

# FATHERHOOD

June 2015

## ONGOING RESEARCH AND PROGRAM EVALUATION EFFORTS

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services promotes the economic and social well-being of families, children, individuals, and communities. Many ACF programs interact with and serve fathers in an effort to promote economic self-sufficiency and social well-being for them and their families. Across ACF, we are implementing rigorous research and evaluation projects to better understand how to serve them and their families.

### Research on the Responsible Fatherhood Grant Program

The [Building Bridges and Bonds \(B3\)](#) study will identify high priority questions for the field and partner with Responsible Fatherhood programs to conduct rigorous evaluations of innovative, evidence-informed approaches to the three core components of fatherhood programs: healthy marriage and relationships, parenting and co-parenting, and self-sufficiency. B3 will also test new strategies that programs can use to improve participant recruitment and engagement. Study enrollment and data collection is anticipated to begin in 2016 in approximately six local sites.

The [Ex-Prisoner Reentry Strategies Study](#) is an implementation study examining how Responsible Fatherhood programs can serve fathers soon-to-be released and recently released from incarceration. The study is following six grantees and documenting program operations, recruitment strategies, the experiences of staff and participants, and the types of activities and services offered to participants and their families. The programs begin serving fathers while they are still in prison and continue serving them after release, with the goals of stabilizing the fathers and their families, moving the fathers towards self-sufficiency, and reducing recidivism.

*"We need fathers to realize that responsibility does not end at conception. We need them to realize that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child - it's the courage to raise one." — President Barack Obama*



**The Responsible Fatherhood grant program, funded by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA), promotes responsible fatherhood by funding programs that support responsible parenting, economic stability, and healthy marriage.**

The [Fatherhood and Marriage Local Evaluation and Cross-Site \(FaMLE Cross-Site\) Project](#) is supporting research and evaluation activities of the FY2015 cohort of Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage grantees. It will train and provide technical assistance related to updated performance measures in order to improve quality of data and eventually conduct cross-grantee analyses. It will also strengthen grantee-led local evaluation plans, and support a subset of them from initial grant implementation through to grant completion.

Through the [Family Strengthening Scholars](#) grant program, OPRE awarded two grants to support dissertation research on Health Marriage/Responsible Fatherhood (HM/RF) policy issues. The grant program is designed to build research capacity in the HM/RF field and to focus research on questions that have direct implications for HM/RF decision making and program administration.

The [Parents and Children Together \(PaCT\) Responsible Fatherhood Evaluation](#) has multiple components including an impact and process study; a qualitative study of a subset of fathers participating in Responsible Fatherhood programs; and a sub-study aiming to understand strategies and adaptations used by selected Responsible Fatherhood programs serving Hispanic fathers.

Through [Secondary Data Analyses of Strengthening Families Datasets Grants](#), OPRE awarded eight cooperative agreements to fund research to conduct secondary data analysis of archived ACF data, specifically the Building Strong Families (BSF), Supporting Healthy Marriage (SHM), and Community Healthy Marriage Initiative (CMHI) datasets. One grantee is examining issues related to relationship education and parental responsiveness, intimate partner violence, and relationship quality and whether enrollment in a relationship education program or relationship support and social network support moderates the association between paternal responsiveness, inter-partner violence, depressive symptoms, and relationship quality.

The [Strengthening Families Curriculum Guide](#) provides information about the content and select features of curricula commonly used by Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grantees. The Guide is intended to help answer questions such as: who is the curriculum intended to reach; what topics are covered in the curriculum; and what do organizations need to implement this curriculum? Additionally, users can generate a side-by-side comparison table of curricula to facilitate the selection of a curriculum best fit for a user's needs.



**Children with involved, loving fathers are significantly more likely to do well in school, have healthy self-esteem and exhibit empathy and prosocial behavior compared to children who have uninvolved fathers.<sup>1</sup>**

## Work Targeting Non-Custodial Parents

The [Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency \(BIAS\)](#) project is the first major opportunity to apply a behavioral economics lens to programs that serve poor and vulnerable families in the United States. BIAS works with human services programs to design and test behaviorally-informed interventions to program challenges, with an ultimate goal of learning how behavioral insights can be used to improve the well-being of low-income children and families.

BIAS has designed and is testing interventions related to child support in four sites:

- BIAS worked with the Texas Office of the Attorney General Child Support Division on increasing the number of incarcerated noncustodial parents who apply for child support order modifications. [Results from this evaluation](#) were published in September 2014. The behaviorally-informed intervention produced a highly statistically significant and policy-relevant impact at a relatively low cost and demonstrated the promise of applying behavioral economics to improve ACF program implementation and outcomes.
- BIAS worked with the Franklin County, Ohio Child Support Enforcement Agency on increasing amount and timeliness of owed payments collected.
- BIAS is working with the Washington State Division of Child Support on increasing the number of incarcerated noncustodial parents who apply for child support order modifications.
- BIAS is working with the Cuyahoga County, Ohio Office of Child Support Services on increasing amount and timeliness of owed payments collected and increasing payments immediately after orders are established but before wage withholding begins.

[Behavioral Interventions for Child Support Services \(BICS\)](#) is a national demonstration exploring the potential relevance and application of behavioral economics principles to child support services, focusing on areas such as modification of child support orders and early engagement of noncustodial and custodial parents. In 2014, the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) awarded grants to California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Ohio, Texas, Vermont, and Washington to develop and test interventions with the goal of implementing successful interventions statewide. OCSE also awarded a grant to Washington State's Division of Child Support to oversee the national evaluation of BICS.



**Noncustodial fathers who are involved with their children are more likely to pay child support, and noncustodial fathers who pay child support are more likely to stay involved in their children's lives.<sup>2</sup>**

The [Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration \(CSPED\)](#) is a national demonstration to test the efficacy of child support-led employment strategies for unemployed noncustodial parents, funded by OCSE. The goal is to increase the reliable payment of child support by noncustodial parents who are willing but unable to pay. In 2012, eight states (California, Colorado, Iowa, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin) were competitively selected to run programs which consist of four core services: 1) case management; 2) employment-oriented services that include job development and retention services; 3) fatherhood/parenting activities using peer support; and 4) enhanced child support services that include review and appropriate adjustment of child support orders. The evaluation of CSPED includes an impact evaluation, an implementation evaluation, and a benefit-cost evaluation.

[Parenting Time Opportunities for Children in the Child Support Program \(PTOC\)](#) is an OCSE-funded pilot program to award child support agencies grants to develop, implement, and evaluate procedures to establish parenting time orders along with new child support orders. The goal is to learn more about how the child support program can safely and effectively give families opportunities to establish parenting time orders, thereby improving child support outcomes and child well-being overall. In 2012, five sites (Miami-Dade County, FL; Monroe County, IN; Fairfield County, OH; San Diego County, CA; and the state of Oregon) were awarded grants to develop pilot projects in close collaboration with local and state domestic violence experts. Each site also contracted with an independent evaluator to develop an evaluation plan and conduct evaluation on the processes needed to safely implement services and on the resulting parenting time orders established in each site.

The [Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration \(STED\)](#) is evaluating the effectiveness of the latest generation of subsidized and transitional employment approaches for low-income populations. The project examines subsidized employment strategies in seven sites designed to address two distinct goals: 1) provide work-based income support for people who are not able to find regular, unsubsidized jobs; and 2) to improve the employability of disadvantaged groups. Each subsidized employment program is being evaluated using a random assignment design. Two sites in STED are specifically targeting noncustodial parents: Good Transitions in Atlanta, GA; and TransitionsSF in San Francisco, CA.



**Helping low-income men develop their earnings capacity and become responsible fathers is an important social policy goal, since the potential benefits—including greater productivity for the men, more stability for their children, and improved economic outcomes for both children and their parents — benefit all of society.<sup>3</sup>**

## Other Work on Fatherhood

The [Fathers and Home Visiting](#) project is an exploratory study that uses qualitative methods to learn about father engagement and fathers' experiences in five purposively selected home visiting programs. The findings will offer lessons about the implementation of father engagement strategies that have important policy and practical implications for the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program, as well as Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood programs nationwide.

The [Fatherhood Research and Practice Network \(FRPN\)](#) supports collaboration among fatherhood researchers and practitioners to build their capacity to conduct rigorous research on practice-relevant issues. FRPN also provides opportunities for investigators across multiple disciplines to engage in dialogue on fatherhood research and broadly disseminates research findings about fathers and fatherhood programs.

The [Linking Low-Income Men to Medicaid and the Health Insurance Marketplace \(LIM\) project](#) aims to provide states and community-based programs, including those that serve fathers, with guidance and long-term strategies on how to connect low-income men to health coverage and care, either through Medicaid or the Health Insurance Marketplace. The project's goals are to: 1) understand the characteristics of newly eligible low-income men and their barriers for accessing and utilizing health insurance and services; 2) identify promising outreach, enrollment, and messaging strategies for low-income men; and 3) determine the feasibility of child support, Responsible Fatherhood, and other ACF programs becoming vehicles for enrollment.

The [National Survey of Family Growth \(NSFG\)](#) is a survey of U.S. men and women of reproductive age conducted periodically by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The survey provides national estimates concerning factors related to fertility, family planning, marriage, divorce, and parenthood, including fatherhood. OPRE provides support to the NSFG for data collection and analyses.



**While many low-income nonresident fathers have a strong interest in building relationships with and supporting their children, a comprehensive range of services is needed to address their varied needs.<sup>4</sup>**

## More About Us

The [Administration for Children & Families \(ACF\)](#) is a division of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. ACF promotes the economic and social well-being of families, children, individuals, and communities. ACF programs aim to:

- Empower families and individuals to increase their economic independence and productivity;
- Encourage strong, healthy, supportive communities that have a positive impact on quality of life and the development of children;
- Create partnerships with front-line service providers, states, localities, and tribal communities to identify and implement solutions that transcend traditional program boundaries;
- Improve access to services through planning, reform, and integration; and
- Address the needs, strengths, and abilities of vulnerable populations including people with developmental disabilities, refugees, and migrants

The federal [Office of Child Support Enforcement \(OCSE\)](#) in ACF oversees the national child support program, and partners with federal, state, tribal, and local governments and others to promote parental responsibility so that children receive reliable support from both of their parents as they grow to adulthood. The mission of OCSE is to increase the reliability of child support paid by parents when they live apart from their children by:

- Locating parents;
- Establishing legal fatherhood (paternity);
- Establishing and enforcing fair support orders;
- Increasing health care coverage for children; and
- Removing barriers to payment, such as referring parents to employment services, supporting healthy co-parenting relationships, supporting responsible fatherhood, and helping to prevent and reduce family violence.

The [Office of Family Assistance \(OFA\)](#) administers federal grant programs that foster family economic security and stability, including the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and the Tribal TANF program, Native Employment Works, Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grants, Health Profession Opportunity Grants, and Tribal TANF-Child Welfare Coordination grants.

OFA's two top priorities for 2015-2016 are to:

- Increase family economic security and stability by supporting our state, territory, tribal, and community grantee partners to design and implement programs that focus simultaneously on parental employment and child and family well-being.
- Promote collaboration among human services agencies, workforce agencies, and educational institutions to encourage service delivery that addresses outcomes for both parents and their children.

The [Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation \(OPRE\)](#) studies ACF programs and the populations they serve through rigorous research and evaluation projects. These include evaluations of existing programs, evaluations of innovative approaches to helping low-income children and families, research syntheses, and descriptive and exploratory studies. OPRE aims to build and disseminate knowledge about effective approaches to helping low-income children and families.



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### Sources

- 1 <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/Parenting/index.shtml>
- 2 [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/programs/css/12\\_child\\_support\\_and\\_parenting\\_time\\_final.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/programs/css/12_child_support_and_parenting_time_final.pdf)
- 3 <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/07/PFF/Keyfindings/>
- 4 <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/07/PFF/Keyfindings/>