



EFFECTS OF FOUR RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS FOR LOW-INCOME FATHERS: EVIDENCE FROM THE PARENTS AND CHILDREN TOGETHER EVALUATION

OPRE Report 2019-05

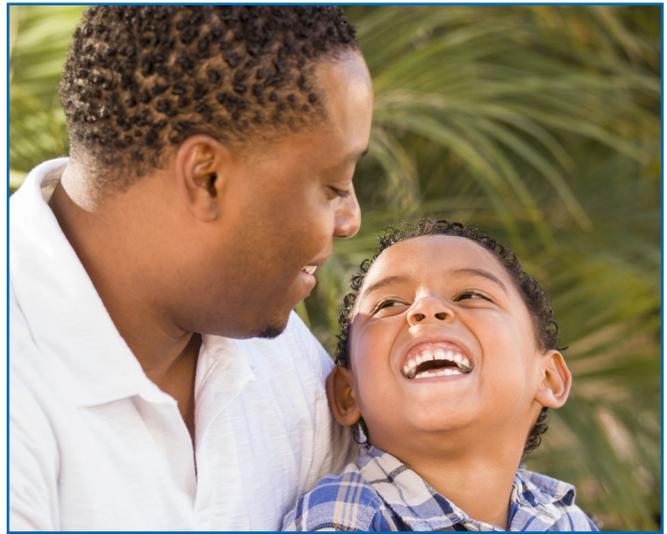
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Children who are supported emotionally and financially by their fathers fare better, on average, than those without such support. Despite wanting to be strong parents, providers, and partners, many low-income fathers struggle to fulfill these roles. Recognizing both the importance of fathers and the challenges that they might face, Congress has authorized and funded grants for Responsible Fatherhood (RF) programs for more than a decade. The Office of Family Assistance (OFA), in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awards and oversees these grants. The grants aim to help fathers be effective and nurturing parents, engage in healthy relationships and family formation, and improve economic outcomes for themselves and their families. OFA funded and ACF's Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation oversaw a contract with Mathematica Policy Research to conduct the Parents and Children Together (PACT) evaluation. The PACT RF impact study was a large-scale, random assignment examination of four federally funded RF programs that received grants in 2011.

RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS IN PACT

The evaluation team selected four grantees to participate in the PACT RF study: (1) Connections to Success in Kansas and Missouri, (2) Fathers' Support Center in Missouri, (3) FATHER Project at Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota, and (4) Urban Ventures in Minnesota. In each RF program in PACT, group-based



Results after one year

Compared with usual services available in the community, the RF programs in PACT...

- improved fathers' nurturing behavior
- improved fathers' engagement in age-appropriate activities with children
- did not affect fathers' in-person contact with their children or the financial support they provided
- did not affect co-parenting
- increased the length of time fathers were continuously employed, but did not affect earnings
- did not affect measures of social-emotional well-being

workshops were a core service for delivering much of the required content. Facilitators in the workshops led fathers in discussions about topics such as the meaning of fatherhood, child development, co-parenting, and finding and retaining employment.

In addition to the workshops, grantees offered individualized support to help fathers with economic stability, such as helping fathers identify job skills and interests, develop résumés, and apply for jobs. All PACT RF programs covered personal development topics. These topics included coping with stress, responding to perceived discrimination, problem solving, self-sufficiency, and goal planning.

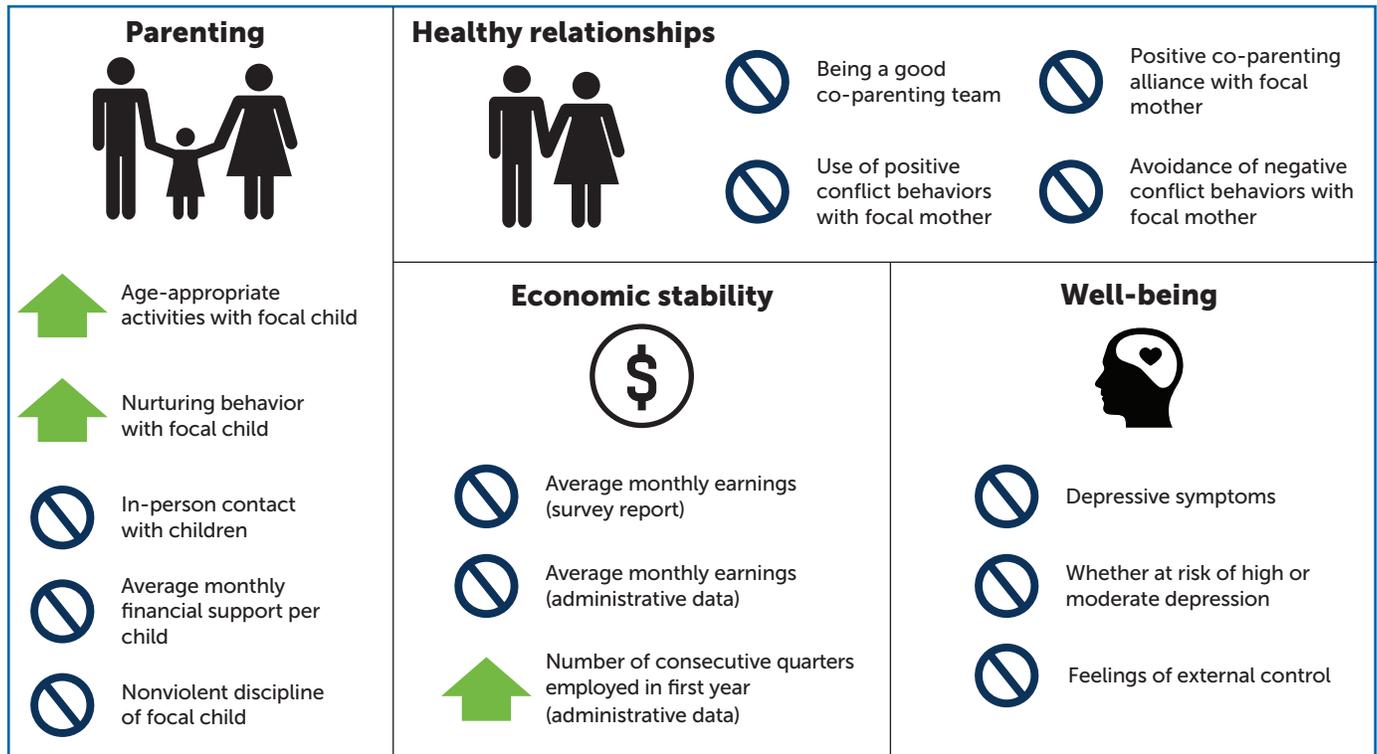
Across all four programs, fathers participated in almost 45 hours of services, on average, during their first nine months after enrollment. The hours of services men received ranged from 15 hours at Urban Ventures to 88 hours at Fathers' Support Center. Programs spent the most time covering economic stability (20 hours, on average).

KEY FINDINGS

The RF programs in PACT improved some aspects of fathers' parenting (Figure 1). In particular, the programs

improved fathers' engagement in age-appropriate activities with children, such as reading books or working on homework together. On a scale of 0 (never) to 3 (very often), the fathers who were offered the program (the program group) had an average score of 2.00 compared to 1.87 among those who had not been offered the program (the control group), a difference that is statistically significant. The programs also improved self-reported nurturing behavior, such as showing patience when the child was upset or encouraging the child to talk about his or her feelings. Fathers in the programs averaged a score of 2.56 (between somewhat often and very often), compared with 2.46 among those in the control group, a difference that is statistically significant. These favorable findings are especially encouraging because most fathers did not live with their children and were typically no longer romantically involved with the children's mother.

Figure 1. Effects of PACT RF programs after one year



Source: PACT follow-up survey, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research; administrative data, the National Directory of New Hires.

Notes: The arrow indicates the effect was significantly different from zero (at the .05 level or less, using a two-tailed test). The "no" sign indicates the effect was not significantly different from zero.

For each father, the evaluation team randomly selected a focal child who met two criteria at baseline: (1) the child was younger than 21 and (2) the child lived with or had in-person contact with the father in the month before the father was randomly assigned to the program or control group.

The PACT RF programs did not improve other aspects of parenting and father involvement. In particular, the programs did not affect the proportion of children with whom the fathers had contact or fathers' financial support of their children. Similarly, the programs did not affect the quality of fathers' relationships with the mothers of their children or their social-emotional well-being, such as depressive symptoms.

The impacts on economic stability were mixed. The PACT RF programs led to a modest increase in employment stability, as measured by the number of consecutive quarters fathers were employed during the year after study enrollment. The effect on employment stability, however, did not translate to improvements in earnings or an increase in fathers' financial support of their children in the year after being randomly assigned to the program or control group.

EVALUATION METHODS

From December 2012 to March 2015, the PACT evaluation team randomly assigned 5,522 fathers who applied for one of the four PACT RF programs to either (1) a program group, which was offered RF services, or (2) a control group, which was not offered these services. The control group received information about other services in the community and could choose to participate in those.

The evaluation team tested the effects of the PACT RF programs by comparing the outcomes of the program group with those of the control group. The four study programs were weighted equally in this analysis. The evaluation team measured outcomes using data from three sources: (1) baseline surveys completed by all fathers when they enrolled in the study, (2) follow-up surveys conducted with the fathers about a year later, and (3) administrative employment records collected from the National Directory of New Hires, a national database on employment and earnings maintained by the Office of Child Support Enforcement.

The PACT evaluation

The PACT evaluation is a large-scale multicomponent project to broaden our understanding of Responsible Fatherhood (RF) and Healthy Marriage (HM) programs. The PACT evaluation addresses research questions from several angles by using a mixed-methods approach that includes the following:

- Implementation study of four RF and two HM programs
- Impact study of four RF and two HM programs
- Qualitative study of fathers in four RF programs
- Descriptive study of Hispanic RF programs
- Study of trauma-informed approaches for men in re-entry

Learn more about the evaluation at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/parents-and-children-together-pact-evaluation>

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