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Summary Report: The DAD MAP Evaluation: A Randomized Controlled Trial of a Culturally Tailored Parenting and Responsible Fatherhood Program



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Introduction

This report describes and summarizes results from a rigorous study conducted by MEF Associates in collaboration with the Center for Urban Families (CFUF), to test the effectiveness of the DAD MAP curriculum (Developing All Dads for Manhood and Parenting) on key fatherhood outcomes. The DAD MAP curriculum is used to guide the parenting workshop component of CFUF's Baltimore Responsible Fatherhood Program (BRFP). CFUF is a community-based organization that aims to empower low-income families to become self-sufficient using intensive case management as well as services to address unemployment, relationship conflict, and parenting education. The DAD MAP curriculum was developed by CFUF practitioner staff, in collaboration with researchers to outline procedures for teaching skills, guiding discussion, and facilitating interactive activities, with the goal of promoting responsible parenting and healthy relationships among fathers.

The current study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are changes in fatherhood outcomes associated with the participation of low-income fathers in the DAD MAP curriculum workshops compared to participation in an unstructured support group?
2. Do some subgroups of fathers benefit from DAD MAP curriculum sessions more than others?

Methods

The DAD MAP curriculum is designed for low-income African American fathers with children under age 12. The fatherhood group workshops are held twice a week for eight weeks, for approximately 90 minutes per session. These workshops are typically co-facilitated by responsible fatherhood specialists who are trained to engage fathers and understand the barriers to positive parenting that many participants may face. Another component of the BRFP offered by the Center for Urban Families is an unstructured support group. Like DAD MAP, it consists of a 16-session workshop that is held twice a week for eight weeks.

Implementation of the DAD MAP evaluation began in April 2015, with recruitment ending in May of 2017. The study was conducted using a randomized experimental design in which fathers were randomly assigned to either 1) the treatment group, which received the BRFP using the 16-session DAD MAP curriculum, or 2) the control group, which received the BRFP using 16 sessions of an unstructured, peer-led support group. The study design and procedures were approved by the Temple University Institutional Review Board.

The DAD MAP curriculum includes interactive exercises, activities, and discussion guides to promote responsible fatherhood, enhance parenting skills, improve communication, and promote workforce participation and engagement. The curriculum exposes low-income men to fatherhood education, information, and skill development. CFUF created the DAD MAP curriculum based on its experience working in low-income, African-American communities in Baltimore.

The unstructured, peer-led support group covered a range of topics that were not addressed in the DAD MAP curriculum. Rather than focus on specific topics on parenting, healthy relationships or employment, the support group members chose the topic of discussion for each session. A fatherhood specialist trained in the DAD MAP curriculum led the workshops for treatment group. To prevent study contamination, a part-time staff person who was not trained on the curriculum guided the group discussion for the control group.



Procedures

Participants in both the experimental and control groups were fathers who enrolled in BRFP during the study period, were at least 18 years old, and reported having children under the age of 12. Fathers were recruited from external, community-based agencies serving men and fathers as well as internal programs such as STRIVE, a work readiness boot camp. BRFP staff also used street recruitment strategies, such as posting literature describing the program in barbershops, convenience stores, and other local businesses. Finally, BRFP staff recruited fathers from the local child support agency by distributing literature and collecting contact information from walk-ins. Fathers who were eligible for the study and expressed interest in participating in the fatherhood program gave their consent to be in the study by a responsible fatherhood specialist.

Once fathers were enrolled into the study, they completed a baseline interview before random assignment. Fathers were then told which group they were assigned to and remained in that group for the remainder of their participation in the study. All fathers received case management services from a responsible fatherhood specialist regardless of which group they were assigned to. Fathers were contacted by phone to complete two follow up surveys three and six months after enrollment. Fathers had the option to complete the survey by phone or in person at the CFUF office. Three self-report surveys were developed to assess participant characteristics and outcomes at baseline and three and six months following enrollment in the project. All three surveys included questions on sociodemographic status and key study outcomes.

To assess study outcomes, several survey items and subscales were included in the surveys dealing with father involvement, co-parenting relationship quality and child well-being, and workforce participation/job seeking. For example, this study used the Father Engagement Scale,¹ which includes two subscales measuring *parental care* and *parental support* containing items about parenting behaviors in the last 30 days. Higher scores indicate more frequent father engagement.

To assess informal child support, individual responses from the six items on the informal contribution scale were summed up to a single score, with greater scores indicating more informal child support contributions. Fathers were also asked to report their financial contributions for any of their children in the last 30 days regardless of whether they consisted of formal or informal child support payments.²

Formal child support provided by fathers was assessed using multiple items. Fathers were asked if they had a child support order, the amount they were obligated to pay each month, and the actual amount they paid in the last 30 days. Child support compliance was assessed by calculating the amount paid over the amount owed in the last 30 days.

Other indicators of fatherhood involvement included items assessing how many nights fathers spent with any of their children in a typical week in the last 30 days, as well as how many days fathers spent at least one hour with their focal child in the last 30 days.³

Sample Demographic Characteristics

See Table 1 for the distribution of baseline characteristics for study participants. In total, there were 164 fathers included in the analysis, with 89 fathers in treatment group and 75 in the control group. On average, participants were 35 years old, identified as African American, and had at least a high school diploma or GED. Fathers in both groups were highly likely to be unemployed and report no income in the last 30 days. Nearly half reported living in a relative's home or apartment.



Table 1: Baseline survey characteristics for total sample and study groups

Demographics	Total <i>n</i> =164	Treatment <i>n</i> =89	Control group <i>n</i> =75
Age mean (SD)	35.2 (8.5)	34.5 (8.2)	36 (9)
African American	158 (96.3%)	87 (97.8%)	71 (93.8%)
High school diploma/GED	110 (67%)	62 (70%)	48 (64%)
Housing			
– Own home/apt	42 (25.6%)	25 (28.09%)	17 (23.46%)
– In a relative's home/apt	71 (42%)	37 (41.57%)	34 (44.44%)
Economic stability			
– Employed	41 (24.4%)	21 (23.86%)	20 (25.93%)
– Income > \$400/month	49 (29.8%)	23 (25.84%)	26 (35.80%)

Program Dosage

Participants in both the DAD MAP group and the peer-led support group had relatively low rates of attendance. Fathers who were randomized to the DAD MAP curriculum condition attended about a quarter of all sessions (roughly three of 16 sessions), while those randomized to the control condition attended closer to four sessions on average. Across both groups, approximately 18 percent of fathers attended at least half of workshop sessions, and 36 percent of fathers attended at least a quarter of all workshop sessions. One hundred fathers attended at least one BRFP workshop session. The control group attended about one additional session on average, but session dosage did not vary significantly between the two groups. There were no significant dosage differences between members of the treatment or control group on any CFUF programs, including the BRFP workshops.

Attendance at other CFUF programs among research participants was somewhat variable. For instance, CFUF's Couples Advancing Together (CAT) program, which is an intervention designed to promote healthy relationships, had a relatively high attendance rate, with enrolled participants completing an average of approximately five of 12 sessions. CFUF attendance for the employment-focused STRIVE program, which includes a total of 15 sessions, had a relatively low attendance rate, with research participants attending about one-third of sessions.

DAD MAP Impacts

DAD MAP curriculum impacts were observed on parental support subscales, the reported number of nights spent with children, provision of informal child support, and the reported amount money spent on children in the last 30 days. All impacts were significant and observed on the three-month follow-up survey only. On average, fathers in the DAD MAP curriculum group scored seven points higher than those in the control group on parental care subscale scores at three-month follow-up (see Figure 1). Similarly, fathers in the DAD MAP curriculum group scored three points higher on the parental support subscale at three-month follow-up, as compared with fathers in the peer-led support group (see Figure 2). Fathers in the DAD MAP group reported spending an average of three more days with their focal children and two more nights with any of their children than fathers in the unstructured, peer-led support group (see Figures 3 and 4). On average, fathers who participated in the DAD MAP curriculum sessions scored three points higher on the informal child support subscale at the three-month follow-up, as compared with control group fathers (see Figure 5). In terms of reported money spent toward the care of their children in the last 30 days, DAD MAP group fathers said they spent an average of approximately \$100 more on their children than fathers in the control group (see Figure 6).

No significant differences were detected between members of the treatment and control groups at the six-month follow-up survey on any outcomes. The current study did not detect any differences between the treatment and control condition when it came to co-parenting relationship quality, child behavioral symptoms, formal child support compliance, nor employment seeking at any follow-up assessment points.

Subgroup analysis suggested that fathers who did not attend CAT or STRIVE sessions tended to show greater treatment group impacts on informal child support scores. There was no indication that any other subgroups of fathers experienced stronger or weaker impacts from the DAD MAP curriculum sessions.⁴

Figure 1: DAD MAP impacts on parental care subscale measures at three-month follow-up*

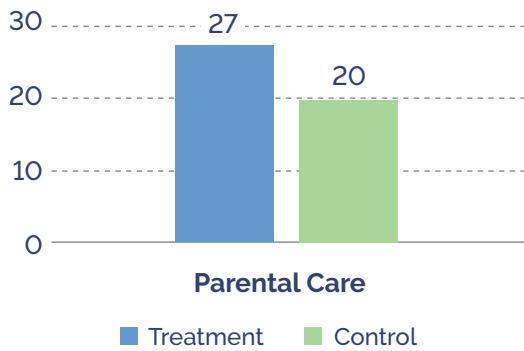


Figure 2: DAD MAP impacts on parental support subscale measures at three-month follow-up*

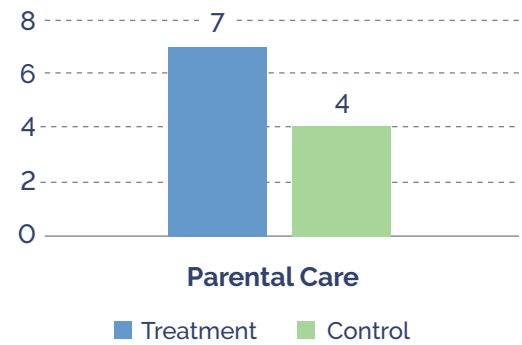


Figure 3: DAD MAP impacts on reported nights spent with children/week at three-month follow-up*

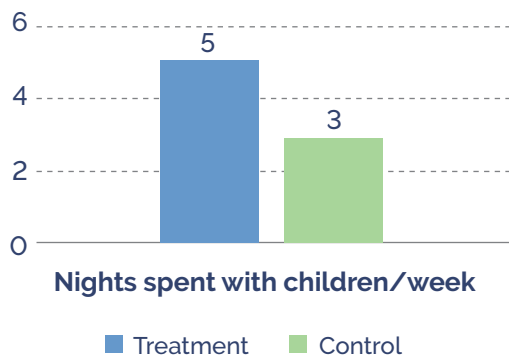


Figure 4: DAD MAP impacts on reported days spent with focal child for at least one hour at three-month follow-up

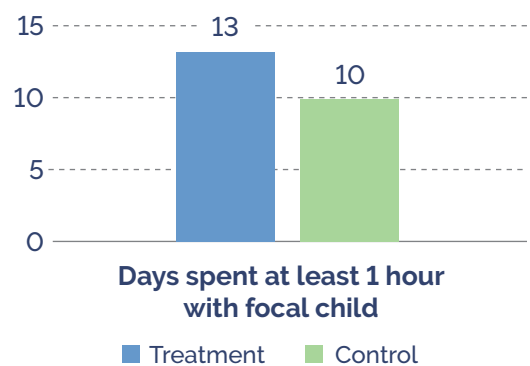


Figure 5: DAD MAP impacts on informal child support subscale scores at three-month follow-up*

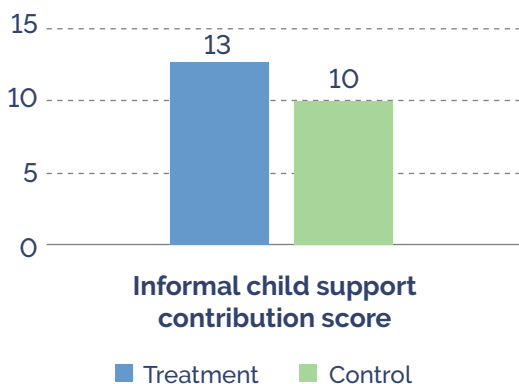
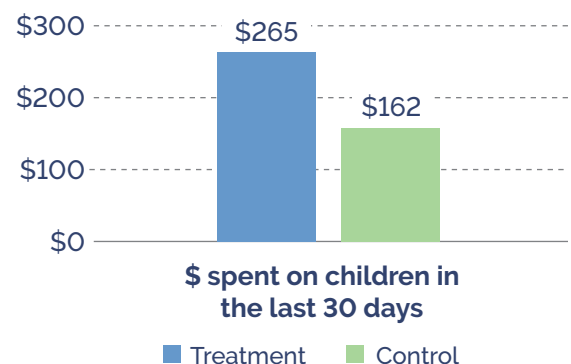


Figure 6: DAD MAP impacts on reported at three-month follow-up*



*p < .05.



Discussion of Findings

Results from the current study suggest that the DAD MAP curriculum is an effective way of promoting fatherhood engagement. Specifically, selection into the treatment group was associated with positive outcomes at three-month follow-up on measures of parenting, informal child support, and time spent with children. Implications for these results are discussed below.

Curriculum Impacts on Parenting

Fathers in the DAD MAP group scored higher on fatherhood engagement scores. Specifically, fathers who participated in the DAD MAP tended to report spending more time with and providing more praise and care for their children. Results suggesting improvements in parental support subscale scores and time spent with children are consistent with the content delivered in the DAD MAP curriculum, which emphasizes the importance of encouragement and praise when raising children.

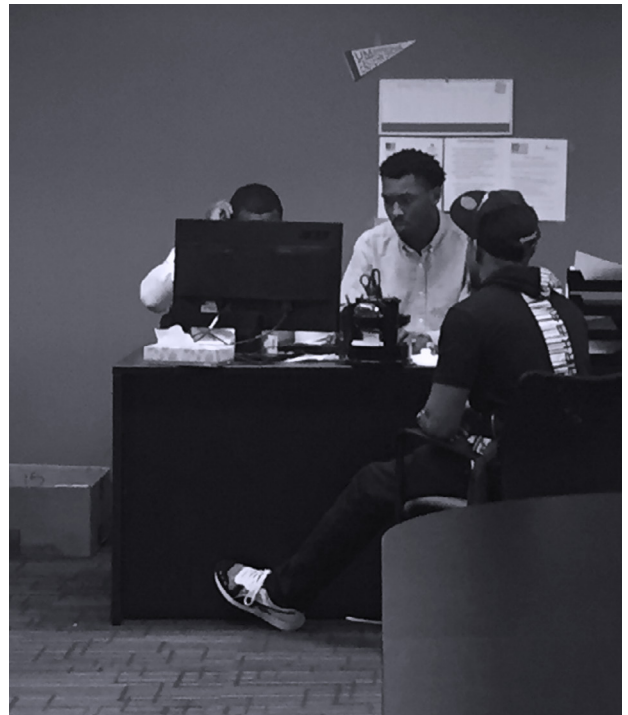
Module 2 of the DAD MAP curriculum, which emphasizes fatherhood and parenting, focuses particularly on using encouragement as a method of teaching children. The module also reviews short- and long-term effects of fathers spending more time with their children, emphasizing that even fathers with few resources can have a strong impact on the lives of their sons and daughters when they are consistently present. These results support the theoretical framework of the DAD MAP curriculum, which assumes that fathers will modify their behavior to achieve positive parenting outcomes learned in the program.

Results from the current study suggest that fatherhood programs using a structured, curriculum-based approach can result in positive behavioral changes among fathers. Specifically, changes in parenting behavior can be gained from structured group interactions, guided discussion, and activities that highlight the benefits of parental support and care on children. Fathers, in particular, may have some challenges attempting certain dimensions of parental engagement, as they may be more associated with mothering and less normative among men in general. While providing parental care may seem essential to most adults, providing signals of love and encouragement to children may seem less intuitive. Fatherhood programs that incorporate messages that emphasize the importance of active support may observe changes in outcomes in an area where fathers have room for improvement.

Curriculum Impacts on Informal Child Support

Results from the current study also suggest that messaging associated with the importance of providing informal child support can be effective even for low-income fathers.⁵ The DAD MAP curriculum does not only emphasize the importance of providing support, but also provides tools and strategies for budgeting and managing funds to make room for contributions to the development of one's children. Although it remains important for programs to avoid viewing fathers exclusively as piggy banks, programs providers, participants, and children can benefit from approaches that prioritize financial education as well as parenting.

Results from study suggested that there were some crossover interaction effects based on program participation. This was particularly true for participation in CAT and STRIVE programs. Specifically, results suggested that fathers who participated in STRIVE or CAT did not benefit as much from the DAD MAP curriculum when it came to informal child support contributions as those fathers who did not participate in the two programs. This finding suggests that fathers who



BRFP staff enrolling fathers in services.



are not participating in other programs, particularly those focusing more heavily on relationship building and workforce participation, may have benefited from the curriculum more than fathers who are participating in other services at CFUF. This suggests that CAT and STRIVE may be key drivers of improvements in informal child support contribution among fathers, which would reduce any observed differences between the two groups. CAT may promote improvements in co-parenting cooperation around supporting a child, while STRIVE participants may have been motivated to contribute towards their children as a result of the employment boot camp activities. It is difficult to know for certain, and future studies can benefit from collecting more data on the experience fathers are having in other programs.

Other Curriculum Impacts

The lack of program effects on co-parental subscale scores supports the need for effective approaches to addressing the interpersonal challenges faced by fathers attempting to work with their co-parents to parent their children. Although the DAD MAP curriculum includes topics to help fathers address the conflicts of their co-parenting relationships and build skills around anger management and communication, such efforts may not work unless the co-parent is able to build skills with the father. Improvement in interpersonal relationships, often requires a systems-level intervention that focuses on behavioral changes of both parties involved.⁶ Fathers may learn skills to communicate effectively with their co-parent, but if their co-parent is not learning the skills to effectively work with the father, they may be unable to implement them. Programs that effectively engage the co-parent could fill a deep void in the field of fatherhood, especially for unmarried, low-income fathers.

Another important finding is the absence of any observed impacts at six-month follow-up. There are several reasons why the immediate effects of DAD MAP may not last long term. Given the many challenges that fathers in the BRFP faced, maintaining curriculum impacts may require ongoing engagement after the formal program ends. The novelty and motivation for behavioral change may wear off over time as well.



DAD Map participants in a BRFP session.

Implications for Practice

Many fatherhood programs follow a model similar to the BRFP and include case management, a peer group component, and workshops. The current study supports the need for a structured approach. Programs using a structured curriculum like the DAD MAP may be effective in changing fatherhood behaviors associated with parenting. On the other hand, getting outcomes associated with child well-being and co-parenting relationships may require an expansion of the group approaches that are somewhat ubiquitous in current fatherhood practices. Fatherhood programs, for example, may benefit from family approaches that include children and co-parents in sessions. These programs may benefit from opportunities to provide instruction to participants who can practice skills with members of their families in dyads or groups. Facilitators may in turn provide real-time feedback to the father based on observations rather than second-hand reports.

One example of such an approach is a program for fathers with young children that is being tested by MDRC. It includes a play session component, where fathers interact with their

child based on lessons learned in an initial parent-training activity.⁷ Fathers then receive feedback based on observations made during the play session. This approach has the potential to expose strengths and or weaknesses in parenting that fathers would otherwise be unable to express or recognize, and can represent a powerful teaching tool for facilitators.

Results from the current study also suggest that programs need to address how to sustain program benefits over time. One possibility is to add booster sessions or use social media or mobile device applications to provide fathers with curriculum-based content on an ongoing basis. It is relevant that some studies are currently examining the effectiveness of mobile device applications that do not depend on fathers having a working phone number to provide consistent messaging.⁸ This mobile technology allows communication over Wi-Fi networks that can be accessed in many public and private settings. Practitioners who often struggle with transient populations who frequently change phone numbers and addresses may benefit from this technology over more traditional methods of engaging fathers.

A great deal of work remains in improving the approaches to fatherhood programs. Programs can still benefit from improving areas of retention, recruitment, and implementation. Researchers and practitioners should prioritize rigorous evaluations to identify best practices and approaches to yield benefits for children, fathers and families.

References

- ¹“FRPN Research Measure: Fathers' Engagement | Fatherhood Research and Practice Network.” Accessed June 20, 2017. <http://www.frpn.org/asset/frpn-research-measure-fathers-engagement>.
- ²Too few fathers had formal child support orders to permit an analysis of changes in formal child support payments following enrollment in the project.
- ³Fathers were asked to identify their youngest child as the focal child for the current study.
- ⁴Subgroup analysis was conducted to examine whether impacts varied based on criminal justice history, workshop dosage, co-parenting relationship quality, and workforce participation.
- ⁵The sample size for fathers with child support orders was too small to assess impacts.
- ⁶McHale, James, Maureen R. Waller, and Jessica Pearson. “Coparenting Interventions for Fragile Families: What Do We Know and Where Do We Need To Go Next?” *Family Process* 51, No. 3 (Sept. 1, 2012): 284–306. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.2012.01402.x.
- ⁷Kruglaya, Inna. “Building Bridges and Bonds (B3) Evaluation.” Text. MdrC, April 20, 2015. <http://www.mdrc.org/project/building-bridges-and-bonds-b3-evaluation>.
- ⁸“Building Bridges and Bonds: Study Design Report.” OPRE, n.d. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/opro/b3_studydesignreport_execsummary_508.pdf.

