Fathers’ Engagement in the First 1000 Days

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There is a wealth of evidence on Father’s (biological or social) positive impact in early childhood development (ECD), as this has been a topic of interest to scientists working in early childhood development globally and in the U.S. (The Lancet Early Childhood Series, 20071, 20112, and 20173). For the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), “creating the right conditions in early childhood is more effective and far less costly than addressing a multitude of problems later” in the lifespan.4 The AAP’s committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health highlights that “fathers do not parent like mothers, nor are they a replacement for mothers when they are not at home; they provide a unique, dynamic, and important contribution to their families and children.”5 The committee explored the “effects of father involvement on child outcomes within each phase of a child’s development”, looking at “fathers’ involvement across childhood ages and the influence of fathers’ physical and mental health on their children” and provided 14 recommendations to child health providers to encourage and support father involvement.5

They noted that involvement and residence at birth are strong predictors of paternal involvement when a child reaches five years and that father’s involvement during pregnancy correlate with maternal likelihood to receive first trimester prenatal care6. They refer to the “universalities of how men see their roles in caring for their children” but caution about cultural diversity and social norms and expectation, with the inherent need for service providers to be aware of issues relevant to particular groups. Specifically, they refer to the importance of pediatric outreach among “vulnerable and marginalized fathers” (socially or economically disadvantaged, adolescent, immigrant, or incarcerated). Lamb and Tamis-Lemonda propose that although fathers have typically been perceived and judged by their breadwinning or provisioning, they play many other roles and that mothers and fathers engage in rather different types of interaction with their children, “especially in

6 Ibid
Anglo-Saxon countries”. These authors quote studies showing that fathers specialize in play and mothers in caretaking and nurturance. They also indicate that positive paternal influences are more likely to occur when there are supportive father-child relationships. Warm attachment relationships and play between children and their fathers’ impact self-esteem, social competence and the ability to manage adversity. It has been noted that children with less behavioral problems and higher social skills have sensitive and supportive fathers. Father accessibility, engagement or interactions, sense of responsibility, and financial contributions can affect overall youth well-being and high fatherhood involvement has been linked with reduced delinquency trajectories by multiple authors, including Jamie Roder et al. Being a first-generation immigrant youth is also associated with reduced risky behavior by some authors. Research suggests a relatively high level of engagement of Latino fathers living in the US with their children.

This is beneficial for children’s social, behavioral and emotional regulation, and linguistic development. The cultural importance given to the family and optimism are in turn, important for children’s wellbeing. Cultural models of parenting and socialization practices suggest that family obligations and family reciprocity are important Latino values. This encourage the fulfillment of family roles, such as taking care of children, increasing father engagement.

Recognizing the protective influence of fathers engaged in ECD, is a precondition to include them as part of “the development of sustainable products, services and implementation models that protect, promote and nurture healthy child and brain development in the first 1000 days at scale with lasting impact on human capital in low resource settings”. For example, Saving Brains Grand Challenge (Canada) and many experts from the newborn health global community, cite Colombia’s Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC) - a multifaceted intervention for preterm and low birthweight infants and their parents that decreases newborn mortality- as a successful example of ECD where the father has a very important role. Among other characteristics, KMC facilitates father’s attainment of

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8 Centre for Mental Health BRIEFING 50 Fatherhood https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/briefing-50-fatherhood (accessed December 2017)
their paternal role by contributing to the survival and development of their premature newborn. KMC has long-lasting social and behavioral protective effects 20 years after the intervention, and is being implemented in low, middle and high income countries.\textsuperscript{15} For a video of a father describing KMC, please see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3QHPSyZmSQ

**Fletcher et al** “Supporting men through their transition to fatherhood with messages delivered to their smartphones: a feasibility study of SMS4dads”\textsuperscript{16} (published on line December 13 2017), presents an innovative solution in response to the difficulty to engage fathers in early intervention programs, using mobile technology to deliver information and support to fathers. The Australian researchers developed messages, including linked information and mood tracking software, to support and enhance paternal relationships with their babies, their partners and themselves across the perinatal period. Their study is “the first of its kind to deliver a tailored intervention to support males with the challenges and stresses they potentially faced through the antenatal and postnatal period.”

The importance of positive engagement of parents in the first 1000 days of life of children cannot be underestimated to decrease Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). The outcomes most strongly associated with multiple ACEs represent ACE risks for the next generation (eg, violence, mental illness, and substance use). Strong associations for sexual risk taking, mental illness, and problematic alcohol use (ORs of more than three to six), and strongest for problematic drug use and interpersonal and self-directed violence (ORs of more than seven) exist.\textsuperscript{17} In this complicated times that we are living in the US, how are ACEs affecting Latinx immigrant children when compared to US Native Latinx Children? Tania Caballero et al\textsuperscript{18} found high ACE prevalence in Latino children overall but Latinx children in immigrant families were less likely than those in US-native families to have high ACEs (16\% vs 30\%). This apparent contradiction might be simply indicating the limitations of ACEs as a tool that does not capture “(1) ICE arrests or deportations of parents or guardians, (2) being a victim of or witnessing ICE arrests or raids, (3) parent or guardian separation because of migration, and (4) experiencing anti-immigrant discrimination.”\textsuperscript{19}

**Barriers to engaging fathers in parenting programs and Engaging Latino fathers into early head start.** Catherine Panther-Brick et al identified seven key barriers to engaging fathers in parenting programs, pertaining to design and delivery biases cultural, institutional, professional,
operational, content, resource, and policy. To remove barriers to father engagement, some of their recommendations include “involving fathers early on, offering flexible hours or visiting at home, being persistent in communicating the positive gains to children of father involvement, being explicit in welcoming them personally to participate (not simply through the mothers).“Latino fathers often are less willing to talk about their problems, (parenting insecurities or health issues) and this could cause “decreased engagement in their children’s life and decreased attendance in parenting programs, which may hinder early childhood development”. Ignacio D. Acevedo-Polakovich (Engaging Latino fathers into early head start: A review of the literature) presents 23 engagement practices (3 linked to community participation, 4 to human resources, 3 to communication, 10 to service [2 needs-driven services and 8 family-focused services] and 3 linked to accessibility) worth analyzing to see what can be extrapolated to increase overall Latino fathers engagement in ECD.

Chile’s ECD program/fathers engagement. Chile’s National ECD Program (Chile Grows with You) focuses on children 0 to 4 and has materials targeting fathers (promotion of active parenting).

22 https://www.journals.elsevier.com/children-and-youth-services-review
Additional Resources


Canada [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vw0TkwjipZU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vw0TkwjipZU)

Colombia [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ne1nWfW8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ne1nWfW8)

Chile (radio) [http://www.crececontigo.gob.cl/radio/inclusion-del-padre-en-la-crianza-y-cuidados-de-los-ninosas/](http://www.crececontigo.gob.cl/radio/inclusion-del-padre-en-la-crianza-y-cuidados-de-los-ninosas/)

Chile [http://www.crececontigo.gob.cl/?s=paternidad](http://www.crececontigo.gob.cl/?s=paternidad)

Programas de radio relacionados

- Los prejuicios en la paternidad y su rol en la crianza
- La importancia de las redes de apoyo en la crianza