

Conference Workshop Abstract

A cross sectional study of mostly African-American men examining mental health and child behavior

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Background: Home visiting receives bipartisan support at both the state and federal level, because several models have demonstrated significant results in both reduction of child maltreatment as well as parenting behavior modification. Yet, parenting research and services lack further engagement and involvement as a primary component. That is, even though research has shown that fathers play an integral role in child development, there is very little research done in which fathers are the primary focus; most of this research focuses on mothers. When it comes to serving children who are victims of child abuse and neglect, this is a problem at both the programmatic and legislative level.

Methods: This study took place within the context of a broader NIH funded trial to examine the efficacy of an adapted (technologically enhanced) version of an evidence-based parenting program, SafeCare, for fathers. This was a cross-sectional examination of the results from a survey in which mostly African-American, at-risk fathers (n=84), reported on – using putative measures – parenting practices, mental health, and behavior of their children. This initial assessment used linear regression to examine the association between fathers' mental health and their child's externalizing and internalizing problem behaviors.

Results: On average, higher levels of father depression and anxiety corresponded to higher scores for child behavior problems. That is, there was a significant correlation between the fathers' anxiety and depression and the child's problem behaviors.

Conclusions: These findings suggest a need for acknowledging the father's role in child development as well as any potential external factors that might have a pernicious effect on the father's mental state[s]. In addition, more attention should be given to separating data within studies that examine both mothers and fathers in order to assess individual effects by each parent.

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