THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AMONG LOW-INCOME FATHERS: **FINDINGS FROM THE PACT EVALUATION**

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Social networks are important in our lives. Connections to family, friends, and organizations enhance a person's well-being and facilitate access to needed resources. Social networks play an important role for all members of society because connections with family and friends can generate vital social capital. Social capital, in turn, provides access to immediate resources, like money, advice, and housing, and also gives information and links to other resources, such as jobs and organizational supports (Young 2006).

Research on social capital demonstrates that individuals with more social connections are "more likely to be hired, housed, healthy, and happy" (Woolcock 2001). Social networks may thus enhance individual well-being in both material and non-material ways. For example, friendships and relationships can support mental health (Umberson 2010) and are thought to be as important to an individual's health as diet and exercise (Yang 2016). Some research identifies loneliness as a public health hazard, because lonely individuals face mortality rates similar to those of people with smoking or drinking habits (Holt-Lunstad et al. 2010).

Like social networks, participation in local or community organizations contributes to the formation of social capital (Curley 2010; Putnam 2000). Low-income, disadvantaged people often depend on local organizations for the services and resources they need to

Relatively little is known about how social networks and organizational resources figure in the lives of these fathers, nor about how accumulation of social capital enables fathers to supplement their own financial, logistical, or emotional resources.

avoid or mitigate hardships (Allard and Small 2013). Even connections to federally run programs, such as those that provide housing or cash assistance, are typically facilitated through community-based organizations (Allard 2009). Although many organizations work to meet the needs of the poor, information about how to take advantage of their services is sometimes communicated most effectively through informal social networks (Allard and Small 2013).

The role of social networks for low-income fathers is less understood. Relatively little is known about how social networks and organizational resources figure in the lives of these fathers, nor about how accumulation of social capital enables fathers to supplement their own financial, logistical, or emotional resources (Castillo and Fenzl-Crossman 2010; Young 2006).[1] The Parents and Children Together (PACT) evaluation offers an opportunity to help fill this information gap. This multi-year formative evaluation is designed to measure the impacts and implementation of four Responsible Fatherhood (RF) programs that were awarded three-year grants in 2011 from the Administration on Children and Families (Box 1). PACT also includes a qualitative study of a subset of fathers participating in the programs.

Box 1. The Parents and Children Together (PACT) Evaluation

The Parents and Children Together (PACT) evaluation is a large-scale multi-component project intended to broaden our understanding of Responsible Fatherhood (RF) and Healthy Marriage (HM) programs. The major components are:

- Implementation study of four RF and two HM programs
- Impacts study of four RF and two HM programs
- Qualitative study of fathers in four RF programs
- Descriptive study of Hispanic RF programs

To understand RF programs and the fathers who participate in them, the PACT evaluation addresses research questions from several angles, using a mixed-methods approach. The implementation study documents how RF programs are designed and operated and identifies challenges and promising practices. The impact study measures the effects of RF programs on fathers' engagement with their children, their employment and economic self-sufficiency, family functioning, and co-parenting and romantic relationships. The qualitative study focuses on three rounds of in-depth, in-person interviews, conducted annually to shed light on the lives of RF program participants. This brief is based on data collected in the PACT Qualitative study.

The fathers in the PACT Qualitative study were enrolled in RF programs at: (1) Successful STEPS at Connections to Success (Kansas City, Kansas, and Kansas City, Missouri); (2) The Family Formation Program at Fathers' Support Center St. Louis (St. Louis, Missouri); (3) The FATHER Project at Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota (Minneapolis, Minnesota, and St. Paul, Minnesota); and (4) The Center for Fathering at Urban Ventures (Minneapolis, Minnesota).

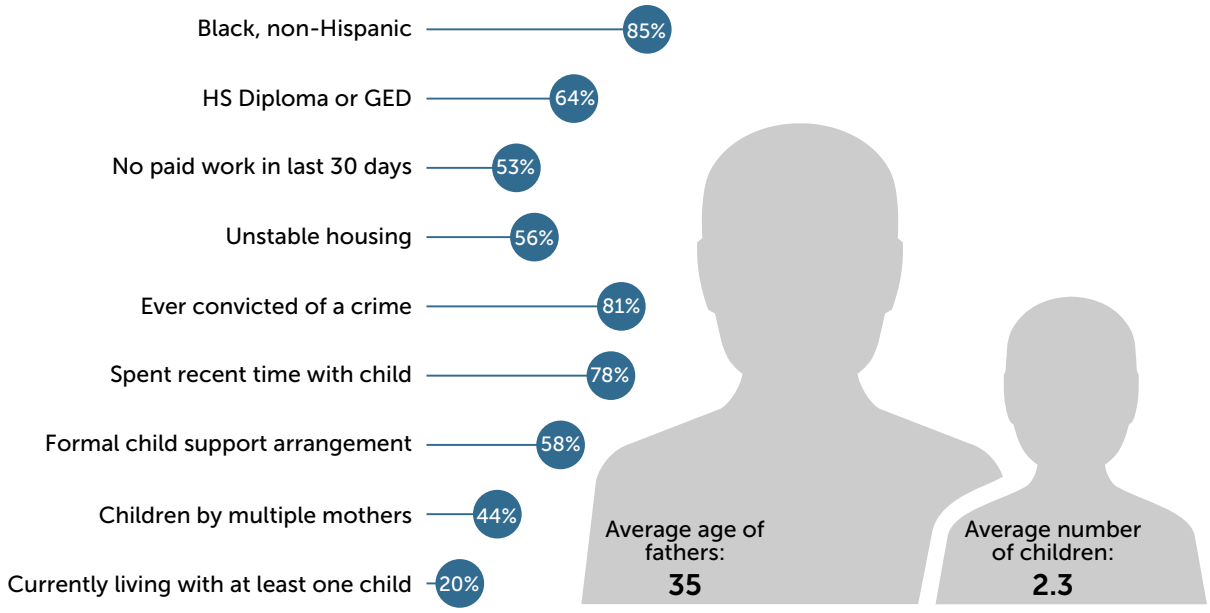
The RF programs in PACT take one of two approaches to service delivery: (1) an integrated cohort approach that provides blended services to groups of fathers who proceed through the program together on an intensive schedule, or (2) an open-entry workshop approach that allows fathers to start at any time and take advantage of a menu of lower-intensity services. Regardless of the format, the parenting and relationship components are delivered in a group setting, where men can give each other peer support and develop friendships based on shared experiences. A detailed description of these four programs is available in a report on the implementation of RF programs in PACT (Zaveri et al. 2015).

[1] In a few studies, qualitative data are used to closely examine social and organizational support networks, but these studies focus on disadvantaged mothers rather than disadvantaged fathers (Dominguez and Watkins, 2003; Nelson 2000).

Since 2005, Congress has funded the Responsible Fatherhood (RF) grant program, which promotes activities that enhance fathers' support of and positive involvement with their children. To receive an RF grant, an organization must offer programming in three core areas: (1) parenting and fatherhood, (2) economic stability (for example, by providing employment services), and (3) healthy relationships and marriage.

Fathers in the PACT evaluation typically face an array of challenges (Figure 1), including low levels of education, employment, and earnings, as well as past involvement in the criminal justice system (Holcomb et al. 2015). They may also lack the social and organizational networks necessary to produce the social capital that could help offset these significant life challenges.

Figure 1. **Characteristics of fathers who participated in round two in-depth interview**



Source: PACT baseline survey.
Note: The characteristics of the 59 fathers that participated in the second round of in-depth interviews were similar to those of the 87 fathers who participated in the first round. For round two, there were no significant differences between those who participated in the round two interviews and those who were eligible but did not participate.

The findings in this brief are drawn from the second round of the qualitative study, which included in-depth interviews with a subset of fathers. We use data from 54 of the 59 fathers who provided information and insights about the size and composition of the fathers' family and friendship ties (their social networks), the types of support they get through these connections, and the types of organizations the fathers received services from (Box 2). In this brief, we present information gleaned from the interviews, and conclude with a summary of key findings and implications for the design of RF programs as those programs continue to evolve.

Box 2. PACT qualitative study design and methods

The PACT qualitative study focuses on the views and experiences of a subset of fathers who voluntarily enrolled in one of the Responsible Fatherhood programs participating in PACT. A stratified random sampling of fathers participating in each of the programs was identified to take part in the first round of in-depth interviews in 2013 (for more information about methods used in Round 1, see Holcomb et al. 2015). Round 1 included 87 low-income, predominantly African American fathers. Two additional rounds of in-depth interviews were conducted in 2014 and 2015, drawing on the same subset of fathers. For Round 2, we attempted to reach all 87 fathers again, ultimately reaching and interviewing 59 of them. An analysis of the background characteristics of the 59 fathers in Round 2 shows they were similar to those of the full sample of fathers interviewed in Round 1.

Each in-depth interview lasted 1.5 to 2 hours and was conducted in person by a qualitative researcher who was trained to take a conversational approach and encourage fathers to convey their views and experiences in their own words. To ensure that all fathers had the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and feelings about the same areas, researchers were guided by a predefined set of topics. Round 1 topics focused on fathers' childhoods, relationships with their children and the mothers of their children, views on fathering, employment experiences, and participation in the fatherhood programs. Round 2 topics built on the earlier discussions but added a focus on fathers' social networks, experiences providing financial support for their children, and their views of co-parenting relationships. To build and enhance rapport, we matched each father in Round 2 with the same interviewer who conducted the Round 1 interview whenever possible. After each round of interviews, the conversations were transcribed and researchers coded their content to create a database of fathers' experiences and views. The resulting databases allow the research team to systematically analyze topics of interest and identify key themes.

This brief draws on themes that emerged on the topic of fathers' social connections, based on the second round of in-depth interviews. During Round 2, researchers asked fathers about the size and composition of their family and friendship ties (their social networks), the types of support they get through these connections, and their involvement in various types of potentially supportive organizations.

FATHERS' SOCIAL NETWORKS ARE TYPICALLY SMALL, AND SOME FATHERS HAVE NO SUPPORTIVE FAMILY OR FRIENDS

In comparison with national norms, fathers in the PACT RF programs lack robust social networks. Based on their perceptions about friends and family they consider supportive, particularly when it comes to helping them function and carry out their role as fathers, the men described social networks that, on average, consist of five friends and family members. This is far below the national average of 23 core ties reported by men and women in the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Boase 2006); comparisons are depicted in Figure 2.[2]

The Pew Internet and American Life Project defines core ties as respondents' connections with people (1) to whom they turn to discuss important matters, (2) with whom they regularly keep in touch, or (3) from whom they seek help (Boase 2006). For the purpose of this brief, our definition of social networks differs in that we exclude a father's current and former partners and his own children and focus on supportive kin and friends.[3] We provide more information on how social network data were collected in Box 3.

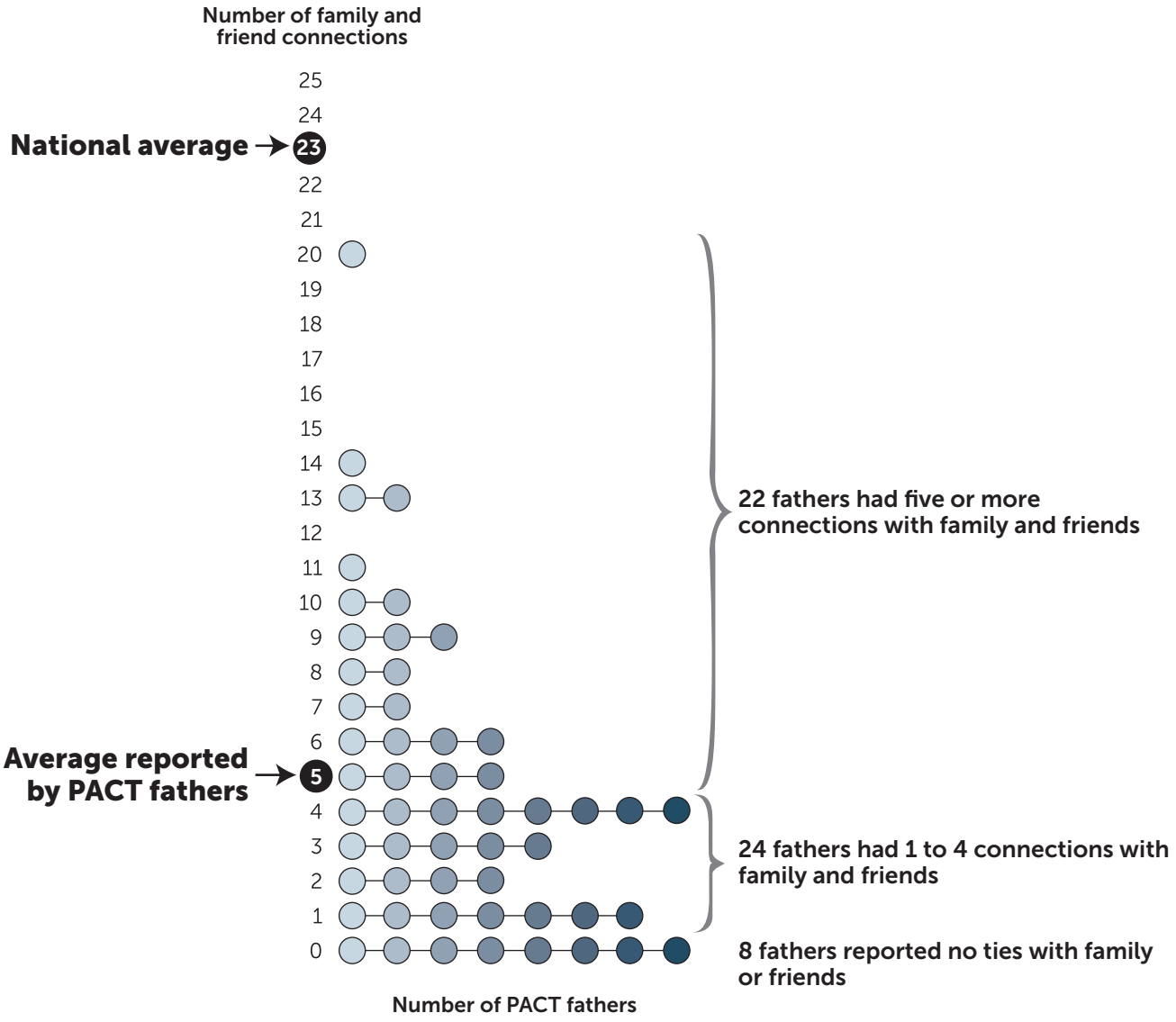
[2] Research on social networks also finds that, regardless of income, women within the general population tend to report more ties than men (McPherson et al. 2006; Boase 2006).

[3] For more information on fathers' relationships with the mothers of their children, see Holcomb et al. (2015). See also the PACT Qualitative study brief "Co-parenting relationships among low-income fathers: Findings from the PACT evaluation" (forthcoming, 2016).

Even though the average size of the social networks of these PACT fathers was small in comparison with national norms (Figure 2), the size and composition of individual fathers' social networks varied. Some had relatively robust social networks, whereas others were extremely disconnected. Moreover, the mix of connections to family and friends varied with the size of the social network.

- Based on the average number of family and friends that each father identified in his social network, 8 fathers reported no ties to their family of origin or to friends; 24 had 1–4 connections to family or friends; and 22 had five or more connections.

Figure 2. **Number of supportive connections with family and friends: national average and results for the PACT qualitative study[a]**



Sources: PACT Internal Network Tree Database 2014; Boase 2006.
[a]Note: Of the 59 fathers that participated in second round of PACT qualitative interviews in 2014, 54 provided information on their connections to family and friends, and 5 did not share this information.

- Fathers with a below average number of connections (1–4) primarily claimed family members as part of their social network, whereas fathers who had an above average number of connections (relative to other fathers in the sample) named ties within and outside their families.

Box 3. Social Network Tree: A Method for Collecting Information About Fathers' Social Connections

To better understand the fathers' social connections and support networks, fathers in the second round of PACT qualitative interviews were asked to name any family, friends, or organizations that supported them in their roles as fathers. Fathers were then asked to explain how they used these sources of support. Interviewers did not attempt to capture *all* the relatives, friends, or organizations that the father interacted with, just those he chose to identify as a source of support.

During each in-depth interview, we recorded the social supports each father named in a Social Network Tree (SNT), which functioned as a visual tool to spark deeper discussion. Later, during the analysis phase, the SNTs were used to systematically compile information about fathers' social connections in a database. The database allowed us to identify the number and types of connections for all fathers and for several subgroups of fathers, and facilitated the identification of common themes related to fathers' use of these sources of support.

Figure 3 illustrates one father's SNT. In this example, Byron, a 25-year-old African American father, named two key family members, his mother Suzanne and his uncle Melvin. He also reported connections to three friends and two supportive organizations.

For the remainder of this brief, we will use these names to refer to the broad groupings of the men's social networks: (1) no family or friend ties (8 fathers), (2) primarily family ties (24 fathers), and (3) both family and friend ties (22 fathers). We first describe the composition and function of these fathers' social networks, and then examine the number and types of organizations they turn to for additional resources and assistance. Examining the fathers by these groupings allows us to examine whether fathers with larger networks have more network resources, more ties to organizations, and in turn, more potential to accumulate social capital.[4] Fathers' own descriptions of the role of family and friends in their lives provide more insight into the factors and circumstances that help account for the varying size and composition of these men's social networks.

FATHERS WITH NO FAMILY OR FRIEND TIES: "I DON'T HAVE ANY FAMILY, REALLY."

Fathers who had no connections to family or friends attributed their isolation to family members' death or abandonment and expressed a general distrust of peers. Several fathers in this highly disconnected group cited the loss of central figures in their families as the main reason why their family ties had weakened or completely dissolved. For example, Charles, a 55-year-old father of one, was primarily raised by

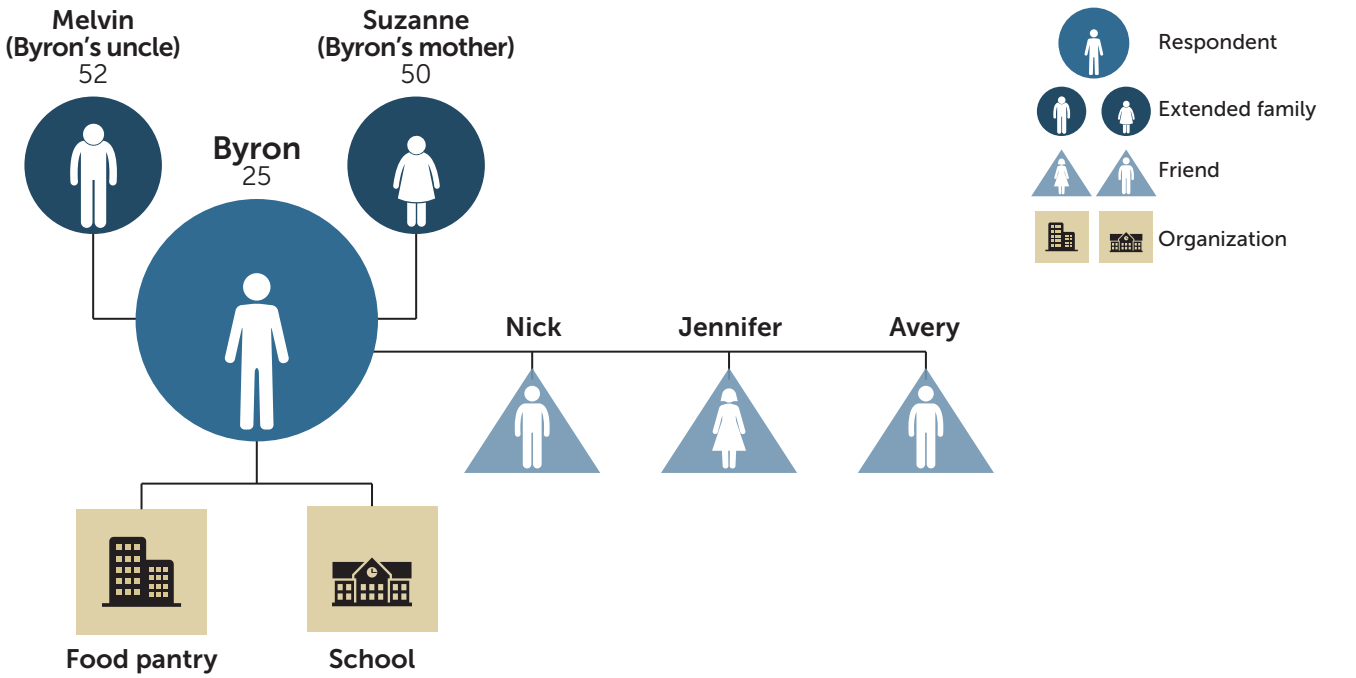
[4] Although we categorize fathers' social networks by size, this division may not always represent the extent to which a father is supported (that is, quantity of connections does not imply quality).

> You know how the family tree break up once an important person in the family dies? And everybody just get discluded from each other. That's kind of how it is right now. —Preston

his older sister after his parents died in a car accident when he was young.[5] Charles bitterly resents his sister for exposing him to drugs at an early age, and he believes that exposure directly led to his addiction to drugs and alcohol. He explained that "all my relatives are gone" and that getting together to share holidays with extended family and even his sister "went by the wayside." In the same way, Preston, a 32-year-old father of four, reported that his family members scattered geographically and did not stay in touch after his mother died. Preston's mother was the one keeping the family in close contact. Preston explained, "You know how the family tree break up once an important person in the family dies? And everybody just get discluded from each other. That's kind of how it is right now."

Fathers also attributed their lack of ties to family and friends to their abandonment by parents early in life. Quincy, a 36-year-old father of four, said his own father abandoned him when he was just 5 years old. Although Quincy lives with his son and has a close relationship with him, he wishes he could provide his son with a close-knit extended family that Quincy lacked in his own childhood. He said "I take pride in […] myself as a family man and I don't have any family, really, you know what I'm saying? So, in that aspect of my life, I feel like a failure." Like Quincy, Kolby, a 40-year-old father of six who was abandoned as a child, recounted that he "didn't have a mother or father" and spent his life "in and out of group homes and fosters and penitentiaries and everything." Kolby spoke of "a life of misery, not having parental guidance from a mother and a father" and talked about how he "needed both of them." Kolby says he was able to straighten out his life only after cutting ties to his adoptive family: "Ever

Figure 3. **Example Social Network Tree**



[5] In this brief, men are referred to by pseudonyms to protect their identity. Each father was given a different pseudonym that we used consistently throughout this brief and other reports and briefs from the PACT qualitative study.

since I cut them [his adoptive family] off, I've been alright. I had to struggle for a while. I had to fight homelessness, and I had to fight mental illness and then alcohol addiction, but I just toughed it out, and here I am. I never made it more than three or four months out of jail. Here it is five years."

Fathers with no ties to family or friends expressed skepticism about the sincerity of their peers and former friends. Most of these fathers, such as Kyree, had negative experiences with friends who got them into trouble, had a bad influence on them, or took advantage of them. Kyree, a 42-year-old father of five, described a common sentiment among fathers with no ties—a deep distrust of his friends' intentions. Kyree reported that he had "no friends. Never had any friends." He thought that friends from his past had taken advantage of him: "Most people just want to use me. Most people just basically take my kindness as a weakness."

Xavier, a 27-year-old father of three, explained that his former friends were "indulging in negative activities" which is why he had to "get rid of them" and "leave them alone." Xavier struggled with making new friends, explaining that "I haven't really met anybody new" to replace his former friends.

A key goal of many fathers who participated in RF programs was to shed their troubled pasts to "straighten out," and reconnect or connect more closely with their children. Former friends and peers in these fathers' lives are often still involved in the deviant activities they wish to leave behind, so they turn away from old friends in an effort to stay out of trouble. For example, Xavier, a 27-year-old father of three, explained that his former friends were "indulging in negative activities" which is why he had to "get rid of them" and "leave them alone." Xavier struggled with making new friends, explaining that "I haven't really met anybody new" to replace his former friends.

FATHERS WITH PRIMARILY FAMILY TIES: "IT'S ABOUT ME AND THE FAMILY."

A large proportion of the 24 fathers in this group said they do not have a close connection with anyone outside their immediate family circle. These fathers had a below average number of ties compared to our qualitative study sample as a whole, citing an average of three connections. In the interviews, they focused on their ties to family, naming few if any friends. Instead of friends, these fathers focused their connections primarily on key figures in their family of origin, most often mothers or siblings. They generally did not express regret about their lack of friends, or articulate any desire to have more friends.

James, a 51-year-old father of two, is one example. He did not identify any friends in his social network because he doesn't "really socialize with a lot of people, other than when [he's] at work" and he does not consider any of his co-workers as friends. James said, "[When] I'm at work, [I'll] be working and I come home, it's about me and the family."

In contrast to fathers with no ties to family or friends, some of these fathers describe how their tight family circle is held together by a central figure in the family. Taylor, a 39-year-old father of seven, described how his mother acts as the linchpin for the whole family. "My mother, she's probably the key to the whole [family] tree. […] Without a doubt." Likewise, James calls his brother "the anchor of the family." He "leans on" his brother, and his brother is there for him and the rest of his family.

Over half of the 24 fathers whose ties are primarily with family members did cite a couple of friends—usually one or two—as part of their social network. These fathers typically named one supportive friend who was often a friend from childhood. For example, DeShawn, a 48-year-old father of two, said he only has one friend, but he can count on that friend to be there if he needs advice. He particularly appreciates his friend's honesty: "Well he gives it to me in the raw. When I'm wrong, I'm wrong. If I'm right, I'm right. If I need him, he's there. And I show him the same in return."

FATHERS WITH BOTH FAMILY AND FRIEND TIES: "THE DOOR'S ALWAYS OPEN FOR ME TO NEED THEM."

The 22 fathers in the group with larger than average social networks in this study often included both family and friends in their circle, and were more likely than the fathers with limited connections to view both of their parents as key figures in their lives. These fathers said family ties gave them a deep source of unconditional love and support that was available whenever a problem arose. On average, these fathers reported nine connections.

Cedric, a 31-year-old father of three, spoke proudly of his relationship with his mother and godmother, saying he has "a really good relationship" with them and they "can talk about anything." He explained how his family supports him unconditionally, by giving him advice, buying things for his children, and watching his children whenever he needs them to. "You can't put your kids with everybody," he noted, and said he appreciated "having somebody that could be able to be there for me, and don't hassle me [about having to watch the children]." Cedric reflected on his support system: "They always there, so the door's always open for me to need them." He also noted that his relationship with his family is a two-way street. "I do things for them too, so it ain't just like they being there for me. Like I said, I love being there for my family. They appreciate me, I'll do it for them in a heartbeat."

Fathers who had ties to both family and friends were more likely than other fathers to report connections to both their mother and father. Nearly half of the fathers with a higher than average number of ties identified both their mother and father as part of their social network, compared to less than one in six of the fathers who had primarily family ties. Almost all highly connected fathers cited friends as part of their social network, and these were typically long-standing friendships, often going back to childhood. This suggests that the fathers who are connected to larger networks of both family and friends may come from more stable families than those with smaller networks. Stable families of origin may, in turn, enable men to invest energy in building strong friendship ties, even from a young age, to avoid a distrust of anyone outside of their immediate family, and to develop even more friendship ties (Brown 2010, Amato 2005).

So like my friendship with these guys that I have, you know, [have] always been there by my side, man. Always, you know, always.
—Juan

Some of these fathers stressed their sheer enjoyment of their friends. For example, Juan, a 51-year-old father of one, explained how he had been friends with the people in his network since childhood, and they were always there for him, "It was like four guys that

we've all grown up together you know. […] So like my friendship with these guys that I have, you know, [have] always been there by my side, man. Always, you know, always." Juan explained that his friends are "just fun" and he can count on "having a good time" with them.

Others more quickly turned to the supportive role their friends play. Jair, a 38-year-old father of four, can count on his friend to help him with more serious needs, such as housing. Although fathers rarely reported that their friends helped with housing, Jair's close friend routinely provided a place for him to stay when he was in town to see his daughter, no questions asked. Jair explained, "He gave me to the key to his house so whenever I come down, I got somewhere to sleep. […] So I ain't never on the streets when I'm [in town], you know what I'm saying? I go to his house and go to sleep."

SHORT-TERM SUPPORTIVE TIES FORMED BY PARTICIPATING IN RF PROGRAMS

Although the PACT RF programs provided opportunities to connect with other fathers in similar situations, very few men said they formed connections there that continued after the program ended. As described more fully in the first PACT qualitative report (Holcomb, et al. 2015), fathers' descriptions of their RF program experiences stressed how much they valued the camaraderie and support of other fathers in the program. Fathers appreciated knowing they were "not alone," or that their problems "weren't so bad" in comparison with those of other fathers. Fathers thought the group-based sessions offered through RF programs gave them a place where they "fit in." However, despite the high value fathers placed on peer interactions while they were participating in the RF program, these connections were only infrequently maintained once their participation ended.

THE MOST FREQUENTLY CITED TYPE OF RESOURCE WAS EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

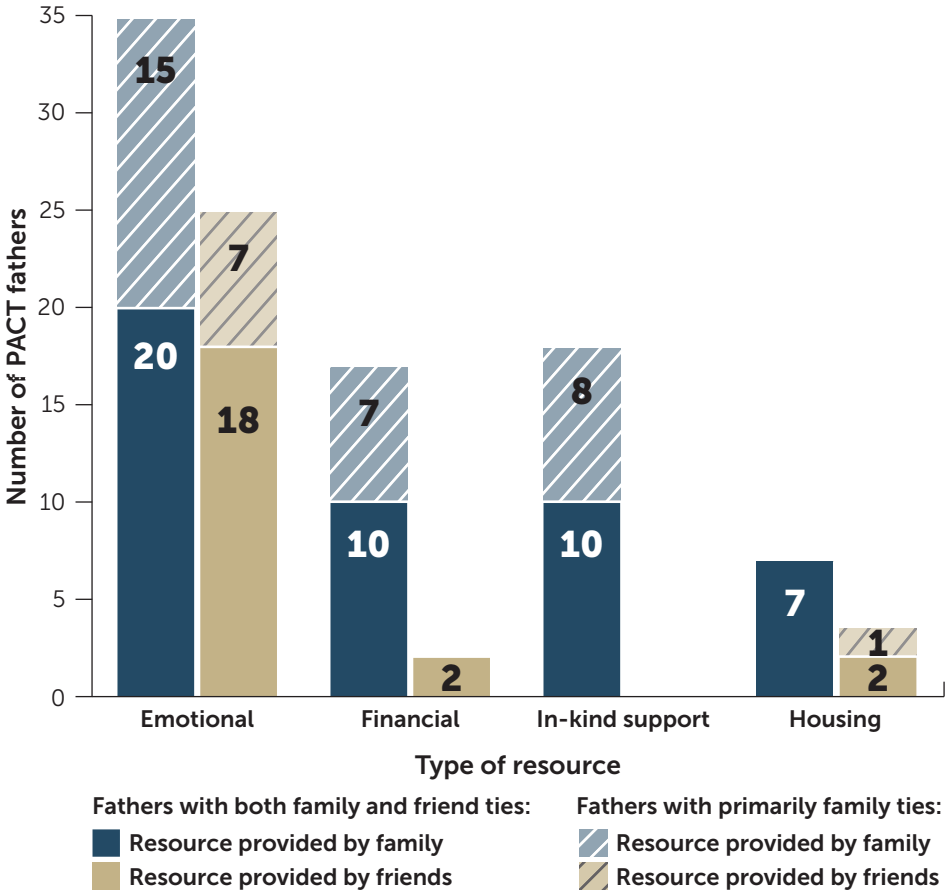
Overall, fathers used their social networks for four main types of support: emotional, financial, in-kind, and housing.[6] Emotional support includes providing advice or guidance, serving as a role model, or being available for a father in difficult times. Financial support includes providing cash on a regular or as-needed basis, ranging from paying bills for a father or giving him "20 dollars to get by." In-kind support includes things like transportation to work or appointments, or providing child care. Housing support means helping with a temporary or permanent place to stay, or sharing rent with a father who cannot afford a place of his own alone.

Fathers overwhelmingly used their social networks for emotional support, with nearly two-thirds of fathers citing family members and about half citing friends as providing this type of support. Less than one-third of fathers relied on family for financial and in-kind support, whereas fewer than one in six fathers got housing support from family members. Very few fathers relied on their friends for financial support or for housing, and none reported using friends for in-kind support (Figure 4).

Fathers overwhelmingly used their social networks for emotional support, with nearly two-thirds of fathers citing family members and about half citing friends as providing this type of support.

[6] Although we recognize that housing is a type of "in-kind" support, for the purpose of the brief we regard housing as a separate category.

Figure 4. **Fathers' use of social network resources: all fathers who provided social network information as part of PACT in-depth interviews[a]**



Sources: PACT internal network tree database, 2014.
[a]Note: Of the 59 fathers that participated in PACT interviews in 2014, 54 provided information on their connections to family and friends, and 5 fathers did not share this information.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS IN FATHERS' LIVES DIFFERS BY THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THESE NETWORKS

The role that social networks play in fathers' lives differs by the size and composition of their network. Fathers with smaller and less diverse social networks reported lower utilization of fewer types of resources, but those with larger networks used all types of support. Fathers with smaller social networks may disadvantage men because they have access to fewer resources, and their social networks may contain less social capital to draw upon.

The 22 fathers with connections to both family and friends used their social networks for all four types of support. Like many fathers in the study, these men relied on friends primarily for advice or companionship. What sets this group apart is the way they relied on their families as a wraparound source of support, with almost all using family for emotional support, about half using family members for financial or in-kind support, and almost one-third relying on family for housing. Family and friend

connections were also integral in helping these men navigate their role as fathers. As described above, Cedric shares a deep connection with his family and is proud of the good relationship he has with them. He explained that his family is always there for him to provide advice, money, or child care. When asked about the ways his family supports him, Cedric responded, "As needed, but if I had to say, probably every other week as far as a dollar amount of buying something, something like that. I get support from my mom all the time. If I need her to watch the kids, or just to talk to, they're always there."

He tells me all the time he's proud of me and keep things up the way they're going. [...] Because the last place he wants to see me is back in jail. So, he's a good influence on me. —Izaiah

In a similar way, Izaiah, a 30-year-old father of two, emphasized that his family supports him on multiple dimensions, providing emotional, financial, and in-kind support. He praised his mother as a "great mother" who always gives him whatever he needs. Izaiah said, "She'll get my kids anytime. She'll watch them anytime I need." His mom also supports him with money: "Financially, if I ever needed something, my mom would give it to me." Izaiah's brother is a role model for him, because he encourages Izaiah to stay out of jail. His brother gives him "good advice" about "how to stay out of trouble." Izaiah explained the emotional support he receives from his brother: "He tells me all the time he's proud of me and keep things up the way they're going. […] Because the last place he wants to see me is back in jail. So, he's a good influence on me."

Compared to fathers with larger and more diverse social networks, those 24 fathers whose social networks were composed of primarily family ties mainly benefited from their family members' emotional support, and depended on them less frequently for financial or in-kind support. It is unclear why fathers whose networks were comprised of both family members and friends received more financial support from their family members than fathers who primarily relied on family members as their network. It is possible that these family members were simply less able to help out financially, or felt that providing emotional support was more important.

Manuel, a 43-year-old father of two, described how his sister has "always been supportive" and is always there for him, despite their geographic separation. Because they do not live in the same city, it is difficult for Manuel's sister to do much more than check in on him, but he feels a strong bond with her and said they have "always been close growing up." Manuel explained, "She always called me and checked on me and seen how I was doing. She knew I was going through the homeless situation up here. We still stay in contact. We check each other regularly."

Isaac, a 29-year-old father of two, described how his mother makes it easier for him to be more involved with his daughter and helps ensure he shows up for all of his appointments and court dates. Isaac's mother communicates with his daughter's mother to ensure that Isaac gets to see his daughter "on the regular." His mother also makes sure he meets his responsibilities: "She behind me making sure everything is taken care of, making sure I don't miss no hearings or I follow up on any type of leads or letters I get to contact the lawyer who I hired to take care of the [visitation petition] information."

Though family infrequently provided financial help to fathers with primarily family ties, Tavion, a 39-year-old father of one, explained how his mother puts his needs before her own and helps him out financially to make sure he can make ends meet. Tavion described how his mother "make sure that I'm alright, probably before she alright […] Buy me things before she buy her own self things."

Fathers with no family or friend ties lacked access to any of the four types of supports that other fathers found in their network connections. Of these eight men, a few reported feeling a "void" because they were disconnected from their family members. D'Angelo, a 38-year-old father of two, lost both his parents and expressed how much he missed his parents: "Cause it used to be where I could go talk to them, you know, about what was going on or see where they stood on certain issues. And they not there. I be missing them." D'Angelo explained that "nobody taking up the void" of his parents and he tries to "just rough through it," always hopeful "it'll get better in the future."

Most of my friends were all drinking buddies…I haven't found anybody that's not drinking that I have enough in common with to get that close to.
—Charles

In addition to missing out on a family, two of these highly disconnected fathers mentioned that having no friends contributed to feelings of loneliness, and they could not find any positive people to socialize with to replace their old drinking buddies. Charles, who was quoted previously, lost his parents at an early age, but he also had to part ways with all his friends who were not a good influence in terms of his maintaining sobriety. He explained, "Most of my friends were all drinking buddies, […] I don't associate with them anymore either." Charles described feeling "lonely" and said "I haven't found anybody that's not drinking that I have enough in common with to get that close to."

MOST FATHERS GOT SOME SUPPORT FROM ORGANIZATIONS, BUT VERY FEW NAMED SAFETY NET PROGRAMS

In addition to the RF program in which they had enrolled, most fathers reported using supports from organizations that were public entities or nonprofits. The typical father cited two supportive organizations, although almost one-quarter of fathers named five or more.[7] (A description of fathers' experiences with the RF programs, based on in-depth interviews, can be found in the first PACT qualitative report (2015).

Half of all the fathers we interviewed reported that they get support from nonprofit organizations, such as religious organizations, or community service agencies. One-third of the fathers named churches as sources of support, and over two-fifths of them (44 percent) named community-based organizations that offer a variety of programs and supports, including job training, food pantries, and health care.

Although one-third of the fathers said they received support from public entities, few of the fathers cited safety net programs, such as cash or housing assistance, as a source of support. Fathers described receiving support from many public entities such as social service agencies, schools, and legal services (such as legal aid or parole officers).

[7] We refer to "organizations" rather than "institutions" or "systems." Organizations may be embedded within systems, and institutions may regulate the operation of both (Allard and Smith, p. 8).

Welfare gives me the hardest time [...] I felt discriminated against as a single father that trying to get help when I really needed the help, and I couldn't get it.
—Marquis

However, just over one-tenth said they received support from safety net programs, such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or the Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8 housing assistance). Marquis, a 29-year-old father of one, discussed his struggles with "welfare," particularly in getting SNAP or housing assistance. He said, "Welfare gives me the hardest time […] I felt discriminated against as a single father that trying to get help when I really needed the help, and I couldn't get it." The only benefits Marquis could obtain were "three to four months of food stamps […] and health insurance," but he could not get help with a new place to stay. Marquis felt discouraged by his experience in the public support system and as though he had "hit a wall." He explained, "Welfare did nothing for me that I expected. I did everything to the T and still got burnt." Fathers, like Marquis, faced obvious challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and homelessness, but did not view safety net programs as a source of help.

FATHERS WITH LARGER NETWORKS WERE MORE LIKELY TO ALSO GET HELP FROM ORGANIZATIONS

Fathers with larger social networks named twice as many organizational sources of support compared to fathers with fewer or no social ties. Low-income fathers with relatively weak social networks did not appear to make up for their lack of social network connections by relying on more organizations for support and resources.

Fathers with larger social networks named twice as many organizational sources of support compared to fathers with fewer or no social ties (on average, four organizations contrasted with two). Low-income fathers with relatively weak social networks did not appear to make up for their lack of social network connections by relying on more organizations for support and resources. These findings stand in contrast to the research on low-income mothers, which shows that mothers compensate for weak social ties by connecting to organizations for help (Dominguez and Watkins 2002).

This suggests that fathers who lack connections with friends, and those who have no ties at all, may be cut off from information that could connect them to organizations within the community. Social networks may not only to provide the direct resources described above, but also to provide the social capital needed to access resources in the community.

Other interpretations are possible. Fathers with smaller and less diverse social networks may, for other reasons, be more cut off from information that may be critical to connect them to organizations within the community. It is also possible that the lack of robust connections to both social networks and organizations is driven by other factors like depression, which is known to be associated with social withdrawal (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2009) or with personality traits such as introversion, known to be connected to the size of a person's social network (Costa and McCrae 1992; Ishiguro 2016). Although other factors may constrain the accumulation of social capital, the lack of strong social networks and linkages to outside organizational resources leaves these low-income fathers doubly disadvantaged.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RF PROGRAM DESIGN

Fathers' reliance on family and friends implies they both need and desire social support. The narratives of these fathers suggest that family and friends play an important role in providing emotional support and advice. This finding is supported by research that suggests social networks contribute to fathers' well-being and may provide access to valuable social capital that men can use to make connections and obtain information about avenues to employment, housing, and other sources of support (Woolcock 2001; Young 2006).

For fathers with few or no connections to friends or family, providing services in a group format may offer them needed peer support and connections. The social isolation experienced by many of these fathers suggests that the peer group service delivery format offered by many RF programs may fill an important gap in their lives. However, since the fathers interviewed stated that the connections made through the program were rarely maintained after program ended, programs may want to consider hosting an ongoing peer support group that continues beyond the program curriculum period. This type of peer support group would not need to offer curriculum instruction or a trained educator, but could provide a resource for fathers who need and desire ongoing social support. Programs may also want to consider strategies that allow fathers to stay connected to the program for a longer period of time, rather than expecting their involvement to end once the core workshops have concluded.

RF programs can play an important role in engaging fathers with organizational resources and supports. Our findings suggest that the fathers who are largely disconnected from family and friends are also least connected to organizations. This group of fathers is likely to need the resources organizations provide since their social networks yield little or no social capital. In the absence of strong social networks, greater programmatic emphasis on providing strategic and targeted outreach may be needed in order to connect these isolated fathers with much needed organizational resources.

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