Fatherhood Research & Practice Network

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Full Report: Fatherhood & Coparenting

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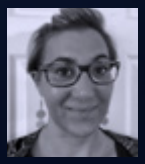

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Executive Summary

Fathers' involvement in their children's lives has received increased attention in recent years. In response, support has grown for responsible fatherhood programs aimed at improving the quantity and quality of fathers' involvement. Research on these programs has concluded that factors such as fathers' parenting skills, coparenting relationship quality, and socioeconomic status all impact fathers' ability to contribute to their children's growth and development. Using this previous research as a foundation, the 4 Your Child project seeks to integrate the provision of responsible parenting, economic stability, and relationship education services to fathers at risk for paternal disengagement. However, evaluation data indicated that many fathers had limited opportunities to apply what they learned in the project when they had to negotiate more access to their children with the custodial mothers who had not participated in the intervention. Further complicating the issue was that the Responsible Fatherhood grant funding authorization from the Office of Financial Assistance (OFA) for the *4 Your Child* project prohibited the use of grant funds to target mothers for services or data collection separately without first and primarily targeting and engaging fathers in those activities. Consequently, funding from the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network (FRPN) was sought to recruit the coparenting partners of 4 Your Child participants into a brief intervention featuring an educational workshop and an opportunity to receive free mediation services.

Mixed methods data were collected from a sample of 153 custodial mothers, 53.6% of 285 eligible mothers whom the research team was able to reach. The quantitative methods featured an experimental design and pre-, three-month, and six-month follow-up data collection waves. Primary outcomes included mothers' report of conflict-resolution skills, fathers' involvement with their children, and coparenting relationship quality. Quantitative data analysis revealed statistically significant main effects for intervention group mothers on conflict-resolution skills and coparenting relationship quality. The qualitative methods featured focus group data collected via verbatim audio recordings of participants' coparenting accounts and experiences. Qualitative analysis produced five emergent themes that were titled (1) What Makes a Good Dad?, (2) Coparenting Outlook, (3) Coparenting Challenges, (4) Mom'sAdvice for Fathers' Behavior and Program Improvement, and (5) Mothers' Reflections. Based on the quantitative and qualitative results, several recommendations are provided to practitioners and researchers interested in engaging mothers in fatherhood and coparenting interventions. These recommendations include using recruitment messaging that it is likely to resonate with custodial mothers, intervening early before coparenting challenges become solidified and coparenting outlooks become pessimistic, and emphasizing the role of empathy as an area of importance to coparenting.

Introduction

In the last 30 years, there has been increased attention paid to fathers' involvement in the lives of their children. In many ways, this burgeoning field is related to the changing role and place of men in American society (Mazza & Perry, 2017). This reconceptualization of fatherhood, combined with increases in divorce rates, nonmarital child births, and federal expenditures for programs disproportionately serving female-led, single-parent homes has led to the proliferation of responsible fatherhood programs designed to assist men in meeting their financial and social-emotional obligations to their children. These programs are as varied and diverse as the men they serve.

Despite what we have learned, many of the fatherhood programs that have been evaluated have either not utilized rigorous methodologies or have yielded mixed to disappointing results (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007; Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2012; Horn, 2003; Magill-Evans et al., 2006). Among the reasons cited for the mixed or negative results are service providers' biased or dismissive first contact with fathers (Velazquez & Vincent, 2009), conflict-laden mother–father relationships (Anderson, Kohler, & Letiecq, 2002; Bloomers, Sipe, & Ruedt, 2002), overemphasizing fathers' financial contributions and underemphasizing their nurturing and caregiving contributions (Johnson, 1998), and disconnects in the ways in which fathers' involvement is conceptualized or measured. Examples include Levine's (1993) discussion related to how Head Start program staff and administrators learned that while they defined involvement as fathers participating in formalized educational programs and taking leadership roles on parent-led committees, the fathers who they served preferred more informal types of communication during pickups and dropoffs. Moreover, Roggman, Fitzgerald, Bradley, and Raikes (2002) concluded that researchers are challenged by the fact that fathers' involvement tends to be more fluid than that of mothers, so simply adapting maternal templates is inappropriate and unlikely to be effective.

Recent fatherhood research provides further insight into the barriers facing noncustodial fathers. Young, uneducated fathers are less likely to find jobs that are sustainable or pay more than a minimum wage (Solomon-Fears, Falk, & Fernandes-Alcantara, 2013). Unaware that they can petition the child support agency or court to modify their child support order, many of these fathers quickly accumulate large child support debt that may lead them to evade the child support system and see less of their children (Martinson & Nightingale, 2008). Similarly, in their report on noncustodial fathers, Solomon-Fears et al. (2013) concluded that issues related to unemployment and limited earnings negatively impacted fathers' ability to establish and maintain active roles in their children's lives. Edin and Nelson's (2013) examination of low-income fathering found that in addition to the influence of their inability to provide economically for their children, high levels of coparental conflict, mistrust, and multiple partner fertility, which necessarily required fathers to spread their already limited financial resources and social capital across several households, significantly truncated fathers' access to their children, resulting in periods of disengagement despite their intention to stay connected.

Understanding these challenges facing fathers is important for programs looking to effectively serve them. Therefore, the 4 Your Child program was designed to help fathers overcome these barriers by addressing many of the salient micro and macro factors shaping men's fathering attitudes and behaviors. However, one of the limitations with the 4 Your Child program is that due to OFA funding restrictions, the program is unable to engage and serve mothers. As a result, upon completion of the program, many fathers expressed frustration that they had increased their parenting knowledge and skills but lacked opportunities to apply what they had learned during the program because they could not negotiate additional access to their children from custodial mothers. Given the importance of coparenting relationship quality (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011) and its influence on fathers' involvement (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015), the purpose of this study was to add a mothers' engagement component to 4 Your Child and test its effectiveness in impacting the coparenting alliance and fathers' involvement with their children. Table 1 displays the research questions and hypotheses under examination in this study.

Table 1. Study Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1
How does providing custodial mothers with coparenting education impact mothers' report of conflict-resolution skills?
Hypothesis 1
It was hypothesized that custodial mothers receiving coparenting education would report more improvements in their reports of conflict-resolution skills over time than custodial mothers who do not receive coparenting education.
Research Question 2
How does providing custodial mothers with coparenting education impact mothers' report of non-resident fathers' involvement with their children?
Hypothesis 2
It was hypothesized that custodial mothers receiving coparenting education would report more fathers' involvement over time than custodial mothers who do not receive coparenting education.
Research Question 3
How does providing custodial mothers with coparenting education impact mothers' report of coparenting relationship quality?
Hypothesis 2
It was hypothesized that custodial mothers receiving coparenting education would report more improvements in their reports of coparenting relationship quality over time than custodial mothers who do not receive coparenting education.

Program Description

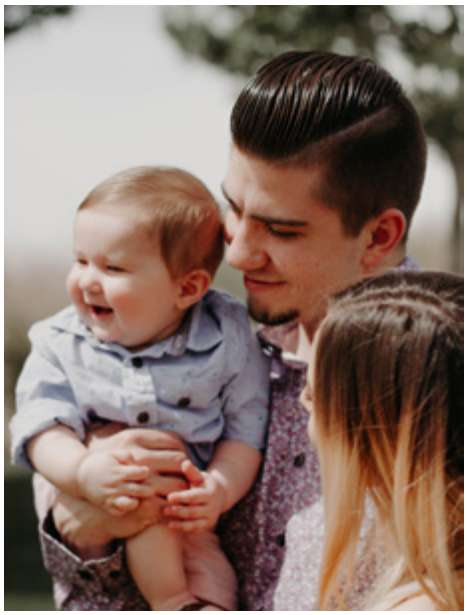
The 4 Your Child program, based in Louisville, Kentucky, is a responsible fatherhood intervention for nonresident fathers ages 16 and up aimed at helping them increase their capacity for taking more active roles in their children's lives. All participants enroll voluntarily and are recruited from residential, substance-abuse treatment centers; community-based social service agencies; community canvassing; and social media outreach, as well as referrals from family court, probation and parole, and word-of-mouth referrals from program alumni. The 4 Your Child program includes 28 hours of parent education and up to six months of case management services. The parent education component of the program contains fatherhood, parenting, and healthy relationship training delivered via group workshops featuring content from the National Fatherhood Initiative's (NFI, 2015) 24/7 Dad® A.M. curriculum. According to NFI, 24/7 Dad® A.M. is a comprehensive fatherhood curriculum covering 12 topics including showing and handling feelings, communication, examining one's masculinity, the father's role, coparenting, discipline, the benefits of marriage, child development, and negotiating the work-family balance. The curriculum is based on the premise that being a good father is a 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week responsibility. The curriculum comes with a facilitator's manual, videos, interactive activities, and workbooks for participants. Given that a large proportion of 4 Your Child's target population, nonresident fathers, are involved in high-conflict coparenting relationships with the child's mother over custody, visitation, and/or child support, program participants also receive additional coparenting modules featuring content from the Together We Can curriculum. These additional modules cover content related to identifying family members and their unique contributions to family functioning, understanding the importance of coparenting and the role of kin networks, and the relationship between child support and parenting time and the barriers to securing them. The 4 Your Child program's 28 hours of parent education are delivered in seven four-hour, group-based workshops. In addition to the core curriculum content, the workshops also include stimulating videos

and activities to reinforce learning for those who are more experiential in nature. These workshops are cofacilitated by teams comprised of male and female staff with human services-related educational backgrounds and experience delivering psychoeducational material in community-based settings.

In addition to the group-based responsible fatherhood, healthy relationship and coparenting training workshops, 4 Your Child participants are also eligible to receive solution-focused case management services for up to six months. These case management services are led by Parent Resource Coordinators (PRC), who begin engaging program participants with an initial intake assessment to determine the participants' strengths and needs. This initial assessment is followed by a goal-setting meeting in which the PRC works collaboratively with the participants to identify their parenting goals and objectives and sets up an individualized service plan. Most often, fathers identify goals related to securing stable employment, improving their economic status, and gaining more access to their children. To aid in the process, fathers are referred to a variety of organizations offering assistance in the areas of workforce development, job placement, supervised visitation, and legal advocacy. Subsequent to the goal-setting meeting, the PRC links the participants to community-based organizations that can aid them in leveraging their strengths to accomplish their goals. For the remainder of the participants' time in the program, the PRC monitors their progress towards their goals via in-person meetings once a week for the first two months and at least one follow-up telephone call. During the third and fourth month, there is an in-person meeting once every other week and at least one follow-up telephone call. The fifth and sixth month consist of an in-person meeting once per month and at least one follow-up telephone call. Although PRCs are trained to tailor their services to meet the individual needs of specific fathers, all fathers participate in Strengths Finders assessments, receive copies of *The 5 Love Languages* (Chapman, 2010) and are referred to workforce development services. Each program participant is also eligible to have his child support case audited for accuracy.

Preliminary post-intervention evaluation data revealed improvements in participants' parenting knowledge, conflict resolution, and reports of consumer satisfaction. However, the fathers also reported that in many cases, they had trouble applying what they learned in 4 Your Child because after graduating, they had to negotiate access to their child with the child's mother who had not been involved in an intervention and was engaging in gatekeeping behavior. Given that the funds for 4 Your Child prohibited services for mothers, the FRPN grant was utilized to develop, and pilot-test, a coparenting intervention aimed at increasing custodial mothers' receptivity to coparenting. The intervention consisted of two phases. The first phase consisted of a two-hour, parent-education workshop. The workshop included selected content and activities from modules in the National Fatherhood Initiative's 24/7 Dad® A.M. (Third Edition) and the Together We Can curriculum developed by the Michigan State University Extension Office. Given that the 4 Your Child target population is nonresident fathers, emphasis was placed on selecting content and activities from modules that focused on contextualizing the connection between family of origin influences in fatherhood, coparenting, communication, and conflict resolution. The modules from which 24/7 Dad® content and activities were selected included What it Means to be a Man, Family History, Showing and Handling Feelings, Grief and Loss, Communication, Getting Involved and Parenting Time, and Working with Mom. The modules from which Together We Can content and activities were selected included the Balloon Activity, Family Wheel, and My Hopes and Dreams. In addition to being introduced to this content, mothers were engaged in discussions about typical responses and questions asked by fathers during the 4 Your Child workshops. Subsequent to completing the parent-education workshop, mothers were invited to participate in the second phase of the intervention, which was a coparenting session led by a court-approved mediator. The purpose of these sessions was to bring mothers and fathers together to work on mutually agreed-upon parenting plans.

Methods



Study Design

The study employed a mixed methods design allowing for the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data (Royse, Thyer, Padgett, & Logan, 2001). For the quantitative methods, this study utilized an experimental design featuring participants randomly assigned to either an intervention group that received the parent-education workshops and the opportunity to receive the free mediation session, or to a control group that only received a brochure with information on how mothers could improve their coparenting relationships with fathers. The qualitative data were analyzed in the phenomenological tradition. These data were related to the participants' coparenting experiences and perspectives, as well as their feedback on the intervention's strengths and weaknesses.

Sample

The sample population for this study included mothers whose child's father was a participant in the 4 Your Child fatherhood program. To recruit mothers, announcements were made during either the second or third (of seven) fathers' workshops about the possibility of referring their coparent to a brief educational intervention. After making the announcement, fathers were queried as to their interest in having their coparent exposed to a sampling of the content and activities that they had or were yet to receive. Fathers expressing interest provided the name and a contact number for their coparent. Fathers offering referrals were provided with a $10 gift card incentive. There were some fathers who expressed an interest in keeping their participation in 4 Your Child away from their coparents. In those cases, the fathers' self-determination was respected and no outreach to the custodial mother was attempted. After receiving names and contact information for mothers from fathers, outreach to them was made by female project staff members using telephone calls and text messages. Mothers were excluded if they were not the custodial parent or they cited concerns related to a history of possible intimate partner violence.

Recruitment and outreach efforts yielded contact information for 353 mothers. Of this total, 21 mothers were excluded for various reasons (e.g., mother cited history of domestic violence, mother was incarcerated, or mother was not custodial parent), 47 mothers could not be reached by telephone or text (e.g., automatic message stating that telephone number was out of service or voicemail was full, resulting in the research team not being able to leave a message) leaving a possible 285 participants. Each of these mothers were given a unique identification number and were randomly assigned to either the intervention or control group using a random number calculator (graphpad.com). Of this 285, 76 mothers did not return the recruitment calls or texts. Because the research team was able to at least leave a message for these mothers, they were distinguished from the aforementioned 47 mothers who could not be reached because their phones were either out of service or had full voicemail inboxes. Finally, 56 mothers responded and declined to participate. Therefore, the data for this study were collected from a sample of 153 mothers, 53.6% of 285 eligible mothers who the research team was able to reach. Of the 153 eligible and interested mothers, 84 were randomly assigned to the control group and 69 were randomly assigned to the intervention group.

Seventy-two (48.0%) of the mothers self-identified as Black, 67 (44.6%) self-identified as White, eight (5.3%) self-identified as biracial, and two (1.3%) reported as other. On average, the mothers were 34.75 (*SD* = 8.09) years old, earned $23,303.94 (*SD* = $17,500.17), had 2.61 (*SD* = 1.28) children with 1.83 (*SD* = .94) childbearing partners. Tables 2 and 3 display the frequency distributions and demographic statistics for the study sample.

Table 2. Sample Frequency Distributions

Variable	Category	N	%
Race			
	White	67	44.6
	Black	72	48.0
	Biracial	8	5.3
	Other	2	1.3
Employment Status			
	Full time	78	52.0
	Part time	21	14.0
	Unemployed	50	33.3
Education			
	Less than GED/high school diploma	14	9.3
	GED/high school diploma	73	48.7
	College degree	63	42.0
Relationship Status			
	Not married or dating	70	46.7
	Married or dating the father enrolled in 4 Your Child	42	28.0
	Married or dating someone other than the father enrolled in 4 Your Child.	34	22.7
Multiple Childbearing Partners			
	Yes	61	40.7
	No	86	57.3

Table 3. Sample Demographics

Variable	N	M	SD
Age	153	34.75	8.09
Income	123	23,303.94	17,500.17
Total children	153	2.61	1.28
Childbearing partners	153	1.83	.94

In addition to testing the effectiveness of the coparenting intervention, there was also interest in learning more about the circumstances under which mothers would be willing to coparent. Therefore, mothers were presented with an a priori list of reasons to coparent and were asked to identify all that applied to them. The most frequently identified reason was that children need to have a relationship with both parents, followed by the father being nominated was a good dad who positively impacted the child's life. Table 4 displays the frequency of responses to a question about mothers' willingness to coparent.

Table 4. Mothers' Willingness to Coparent

Response	N	%
Children having a relationship with both parents is best for them.	119	50.0
My child's father is a good dad and positively impact my child's life.	55	23.1
I am romantically involved with my child's father.	22	9.2
My child's father is a good provider.	28	11.8
Other	14	5.9

Note: Mothers were instructed to respond with all that applied.

Procedures

Mothers assigned to the control group did not receive any services. Instead, they were simply mailed coparenting brochures that were developed by the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) that provided tips on effective coparenting. Mothers assigned to the intervention group were invited to participate in a one-time, parent-education workshop that lasted approximately two hours. A total of 19 workshops were conducted, 12 of which were led by the first author and seven were led by the second author. It should be noted that although there was an average of 3.63 participants per workshop, nine of the workshops were individual sessions.

Immediately following each of the workshops, mothers were invited to participate in focus groups. These focus groups were facilitated by the same person who conducted the workshop and followed a semi-structured format. The proceedings were audio recorded to ensure accuracy during transcription. Subsequent to the focus groups, mothers were offered a free coparenting session with fathers that was facilitated by the second author, a court-approved mediator. The intent of these sessions was to bring mothers and fathers together to discuss and negotiate mutually agreed-upon coparenting plans.

Measures

Conflict-Resolution Skills. Conflict-resolution skills were measured using the Relationship Dynamics Scale (Renick et al., 1992). This measure has 12 items aimed at identifying the frequency with which respondents used various styles (i.e., launching personal attacks, tuning the other person out, throwing insults and digs) to deal with arguments and disagreements scored on a 5-point scale ranging from *1 = never* to *5 = always*. This measure has a reported internal consistency score of .81. The Cronbach's Alpha for the current study was .76. All items were aggregated for analysis. Because the wording of the items reflected negative conflict-resolution styles (i.e., launching personal attacks), scores ranged from 12 to 60, with lower scores indicating better conflict-resolution skills.

Coparenting Relationship Quality. Mothers' report of coparenting relationship quality was measured using the Coparenting Questionnaire (Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001). This measure is a 14-item, self-report instrument examining (1) the amount of conflict between parents surrounding parenting issues; (2) extent of cooperation between mothers and fathers, including support, value, respect, and the degree to which they ease one another's parenting burden; and (3) triangulation, the extent to which parents distort parent–child boundaries by attempting to form a coalition with the child that undermines or excludes the other parent. All 14 items (e.g., tells me lots of things about our child, shares the burden of discipline, asks my opinion on issues related to parenting) are measured on a 5-point scale ranging from *1 = never* to *5 = always*. The measure has a reported internal consistency score of .87. The Cronbach's Alpha for the current study was .89. Given the interest in examining the participants' global reports of coparenting relationship quality, the scores from all items were aggregated for analysis. Aggregated scores ranged from 14 to 70, with high scores indicating positive coparenting relationships.

Fathers' Parenting Behavior. Mothers' report of fathers' parenting behavior was measured using the Index of Father Involvement (Hawkins et al., 2002). This measure has a total of 26 items designed to account for various forms of father involvement. All items (e.g., spending time with child, reading to child, attending events in which the child participates) are measured on a 6-point scale ranging from *1 = poor* to *6 = excellent*. The measure has a reported internal consistency score of .69. The Cronbach's Alpha for the current study was .97. Given the interest in examining the participants' global reports of fathers' involvement, the scores from all of the items were aggregated for analysis. Aggregated scores ranged from 26 to 156, with high scores indicating more involved fathers.

Data for the other demographics were measured using surveys developed by the research team. These surveys collected data on the participants' age, race/ethnicity, employment status, educational attainment, income, marital status, total number of children, total number of parenting partners, and the factors impacting their willingness or unwillingness to coparent and facilitate fathers' involvement. In addition to the quantitative data, qualitative data collection included post-workshop focus groups. The focus groups were intended to go beyond the surveys by soliciting more in-depth information from the participants regarding their parenting experiences, feedback on how to improve the workshops, and strategies they recommended that fathers and service providers employ to increase mothers' receptivity to coparenting and willingness to facilitate fathers' involvement.

Data Analysis

With regard to the quantitative data, preliminary analyses consisted of a series of *t*-tests that were used to determine baseline equivalences on each of the various outcomes for the intervention and control groups. Primary analyses consisted of a series of repeated measures mixed ANOVAs that were used to determine the differences in various outcome measures by study condition over time. There was one repeated measures mixed ANOVA analysis for each primary outcome including mothers' conflict-resolution skills, mothers' report of fathers' involvement, and coparenting relationship quality. To collect follow-up data, the research team utilized electronic surveys sent to participants' email address through Survey Monkey. Despite some attrition over the course of the study, the majority of study participants were retained across each of the data collection waves. Of the 153 mothers completing baseline surveys, 146 completed three-month follow-up surveys and 141 completed six-month follow-up surveys. Missing data were omitted from final analyses.

With regard to the qualitative data analysis, the audio files were transcribed and the data were analyzed utilizing a phenomenological approach because of its usefulness in eliciting data related to the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 1998) as parents, coparents, and participants in the intervention. Consistent with the tenets of phenomenological approaches, the data analysis plan involved a round of initial, open coding by members of the research team. This iterative process continued until the team members decided that the data reached the point of saturation. From there, the research team members identified the most salient themes while placing an emphasis on finding significant, illustrative statements within the text of the transcripts. These statements were then grouped into meaning units that led to an overall description of the participants' coparenting experiences and their feedback regarding the services that they received, as well as those that should be added to the program.

Quantitative Results

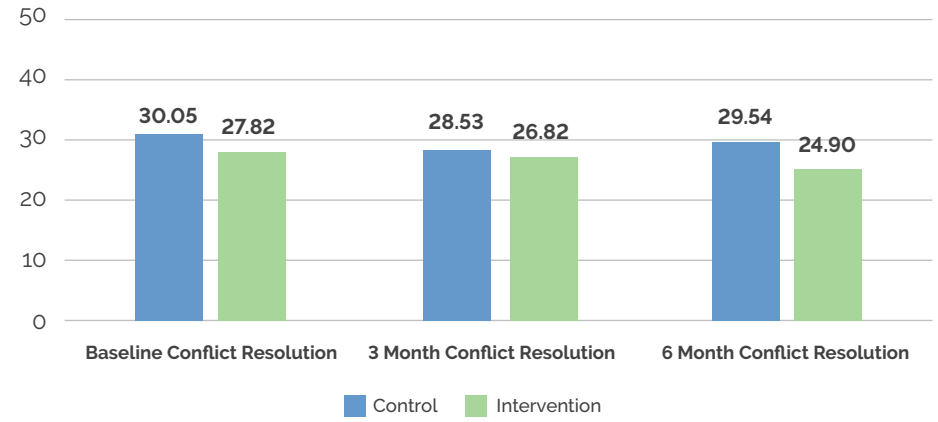
Conflict Resolution

Preliminary analysis consisted of an independent sample *t*-test that was used to determine if there were baseline equivalences between the intervention and control groups on their reports of conflict-resolution skills. Analysis revealed that at baseline, the differences in intervention (M = 27.82, SD = 6.98) and control groups' (M = 30.05, SD = 7.51)

report of conflict-resolution skills were not statistically significant $t(151) = -1.827$, $p = .07$. Thus, it was determined that the groups were equivalent at baseline.

Primary analysis consisted of a repeated measure mixed ANOVA that was conducted with mothers' conflict-resolution skills as the outcome. The analysis revealed a main effect for the study condition $F(2, 141) = 4.656$, $p < .01$, with intervention group mothers reporting statistically significantly lower conflict-resolution skills than control group mothers at six-months follow-up, with lower scores indicating better conflict-resolution patterns. These differences yielded a small effect size ($\eta^2 = .022$). Chart 1 displays bar graphs for both study groups across each of the data collection waves.

Chart 1: Conflict Resolution Skills

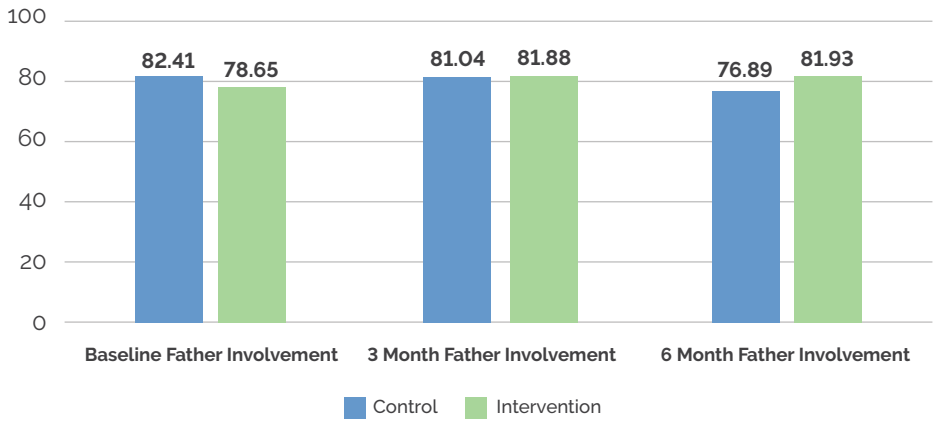


Mothers' Report of Father Involvement

Preliminary analysis consisted of an independent sample *t*-test that was used to determine if there were baseline equivalences between the intervention and control groups on their reports of fathers' involvement. Analysis revealed that at baseline, the differences in intervention ($M = 78.65$, $SD = 47.72$) and control groups' ($M = 82.41$, $SD = 43.38$) report of fathers' involvement were not statistically significant $t(151) = -.450$, $p = .65$. Thus, it was determined that the groups were equivalent at baseline.

Primary analysis consisted of a repeated measure mixed ANOVA that was conducted with mothers' report of fathers' involvement as the outcome. The analysis revealed that intervention group mothers reported higher levels of fathers' involvement than control group mothers over time. However, these differences were not statistically significant $F(2, 141) = 1.683$, $p = .506$. Chart 2 displays bar graphs for both study groups across each of the data collection waves.

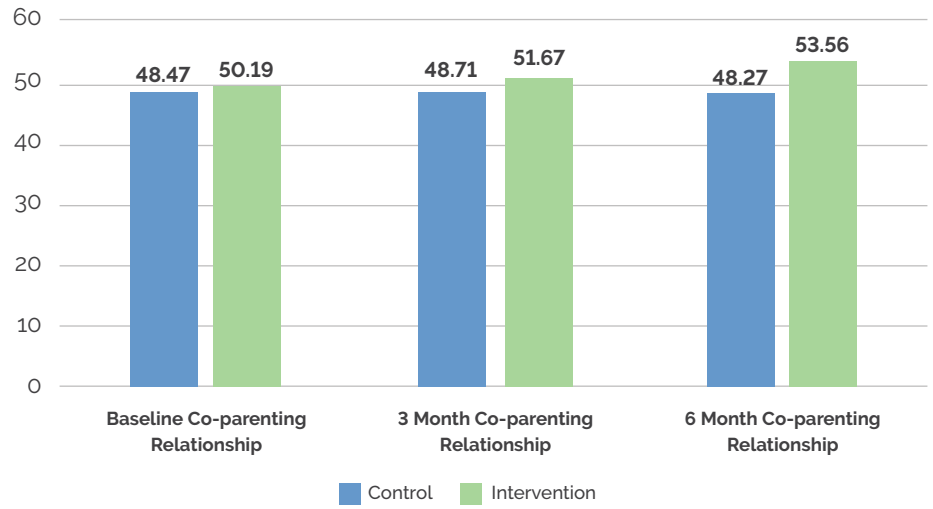
Chart 2: Mothers' Report of Father Involvement



Preliminary analysis consisted of an independent sample *t*-test that was used to determine if there were baseline equivalences between the intervention and control groups on their reports of coparenting relationship quality. Analysis revealed that at baseline, the differences in intervention (M = 50.19, SD = 12.25) and control groups' (M = 48.47, SD = 12.23) report of conflict-resolution skills were not statistically significant $t(151) = .829$, $p = .41$. Thus, it was determined that the groups were equivalent at baseline.

Primary analysis consisted a repeated measure mixed ANOVA that was conducted with mothers' report of coparenting relationship quality as the outcome. The analysis revealed a main effect for the study condition $F(2, 141) = 3.739$, $p < .05$, with intervention group mothers reporting significantly higher coparenting relationship quality than control group mothers at six-months follow-up. These differences yielded a small effect size ($\eta^2 = .019$). Chart 3 displays bar graphs for both study groups across each of the data collection waves.

Chart 3: Coparenting Relationship Quality



Parenting Plan/Mediation Services

Phase two of the intervention provided an opportunity for participants to receive a free coparenting session from a court-approved mediator. The intent of these sessions was to bring mothers and fathers together to establish mutually agreed-upon parenting plans in a collaborative fashion that reflected both parents' values and desires. Of the 69 mothers participating in the parent education workshop, only four (5.7%) agreed to participate in the facilitated parenting-plan session. Due to the small number of mothers participating in the coparenting sessions with the mediator, no further analyses were conducted on their impact.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative analyses involved in-depth interview data with a subsample of 55 mothers participating in post-workshop focus groups. The purpose of these focus groups was to elicit more nuanced parenting perspectives, as well as the participants' parenting challenges and needs relative to enhancing fathers' involvement, their coparenting relationships, and the effectiveness of the 4 Your Child program. The focus groups followed a semi-structured format featuring an interview script with questions developed a priori (see Table 4 for a list of focus group questions). The focus groups produced very rich data and yielded over 250 pages of transcripts that were analyzed using QSR International NVIVO 12. These analyses led to the research team identifying 14 free-standing codes that had an associated 51 branch codes (see Table 5 for a complete list). From these codes, five salient themes emerged. These

themes were titled: What makes a Good Dad?, Coparenting Outlook, Coparenting Challenges, Mom's Advice on Fathers' Behavior and Program Improvement, and Mothers' Reflection.

What Makes a Good Dad?

One of the most prominent emergent themes was What Makes a Good Dad? Here, mothers were responding to being asked about the traits and qualities of a good father. Mothers provided a range of responses, but most of them centered around the amount of time fathers spent with their children. Many of the mothers made a point to mention that they were less concerned about whether fathers provided financially and were more interested in the extent to which fathers were willing to do whatever it took to *be there* for their children. This sentiment was expressed by a 30-year-old, unmarried mother of four:

> *I think a good father is an everyday father. He's involved because we have to be everyday mothers. So the goal is if you gotta work, if you got another relationship, or if you have personal obligations you still connect with your child each day. You still make your time available for what's important. Different things that change in your child's life you're still there for. You're making graduation even though you gotta work, you're making birthday celebrations even though you have another obligation somewhere else. You make those things happen as a parent every day because that's what mothers have to do. So to me that's a good dad. You make a sacrifice on your time for your child.*

In this quote, the mother outlines several common excuses that her child's father has offered for not having the time, or not being available to spend time with the child(ren). However, she refutes them as being invalid and inexcusable and explains that mothers often have similar obligations but do not allow them to prohibit them from being there for the child(ren). Therefore, she contends that a "good dad" is one who sacrifices and makes time to be with his child(ren).

Coparenting Outlook

After participating in the coparenting workshop, mothers expressed a variety of perspectives related to their level of optimism about whether their coparenting relationships would or could be improved. These coparenting outlooks ranged from positive and hopeful about the changes that the fathers would make as a result of participating in 4 Your Child, to skeptical about fathers' motivation for enrolling in the fatherhood program. Even worse, some mothers were doubtful that any intervention could lead to meaningful changes in fathers' behavior. Illustrations of these divergent perspectives appear in the following quotes. First, a 33-year-old, unmarried mother shared that the decision to participate in the workshop was based on a combination of a discussion with her child's father and her interest in matching his commitment to improving their coparenting relationship.

> *Yeah. He told me that he was doing the workshop and everything, so that's why I was okay with . . . when I got that phone call, when I first got the phone call from [research assistant who made recruitment phone calls] before, and she was explaining it to me, and I was like, oh, well, that sounds good. You can never go wrong with that. I'm not . . . that's selfish and arrogant and everything if I was just to sit there and be like, "naw, I'm not interested." I am interested. I want to know how I can be a better coparent as well, and everything. Because nobody's perfect. I'm not perfect. So, it's just that.*

However, not all of the mothers were as hopeful about the potential for fathers to change. For some mothers, previous experiences with fathers created a sense of skepticism about the fathers' motivation for joining the fatherhood program. According to a 32-year-old, unmarried mother of two, "I believe he only signed up and completed the program because it helped him with his child support." In this quote, the mother references a

programmatic benefit in which fathers who attended all of the workshops in their cohort were eligible for arrears forgiveness on past-due child support owed to the state as what she suspects was the real driving force behind her child's fathers' enrollment.

Beyond the mothers who expressed skepticism about their child's father's motivations, there were other mothers who were more definitive in proclaiming that their child's father was not capable of change. Consider this quote from a 29-year-old mother of three:

> *To date he has not paid a penny of child support since his release and my forgiveness. He has not initiated a conversation with our child in about two months, nor has he responded to any messages from him. [Child's name] is almost 11, has his own cell phone, and can see that his messages have been read. Don't take it personal, you can't teach a man to have a heart.*

In this quote, the mother is not only skeptical about the prospects for changes in the father's attitude and behavior, she also proclaims that he has not made any changes. Moreover, she further expresses the opinion that the disengagement exhibited by her child's father is willful and intentional and that any external intervention will be ineffective in contributing to change. Hence the words, "you can't teach a man to have a heart."

Coparenting Challenges

Another salient theme that emerged in the post-workshop focus groups was the coparenting challenges that the mothers cited as interfering with their ability to develop and maintain an alliance with their child's father. Among the challenges that the mothers identified were fathers' incarceration, substance abuse and mental health issues, and the difficulty some fathers had in untangling their roles as former romantic partners from their ongoing roles as parents. However, the most frequently identified challenges were mothers' report of fathers' lack of reliability, selfishness, and the complexity associated with attempting to coparent in multiple-partner fertility families.

Several of the mothers expressed that their coparenting relationships were fraught with a lack of reliability on the part of their child's father. When stating this concern, mothers pointed to instances in the past when fathers broke promises to their children, were inconsistent in their engagement, or did not possess the requisite child development experience or knowledge to be trusted to keep small children safe during visits. For example, a 29-year-old, unmarried mother of two stated:

> *My coparent relationship is not existent. I think my son is seven years old and me and his dad, his dad is [father's name], the one that's in your program, we kind of broke up. It was a whole lot of relationship issues with us, we don't get into that, but kind of just, you know, ended things, or I ended things and it's just one of those situations where he felt like if he can't be in a relationship with me, he doesn't have to have a relationship with his child, you know. Years ago, that's exactly what he told me.*

Although the frustration expressed by this mother stems from what she calls a "non-existent" coparenting relationship with her child's father, other mothers found themselves equally dismayed with fathers who they felt were selfish and uncompromising with their time. Consider the quote below from a 33-year-old, divorced mother of two:

> *I try to come up with a schedule, and we went along with the schedule until it got altered; missing weekends, missing hours, alternative places to meet. So, it just kind of didn't work after a while. I feel like his time in his mind is more valuable than mine. I have to adjust. My*

> *child gets sick, I leave work. Something happens to him, it's, "Oh I can't do it 'cause I gotta work." I be having to work too. I make adjustments in my schedule. You can't do it? It's always when something comes up for him, it's a no-go, period, point blank. When I'm like, "Hey I need you to take her to a doctor. Well, I can't do it." It was always me. I gotta do it. I gotta adjust. I gotta be flexible. So it was when he couldn't do something, I had to adjust, I had to be flexible, I to reschedule. It was never the other way around.*

Finally, multiple-partner fertility also served as a challenge to forging high-quality coparenting relationships. In the following quote, a 30-year-old mother who has three children with three fathers describes the complexity of her coparenting relationships with each of the fathers:

> *Well, I have three children, and they're all different daddies, so I've had different experiences with all three of my children. The one that I'm with now that was in your classes, just started . . . well, not really just started, but we're having a baby. Then my older daughter's like even though he's not their dad, he still plays a role in my house, you know? Yeah, like, with my 11-year-old, her daddy, he hasn't really been in her life at all like during the pregnancy, when she was a baby, and up until now. He's just starting to pay child support, so he hasn't really been a factor in her life at all, and our families don't get along so there's some drama and stuff. With my eight-year-old, it's the total opposite. Like, her daddy's . . . we share her through court. It's like 50-50 every other week, and it's gotten to the point where were fighting for custody, and it's been drama between the families again. But with our new baby, we're together. We've been together for like five or six years almost, and we're coparenting pretty good. I've been seeing this side of him now that baby's here, he's Mr. Know It All, and he's like teaching me all types of stuff with the baby even though I've had two. It's been a while, you know? It's just a totally different experience right now.*

Here, the mother shares her perspectives on her relationships with her children's fathers. As she describes, each father is different and as such, each coparenting relationship and associated level of engagement is different. As she details, the coparenting relationships with the fathers of her two oldest children, men with whom she has no romantic relationship, are difficult to manage, as they are characterized by drama and custody battles. To contrast, the coparenting relationship with her youngest child's father, (the man participating in 4 Your Child) is described as not only positive, but also enlightening as this father is described as a "Mr. Know-It-all" who brings information from the workshops home to share with his child's mother.

Mom's Advice on Fathers' Behavior and Program Improvement

In addition to sharing their perspectives on the traits of a good father, coparenting outlook, and coparenting challenges, mothers were asked for feedback on the workshop and suggestions for improvement. The feedback they provided included advice to fathers on developing and maintaining better coparenting relationships, as well as their input on areas for improvement for the workshops. With regard to the advice to fathers, many of the mothers mentioned that fathers would be better off if they listened to their children rather than being dismissive of them. According to a 35-year-old, married mother of two, fathers would have better relationships with their children if they created opportunities for them to share how they feel and what they were experiencing.

> *I think that dads need to listen and actually give their child the opportunity . . . I've seen in the past, and I think that my kid's dad is working on it. That people sometimes think that, oh it's a child, and they don't really value their opinions and how bad they feel because they're like,*

> *well okay, they're 10. They don't really know what they want. They don't know what they're doing, you know?*

Many also felt that fathers needed to do a better job of listening to mothers. As stated by a 42-year-old, unmarried mother, "Learn how to communicate. Quit getting frustrated as soon as I call and start screaming and hollering. Learn how to listen before you assume I'm calling you nagging."

Besides listening, mothers also talked about how they wanted fathers to be more considerate of what they, as primary caregivers, have to deal with and the sacrifices they routinely make. In expressing these feelings, mothers were reacting to what they felt were unfair double standards that require mothers to put their children's needs and wants ahead of their own while there is no such expectation for fathers. According to a 23-year-old, unmarried mother of two, "I think the expectations from the father, whatever expectations he has of us, we gotta be able to hold him accountable too." To facilitate this type of understanding, some mothers suggested that role-reversal activities be built into the program. Below, a 35-year-old, unmarried mother of five provides details of the recommended activity:

> *Just, like I said, aid them in the understanding, even if it's having some type of project of . . . having them live that life for 24-hours. Or even just a few hours, because some of them, I don't think, can do a few hours. But, if they just . . . like you said, walk in our shoes a little bit, you know? Have your day fueled by other stuff that you can't control, that has nothing to do with you. You have to take care of everybody else and everything else and then maybe, they'll start coming around. And it won't be just, "Oh, they're nagging." Or, "They just don't want me to see my child." It'll be, "I understand it's not about me."*

Mothers offered several suggestions on how to enhance the program's effectiveness. This feedback covered a range of program components including intervention implementation and data collection. Regarding the intervention, mothers suggested that mothers and fathers be brought into the same workshop after each completed their separate programs individually. In doing so, some mothers felt that both fathers and mothers would have a solid knowledge base that could be leveraged to enhance skill building via role plays and reenactments featuring real-life scenarios from their coparenting relationships. Interestingly, although very few mothers took advantage of the opportunity to receive free mediation services, many of them mentioned that having it available was a strength of the intervention. From an evaluation perspective, mothers also suggested including observational data-collection methods where coaches or interventionists monitored program participants' interactions and scored them for quality and consistency with curriculum content.

In addition to the feedback and suggested improvements, many of the mothers acknowledged the positive changes that they noticed in their children's fathers since his enrollment in 4 Your Child. Most often, these changes were in the areas of communication and what seemed to be an increased amount of patience exhibited by the father surrounding topics that otherwise would have drawn his ire and led to an argument. Below, an unmarried, 36-year-old mother describes the changes that she noticed in her child's father and how she was able to attribute the changes to the program once she participated in the mothers' workshop.

> *I love the fact that you guys talk about allowing them to speak before, without cutting them off. That was always a huge problem for [child's father]. He would never let me finish talking. I'm like, "Can I finish please?" I didn't know that was something that you guys went over, you know, just within the last month he will sit there and let me finish talking. And I'm like, "Okay, who are you again?" . . . And the language he has in front of the kids. He used to not care how he spoke in front of the kids. Whether or not he was downgrading me or cussing or just speaking bad. He no longer*

does that. So, that was encouraging there. I didn't know that you guys talked about that in class though [until attending the mothers' workshop].

Mothers' Reflections

Finally, after sharing their input on program strengths and suggestions for improvement, the mothers also discussed the ways in which they were personally impacted by participating in the workshop. In these cases, the most frequent way that mothers reported being impacted was that by participating in the workshop and being exposed to what their child's father was learning, they themselves began to give more thought and consideration to what parenting was like from the father's perspective. In other words, because of their status as custodial parents who co-resided with their children and had significant decision-making authority, many mothers acknowledged that they had never thought much about what fathers had to deal with in order to take part in their children's lives. For example, in the following quote, a 30-year-old mother of three acknowledges that participating in the workshop helped her to understand that when it came to her coparenting relationship, she also had some room for improvement, particularly in the area of communication.

Yeah. Yeah, it did. It kind of made me reflect on my own relationships, and what I've been through, and kind of made me think like maybe I should work on communicating a little bit more, or trying to not always focus on myself, what I'm going through. Because I don't never ever think about what they going through as a man, you know? Like, men never really enter my mind, what is this you're going through? Like, with this new baby, I kind of think about like, this must be a big, different experience for him as much as it is for me, but [in the past] I don't never really think more about it. You know what I'm saying?

In other instances, some mothers admitted that because they had not thought about what parenting was like for their children's fathers, they were unable, and sometimes unwilling, to understand his frustrations. This perspective was best explained by a 35-year-old mother of four who was engaged to a new partner. After participating in the workshop, she reflected on some of the difficulties in her coparenting relationship with a former partner with whom she shared children.

Well, really, what affected me the most, because he really struggles with communicating. So, seeing all the communicating that he's been forced to deal with and seeing him picking them up every day with a smile on his face, one it's showing me that maybe it's not necessarily that he didn't wanna communicate, maybe he just didn't know how to communicate and maybe the way that I was approaching him with communicating was not the best way. So, it's making me want to look at different ways to be able to communicate with him about things and issues that we have at home with the children, or just within our personal relationships that could be more beneficial and have a more productive outcome.

Here, the mother explained that the workshop content forced her to do some introspective thinking regarding her involvement in the coparenting obstacles that she and her child's father are facing. Furthermore, it provided her with a new perspective on the possible underlying causes of her tumultuous coparenting relationship. Most importantly, she was also provided with some practical tools to aid in overcoming these challenges.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of enrolling custodial mothers into an intervention featuring content from a fatherhood program on their coparenting relationship. More specifically, this study aimed to determine whether providing custodial mothers with a parent-education workshop impacted their conflict-resolution skills, coparenting relationship quality, and their report of the child's fathers' involvement. The intervention under examination was a two-hour workshop featuring selected modules from the National Fatherhood Initiative's 24/7 Dad® and the Together We Can curricula. The participants were custodial mothers whose children's fathers were enrolled in the 4 Your Child fatherhood program. The evaluation of this intervention featured a mixed-methods design combining analyses of experimental quantitative longitudinal survey data and qualitative data collected in the phenomenological tradition.

It was hypothesized that providing the mothers with the parent-education workshop would be associated with them reporting increases in conflict-resolution skills, higher reports of fathers' involvement, and higher coparenting relationship quality over the six-month study as compared to non-participating mothers. The results of the quantitative analyses revealed statistically significant intervention group main effects for mothers' conflict-resolution skills and coparenting relationship quality. Both of these analyses also yielded small effect sizes. The increases in reports of coparenting relationship quality are consistent with the findings from Marczak, Becher, Hardman, Galos, and Rhuland (2015), who found that participation in a court-based, 12-hour coparenting curriculum produced positive changes in mothers' report of coparenting relationship quality for 63% of intervention group mothers, compared to only 36% of control group mothers.

With regard to mothers' report of fathers' involvement, data analysis revealed that while control group mothers reported more father involvement at baseline, fathers were less involved over time. To contrast, intervention group mothers reported that fathers were more involved over time, although these differences did not reach statistical significance. Several possible explanations exist that might explain why this trend did not reach statistical significance. First, it may be that increases in fathers' involvement over time were more subtle in nature and therefore, not substantial enough to warrant increases that were statistically significant. An alternative possible explanation is related to 4 Your Child's target population. Since all of 4 Your Child's fathers are nonresident and many have limited access to their children, fathers are encouraged to think outside of the box with regard to how they can have more of a presence in their children's lives even if they cannot get any additional access to them. For example, many fathers favor visiting at a relative's home rather than a traditional visit at the home of the custodial mother. For fathers with older children, many of them are able to make use of texting and video-call technology to send and receive updates

directly from their children. In these ways, it could be that although mothers acknowledged that fathers became more involved over time, some involvement remained unnoticed. The possibility of this type of underreporting is consistent with previous research concluding that mothers have reported lower levels of fathers' involvement than fathers (Charles et al., 2018; Mickelson, 2008).

In addition to the parent-education workshop, participants were offered the opportunity to work with a court-approved mediator to work on a collaboratively developed and mutually agreed-upon parenting plan. Despite efforts to connect parents to these free mediation services, very few took advantage of them. Two explanations are offered for the lack of engagement in mediation. First, many of the custodial mothers viewed mediation as a process that meant compromise and a potential decrease in their authority and decision-making power—something they did not view favorably. Second, the formality of working with a mediator concerned many mothers. Although 4 Your Child is not a court-based program, mothers presumed that their parenting plans might become formalized in court and legally binding. While many mothers were optimistic about the changes they saw in their coparents as result in his enrollment in 4 Your Child and their own participation in the mothers' workshops, these changes were new and still preliminary. As a result, they were apprehensive about pursuing a formal, written parenting plan. Previous research on the receptivity to mediation and parenting plan assistance services is mixed with some studies such as Marczak, Galos, Hardman, Becher, Ruhland, and Olson (2015) finding that a court-based intervention led to 57% of coparents agreeing to their professionally facilitated parenting plans. On the other hand, McHale, Waller, and Pearson (2012) found that substantial proportions of families offered these services declined because one or both parents refused to participate.

Findings from the qualitative analyses revealed five emergent themes: What Makes a Good Dad?, Coparenting Outlook, Coparenting Challenges, Mom's Advice on Fathers' Behavior and Program Improvement, and Mothers' Reflection. Mothers said that good fathers were those who not only prioritized financial provision, but also spent time with their children and were willing to adjust their schedules to deal with issues brought on by the obligations of parenting. With respect to coparenting outlook, some mothers felt positively about the prospects of their future coparenting relationship based on their child's fathers' enrollment in 4 Your Child, while others remained skeptical and doubtful that meaningful change was imminent. In some cases, the mothers doubted if change was even possible. In discussing what they felt were the largest coparenting challenges, mothers shared that fathers' external factors such as incarceration and unemployment, as well as internal factors such as fathers' mental health, substance abuse, selfishness, rigidity, and other relationships, all served as barriers to them establishing and maintaining high-quality relationships. Given the improvements in coparenting relationship quality reported by the intervention group mothers, the negative feelings expressed by some of the mothers may seem paradoxical. However, for the majority of the mothers, even those whose coparenting relationships were characterized by previous disappointments and frustrations, fathers' enrollment in 4 Your Child was viewed as a reason for cautious optimism. This was a sentiment best expressed by a 31-year-old, unmarried mother who stated, "so far so good, but . . . we'll see," in response to being asked to describe her recent interactions with her child's father since his enrollment in the fatherhood program.

In providing feedback on their participation in the mothers' workshops, participants encouraged fathers to be more effective communicators, particularly as it related to listening. Mothers also thought that it would be important for fathers to get more firsthand exposure to what mothers (i.e., custodial parents) endure with regard to having to put the needs of their children before their own and, in many ways, be beholden to their children's schedules. Finally, in reflecting on their experiences in the intervention and as coparents, many of the mothers acknowledged that as a result of the workshop, for the first time, they were prompted to give thought to how it is that noncustodial fathers may have experienced parenting and coparenting.

Limitations

Although the study's results support the notion that mothers can not only be recruited into coparenting and fatherhood interventions but that these interventions can produce positive outcomes, the study had some limitations that should be considered. First, the intervention was a single, low-dosage workshop. As such, the small effect sizes, in comparison to other studies that had longer, higher-dosage interventions (Fagan, 2008), were not surprising given the short duration and limited intensity. Second, the sample size of 153 is relatively small. Therefore, the results should be considered preliminary until they can be replicated with a larger number of participants engaged in a more comprehensive intervention. Finally, the primary outcomes, coparenting relationship quality, conflict-resolution skills, and mothers' report of fathers' involvement were all based on self-report survey measurement instruments. Although this is common practice, exclusive reliance on self-report survey measures means that the results are susceptible to participants providing socially desirable responses.

Recommendations for Practice

Despite the limitations, the results of the study are promising. Therefore, we offer several recommendations for professionals seeking to engage mothers in fatherhood and coparenting interventions. First, messaging matters. In other words, care should be taken in the way that the invitation for mothers to participate is framed. In this study, the original recruitment strategy revolved around gauging mothers' interest in participating in the workshops to improve their coparenting knowledge so as to position them to strengthen the coparenting alliance. After proving unsuccessful, the recruitment strategy was later modified so that emphasis was placed on recruiting mothers to participate in the workshops to provide their input and feedback, as well as learning more about the information the fathers were learning in 4 Your Child. The original strategy was largely ineffective because not many mothers felt as though they needed to increase their parenting and coparenting knowledge. Instead, they felt that it was fathers who were in need of an educational intervention. Because they felt that they did not need an educational intervention, many of the mothers received the invitation to participate as a signal that they were deficient or in need of remediation, a notion that they summarily rejected. However, mothers were much more receptive to the prospects of participating in the workshop to use their parenting experience and expertise to provide feedback to the researchers conducting the study as to how they could improve the workshop and fatherhood program. In fact, subsequent to the change in recruitment strategy, many mothers requested to learn more about the content of the fatherhood program than could fit in the one-time workshop. These mothers also suggested that the researchers include combined sessions for mothers and fathers, as well as extending the program for both mothers and fathers to provide them with ongoing support.

Another recommendation is to introduce coparenting interventions to young parents. On average, 4 Your Child fathers were 36.4 years old and the mothers in the coparenting study were 34.7 years old. This means that many of the coparenting dyads enrolled in the fatherhood and coparenting interventions several years after their children were born or romantic relationship dissolved, if it ever existed. In the focus groups, some of the mothers expressed frustration grounded in years of what they felt were unsuccessful attempts to encourage, support, and facilitate fathers' involvement. Therefore, it is recommended that future efforts to integrate mothers into coparenting and fatherhood interventions try to recruit parents earlier in their relationships, when they are less fraught with hurt feelings, anger, or negativity. Given the recent research recommending that interventions include mothers and fathers (Cowan & Cowan, 2019), doing so might serve to reduce the barriers associated with romantic relationship and coparenting disappointment, frustration, and resentment. Considering the association between fathers' prenatal and postnatal involvement, it may be best practice to intervene during pregnancy or shortly after birth.

A final recommendation is to emphasize the impact of empathy in shaping the coparenting relationship by further integrating it into interventions and measuring it in future studies. Although some mothers questioned fathers'

motives for enrolling in 4 Your Child, most mothers commended fathers for their effort and became more receptive to coparenting. In fact, several mothers reported that their willingness to participate in the workshop was related to their previously unsuccessful attempts to facilitate fathers' involvement. Also, mothers reported wanting fathers to listen to them and to place themselves in mothers' shoes (i.e., primary caregivers) as it relates to the demands on their time, mandatory flexibility, and seemingly inescapable obligations associated with caregiving. Most notably, empathy also emerged in mothers' reflections, as they talked about how until they participated in the workshop, they never had much reason to stop and think about what parenting looked or felt like from the nonresident (and oftentimes disenfranchised) fathers' perspectives. Given the ways in which previous research has concluded that interventions can contribute to the development of high-solidarity coparenting dyads that are characterized by warm, engaged, and respectful interactions (McHale & Coates, 2014), practitioners and researchers alike would be wise to highlight the salience of empathy in coparenting.

Conclusion

In sum, this study's results provide support for the notion that engaging mothers in fatherhood and coparenting interventions is feasible (53.4% of eligible mothers who could be reached agreed to participate) and can lead to positive outcomes in the areas of conflict resolution and coparenting relationship quality. Moreover, mothers participating in the intervention expressed appreciation for the fatherhood program as, consistent with many of their own previous efforts, it was striving to encourage fathers to take a more active role in their children's lives. Because the results are based on a one-time, low-dosage intervention, they should be considered preliminary. Given that many of the mothers in the intervention group expressed an interest or willingness to participate in a longer intervention, a higher-dosage intervention is recommended. However, future research should explore various configurations to determine what is most feasible and effective with regard to the number of sessions and length per session. As it relates to intervention content, many of the mothers were intrigued with learning more about what the fathers were learning, so the focus on communication, conflict resolution, coparenting, and the influence of the family of origin should be received favorably. However, the role of empathy emerged as most salient in shaping mothers' coparenting experiences. On one hand, several mothers lamented the fact that their children's fathers did not seem to understand or appreciate the time, effort, and energy that they as custodial parents put into providing care for their children. This lack of understanding resulted in frustration from mothers. This lack of understanding also led mothers to recommend developing activities and exercises that put fathers in mothers' situations so that they could better understand their perspectives. On the other hand, mothers also acknowledged that participating in the workshops forced them to come to terms with the fact that they themselves had not spent much time thinking about what nonresident fathers go through or how they might experience parenting. Therefore, the results of this study, particularly the findings that custodial mothers could be successfully recruited into an intervention through their coparents' enrollment in a fatherhood program, represent a building block on which both researchers and practitioners can continue their pursuit of evidence-informed interventions to positively impact family functioning.

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Appendix A

Table 4. FRPN Fatherhood and Coparenting Focus Group Interview Script

Question	Prompt (if needed)
Describe your coparenting experience with your child's father?	Describe your interactions with your child's father. Have you made explicit and intentional efforts to facilitate your child's fathers' involvement? If so, how did he respond? If not, is there a specific reason as to why not? What are your child's fathers' strengths and needs?
What does a good father look like to you?	What should a man do to get the title of a great father? If you can imagine an ideal father, in what activities would he participate?
What should fathers do to improve their coparenting relationships with mothers?	
What should agencies looking to serve families do to help fathers improve their coparenting relationships with mothers?	How can programs help fathers and mothers work together for the best interest of their children?

Appendix B

Table 5. Qualitative Codes, Descriptions, and Branches

Code	Description	Branches
Ups and downs in coparenting	Mothers discussing the evolution of their coparenting relationship	
Overall description of coparenting	Mothers providing a general overview of their current coparenting relationship	
Factors shaping coparentings experiences	Mothers discussing the areas that have had a major impact on their lives	- Religion - Politics - Different parenting style - Overcoming differences - Drugs/drug abuse - Incarceration
What makes a good dad?	Mothers discussing the traits and qualities of an engaged father	- Quality time - Financial provider - Responsibility - Emotional involvement - Being there - Attentiveness - Role model/leader/teacher - Prioritizing your children/family - Willing to sacrifice for your kids - Finances - Openness/vulnerability - Role model/leader - Willing to sacrifice for your kids
Moms advice for dad	Mothers discussing what they think fathers should do to develop more functional coparenting relationships	- Active listening to mother - Active listening to child - Providing opportunity - Involvement
Dad gets short end of the stick	Mothers discussing the ways in which fathers are marginalized	- Dad being marginalized - Drama from momma - Social scripts

Mom's feedback from workshop	Mothers sharing their thoughts on what could make the workshops better	- Props to the program - Stay in touch - Follow - up - Reflection
Empathy	Mothers discussing the role of empathy in coparenting	
Communication	Mothers discussing the role of communication in coparenting	- Listening - Mediation
Overcoming differences	Mothers discussing examples from their lived experiences when they worked through a coparenting challenge	
Coparenting challenges	Mothers discussing areas that make coparenting difficult	- Decision - making input (who makes the decisions) - Respect/disrespect - Judgment or feeling judged - Emotional baggage - "It's not personal, its business" - Court - ordered participation - External/environmental challenges - Lack of initiative/effort - Inability to untangle partner from parent role - Inconsistency
Factors facilitating positive coparenting	Mothers discussing areas that make effective coparenting possible	- Information sharing - Compromise - Unselfishness - Consistency/reinforcement/ united front - Participates willingly/initiative
Multiple partner fertility differences	Mothers discussing challenges related to having to spread parenting resources across multiple households	
Coparenting outlook	Mothers discussing their prognosis for the future of their coparenting relationship.	- Skepticism - Optimism