross 2000; Martinez and Miller 2000)	5,611 low-income, noncustodial fathers	Skills training and education, job search assistance, group meetings, voluntary mediation with custodial parent, and enhanced child support enforcement services	12 and 24 months after random assignment	Positive impact on formal child support paid; negative impact on informal financial support; no impact on total dollar value of support received; no impact on contacts with the child	No positive effects on co-parenting; increased proportion of mothers who reported a disagreement with non-custodial father	No impact on employment or earnings one or two years after random assignment	Not examined

In terms of general effectiveness, the most recent review, which included studies of 34 responsible fatherhood programs, found a small, significant overall effect for fathers who participated in responsible fatherhood programs (Holmes et al. 2018).<sup>3</sup> For specific outcomes, responsible fatherhood programs appeared to have small but significant effects on parenting, father involvement, and co-parenting relationships (the three most commonly measured outcomes), but no effects on economic outcomes or child support payments (the least commonly measured outcomes). Outcomes for father well-being and romantic relationships were not reported.

ACF directed Mathematica to create a set of RF Pathways-to-Outcomes models to explore how and why RF programs may achieve different impacts and to examine the links between program activities and participant outcomes.

### **Purpose of this report**

Despite offering important contributions to the body of knowledge on programs serving fathers, prior evaluations did not aim to identify which program activities contributed to any achieved impacts. In light of this gap, ACF directed Mathematica to create a set of RF Pathways-to-Outcomes models described in this report to explore how and why RF programs may achieve different impacts and to examine the links between program activities and participant outcomes. The Pathways-to-Outcomes models draw on evaluation findings and RF researcher and practitioner review and input to depict how specific program activities may contribute to the intended outcomes. The goal was to develop a series of models that visually link program activities to outcomes.

By identifying possible connections between programs' strategies and their intended impact, practitioners and program developers could consider these hypotheses as they design and implement programs. Additionally, researchers can generate testable hypotheses about the connections between specific program activities and their impact on participants. Testing these hypotheses could allow practitioners and researchers to better understand the effects of specific RF program activities responsible for observed outcomes. Therefore, these models may help researchers form specific questions for future research aimed at further improving RF programs and advancing the field.

### **What are Pathways-to-Outcomes Models?**

Pathways-to-Outcomes models visually depict how program activities may lead to specific outcomes. They use evaluation findings to identify program impacts and activities that are conceptually related. The Pathways-to-Outcomes models were designed for use by a broad audience, including practitioners in the HMRE field. As a result, the Pathways-to-Outcomes models aim to provide information on the activities RF programs may undertake to work towards the expected outcomes. The Pathways-to-Outcomes models show only the activities and outcomes relevant to a specific hypothesis—whereas other types of models may include a broader set of activities, outcomes, and other factors. The set of Pathways-to-Outcomes models are related to each other and should be considered together.

### **Report roadmap**

The remainder of this report presents a set of models for RF programs developed as part of the PACT Pathways-to-Outcomes project. Chapter II describes our methods and process for developing the models. Chapter III introduces the model template. Chapter IV presents the four RF models and provides a discussion of the model components. Chapter V discusses considerations for future research and programming.

## II. METHODS

The contents of the Pathways-to-Outcomes models draw primarily from three components of the PACT evaluation: impact, process, and qualitative studies. The impact and implementation studies examined four RF programs that received OFA RF grants in 2011 (Table II.1). The qualitative study featured three rounds of in-depth interviews with fathers who enrolled in the RF programs in PACT about their upbringing, life experiences, and experiences with the RF programs. The PACT evaluation is the starting point for the Pathways-to-Outcomes models because it is the largest and most detailed study of RF programs that provide parenting, relationship, and economic security services to date.

**Table II.1. RF Programs in PACT**

Grantee name	Program name	Location
Connections to Success	Successful STEPS	Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas City, Kansas
Fathers' Support Center	Family Formation Program	St. Louis, Missouri
Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota	The FATHER Project	Minneapolis, Minnesota and St. Paul, Minnesota
Urban Ventures	The Center for Fathering	Minneapolis, Minnesota

We developed models for outcome domains for which at least one RF program in PACT had a statistically significant impact (Table II.2). As a result, we did not develop a hypothesis for healthy romantic relationships, even though it is one of the three required components of services for RF grantees (Avellar et al. 2018).

In addition to the PACT evaluation findings, the Pathways-to-Outcomes models are informed by discussions with practitioners and researchers and the results from a targeted literature search.<sup>4</sup> The process is depicted in Figure II.1 and is described below:

1. **Reviewed PACT evaluation documents.** We reviewed eight research reports from the PACT evaluation (2011 to 2020), which contain program design and implementation information, impact analysis results, and findings from in-depth interviews (see box on next page).

2. **Developed detailed program models.** We coded and synthesized information in the documents above to identify influence factors, key program activities, and outcomes. Then, we created four detailed program-specific models, one for each of the programs listed in Table II.1. We designed the detailed program models to organize and synthesize all of the information we knew about the programs and to provide a first step towards identifying the pathways to change. The models incorporated information on influence factors such as public policy, community/ neighborhood factors, and individual and interpersonal factors. They also contained detailed information about the key features of each program. The outcomes section listed all the outcomes measured in the PACT impact study and their expected direction. It also highlighted outcomes for which there were statistically significant impacts for the pooled sample of fathers in PACT.

### **PACT reports used in Pathways-to-Outcomes model development**

#### **Process Study**

- Parents and Children Together: Design and Implementation of Responsible Fatherhood Programs (OPRE Report No. 2015-76)
- Participation in Responsible Fatherhood Programs in the PACT Evaluation: Associations with Father and Program Characteristics (OPRE Report No. 2018-96)
- Parents and Children Together: The Complex Needs of Low-Income Men and How Responsible Fatherhood Programs Address Them (OPRE Report No. 2018-18)

#### **Impact Study**

- Parents and Children Together: Effects of Responsible Fatherhood Programs (OPRE Report No. 2018-50)

#### **Qualitative Study**

- In Their Own Voices: The Hopes and Struggles of Responsible Fatherhood Participants in the Parents and Children Together (PACT) Evaluation (OPRE Report No. 2015-67)
- The Role of Social Networks Among Low-Income Fathers: Findings from the PACT Evaluation (OPRE Report No. 2016-60)
- Fathers' Views of Co-Parenting Relationships: Findings from the PACT Evaluation (OPRE Report No. 2016-60)

#### **Special Topics**

- H-PACT: A Descriptive Study of Responsible Fatherhood Programs Serving Hispanic Men (OPRE Report No. 2015-112)

3. **Consulted with research experts.** We held webinars with researchers who study fatherhood and parenting programs to introduce the Pathways-to-Outcomes work and get feedback on the initial models. Researchers provided input on (1) whether identified pathways between program activities and short-term outcomes were plausible; (2) whether the models were complete or were missing key information (such as key program activities); (3) recommendations for literature to review; and (4) the potential value of the models to practitioners and researchers. The

**Table II.2. Overview of impacts observed in the PACT evaluation**

Outcome measure	All programs	Family Formation Program	Successful STEPS	The FATHER Project	The Center for Fathering
<b>Co-parenting</b>					
Being a good co-parenting team	•	•	•	•	•
Positive co-parenting alliance with focal mother	•	•	•	•	•
<b>Positive conflict behaviors with focal mother</b>	•	++	•	•	•
<b>Avoidance of negative conflict behaviors with focal mother</b>	•	+++	•	•	•
<b>Social-emotional and mental well-being</b>					
<b>Depressive symptoms</b>	•	++	•	•	•
<b>At risk of high or moderate depression</b>	•	+++	•	•	•
<b>Feelings of external control</b>	•	+	•	++	•
<b>Labor market success</b>					
Average monthly earnings, reported	•	•	•	•	•
Average monthly earnings, administrative data	•	•	•	•	•
<b>Number of consecutive quarters employed in first year, administrative data</b>	++	++	+	•	•
<b>Parenting skills and father involvement</b>					
In-person contact with children	•	•	•	•	•
<b>Age-appropriate activities with focal child</b>	+++	+++	•	•	++
Average monthly financial support per child	•	+	•	•	•
<b>Nurturing behaviors with focal child</b>	+++	++	•	•	+
Nonviolent discipline of focal child	•	++	•	•	•

Notes: • = Not statistically significant

+ / ++ / +++ = Statistically significant at the .10 / .05 / .01 level

Bolded outcomes are the focus of Pathways-to-Outcomes models.

research experts appreciated the models and thought they were complete. But, recognizing the changing landscape of RF programs, the research experts suggested that evidence-informed models that linked specific program activities to intended outcomes would be more useful to the field. This type of model would enable researchers and grantees to identify opportunities to strengthen programs and develop specific strategies for targeted outcomes.

4. **Developed hypotheses to link program activities to outcomes.** We used the information collected in the initial program-specific models to identify activities that might have produced positive changes in the outcomes. First, we reviewed the PACT impact report that reported on impacts in a pooled sample of all fathers in PACT as well as exploratory, program-level analyses (Table II.2). Using the pooled and program-specific impacts, we identified a set of outcomes and programs to focus on:
  - **Healthy relationships between co-parents (Model 1):** Positive impacts for the Family Formation Program on two outcome measures (positive conflict behaviors with focal mother and avoidance of negative conflict behaviors with focal mother)
  - **Father development and well-being (Model 2):** Positive impacts for the Family Formation Program on three outcome measures (depressive symptoms, at risk of moderate or high depression, and feelings of external control) and The FATHER Project on one outcome measure (feelings of external control). We also added “decreased drug use” to the model, based on feedback from practitioners (see below).
  - **Consistent employment (Model 3):** Positive impacts for the Family Formation Program and Successful STEPS on one outcome measure (the number of consecutive quarters employed in the first year after program enrollment). While significant in the pooled sample, program-specific analyses suggested that the impact finding was driven by two programs with a similar implementation model.<sup>5</sup> Using the program-specific analyses, we focused on activities conducted by these two programs.

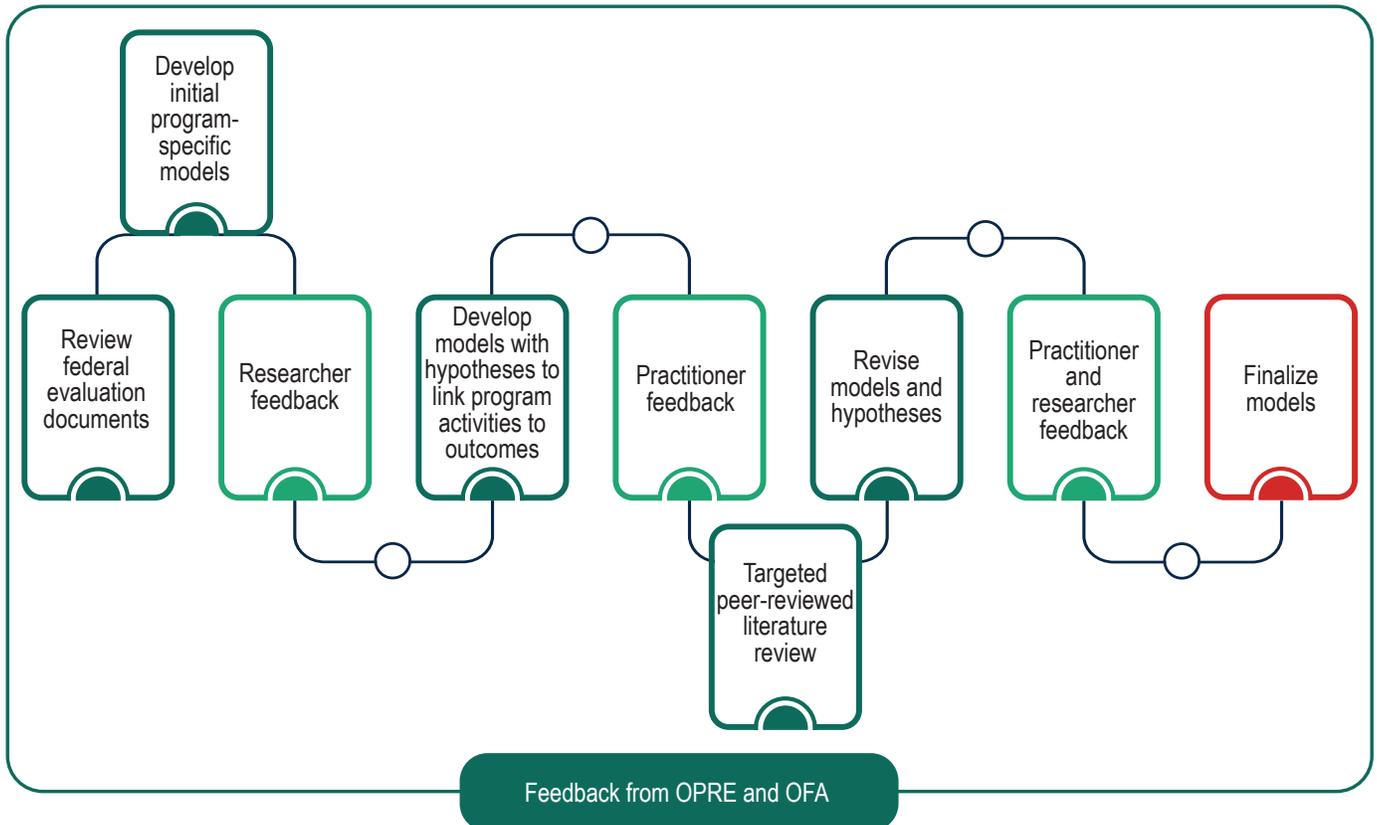
- **Parenting skills and father involvement (Model 4):** Positive impacts on two outcome measures (age-appropriate activities with focal child and nurturing behaviors with focal child) observed in the pooled sample. Program-specific analyses suggested these findings were driven by the two programs with the largest number of fathers in the pooled sample (Family Formation Program and The Center for Fathering). These programs represented both implementation models used by PACT programs, so we considered program activities common across all programs.<sup>6</sup>

Next, we examined program-specific activities that might relate to or be important for the observed impacts. For example, if two or more programs had impacts on a given outcome, we looked for related program activities that all programs used. We reviewed the PACT qualitative and implementation study to identify relevant influence factors, such as experiences that fathers reported made it harder to spend time with their children, or local and state policies that programs reported made it challenging to address fathers' barriers.

5. **Solicited practitioner feedback.** Practitioners from programs in the PACT study and other fatherhood programs provided input on (1) how well the models resonated with their experience in delivering these programs, (2) whether the models were missing any key program activities, and (3) how to refine and clarify the models to make them more useful to practitioners. For example, practitioners recommended that we add the outcome "decreased drug use" to Model 2. Many fathers in PACT struggled with drug use issues. In the process study, some program leaders felt that fathers' challenges with drug use underlay other issues, such as not being a regular presence in the lives of their children and being unable to find and retain a job, and provided services to address fathers' drug misuse (Dion et al. 2018; Zaveri et al. 2015).
6. **Conducted targeted literature searches.** While we relied primarily on the PACT evaluation findings, we conducted targeted literature searches to help refine, inform, and support our hypotheses. We sought meta-analyses and other literature to fill in knowledge gaps and inform our influence factors. (See Appendix A for a description of our search methodology).

7. **Reviewed models with practitioners and researchers.** Before finalizing the models, we consulted the same set of practitioners and researchers who provided feedback in Steps 2 and 5 to ensure that the models were complete, useful for practice and research, and responsive to the earlier feedback they provided.

Figure II.1. **Process for developing Pathways-to-Outcomes models**



### III. PATHWAYS-TO-OUTCOMES MODEL TEMPLATE

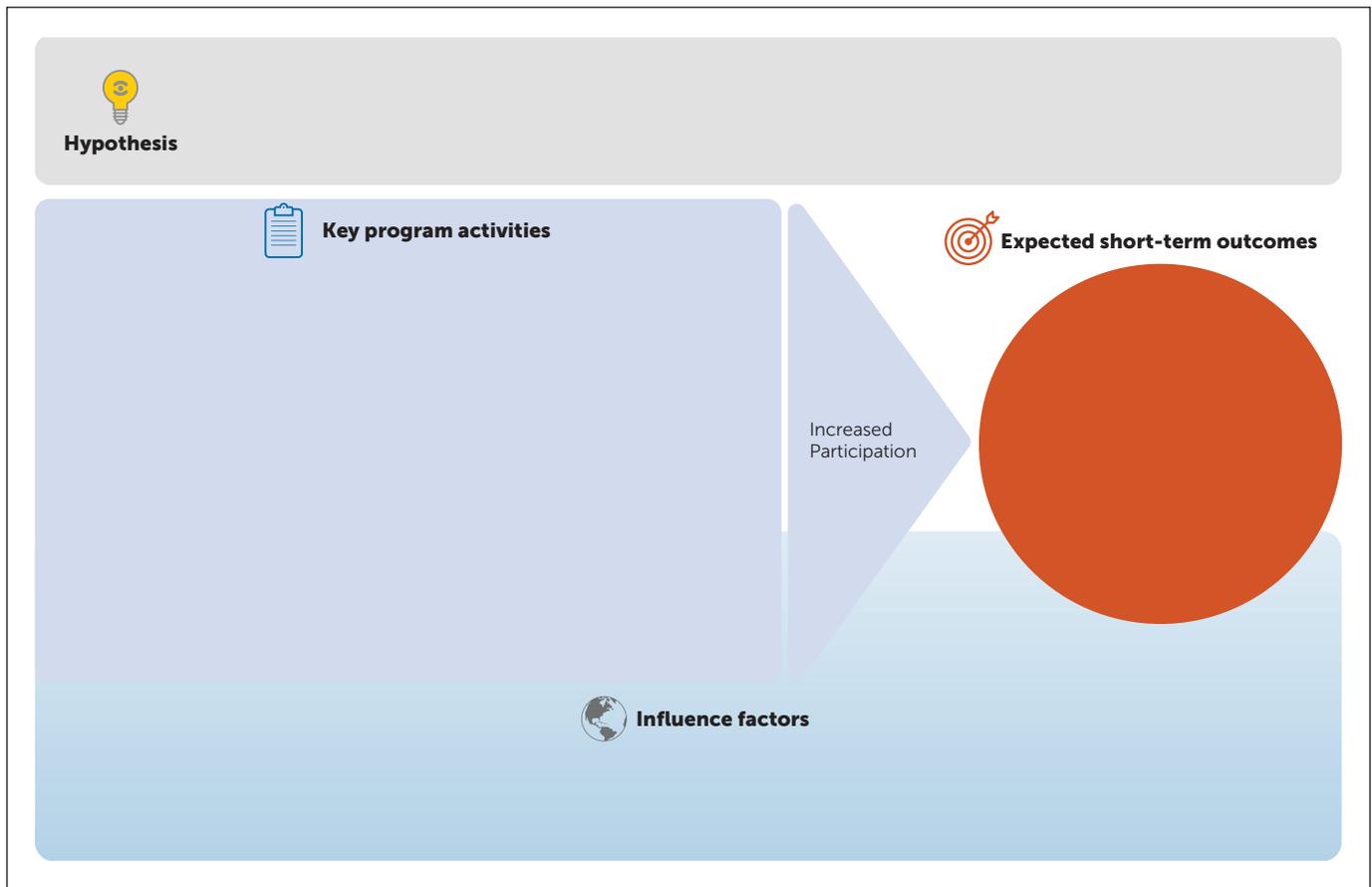
Each Pathways-to-Outcomes model focuses on one of four outcome domains measured in the PACT evaluation: (1) healthy relationships between co-parents, (2) father development and well-being, (3) consistent employment, and (4) parenting and father involvement. Each model includes the following components (Figure III.1):

- **Hypothesis.** The hypothesis is a summary statement that links key program activities to the short-term expected outcomes.
- **Key program activities.** Key program activities are what grantees do to design, implement, and support the delivery of their services. Activities include program components and strategies. Program components are the actual services provided, such as the core workshops. Program strategies refer to how programs deliver those services, such as frontloading parenting content in the workshops.
- **Intermediate participation output.** Fathers must spend sufficient time in the program to experience benefits. Each model includes increased participation as an intermediate output in the head of the arrow between key program activities and short-term outcomes. Emerging research points to the importance of fathers receiving a high amount of content for programs to have positive effects (Pearson et al. 2018).
- **Outcomes.** Outcomes represent the expected changes for fathers following program participation. The models only include short-term outcomes because the federal PACT evaluation only measured impacts 12 months after program enrollment.
- **Influence factors.** Influence factors define the broader context in which a program operates and include both personal and environmental factors. In the models, we organized personal and environmental factors into personal characteristics and community and policy context. Personal characteristics include individual attributes or experiences, such as employment history and exposure to trauma. Community and policy context describes the community in which the program operates. It can include the available services and organizations in the community, as well as infrastructure (such as transportation). The influence factors were drawn primarily from the qualitative interviews with fathers, who shared detailed information

about their life experiences and their thoughts about participating in the RF programs. We combined these insights with information from the process study, including interviews with program staff.

Influence factors may affect the development of program services and implementation, or even the outcomes that programs might expect to see (Fixsen et al. 2005). For this reason, influence factors underlie every other component of the model.

Figure III.1. **Responsible Fatherhood Pathways-to-Outcomes model template**



## IV. RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD PATHWAYS-TO-OUTCOMES MODELS

This chapter presents four Pathways-to-Outcomes models for RF programs and their associated hypotheses. The models hypothesize program activities that could lead to short-term outcomes. Each model lists specific program activities hypothesized to be associated with selected outcomes. Some activities, such as encouraging fathers to form bonds with their peers in the programs, could influence multiple outcomes. As a result, some activities are included in more than one model.

Though the Pathways-to-Outcomes models are presented individually, the key program outcomes overlap, influence, and reinforce each other. For example, the quality of a father's co-parenting relationship influences father involvement (Isacco et al. 2010; Arnold and Beelman 2018; Dyer et al. 2017). There is a relationship between well-being and co-parenting, particularly for nonresidential fathers (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2007; Coates and Phares 2014). Poor well-being is also highly correlated with unemployment (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2007; Hoard and Anderson 2004) and diminishes the quality of interactions between fathers and their children (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2007). Labor market outcomes are intertwined with parenting outcomes (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2010; Child and Family Research Partnership 2018; Bryan 2013). These interactions have implications for the design and implementation of RF programs. Readers should consider the set of models together and complementarily. However, for the sake of clarity and ease of interpreting the models, we chose to present them separately.

Readers should consider the set of models together and complementarily.

The pathways suggested in the models below have several limitations:

- **Although they hypothesize causality, they do not confirm causality.** As discussed earlier, these hypotheses were developed on the basis of PACT findings. The PACT impact study only tested the impact of the programs as implemented, not the influence of either individual program activities or groups of program activities on outcomes. The main confirmatory impact analysis was based on results pooled across the four programs. The exploratory subgroup analyses, which formed the basis for three of the four models, had smaller sample sizes than the main confirmatory analyses. We did not conduct additional statistical analyses to develop these hypotheses.

- **They do not present an exhaustive list of program activities or influence factors that could affect outcomes.** The models only present a selection of the activities that the programs in PACT implemented—features hypothesized to be linked to outcomes because they are seen more commonly in the PACT programs that had impacts than those that did not. RF programs may implement other strategies tailored to the populations they serve and the contexts in which they operate, and may have other nuanced approaches to working with fathers that are difficult to capture or measure. We did not conduct a moderator analysis to assess how influence factors may have affected the hypothesized pathways.
- **They do not present long-term outcomes.** The PACT evaluation measured outcomes for fathers 12 months after program enrollment. This is a longer time frame than many other evaluations of RF programs, which generally measured outcomes immediately after program completion (Osborne et al. 2016; Holmes et al. 2018). However, it is still a relatively short window. The short-term outcomes measured in PACT may be linked to longer-term outcomes. For example, improved father involvement influences social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes for children (Adamsons and Johnson 2013; Sobolewski and King 2006; Stewart 2003; Marsiglio et al. 2000). Because of the limited evidence base, we do not include long-term outcomes in the models.

Before adopting any strategies contained in the models, program designers should consider whether they are appropriate for their program contexts and the populations they serve.

In sum, the Pathways-to-Outcomes models presented below are formative and exploratory. They suggest directions for advancing the field of RF programming and research by depicting evidence-informed hypotheses that could be tested in future evaluations. Program designers can consider the key program activities in the models as evidence-informed suggestions for building more effective programs. They are not evidence-based practices, because individual strategies have not been directly evaluated. Before adopting any strategies contained in the models, program designers should consider whether they are appropriate for their program contexts and the populations they serve. Not all of the strategies listed in these models are directly discussed in the section below. Rather, this chapter highlights those that are most central to each hypothesis.

### **Model 1: Healthy relationships between co-parents**

For nonresidential and unmarried fathers, maintaining a positive and respectful co-parenting alliance with their children's mothers is essential to being involved with their children (Isacco et al. 2010; Arnold and Beelman 2018; Dyer et al. 2017; Levine et al. 2015). Co-parenting describes how parents share responsibility for raising their children (Dyer et al. 2017). Fathers sometimes view mothers as gatekeepers who control fathers' access to their children when they do not live under the same roof (Allen and Hawkins 1999; Dyer et al. 2017). Gatekeeping is not the only mechanism that affects father involvement. Mothers' unsupportive or undermining behaviors can also influence fathers' parental self-efficacy and involvement (Hwang 2018; Fagan and Barnett 2003). For their part, mothers may not trust fathers or look favorably on their parenting skills based on the fathers' past actions and attitudes. Also, mothers' new romantic partners may want them to limit contact with fathers (Whitton et al. 2018).

For nonresidential fathers, a poor or conflictual co-parenting relationship is often the primary barrier to being involved with their children (Whitton et al. 2018). Fathers with poor co-parenting relationships tend to be less satisfied with their relationships with their children, even if their access is not restricted (Levine et al. 2016). Nonresidential fathers must develop skills to have a positive relationship with their co-parents, which may allow them access to their children and even allow them to participate fully in their children's

#### **Hypothesis**

**Programs may improve fathers' co-parenting relationships by integrating personal development, parenting, and healthy relationships content in a group-based workshop, educating fathers about domestic violence, providing individual case management, and engaging co-parents.** Programs primarily address co-parenting through workshop content on personal development, parenting, and healthy relationships. When sequencing content, programs often offer personal development content, such as emotional well-being, goal setting, and personal accountability, before co-parenting content. Fathers also may have opportunities to discuss co-parenting issues and challenges one-on-one with a qualified case manager or other staff member. Programs can partner with community providers to educate fathers on domestic violence. Supplementary services that help fathers reduce barriers to child access and engage co-parents may further strengthen fathers' co-parenting relationships.

lives. Yet, most interventions and measures of co-parenting have focused on mothers and fathers who live together (Florsheim and Hawkins 2014; Whitton et al. 2018, Fagan and Kaufman 2014), and little to no research has been done on the components or delivery methods of effective co-parenting interventions (Florsheim and Hawkins 2014). This makes improving the co-parenting relationship an important and essential component of RF programs.

### **Observed outcomes based on the PACT findings**

One program in PACT had positive effects on fathers' reported co-parenting behaviors. Specifically, this program increased fathers' reported use of positive conflict behaviors and reduced fathers' reported use of negative conflict behaviors with the mothers of their children. Our hypothesis is based primarily on the activities of this program (Figure IV.1).

Research suggests that other fatherhood programs have had some success influencing co-parenting. Two of the large, randomized studies described in Table I.1 measured outcomes related to co-parenting relationships, and one found favorable effects. A recent literature review of fatherhood programs identified five studies that measured the programs' effects on co-parenting (Osborne et al. 2016). Three of the studies found no effects. One study reported reduced conflict behaviors between co-parents. The remaining study found mixed results: Fathers reported improved co-parenting, while mothers did not report improvements. The Fatherhood Research and Practice Network meta-analysis (Holmes et al. 2018) found that, of all the outcomes it measured, responsible fatherhood programs had the largest effect on co-parenting outcomes.<sup>7</sup> However, only 14 of 34 studies measured co-parenting, and the overall aggregated magnitude of the effect was small, assuming a normal distribution.<sup>8</sup> The program activities described in the following model contribute to a nascent body of knowledge about how RF programs may improve co-parenting relationships.

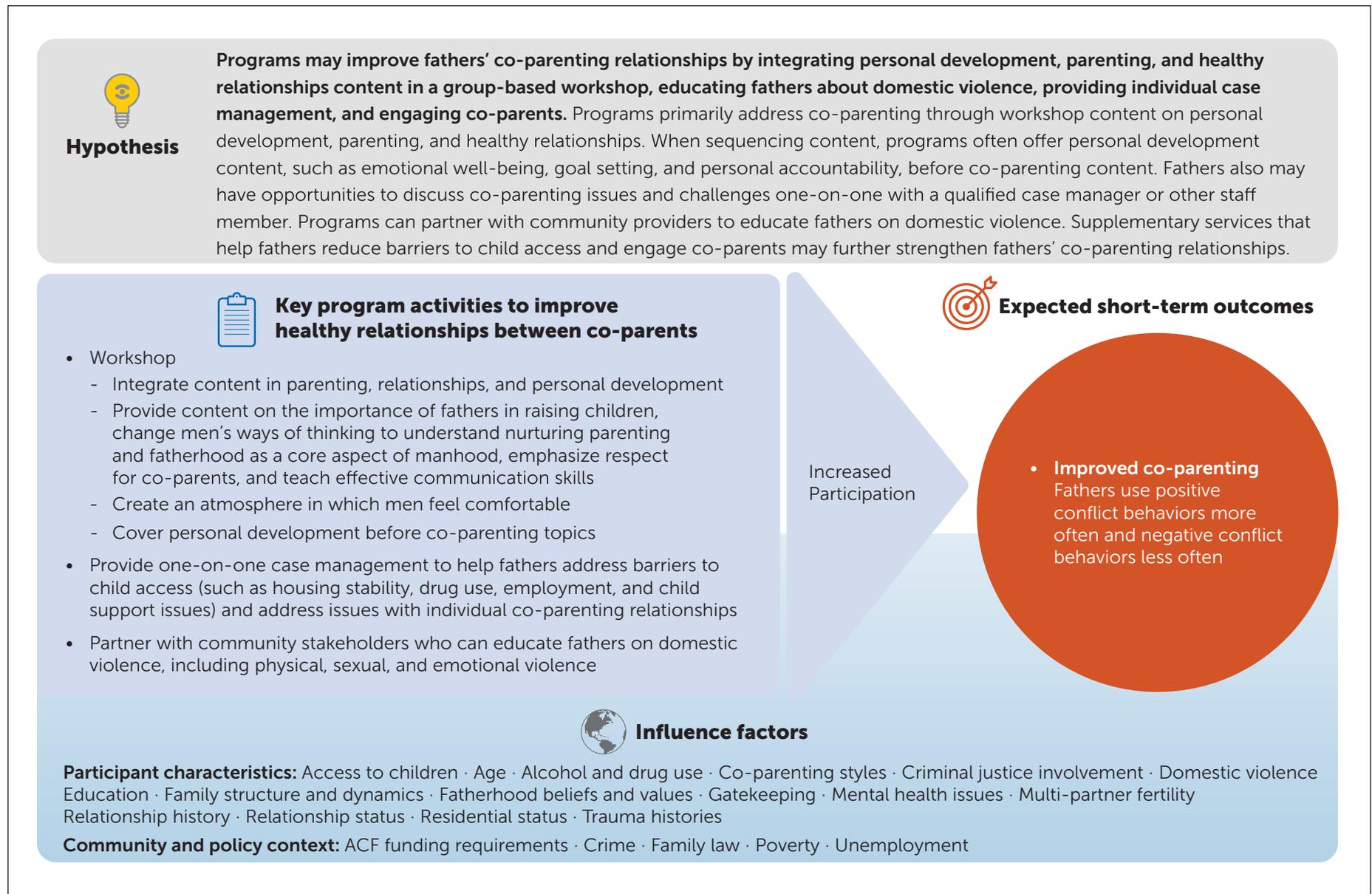
The program activities described in the following model contribute to a nascent body of knowledge about how RF programs may improve co-parenting relationships.

### **Key program activities**

This section describes the key program activities that appear to be most relevant to co-parenting and the positive impacts that one program in PACT achieved.

**Implement a core integrated workshop.** The program with effects on co-parenting outcomes featured a core workshop that integrated parenting and relationship skills content. For parents to support one another and

Figure IV.1. **Healthy relationships between co-parents**



manage their interactions, fathers must develop relationship skills, such as communication, conflict resolution, active decision making, and managing roles and expectations in a relationship. They must also develop parenting knowledge and skills in order to contribute to child-rearing decisions and to share parenting responsibility (Feinberg 2003). Generally, RF programs provide content in a single, integrated core workshop, or in separate topic-specific workshops. Providing parenting and relationship skills content in an integrated workshop, as opposed to separate workshops, may increase the chance that participating fathers are exposed to content in both areas. While all RF programs in PACT covered relationship skills, three did so in separate relationship skills workshops, which were poorly attended (Dion et al. 2018). An integrated workshop may also offer opportunities to provide explicit instruction on how to apply relationship skills to nonromantic co-parenting relationships, whereas a stand-alone relationship skills workshop might focus primarily on romantic relationships.

**Maintain a workshop environment that is comfortable for fathers.**

Unlike the other three PACT programs, the program with effects on co-parenting outcomes did not allow co-parents or romantic partners to attend any parenting or relationship skills group workshops. A space that is focused just on program participants may allow fathers to be comfortable and forthcoming with their troubles and insecurities as parents and co-parents, and may promote mutual support. Around their co-parents, participants may be more likely to deflect or not admit to challenges—especially if their co-parenting relationship is marked by tension and frustration. Additionally, a participant-only workshop environment can provide a space for fathers to discuss issues of privilege and discrimination safely and without judgment. According to one reviewer who is both a researcher and practitioner, in order to be strong co-parents, fathers must reconcile their personal experiences with being discriminated against—as a racial/ethnic minority, for example—with how their maleness and masculinity has shaped their relationships with their co-parents, such as through power dynamics, control, and the decision of who is considered primarily responsible for caring for their children. Conversations such as these are tied into the personal development content that the RF programs in PACT offered.

**Sequence the workshop so that personal development content comes before other topics.** The program with effects on co-parenting outcomes began its integrated workshop with units on personal accountability,

setting goals, identifying individual values, and exploring what it means to be a father and a provider. The program found these topics to be foundational to all of the other content in the workshop, and believed that fathers must become accountable for themselves in order to be responsible fathers and have a healthy co-parenting relationship with the mothers of their children. Model 2 discusses personal development content in greater depth.

**Educate fathers on physical, emotional, and psychological abuse and domestic violence, and involve community partners in this education.** The PACT program with effects on co-parenting outcomes had a long-standing relationship with a community partner that provided services to families affected by domestic violence (DV).<sup>9</sup> A representative from this agency presented to fathers during the integrated workshop. Based on the PACT in-depth interviews with participants (Holcomb et al. 2015), many fathers in the RF programs in PACT reported being perpetrators and victims of violence in their prior romantic relationships. These fathers described many of their more volatile relationships as littered with emotional, psychological, and physical violence. For some, this continued even after the relationship ended within the context of a purely co-parenting relationship (Holcomb et al. 2015; Friend et al. 2016). Based on this and our conversations with experienced practitioners and researchers, it is important for RF programs to have conversations with fathers about DV that cover not only physical violence but also emotional and psychological abuse.

**Provide separate, supplementary services to co-parents of participants.** Although there may be benefits of workshops focused on participants, these alone may not be sufficient to influence co-parenting outcomes. One of the reasons RF programs may struggle to influence co-parenting outcomes is that changes in co-parenting are dependent on the actions and attitudes of both parents. RF practitioners and researchers suggested that mothers may distrust the fathers in the program because of a history of negative interactions or broken promises, emotional trauma, and/or psychological and financial control. They may need firsthand proof of improvement—not just fathers' words.

In addition to providing a workshop just for participants, services targeted at co-parents, such as a separate co-parents-only group, may be important for improving co-parenting relationships. Limited research suggests that

some mothers may also benefit from learning the conflict management, communication, and co-parenting skills taught in these programs (Whitton et al. 2018; Friend et al. 2016). One researcher and practitioner noted that for mothers to be receptive to fathers' efforts to be better co-parents, the RF program may help mothers understand how the fathers are changing their attitudes and behaviors.

Separate services for mothers—that is, services where mothers are targeted and engaged, without first and primarily targeted and engaging fathers—are not allowable activities under the current RF grant funding authorization, and they were not implemented by the PACT programs.<sup>10</sup> The practitioners we consulted had provided separately funded services for mothers in their RF programs and stressed the importance of these services. An evaluation of one fatherhood program highlighted the promise of co-parenting services for mothers and fathers, but noted several challenges related to engaging co-parents, including distrust of the program, frustration with the fathers' behaviors, concerns about their safety when interacting with fathers, and logistical barriers (Whitton et al. 2018). In interviews, both fathers and mothers agreed that the fatherhood programs could do more outreach to mothers and make more of an effort to include them meaningfully in services (Whitton et al. 2018).

**Include case management services.** Although the core workshop can teach content and skills that contribute to improved co-parenting relationships, fathers in RF programs face other barriers that can impede effective co-parenting. These include economic instability, child support enforcement issues such as nonpayment of child support orders (Child and Family Research Partnership 2018; Bryan 2013; Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2010), domestic violence, and depression or other mental health problems (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2007; Coates and Phares 2014). Individual case management can help fathers resolve co-parenting challenges and access supports through referrals to other social service agencies (and not through ACF grant-funded RF programs). These supports may include legal services, family counseling, and mental health treatment.

### **Influence factors**

Many individual and interpersonal factors directly and indirectly influence co-parenting outcomes. The majority of the fathers in PACT were not in

a steady relationship with the mothers of their children or did not live with either the mothers or the children (Avellar et al. 2018). In addition, many had conflicted or disengaged relationships (Friend et al. 2016). Gatekeeping, fatherhood beliefs and values, and parenting styles—of both co-parents—are different aspects of the co-parenting relationship (Dyer et al. 2017). Fathers who see their co-parents as gatekeepers who restrict access to their children may resent them; differing beliefs, values, and parenting styles can also cause conflict if co-parents are unable to resolve their differences or compromise. Mothers may not trust their co-parents because of their past actions or a history of controlling and abusive behaviors (Whitton et al. 2018). Relationship history, trauma history, family structure and dynamics, multiple partner fertility, and residential status are part of the context of co-parenting (Friend et al. 2016). For example, fathers who have children with multiple women may have different co-parenting relationships with each (Levine et al. 2016), which makes co-parenting issues more challenging and complex for programs to address (Hammar et al. 2015).

Individual factors may also influence the way parents work together and interact. Factors such as drug use, mental health issues, and criminal justice history limit the extent to which fathers are active and involved co-parents; younger fathers may also be less involved (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2007; Child and Family Research Partnership 2018; Coates and Phares 2014). Access to children also is affected by the co-parenting relationship. In qualitative interviews, fathers in PACT indicated that access to children was the greatest source of conflict between themselves and the mothers of their children (Friend et al. 2016; Dion et al. 2018).

High rates of crime, poverty, and unemployment are all contextual stressors that may affect the relationship between co-parents. Dealing with an unsafe environment or constrained resources may cause tension within a family. A lack of job opportunities, for example, may limit a father's ability to pay child support. Similarly, if a father lives in an unsafe area, the mother of his child may not want to leave the child in his care. Family law, such as how custody is determined for noncustodial parents, the process for getting parenting time agreements, and the child support order modification process, were significant challenges for the fathers in PACT (Holcomb et al. 2015; Dion et al. 2018).

## **Model 2: Father development and well-being**

RF programs must contend with health and well-being issues as a part of a comprehensive set of services for low-income fathers that aids in their development. Many fathers in PACT entered the program having experienced difficult life circumstances and adverse events. Based on prior research (for example, Felitti et al. 1998), these adverse experiences place them at risk for a variety of mental and physical health conditions that may influence their ability to fulfill their roles as supportive parents, partners, and providers. Depressive symptoms were more common among fathers who participated in PACT than the general population (Avellar et al. 2018). In addition, the fathers tended to be socially isolated, which contributes to depression (D'Angelo et al. 2016). Substance use disorders often co-occur with well-being issues. Many fathers in PACT struggled with drug use issues. In addition, some program leaders felt that fathers' challenges with drug use underlay other issues, such as not being a regular presence in the lives of their children and being unable to find and retain a job (Dion et al. 2018; Zaveri et al. 2015). To improve and promote the personal growth of fathers and prepare them to focus on parenting, economic stability, and healthy marriage, programs worked to strengthen fathers' underlying protective factors through services considered "personal development" (Dion et al. 2018).

Depression contributes to reductions in the quantity and quality of father involvement with their children. Married and unmarried fathers showing depressive symptoms are likely to be less involved with their children (Child and Family Research Partnership 2018; Isacco et al. 2010). A strong co-parenting relationship may help depressed fathers engage more with their children (Coates and Phares 2014), but other research suggests that depressed fathers also have poor relationships with their co-parents (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2007). As discussed previously, a poor co-parenting relationship may also contribute to lower levels of father-child interaction. Further, research suggests that fathers with depressive symptoms and other markers of psychological distress are less warm and less engaged with their children and have less-stimulating interactions (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2007; Coates and Phares 2014).

The interaction between father involvement and depression is complex. In general, increased access to children helps improve fathers' well-being. However, more child involvement may actually exacerbate mental health issues

## Hypothesis

**Programs may support father development and well-being by reducing their risk for depression or depressive symptoms and associated risk of substance use disorder.** To achieve this, programs can encourage peer interactions, hire staff with whom participants can identify, and partner with mental health and substance use disorder treatment programs to increase access to these services. Programs may need to include substantial personal development content in core workshops.

for nonresidential fathers (Kotila and Dush 2013). This may be because nonresidential fathers struggle to effectively co-parent with someone they are no longer romantically involved with. Research on depression implies that RF programs should consider options for addressing the well-being of fathers. It may not be correct to assume that increasing fathers' access to their children alone will reduce fathers' depressive symptoms. Moreover, without addressing fathers' existing mental health challenges, improving fathers' parenting knowledge and skills may not by itself improve the quality of fathers' interactions with their children.

### Observed outcomes based on the PACT findings

The PACT impact study measured three well-being indicators: (1) frequency of experiencing depressive symptoms, (2) fathers' risk of moderate or high depression, and (3) the extent to which fathers believe they have control over their lives or whether they are controlled by external forces. Overall, the programs in PACT did not have any effect on outcomes related to well-being. Program-level analyses suggested that one program had an effect on all three measures of well-being that PACT assessed, while one program had an effect on reducing fathers' feelings of external control. Key program activities in the Pathways-to-Outcomes model were primarily drawn from the activities of these two programs (Figure IV.2).

Program-level analyses suggested that one program had an effect on all three measures of well-being that PACT assessed, while one program had an effect on reducing fathers' feelings of external control.

Few evaluations of RF programs have reported well-being or health outcomes (Osborne et al. 2016). The Child and Family Research Partnership literature review identified two evaluations that reported mental health outcomes, although both were of programs for specialized populations (incarcerated fathers and parents whose children had died). The mental health outcomes these evaluations measured included the prevalence of psychiatric

disturbances, anxiety, and self-worth. The Fatherhood Research and Practice Network meta-analysis (Holmes et al. 2018) did not measure effect sizes for outcomes related to well-being, such as mental health. Aside from PACT, one large, randomized study described in Table I.1 found no impacts of program participation on fathers' emotional well-being (Cancian et al. 2019); the others did not measure father development or well-being outcomes.

### **Key program activities**

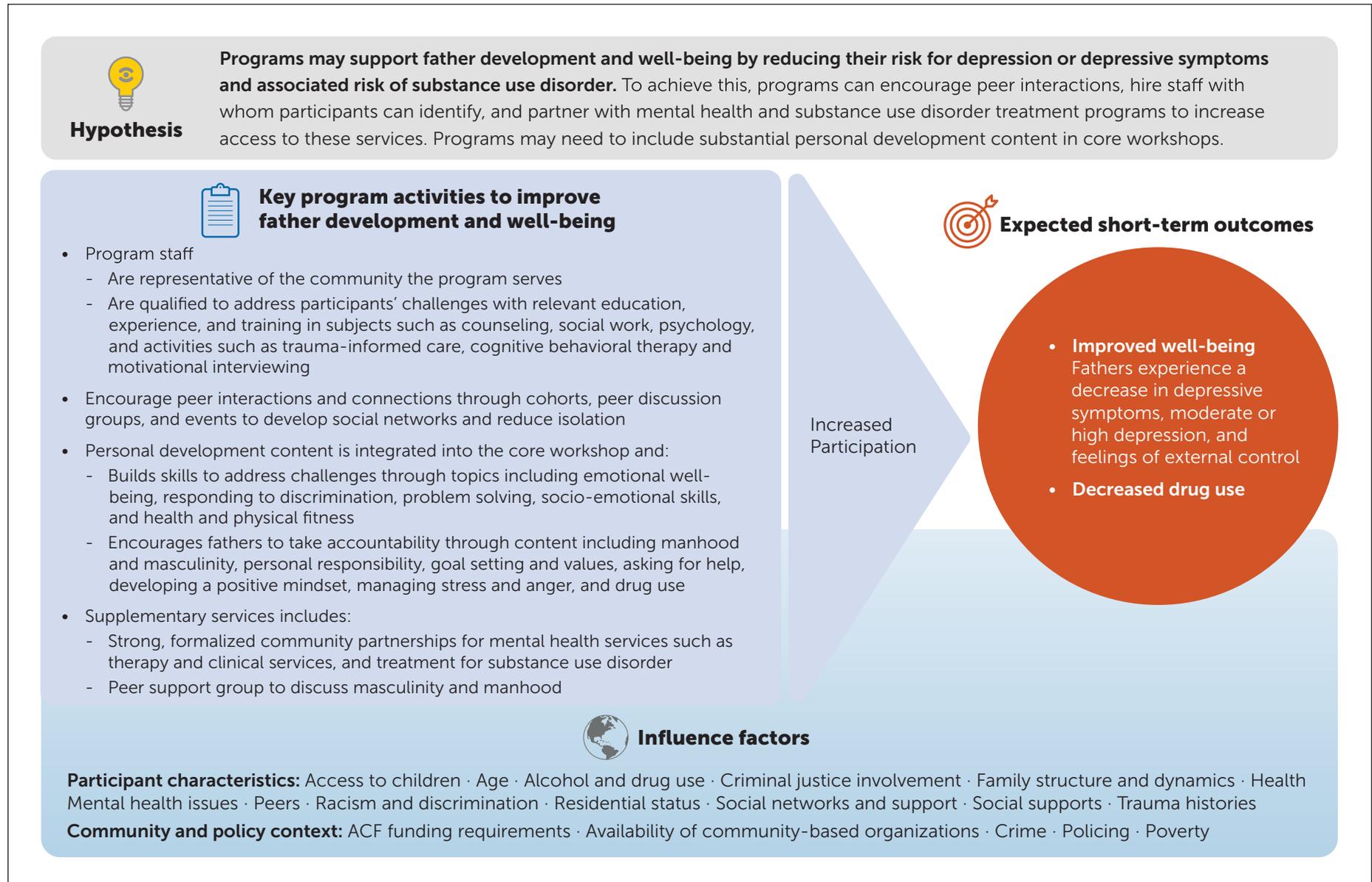
This section describes the key program activities that appear from our research to be most relevant to father development and well-being and the positive impacts that two programs in the PACT achieved.

**Hire and train relatable and qualified staff.** Research on RF programs suggests that encouraging bonds between staff and participants may unlock fathers' intrinsic motivation to improve themselves and might also improve program participation, particularly for disadvantaged populations (Pearson et al. 2018). All of the programs in the PACT evaluation included program graduates among their employees. These graduates served as role models for the fathers in the program. Their personal histories and experiences served as evidence that fathers can overcome their challenges. The programs explicitly encouraged staff to share personal stories during the workshop as a way of motivating fathers and showing fathers that they could take control of their lives. The fathers in the program looked up to program staff and felt they could contact them at any time (Zaveri et al. 2015; Holcomb et al. 2015).

Although not all staff were program graduates, the programs tried to hire frontline staff (those who work directly with participants) who could relate to the fathers. Sharing backgrounds and having an intimate understanding of fathers' experiences may have made it easier for programs to establish an environment of trust, which program leaders felt was a necessary foundation for fathers to make changes in their lives (Zaveri et al. 2015).

**Encourage peer connections and bonds with program staff.** Both of the programs with favorable effects emphasized developing strong bonds and friendships between the fathers and with program staff as a safeguard against fathers feeling isolated and depressed. Fathers in PACT tended to have small social networks outside of the programs, sometimes limited to just a few family members and friends (D'Angelo et al. 2016). Social supports,

Figure IV.2. **Father development and well-being**



such as networks of friends and family, may motivate and assist fathers with poorer emotional well-being to engage with their children (Coates and Phares 2014) and can be a protective factor against depression (Wilmot and Dauner 2017; Feinberg 2003; D'Angelo et al. 2016).

Two PACT programs (including one that showed impacts) organized their programs by cohorts so that groups of fathers received the same services in the same sequence and had time to bond over shared experiences.<sup>11</sup> Workshops and supplemental services were group-based rather than one-on-one activities, which gave men opportunities to share information about their personal lives with one another. For example, the two programs that showed impacts started each core workshop session with time for fathers to share updates with the group about what they had been doing to achieve their goals. One program had a supplemental drop-in peer support group, while another had a father leadership group for program graduates. Other programs sponsored outings with fathers and their children, such as trips to the zoo and baseball games, which gave them a chance to build connections with the other fathers while practicing their parenting skills.

**Integrate father development and well-being topics into the core workshop.** All of the RF programs in PACT provided some personal development content about topics intended to help fathers develop skills to address challenges in their lives—such as stress from work, living arrangements, and/or access to their children—and take accountability for their actions. These included emotional well-being, responding to discrimination, problem-solving, manhood and masculinity, accountability and personal responsibility, social-emotional skills, goal setting and values, asking for help, developing a positive mindset, managing stress and anger, health and physical fitness, and substance abuse. Federal funding does not require programs to provide father development and well-being content, but the PACT implementation study found that each program independently decided to include father development and well-being topics because program developers felt it was foundational to program participants' success as fathers, co-parents, and workers (Zaveri et al. 2015).

**Partner with community stakeholders to provide services to address mental health and substance misuse issues.** The programs in PACT recognized that well-being issues such as depression and substance misuse could be debilitating. Both of the programs that had

effects on fathers' well-being also had formed community partnerships with mental health service providers, including a mental health clinic and substance use disorder treatment programs, which facilitated access to treatment for participating fathers.

### **Influence factors**

A number of personal characteristics influence father development and well-being. Many listed in the model are targeted by key program activities, including the fathers' peers, social networks, and supports; access to and involvement with their children; and residential status and family structure. Age may also play a role in depression risk. For example, the risk of depression may be higher in teenage fathers than men who have children as adults (Heath et al. 1995). A 2007 analysis of the correlates of depression found that age was not positively correlated with depression, but other sociodemographic factors were, including the father's identification with a minority group and his criminal history (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2007). Childhood trauma, neglect, and loss are also significant factors associated with adult depression (Heim et al. 2008) and substance use disorder (Khoury et al. 2010).

Communities also influence individuals' development and well-being. The conditions of living in a poor neighborhood with few services available can create stress and lead to poorer mental well-being. RF programs can partner with other community services to provide mental health services and reduce depression. However, if few services are available, programs may find it challenging to provide access to treatment to meet their participants' needs. Similarly, ACF requirements restrict how RF programs can spend their grant funding. Activities such as counseling and therapy are not allowable expenditures under the RF grant. PACT programs that provided such services paid for them through other mechanisms, such as operational funds that paid for other programs within their organizations.

Most of the fathers in PACT identified as African American. African American fathers may be especially vulnerable to depression, in part because of their exposure to traumatic experiences and racism (Sinkewicz and Lee 2011). A large body of literature has suggested that perceived racism and discrimination—both observed in their environments and personally experienced—is associated with depressive symptoms in populations of African American men, including fathers of young children (Bamishigbin et al.

2017). This may operate on a community level if fathers observe systemic racism or disparate treatment of men of color by institutions, such as the criminal justice system, and on an interpersonal level if they are treated differently by others.

PACT fathers also tended to have very little income. Individuals who belong to a lower social class or have a lower socioeconomic status also tend to have greater feelings of external control—that their own behaviors matter little for influencing their circumstances (Kraus et al. 2009; Lachman and Weaver 1998). Greater feelings of external control have been associated with higher levels of stress, frequent illness, psychological distress, and relationship dissatisfaction in various populations (Morry 2003; Muhonen and Torkelson 2004; Wu et al. 2004).

### **Model 3: Consistent employment**

Economic stability is a significant concern for fathers in RF programs. Of the fathers who participated in PACT, 71 percent had worked in the six months leading up to program enrollment (Avellar et al. 2018), but only 51 percent had worked in the month before enrolling (Dion et al. 2018). Average earnings over the 30 days prior to enrollment was about \$378, or just over \$4,500 annually if employment was consistent (Avellar et al. 2018). The fathers faced significant challenges to labor market success: More fathers (72 percent) had been convicted of a crime than had a high school diploma or equivalent (69 percent) (Avellar et al. 2018). Improving one's job situation was the primary motivation for enrollment for about a third of the fathers (Zaveri et al. 2015).

### **Hypothesis**

**Programs may improve fathers' employment and economic stability by providing intensive and comprehensive work-related services.** Programs may implement core employment services in a way that requires daily attendance and with sufficient dosage of content focusing on skills needed to acquire and retain a job, as well as case management and job development services.

## Observed outcomes based on the PACT findings

The PACT programs significantly improved the number of consecutive quarters fathers were employed in the year after enrolling in PACT, but the magnitude of the effect was small, and average monthly earnings were unaffected.

The PACT programs significantly improved the number of consecutive quarters fathers were employed in the year after enrolling in PACT, but the magnitude of the effect was small, and average monthly earnings were unaffected (Avellar et al. 2018). Exploratory subgroup analyses suggested that the overall findings were driven by two programs that featured an intensive, daily, integrated workshop that fathers completed as a cohort (Zaveri et al. 2015). The hypothesized Pathways-to-Outcomes model focuses on consistent employment, based on the impacts and activities of those two programs (Figure IV.3).

Other evaluation findings for labor market success also suggest mixed success for fatherhood programs. About a quarter of the studies in the Child and Family Research Partnership literature review measured economic outcomes, such as job acquisition and retention and wages, and found that fathers enrolled in fatherhood programs tended to increase their employment but not their wages (Osborne et al. 2016). The Fatherhood Research and Practice Network meta-analysis found only six studies that measured employment-related outcomes, and no statistically significant effect (Holmes et al. 2018). Of the four large, randomized studies described in Table I.1, one showed improvements in earnings in the first year after program enrollment, but these faded by the second year. One showed that fathers increased their hours spent working but not their income.

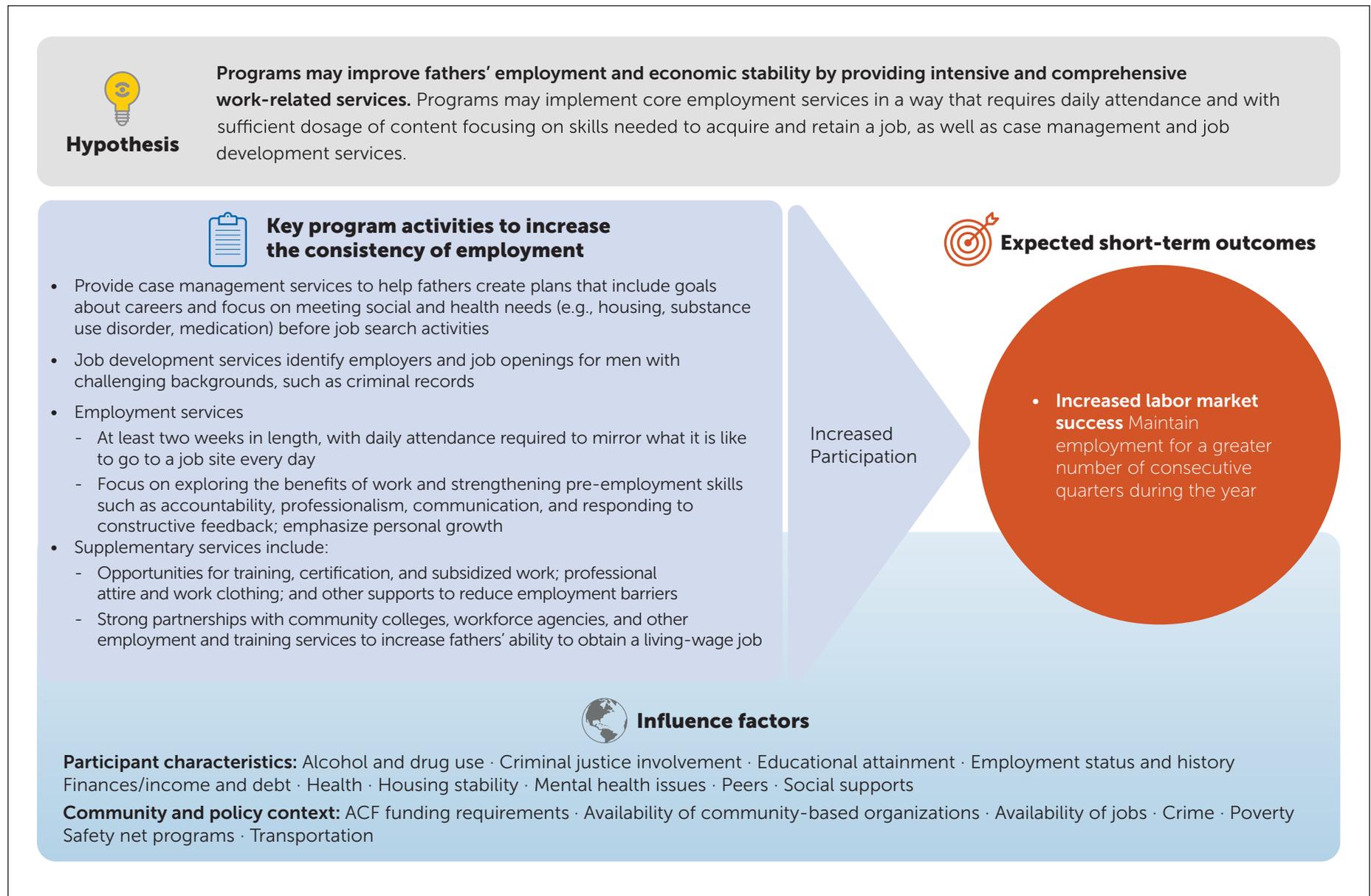
### Key program activities

This section describes the key program activities that appear from our research to be most relevant to economic stability and the positive impacts that programs in PACT achieved.

#### **Provide case management to set employment goals and identify and address barriers to employment.**

Case management may be another necessary element for achieving labor market success. To provide case management, program staff first helped fathers identify their needs and goals through one-on-one meetings, personal assessments, and development of life plans. These activities helped fathers articulate why they wanted a job and the individual steps they had to take to get one. The PACT programs that showed consistent employment outcomes waited to place fathers into jobs until they were deemed “work ready” and had addressed major employment barriers (Zaveri et al. 2015).

Figure IV.3. **Consistent employment**



**Work with employers to find positions for fathers.** Job developers work with employers to identify positions for which RF program fathers are qualified. In-depth interviews with fathers in PACT suggested that incarceration was their most significant barrier to employment (Holcomb et al. 2015). Finding “felony friendly” employers who would hire men with histories of incarceration was therefore one job development strategy. Job developers may or may not have worked directly with fathers in the program. One PACT program initially assigned a case manager and a job developer to each participant but found that meeting with two separate staff was confusing for the participants. As a result, it changed its model to have the case managers meet face-to-face with participants and then coordinate with job developers, who worked behind the scenes to find appropriate employment opportunities.

**Conduct intensive, daily group sessions focused on pre-employment skills development.** The PACT programs that appeared to make a difference in fathers’ labor market success shared a central implementation feature: a daily group session in excess of 40 hours long.<sup>12</sup> Practitioners felt that the structure of a daily group session taught workplace ethics and accountability because required daily attendance mirrored what it was like to go to work every day.

We explored the research for recommendations on minimum dosage. Although we were unable to identify any studies that confirmed a specific threshold of dosage or intensity for increasing the consistency of employment or average earnings, other research on RF programs also suggests that group sessions requiring daily participation see better attendance than those that meet less frequently. Increased attendance, in turn, is linked with improvements in outcomes (Pearson et al. 2018). Fathers enrolled in one of the programs with positive impacts on consistent employment received between 12 and 47 hours of employment content, on average.

The employment content in the group sessions emphasized the development of pre-employment skills—that is, teaching fathers about professionalism, workplace communication, accountability, responding to criticism from a supervisor, and other topics that are sometimes referred to as “soft” or pre-employment skills (Dion et al. 2018). The group sessions also covered more traditional topics related to finding a job, such as resume development, job searching, and interviewing strategies. Fathers in PACT reported that they appreciated learning these skills (Holcomb et al. 2015).

Another important goal related to preparing fathers for employment was to change fathers' attitudes about working. Fathers who have a hard time finding a steady job or whose paychecks are garnished by a child support enforcement agency may feel defeated by the job market and the jobs that are available to them (Holcomb et al. 2015). Fathers who are primarily concerned with being appreciated or not disrespected by employers may be quick to quit a job, particularly when sporadic or no employment is the norm in their community (Young 2004). Program operators hoped to build fathers' resolve to find living wage work, keep their employment, and not backslide into work in the informal economy.

**Help fathers to access supplementary education, training, and work experience services in the community.** Fathers in RF programs may lack work-relevant skills and have low educational attainment. Partners such as community colleges and workforce centers can provide fathers with access to a high school equivalency degree and industry credentialing programs. Other community partners can reduce other work barriers, such as by providing low-cost or no-cost professional clothing and transportation. The programs in PACT that achieved consistent employment had robust networks of community partners.

The two PACT RF programs with effects also provided access to on-the-job experiences. One program required unemployed fathers to participate in a "job practicum," or community service internship, while they were enrolled in the core workshop. The other program connected a limited number of fathers to subsidized job opportunities (Zaveri et al. 2015).

Evidence suggests that opportunities to gain work experience are important for fathers with significant barriers to labor market success. Program participants in a federal evaluation of the Center for Employment Opportunities Transitional Jobs program, who were formerly incarcerated individuals reentering society, received an intensive pre-employment training workshop, placement in a transitional job, job coaching and job development, parenting classes, and ongoing case management (Redcross et al. 2012). Impact findings suggested that the transitional jobs program increased short-term employment, particularly for participants who had recently been released from prison, who had a high risk of recidivism, or who did not have a high school diploma (Redcross et al. 2012). Though the target population for that program differed

from RF program participants, they shared similar disadvantages in the labor market, such as criminal records and low educational attainment.

### **Influence factors**

A number of individual factors could influence labor market success, as discussed above. For many of the PACT fathers, criminal justice histories and low educational attainment were the most significant factors. A spotty record of employment can also be problematic because it reflects negatively on a job candidate. Many of the PACT fathers had worked in the underground economy or under the table (Holcomb et al. 2015), experiences that could not be included in a traditional resume. Case managers worked to address these and other individual employment barriers, including housing, poor finances, and an inability to purchase professional work clothing, as well as health, mental health, and substance abuse issues.

Peers and social supports are also important influences for labor market success. Social networks create social capital, which provides access to important resources that make it easier for people to become employed, such as housing, access to community organizations that provide services, and jobs themselves (Young 2006, Allard and Small 2013), leading people to be “more likely to be hired, housed, healthy, and happy” (Woolcock 2001). Fathers in PACT had small social networks, often made smaller because they wanted to leave behind old friends who remained involved in undesirable activities (D’Angelo et al. 2016).

Community, neighborhood, and policy factors also play a substantial role in labor market success. Fathers will have a more difficult time finding employment in areas with few job opportunities and high competition for jobs or areas marked by poverty, crime, and disinvestment (Young 2006). For fathers who generally do not have access to their own car, the availability of reliable public transportation restricts employment to nearby work sites (Barkley and Gomes-Pereira 2015, Ducceschi and Mierzwa 2017, DeMaria and Sanchez 2018, Andreason et al. 2018). Unreliable transportation can also jeopardize employment, if it results in frequent tardiness (DeMaria 2018).

### **Model 4: Parenting skills and father involvement**

Equipping fathers with the parenting skills to make good on their intentions to be positive influences on their children's lives has been a primary activity of RF programs. Fathers enrolled in PACT primarily to improve their relationships with their children (Zaveri et al. 2015). The fathers in the study understood the importance of "being there" and getting involved in activities such as playing with their children, spending family time together, and providing guidance (Holcomb et al. 2015). Because the fathers described their own childhood experiences as including trauma, abuse, and father absence, they may not have had many positive parenting examples in their personal histories to build on (Holcomb et al. 2015). Improved parenting skills and increased father involvement may benefit fathers as well as their children. Fatherhood motivated the fathers in PACT to seek to transform their own lives and be a positive influence in their children's lives, often despite or because of their own fathers' absences (Dion et al. 2018; Holcomb et al. 2015).

#### **Hypothesis**

**Programs may improve fathers' parenting skills and increase involvement in their children's lives by frontloading parenting content in a group-based workshop that covers the importance of father involvement, child development, and co-parenting.** Providing parenting services early in the program may engage fathers and increase the likelihood they receive parenting content. Programs may also need to help fathers reduce barriers to child access to increase effects on father involvement.

Research finds linkages between parenting and father involvement and child well-being. Child well-being has always been the central long-term goal of responsible fatherhood initiatives (Solomon-Fears and Tollestrup 2018; Holmes et al. 2018). Nonresidential fathers' engagement in child-related activities has been linked to positive social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment in their children (Adamsons and Johnson 2013). Greater contact between nonresidential fathers and their children also is associated with fewer child and adolescent behavior problems (King and Sobolewski 2006). A large body of research on fatherhood has underscored the negative impacts of father absence on children (Marsiglio et al. 2000, Holmes et al. 2018). The quality of

father–child interactions also appears to make a difference in improving child outcomes (Stewart 2003; Marsiglio et al. 2000).

Long-term evidence on how RF programs affect child outcomes is incomplete. The Fatherhood Research and Practice Network meta-analysis (Holmes et al. 2018) identified only one study that measured child outcomes (Fagan and Iglesias 1999). This study found positive effects of the fathering intervention on the child’s short-term academic readiness, but only for children of fathers who received a high dosage of services (Fagan and Iglesias 1999). As with the other hypotheses, we focus on short-term outcomes measured by the PACT evaluation (Figure IV.4).

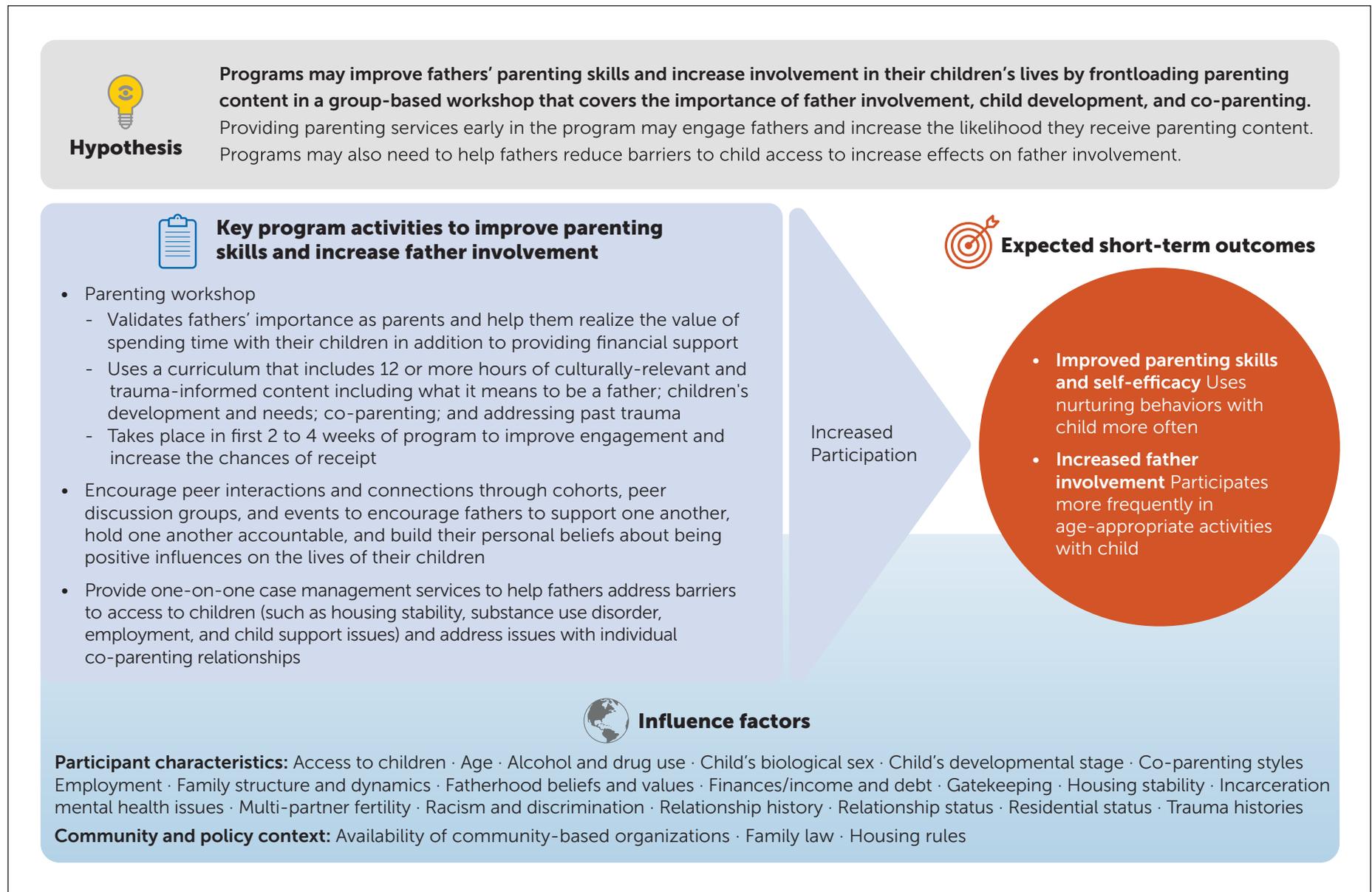
### **Observed outcomes based on the PACT findings**

PACT programs positively impacted one measure of father involvement and one measure of parenting competency.

Improving access to their children was a high priority for the fathers in PACT, who were mainly nonresidential (Holcomb et al. 2015). Evaluation data showed that just over half of the fathers in PACT had contact with their children at least weekly when they enrolled in an RF program (Dion et al. 2018). The PACT study measured three domains of father involvement and two domains of parenting competency. Overall, PACT programs positively impacted one measure of father involvement—fathers’ reported frequency of participating in age-appropriate activities with their child; and one measure of parenting competency—fathers’ reported use of nurturing behaviors with their child (Avellar et al. 2018).<sup>13</sup> Age-appropriate activities include things such as reading together, feeding their child, playing with their child, or working on homework together. Nurturing behaviors include things such as showing patience when their child is upset and encouraging children to talk about their feelings. The key program activities are based on all four of the PACT programs because of the overall positive effects they had on fathers’ involvement and parenting behaviors in the pooled sample.

Father involvement was the most common outcome domain reported in the studies included in the Child and Family Research Partnership literature review (Osborne et al. 2016). This domain includes measures such as parenting knowledge, attitudes, and skills; frequency of contact with children; and comfort with fathers’ role as a parent. In general, programs in the literature review were successful at improving parenting knowledge and attitudes and fathers’ perceptions of their relationships with their children. However, the ability of programs to improve parent–child interactions or frequency of contact

Figure IV.4. **Parenting skills and father involvement**



depended largely upon the populations the programs served and their setting. Five programs, for example, served incarcerated fathers. In this setting, there were limited opportunities to increase the frequency of contact between fathers and their children. Programs serving resident fathers tended to have more success at improving parent-child interactions than those serving nonresidential fathers. Aside from PACT, the four large, randomized studies described in Table I.1 showed mixed effects.

Parenting (19 studies) and father involvement (15 studies) were also the most common outcomes measured in the studies included in the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network meta-analysis (Holmes et al. 2018). Findings from the meta-analysis suggest that responsible fatherhood programs have small, statistically significant effects on these outcomes.

This model includes increased parenting skills, confidence in parenting abilities, and father involvement because these outcomes are related to each other. Fathers' confidence in their parenting abilities is included as an outcome, though it was not measured directly by the PACT evaluation. In general, fathers who feel confident and competent as parents spend more time with their children and take on more caretaking activities (Child and Family Research Partnership 2018). Trahan (2018) found a bidirectional relationship between father involvement and fathers' confidence in their ability to parent. Fathers with low parental self-efficacy tend not to engage much with their children, but those who do not engage with their children are also not getting the opportunities to develop their skills and build confidence (Child and Family Research Partnership 2018).

### **Key program activities**

This section describes the key program activities that appear from our research to be most relevant to parenting and father involvement and the positive impacts that the programs in PACT achieved.

**Offer workshop content that validates the importance of father involvement, teaches them parenting skills, and is culturally-relevant and trauma-informed.** Although each of the programs in PACT used different parenting curricula, we identified three common topics that they covered in their parenting workshops: (1) what it means to be a father, (2) children's development and needs, and (3) co-parenting. All of the programs

also taught concrete parenting skills, such as communicating and playing with children. According to one expert we spoke to who is both a researcher and practitioner, other more challenging parenting skills, such as providing positive praise and modeling self-regulation, are also critically important. Combined, these topics help fathers understand that they have something to contribute to raising their child beyond regularly paying child support, and give them the skills to be involved in parenting. A key goal of the parenting workshops was to help fathers understand their importance as a parent. A mixture of confidence and skills is important to raising a father's parenting abilities.

Fathers in RF programs may need adapted parenting content that is responsive to their background and cultural context (Parra-Cardona 2019). For example, parenting programs may teach parenting approaches that are dissimilar from fathers' own experiences as children. Reflecting on how they were raised could bring up past trauma that programs need to address. For the fathers in PACT, this sometimes manifested as the absence of their own fathers in their lives and how that influenced their desire to not have their children experience that same trauma (Holcomb et al. 2015). At the same time, parenting workshops should uphold parents' cultural background as a source of empowerment by emphasizing strong positive cultural values. For example, in the Hispanic community, these may include *familismo* (family-centeredness) and the *hombre noble* (the ideal father who prioritizes family relationships and takes full responsibility for his actions) (Cabrera et al. 2015). Finally, parenting workshops may include space for conversations about how discrimination and racism shape parent-child interactions, such as how fathers cope with being discriminated against and how they teach their children to exist in a society with racial and ethnic inequities, and how to parent in the context of racism and discrimination (Parra-Cardona 2019).

**Include an adequate dosage of parenting content in workshops.**

An emerging body of research points to the importance of fathers receiving a high dosage of parenting content (Pearson et al. 2018). Typically, fatherhood programs range from as little as 5 hours of content to 24 hours or more. Longer programs tend to have stronger positive effects (Pearson et al. 2018). Although individual studies mention dosage, no research evidence defines dosage thresholds. Fathers in PACT programs could receive between 12 and 25 hours of parenting content, depending on how much the individual programs offered. On average, they received slightly less than 9 hours of

parenting content (Dion et al. 2018).<sup>14</sup> A central challenge for community-based fatherhood programs is getting fathers to attend and remain engaged in services. In general, evaluations of fatherhood programs have observed wide variation in attendance, with some fathers receiving most or all of the offered services, and some receiving very little (Pearson et al. 2018). We hypothesize that 12 hours of content is a minimum dosage that programs should offer to see impacts on parenting outcomes, with the assumption that some fathers will access less than the full amount of content offered.

**Sequence parenting services early in the program.** The programs in PACT took two main approaches to implementing parenting services—either in a separate workshop focused on parenting content only, or as part of a core workshop that integrated parenting content with content on workforce development or relationship skills (Zaveri et al. 2015). Regardless of the implementation approach, the programs front-loaded parenting services. Fathers in PACT were engaged by programming that improved their parenting skills, even if they entered the program for another reason (Zaveri et al. 2015; Holcomb et al. 2015). In PACT, initial engagement in parenting services was generally higher than personal development, relationship, or economic stability services (Dion et al. 2018).

If a program provides the parenting workshop separately from relationship skills and workforce development workshops, it may be most effective if the program recommends or requires that fathers complete the parenting workshop first. If the parenting content is provided in a workshop that includes workforce development or relationship skills, then programs may be more effective in achieving parenting outcomes if they cover parenting content early on.<sup>15</sup>

**Encourage peer connections.** As in other RF program hypothesis models, strong peer connections appear to be important. Along with their other advantages, these types of relationships might build fathers' self-efficacy. Fatherhood program practitioners we spoke with suggested that peers with similar goals and motivations can support each other and help one another stay motivated when obstacles arise.

**Provide one-on-one case management.** Individualized case management can help reduce barriers that impede capable parenting (and other outcomes). Barriers fathers face include a lack of stable housing; a

lack of legal representation; and a lack of assistance in negotiating child support, custody, or parenting time agreements. Programs may seek out community partners that can provide supports that are unallowable with the RF grant, such as legal services. All of the programs in PACT had agencies in their communities that they partnered with to help the fathers address parenting issues.

### **Influence factors**

Parenting outcomes are dependent on triadic interactions between both parents and their children. Coates and Phares (2014) organized individual and interpersonal factors influencing parenting outcomes into four categories: (1) father factors (including age, mental health, residential status, and employment status); (2) mother factors (including relationship status and support of the father); (3) child factors (including age, developmental stage, and biological sex); and (4) co-parenting (including relationship status, residential status, cooperation between parents, and mutual support).

In in-depth interviews, fathers in PACT described additional factors that influenced their parental role. They included their own mental health; drug use; economic stability (including finances and employment); and co-parenting (including relationship status, co-parenting styles, and gatekeeping)—all of which influenced access to their children. Access to children and related factors such as gatekeeping and residential status play a substantial role in how involved fathers can be (Holcomb et al. 2015). The structure and dynamics of the father's own family and history of trauma are related to the parenting examples that fathers observed when they were children and young adults. These observations shape the fatherhood beliefs and values with which they enter a program (Holcomb et al. 2015).

Multi-partner fertility also affects a father's ability to be part of his children's lives. Nearly half of the fathers in PACT had children with multiple women (Avellar et al. 2018). Complex family networks can place multiple, sometimes competing, claims on a father's time. Fathers of children with different mothers may not be able to spend an equal amount of time with each child, and how they divide their time may depend on the multiple co-parenting relationships involved in this complex family situation (Holcomb et al. 2015).

Literature on father involvement suggests additional individual and interpersonal influence factors. Though none of the PACT programs served incarcerated fathers, research on programs for such fathers has documented that being incarcerated limits the amount of contact that fathers can have with their children (Osborne et al. 2016). Literature also suggests that the sex of the child influences parenting behaviors. Some fathers—particularly nonresidential fathers—may be more comfortable interacting with sons rather than daughters because they have more confidence in their ability to parent boys (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2007; Coates and Phares 2014).

Contextual factors also influence father involvement (Thomas 2014). In PACT, we identified the availability of other community organizations (to provide referrals and additional support) as well as child support and housing laws as important community and policy factors that influenced parenting outcomes. For example, laws that prevent convicted felons from living in public housing may result in some fathers being unable to live with their children.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The PACT evaluation is the most in-depth look at RF programs to date, with process and impact studies of four 2011 RF grantees and a qualitative study involving three rounds of in-depth interviews with fathers who participated in one of the four RF programs. The Pathways-to-Outcomes models described in this report bring together information from the three main strands of the PACT evaluation to posit research-informed hypotheses that link program activities to outcomes observed in the impact study.

The Pathways-to-Outcomes models described in this report bring together information from the three main strands of the PACT evaluation to posit research-informed hypotheses that link program activities to outcomes observed in the impact study.

The four models presented in this report are research-informed hypotheses, but they have not yet been tested. Moreover, these models are not comprehensive. Additional activities might be critical to achieve effective programs. Given this, these models point to the need for additional research. Below, we present five recommendations for future directions in research:

1. **Evaluations to link program activities to outcomes.** The Pathways-to-Outcomes models present hypotheses linking program activities to participant outcomes, but they do not imply causality. Future experimental studies of RF programs may be able to test hypotheses such as those presented in the models by using designs such as factorial experiments, which allow for simultaneous testing of different variations in an implementation model. The Building Bridges and Bonds (B3) study, currently being conducted for ACF, is using an experimental design to test the effectiveness of innovative program activities that enhance core RF services (Harknett et al. 2017).
2. **Formative evaluation to test and refine program improvements.** Programs may use the hypotheses presented in this report to design or improve their services. They can use a framework for program change such as Learn, Innovate, Improve (Derr et al. 2017) that employs analytic research methods to identify, install, test, and refine small changes to an implementation model through a process known as “road testing.” Through road testing, programs can strengthen their implementation and generate evidence for program improvement. Strong implementation of a program model is a precursor to a rigorous, longer-term evaluation of program effectiveness.

3. **More research on influence factors.** We know that personal characteristics and community contexts are important for understanding fathers' behaviors and outcomes. However, little research exists that explores the relationship between fathers' personal characteristics and community contexts and their interactions with RF programs. A PACT brief (Alamillo and Zaveri 2018), for example, explored associations between fathers' characteristics at study enrollment with their participation behaviors, but more research is needed on this topic.
4. **Explore program activities leading to improvements in healthy relationship outcomes.** The programs in PACT did not have statistically significant, positive impacts on healthy relationships. As a result, we did not develop a hypothesis for healthy relationships, even though it is one of the three required components of services for RF grantees. The CHaRMED (Co-parenting and Healthy Relationship and Marriage Education for Dads) study, currently being conducted for ACF, is using a multi-method approach to understand and improve healthy relationship, marriage education, and co-parenting services for fathers.
5. **Additional literature review.** These models are narrowly defined, limited to the outcomes that were tested in the PACT evaluation. Although they may be indicative of broader intended outcomes, the evaluation findings are limited. For example, more consistent employment, an outcome of the PACT findings, may eventually lead to increased monthly earnings. However, we could not find evidence that RF programs led to sustainable increases in wages or earnings. Literature in other areas, such as labor and workforce development, could shed light on these outstanding questions. Theoretical literature could also elucidate possible connections between short-term and long-term expected outcomes, as well as linkages between program strategies and outcomes.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **LITERATURE SEARCH STRATEGY AND RESULTS**

## LITERATURE SEARCH STRATEGY AND RESULTS

A targeted scan of the literature supplemented the PACT evaluation findings. The literature scan included five searches developed to understand the factors that influenced the outcomes featured in the models and the interrelationships between those outcomes:

1. What influences effective co-parenting in men?
2. What is the relationship between depression and parenting, co-parenting, and employment?
3. How does unemployment or joblessness affect parenting behaviors?
4. What programs or interventions affect father involvement and nurturing parenting?
5. What dosage of workshop-based employment services is associated with improvements in labor market outcomes?

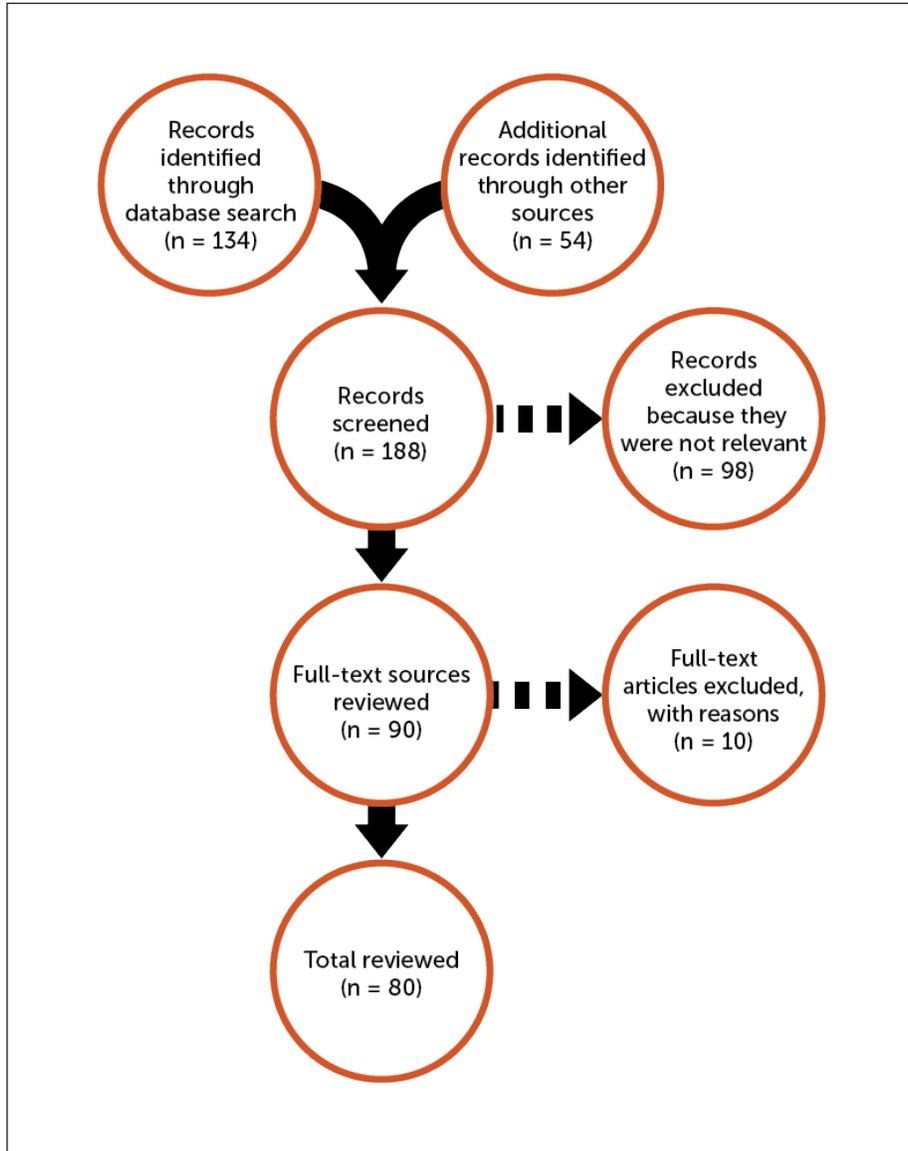
These searches were limited to English-language publications from the past five years, released no earlier than 2013. The searches were also limited to low-income fathers by using the keywords “low income” and “father,” “noncustodial,” “non-custodial,” “nonresidential,” “non-residential,” or “dad.”

We searched five databases for relevant literature: (1) PsychInfo, (2) ERIC, (3) Education Research Complete, (4) SocIndex, and (5) the Dissertation Database. We also reviewed publications from two websites: the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network (<http://www.frpn.org/>) and the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (<https://www.fatherhood.gov/>). Finally, we relied on two existing literature reviews on parenting programs for fathers: the Strengthening Families Evidence Review (Avellar et al. 2011) and one conducted by the Child and Family Research Partnership at the University of Texas at Austin (Osborne et al. 2016).

Figure A.1 presents a flow diagram of the overall literature search. In total, the database searches returned 134 results. Search 1 returned 9 results. Search 2 had three arms: Search 2.1 (depression and parenting) had 8 results; Search 2.2 (depression and co-parenting) had 8 results; Search 2.3 (depression and employment) had 48 results. Search 3 had 41 results. Search 4 returned 20

results. Search 5 had zero results. We augmented the database searches with 54 additional records identified from snowballing and ad-hoc searches (shown at the top of Figure A.1). This resulted in 188 abstracts for screening. Screening removed 98 articles. We reviewed the full text of 90 articles. After reviewing these, we excluded 10 articles that were not relevant to the models. In total, 80 articles informed the development of the models.

Figure A.1. **Search results diagram**



## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> More than 80 percent of noncustodial parents are fathers (Grall 2018).
- <sup>2</sup> PRWORA created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant to replace Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).
- <sup>3</sup> The meta-analysis includes the PACT impact study in its sample. To be included in the meta-analysis, the studies had to be quantitative (experimental, quasi-experimental, or pre-post design) evaluations of programs serving primarily nonresident, unmarried, low-income fathers, and had to have enough information to calculate effect sizes for the outcomes of interest.
- <sup>4</sup> We also incorporated feedback from OPRE and OFA throughout the development process.
- <sup>5</sup> In PACT, these programs are referred to as using an “integrated cohort” model.
- <sup>6</sup> In addition to “integrated cohort” programs the PACT process study also identified “open-entry workshop” programs.
- <sup>7</sup> There is overlap in the studies included in Osborne (2016) and Holmes and colleagues (2018); however, Holmes and colleagues measure aggregate effects, whereas Osborne qualitatively summarizes the literature.
- <sup>8</sup> Holmes and colleagues found a standardized mean difference of  $d=.147$ , which suggests a 53 to 56 percent chance that a treatment group father had better co-parenting outcomes than a control group father.
- <sup>9</sup> Two other RF programs in PACT also partnered with domestic violence services agencies.
- <sup>10</sup> Though RF grantees cannot provide specific services for mothers with grant funding, mothers cannot be turned away from other grant-funded services, such as a relationship skills workshop.
- <sup>11</sup> An alternative strategy places each new enrollee immediately into ongoing workshops and services, rather than forming separate cohorts.
- <sup>12</sup> Both of these programs also integrated parenting content into their employment workshops.
- <sup>13</sup> Site-specific impacts for father involvement and parenting skills were similar in magnitude.
- <sup>14</sup> Two programs integrated parenting and employment content into a single workshop. Two programs offered stand-alone parenting workshops.
- <sup>15</sup> Other research has found that other RF programs also sequence parenting content first, but hypothesized that fathers may actually be more interested in employment services and are simply willing to complete parenting content first in order to receive them (Pearson et al. 2018).

