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## Engaging fathers : examining social service agency father-friendliness and its relationships with father involvement

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Cole Douglas Hooley  
Engaging Fathers: Examining Social  
Service Agency Father-Friendliness  
and its Relationship with Father  
Involvement

## ABSTRACT

Social scientists have become increasingly interested over the past 30 years in the role fathers play in child development. As a result, a large bank of research has been accumulated; however, one area in this literature which remains understudied is the relationships between agency father friendliness and father involvement. This paper is one attempt to understand the intricacies of the interchange point between fathers and agencies by using longitudinal data collected by the Supporting Father Involvement study, specifically examining the associations between father involvement and father friendliness, as well as the relationships among the various components of agency father friendliness over time. Based on the results of the analysis, recommendations are made about how agencies can increase their level of father friendliness and increase father involvement among their clients.

ENGAGING FATHERS: EXAMINING SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCY FATHER-  
FRIENDLINESS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH FATHER INVOLVEMENT

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work

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2009

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

A significant body of research has been conducted on the positive impacts fathers have on their children's development (Allen & Daly, 2002; Cabrera, LeMonda-Tamis, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000; Coley, 2001; Lamb, 2000; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). In response, programs and interventions are being implemented by social service agencies and groups to help men maximize their involvement in childrearing. However, little research has been done examining the service agencies serving men and the relationship between agency structures, environment, procedures, and policies, and the father involvement interventions situated in those agencies. Using longitudinal data collected by the Supporting Father Involvement (SFI) study, this is one attempt to enhance the father involvement literature by examining whether or not there is a relationship between the degree of an agency's father-friendliness and the level of father involvement of their clients. In addition, this study will seek to better understand how the various components of agency father friendliness interact. The findings of this thesis may help in the development of agency policies to maximize the delivery of services to fathers, thereby improving the welfare of children and families.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptualization of the role of fathers and their involvement in childrearing has changed throughout time (Carpenter, 2002; Lamb, 2000; Lamb & Tamis-Lemonda, 2004). At different points of history fathers have been expected to be moral teachers, bread winners, and sex-role models (Lamb, 2000). The “new fatherhood” (Almeida, Wethington, & McDonald, 2001, p. 417) expectation emerged about 30 years ago with a focus on men being nurturant fathers participating more actively in the care of their children (Almeida et al., 2001; Lamb, 2000). These changing expectations and roles have also increased the interest in, and specific research about, father involvement and its impact on child development (Allen & Daly, 2002; Cabrera, LeMonda-Tamis, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000; Coley, 2001; Lamb, 2000; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). In that time span, social scientists have found that fathers make unique contributions to the development of their children (Pruett, 2000; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001).

The breadth of father research has increased greatly over the past three decades (Cabrera et al., 2000; Lamb, 2000) and researchers are discovering many relationships between father involvement and positive child development (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, & Pruett, 2008; Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006). For example, infants are less likely to experience cognitive delays if they have an involved father (Bronte-Tinkew, Carrano, Horowitz, & Kinukawa, 2008). An early positive attachment

with fathers is also associated with future robust development and a stronger sense of individual security for children (Lamb & Lewis, 2004). The greater amount of time fathers spend with their children, and the higher quality of this time, the better the overall adjustment is of their children (Phares, Fields, & Binitie, 2006), which is an indicator of healthy psychological development (Videon, 2005). Children with involved fathers are better able to regulate their emotions and have improved language and cognitive developmental skills (Cabrera, Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, 2007; Lewis & Lamb, 2003). Other researchers have found relationships between positive father involvement and a number of other encouraging mental, behavioral, emotional, and academic outcomes (Akande, 1994; Amato & Rivera, 1999; Boyce, Essex, Alkon, Goldsmith, Kraemer, & Kupfer, 2006; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997; Harris, Furstenberg, & Marmer, 1998; Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997; Williams, Radin & Coggins, 1996; Yogman, Kindlon, & Earls, 1995), reinforcing the notion that fathers are uniquely important to children (Pruett, 2000).

In recognition of the importance of father involvement, efforts have been undertaken to discover how father involvement can be increased within the family. Gearing, Colvin, Popova, & Regehr (2008) found that in lieu of teaching specific parenting skills, when fathers' confidence in their parenting ability is enhanced their role performance, involvement, communication, and self-esteem also increase. Fathers are more likely to engage in certain activities, like teaching their children, when they feel that they are competent in that arena (Fagan & Stevenson, 2002). And though many fathers could benefit from capacity or confidence enhancing interventions, most social service



agencies do not include fathers as part of family interventions (Duhig, Phares, & Birkeland, 2002; Lundahl, Tollefson, Risser, & Loverjoy, 2008).

Researchers have already expressed the importance of agencies making their services more accessible and friendly towards fathers (Carpenter, 2002; Fabiano, 2007; Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006), noting that learning how to effectively engage and treat fathers is a component of culturally sensitive practice (Liu, 2005). Fathers, like other populations, have unique needs, concerns, viewpoints, and expectations (Liu, 2005; Addis & Mahalik, 2003) which must be considered in the design of effective interventions. Yet, fathers have been left out of research and largely ignored until recently (Lamb, 2000), making the case of increasing culturally sensitive practice among fathers that much more pertinent. Researchers have found that agencies who explicitly invite fathers to participate, have flexible service hours, maintain a father-friendly environment (e.g. gender neutral art work in the waiting room, forms/paperwork designed to not solely rely on mother report, etc.), do not focus on deficits, provide hands-on activities, have clinicians sensitive to fathering issues, and allow fathers to determine certain aspects of the interventions designed for them are more likely to engage fathers as participants in their programs (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Duhig et al., 2002; Fabiano, 2007; Phares, et al., 2006; Rosbenberg & Wilcox, 2006).

In addition to these more concrete dimensions of father friendliness, service providers' beliefs and stereotypes about fathers' emotions also impact engagement and treatment effectiveness (Fletcher & Visser, 2008; Phares et al., 2006). To help better gauge how father-friendly an agency is, questionnaires such as the Father-Friendliness Organizational Self-Assessment (OSA) have been developed by The National Center for

Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership in partnership with The National Head Start Association, The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, Region V, and The Illinois Department of Public Aid, Division of Child Support Enforcement (NPCL, 2004). The OSA is used widely by organizations to assess the degree of their own receptivity to fathers.

Using such instruments is important because, as Raikes & Bellotti (2006) have pointed out, an agency's level of father-friendliness has important implications for the potential effectiveness of father interventions. However, little longitudinal research has been conducted to see if the level of father-friendliness (i.e. OSA scores) in agencies is related to fathers being more involved with their children. Also, little research has examined the relationship between the various aspects of agency father friendliness to assess what kinds of organizational features are related to each other, and if those relationships change over time, perhaps as a result of change within the organization.

Using longitudinal data collected by the Supporting Father Involvement (SFI) Study, this research project seeks to further research in this area, specifically addressing the questions: 1) Is father involvement associated with the degree of father-friendliness in social service agencies prior to the SFI father involvement intervention? 2) Are they related 18 months after the intervention? 3) Does an agency's father friendliness impact the father involvement of its individual parents? 4) Are various aspects of agency father friendliness related prior to an intervention? 5) Are the same or different aspects related one year after the intervention?

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Data Collection*

This thesis will use longitudinal data that was collected as part of the larger Supporting Father Involvement (SFI) study. The study is a preventive intervention project that stems from a unique collaboration between College/University researchers and the California Department of Social Services, Office of Child Abuse Prevention (Pruett, Cowan, Cowan, & Pruett, 2009). The study consists of an intervention designed to (1) strengthen father involvement and (2) promote healthy child development in low income families with young children. Families were recruited to be a part of the intervention through Family Resource Centers in five California counties. Couples who participated in the study agreed to be placed randomly in one of three conditions, a 16-week group for couples, a 16-week group for fathers, or a one-time informational meeting (control group) (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, & Wong, in press).

The father and the couple groups were led by a male-female pair of mental health professionals. The groups met for 16 weeks, two hours each week. Each group session consisted of structured exercises, discussion, short presentations, and open-ended time when members could share life difficulties they were experiencing (Cowan et al., in press).

The interventions were implemented through Family Resource Centers which primarily provided services to low-income families in urban and rural areas (Pruett et al., 2009). Participants were given a pre-intervention assessment (“baseline”) and a series of post-intervention assessments at different time intervals (e.g. 2 months following the intervention and at 18 months after entering the study (which is about one year post-intervention)). Data from the pre-intervention assessment and 18 month follow-up will be used in the analysis for this paper. In addition to the father involvement assessments, researchers assessed the degree of father-friendliness at each site at yearly iterations using key informant interviews and the OSA questionnaire.

#### *Measures*

Though multiple measures were used in the SFI study, this particular thesis will only use information gathered from three of those instruments, two measures for father involvement (“Who Does What” and “The PIE”) and one for agency father friendliness (OSA).

The “Who Does What” instrument (Cowan, Cowan, Coie, & Coie, 1978) used in this analysis is a self-report questionnaire in which fathers are asked about 12 specific tasks involved with caring for their children (e.g. feeding, dressing, taking them to activities, etc.). Each respondent rates himself on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (she does it all) through 5 (we do this task equally) to 9 (he does it all). The higher the rating, the more involved the father. The instrument and indicators of its reliability and validity are described in Cowan, Cowan, Ablow, Johnson, & Measelle, (2005).

“The PIE” is a measure designed to serve as an indicator of an individual’s sense of the relational self (Cowan & Cowan, 1990). Each respondent is requested to list his

major life roles and then divide a circle (i.e. pie) so that each section reflects the salience of that role in his life. Each section of the respondent's pie was measured in degrees and then calculated into a percentage of the total pie. In the construction of this measure Cowan & Cowan (1990) identified four major role categories (e.g. parent, partner, worker, etc.), but for this study only the section dealing with the father's perception of his role of "parent" is analyzed. Again, further description of the instrument and its qualities can be found in Cowan et al. (2005).

The Father-Friendliness Organizational Self-Assessment (OSA) is used as the dependent variable in this study; it measures the degree of father-friendliness in each of the Family Resource Centers (FRC). The OSA was developed by The National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership in partnership with The National Head Start Association, The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, Region V, and The Illinois Department of Public Aid, Division of Child Support Enforcement (NPCL, 2004). It is a self-assessment questionnaire in which items are organized into eight categories (organizational support for fathers, position and reputation for serving fathers, father inclusive policies and procedures, general staff preparedness to provide services to fathers, specific staff availability, program's approach towards fathers, physical environment, and how fathers are treated) with a series of Likert scale questions for each category (a total of 69 questions). A group of key informants at each of the FRC sites were asked to fill out the OSA on a yearly basis throughout the study. Key informants include all of the agency staff, administrators, and clinicians at the Family Resource Centers. Each key informant

filled out an OSA, and then each person's category scores were summed and the individual scores averaged to generate an overall OSA rating for that particular agency.

### *Data Analysis*

Using the SFI data for this analysis posed certain challenges, particularly in regard to data selection. Due to the large sample size of the SFI study, the participants were recruited in cohorts or waves, with each wave beginning the assessments and intervention at a different time period, depending upon when a full group was successfully recruited and initiated. Each wave was given a pre-intervention assessment ("baseline"), followed by a series of post-intervention assessments (e.g. at 6 months, 18 months). Each wave received all of the assessments at the same point in relative terms, but at different iterations. Meanwhile, each agency was assessed using the OSA questionnaire on a yearly schedule. Because the father-involvement and OSA assessments were not conducted on the same schedule, we had to find a way of matching the father-involvement responses with the closest OSA assessment. To do so we identified the collection date for the baseline OSA and then reviewed the father-involvement responses, keeping only those respondents who were assessed no more than 3 months prior to or 3 months after an OSA. This buffer period serves as a reasonable estimate of time in which father-friendliness is assumed not to have changed dramatically.

A series of Pearson  $r$  correlations are used to test whether father involvement is associated with agency father-friendliness a) at baseline and b) at the 18 month follow-up. Each of the father's responses to the "Who Does What" and "The PIE" instruments

were correlated through SPSS with the eight separate subcategories of the applicable OSA data.

Next, the question of whether an agency's father friendliness impacts the father involvement of its individual parents is examined using hierarchical multiple regression analysis to determine if an increase in father friendliness could be explained by an increase in father involvement by individual parents.

Finally, a series of Pearson  $r$  correlations are used to answer the questions regarding how the various aspects of agency father friendliness are related to one another. The correlations are used to test which OSA categories are most associated with each other a) at baseline and b) at the 18 month follow-up. Each OSA category is correlated with all others for both time periods, and then the baseline categories are correlated with the 18 month follow-up categories.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

There are 203 father respondents in the sample of this analysis (n=203). Approximately two-thirds (64.5%) of the participants identify as Latino/Hispanic American, 27.6% identify as European American, and the remainder identified as mixed or other (7.9%) ethnicity. In regard to education, 3% had no formal schooling, 19% completed 9<sup>th</sup> grade or less, 18% went to some high school, 20% received their High School diploma or obtained their GED, 27% of respondents completed some college or a two-year degree, and 13% completed a 4-year college or beyond (e.g. Bachelor's degree, Graduate school). The median income reported by participants was \$23,500, with a range from \$0.00 to \$240,000.

At baseline, no significant correlations were found between father involvement in childcare (WDW) or the father's sense of himself as father ("The PIE") with father friendliness measured as organizational support for fathers, agency position and reputation for serving fathers, father inclusive policies and procedures, general staff preparedness to provide services to fathers, specific staff availability, program's approach towards fathers, physical environment, and how fathers are treated.

At the 18 month follow-up, again no correlations were found at a .05 significance level. However, at the .10 or trend significance level, there were significant correlations



between five of the OSA subcategories and the father's sense of himself as father ("The PIE"). The five organizational aspects most related with father involvement at the trend level are: father inclusive policies and procedures ( $r=.134$ ;  $p=.07$ ), how fathers are treated in the agency ( $r=.139$ ;  $p=.08$ ), an agency's position and reputation for serving fathers ( $r=.136$ ;  $p=.09$ ), an organization's support for fathers ( $r=.134$ ;  $p=.09$ ), and finally, the general staff's preparation to provide services to fathers ( $r= .131$ ;  $p=.10$ ).

The results from the hierarchical regression show that 53% of the variance is explained by the model ( $R^2=.53$ ); of that, 51% of it is explained by the Time 1 OSA ( $F=29.66$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Entering the baseline OSA into the first step to control for prior strength of correlation between OSA scores at the two time points under study resulted in the 18 month follow-up OSA being predicted so strongly by the baseline score that the father involvement variables added into subsequent steps in the equation did not explain any additional variance.

The most statistically significant findings resulted from the OSA category correlations. These are presented in tables below, with summaries discussed for each table.

Table I

*OSA at Baseline Category Correlation Results*

|                              | Org support for F.I. | Pos/reput in serving | Father incl. poli/proce | Gnrl staff prepared | Specific staff available | Program approach | Physical Environ. | How fathers treated |
|------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Org support for F.I.         | r=1.00               | r=.778<br>p=.000     | r=.858<br>p=.000        | r=.967<br>p=.000    | r=.688<br>p=.000         | r=.551<br>p=.000 | r=.917<br>p=.000  | r=.889<br>p=.000    |
| Pos/reput in serving fathers |                      | r=1.00               | r=.901<br>p=.000        | r=.774<br>p=.000    | r=.712<br>p=.000         | r=.058<br>p=.447 | r=.808<br>p=.000  | r=.974<br>p=.000    |
| Father incl. poli/proce      |                      |                      | r=1.00                  | r=.815<br>p=.000    | r=.697<br>p=.000         | r=.194<br>p=.010 | r=.929<br>p=.000  | r=.940<br>p=.000    |
| Gnrl staff prepared          |                      |                      |                         | r=1.00              | r=.583<br>p=.000         | r=.626<br>p=.000 | r=.861<br>p=.000  | r=.876<br>p=.000    |
| Specific staff available     |                      |                      |                         |                     | r=1.00                   | r=.256<br>p=.001 | r=.833<br>p=.000  | r=.740<br>p=.000    |
| Program approach             |                      |                      |                         |                     |                          | r=1.00           | r=.447<br>p=.000  | r=.226<br>p=.003    |
| Physical Environ.            |                      |                      |                         |                     |                          |                  | r=1.00            | r=.899<br>p=.000    |
| How fathers treated          |                      |                      |                         |                     |                          |                  |                   | r=1.00              |

Key

- Org support for F.I. - Organization support for father involvement
- Pos/reput in serving fathers – Position and reputation for serving fathers
- Father incl. poli/proce – Father inclusive policies and procedures
- Gnrl staff prepared – General staff prepared to provide services to fathers
- Specific staff available – Specific staff available
- Program approach - Program approach to fathers
- Physical environ. – Physical environment
- How fathers are treated – How fathers are treated

Nearly all of the OSA1 categories are highly related. The most highly related categories are: how fathers are treated and the position/reputation of an agency in serving fathers ( $r=.974$ ), the preparedness of the staff and the organization's support for father involvement ( $r=.967$ ), how fathers are treated and the inclusiveness of fathers in policies and procedures ( $r=.940$ ), and the physical environment of the agency and the organization's support for father involvement ( $r=.917$ ). There is one pair of subcategories for which there is not a significant correlation and that is between a program's approach to fathers and the agency's position/reputation ( $r=.058$ ,  $p=.447$ ). There are two pairs of categories which are less highly, though still significantly, correlated: how fathers are treated and the program's approach to fathers ( $r=.226$ ), and the availability of specific staff and a program's approach to fathers ( $r=.256$ ).

Table II

*OSA 18 Month Follow-up Category Correlation Results*

|                              | Org support for F.I. | Pos/reput in serving | Father incl. poli/proce | Gnrl staff prepared | Specific staff available | Program approach | Physical Environ. | How fathers treated |
|------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Org support for F.I.         | r=1.00               | r=.677<br>p=.000     | r=.755<br>p=.000        | r=.683<br>p=.000    | R=.634<br>p=.000         | r=.493<br>p=.000 | r=.903<br>p=.000  | r=.689<br>p=.000    |
| Pos/reput in serving fathers |                      | r=1.00               | r=.965<br>p=.000        | r=.958<br>p=.000    | R=.800<br>p=.000         | r=.883<br>p=.000 | r=.568<br>p=.000  | r=.793<br>p=.000    |
| Father incl. poli/proce      |                      |                      | r=1.00                  | r=.968<br>p=.000    | R=.870<br>p=.000         | r=.768<br>p=.000 | r=.728<br>p=.000  | r=.764<br>p=.000    |
| Gnrl staff prepared          |                      |                      |                         | r=1.00              | R=.876<br>p=.000         | r=.740<br>p=.000 | r=.627<br>p=.000  | r=.823<br>p=.000    |
| Specific staff available     |                      |                      |                         |                     | r=1.00                   | r=.596<br>p=.000 | r=.658<br>p=.000  | r=.777<br>p=.000    |
| Program approach             |                      |                      |                         |                     |                          | r=1.00           | r=.313<br>p=.000  | r=.744<br>p=.000    |
| Physical Environ.            |                      |                      |                         |                     |                          |                  | r=1.00            | r=.511<br>p=.000    |
| How fathers treated          |                      |                      |                         |                     |                          |                  |                   | r=1.00              |

Key

- Org support for F.I. - Organization support for father involvement
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- Father incl. poli/proce – Father inclusive policies and procedures
- Gnrl staff prepared – General staff prepared to provide services to fathers
- Specific staff available – Specific staff available
- Program approach - Program approach to fathers
- Physical environ. – Physical environment
- How fathers are treated – How fathers are treated

The 18 month follow-up results show that all of the subcategories are significantly related. However, from the baseline measure to the follow-up there is a shift in which pairs of categories are most highly related. At 18 months the most highly related categories are: the preparedness of the staff and the inclusiveness of fathers in policies and procedures ( $r=.968$ ), the inclusiveness of fathers in policies and procedures and the agency's position and reputation ( $r=.965$ ), the preparedness of the staff and the agency's position and reputation ( $r=.958$ ), and the physical environment and the organization's support for father involvement ( $r=.903$ ). There are two pairs of categories which are less highly, though still significantly, correlated: the physical environment of the agency and the program's approach to fathers ( $r=.313$ ), and the program's approach to fathers and the organization's support of father involvement ( $r=.493$ ).

Table III

*Baseline to 18 Month Follow-up Correlation Results*

| OSA3                     | OSA1               |                          |                        |                     |                          |                  |                  |                     |
|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|
|                          | Org support for FI | Pos/repu serving fathers | Father incl. poli/proc | Gnrl staff prepared | Specific staff available | Program approach | Physicl Environ  | How fathers treated |
| Org support for FI       | r=-.095<br>p=.266  | r=.007<br>p=.935         | r=.038<br>p=.656       | r=.008<br>p=.929    | r=.200<br>p=.019         | r=.314<br>p=.000 | r=.146<br>p=.086 | r=-.023<br>p=.788   |
| Pos/repu serving fathers | r=.678<br>p=.000   | r=.293<br>p=.000         | r=.510<br>p=.000       | r=.753<br>p=.000    | r=.209<br>p=.014         | r=.890<br>p=.000 | r=.620<br>p=.000 | r=.439<br>p=.000    |
| Father incl. poli/proc   | r=.627<br>p=.000   | r=.233<br>p=.006         | r=.464<br>p=.000       | r=.658<br>p=.000    | r=.413<br>p=.000         | r=.898<br>p=.000 | r=.648<br>p=.000 | r=.375<br>p=.000    |
| Gnrl staff prepared      | r=.728<br>p=.000   | r=.343<br>p=.000         | r=.513<br>p=.000       | r=.766<br>p=.000    | r=.449<br>p=.000         | r=.920<br>p=.000 | r=.707<br>p=.000 | r=.490<br>p=.000    |
| Specific staff available | r=.498<br>p=.000   | r=.147<br>p=.085         | r=.125<br>p=.145       | r=.558<br>p=.000    | r=.380<br>p=.000         | r=.862<br>p=.000 | r=.386<br>p=.000 | r=.266<br>p=.002    |
| Program approach         | r=.576<br>p=.000   | r=.379<br>p=.000         | r=.493<br>p=.000       | r=.706<br>p=.000    | r=-.054<br>p=.526        | r=.629<br>p=.000 | r=.443<br>p=.000 | r=.471<br>p=.000    |
| Physicl Environ          | r=-.100<br>p=.241  | r=.044<br>p=.609         | r=.075<br>p=.383       | r=-.121<br>p=.159   | r=.544<br>p=.000         | r=.105<br>p=.222 | r=.224<br>p=.008 | r=-.003<br>p=.971   |
| How fathers treated      | r=.573<br>p=.000   | r=.500<br>p=.000         | r=.441<br>p=.000       | r=.720<br>p=.000    | r=.356<br>p=.000         | r=.746<br>p=.000 | r=.553<br>p=.000 | r=.558<br>p=.000    |

## Key

Org support for F.I. - Organization support for father involvement  
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Correlating the baseline and 18 month follow-up OSA data yields interesting findings. The baseline category most highly related to the 18 month follow-up category is the program's approach to fathers. That is, how an agency reaches out to and includes fathers in the design and implementation of the interventions in a program is highly related to nearly all of the other categories at the 18 month follow-up. The only 18 month follow-up category which does not correlate with the baseline's program approach is the physical environment ( $r=.105$ ,  $p=.222$ ). Correlations indicate that the baseline program approach is most highly associated with: general staff preparedness ( $r=.920$ ), father inclusive policies and procedures ( $r=.898$ ), and position/reputation of the agency ( $r=.890$ ).

Among the eight separate categories in the 18 month follow-up, there were two categories which consistently have the lowest correlations with the baseline categories: organization support for father involvement and physical environment. Thus, an agency's measure of organizational support and physical environment at the 18 month follow-up are not very related (though there were a few 18 month/baseline correlations which yielded significant results) with how the agency rates itself in their baseline assessment.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This project contributes to the growing body of father involvement and engagement literature by further exploring the relationships between father involvement and agency father friendliness. In addition, this study also explores how the various components of agency father friendliness interact over time, in an effort to understand how individual families impact or are impacted by the community agencies with which they interact.

Although there are no statistically significant findings in regard to the question of whether father involvement is related to agency father friendliness at either pre-assessment or 18 months following the intervention, the trend findings are of some interest. For example, in analyses reported elsewhere, the SFI intervention led to increases in father involvement and in father friendliness by the 18 month follow-up (Cowan et al., in press). Looking at correlations between the OSA categories and the “PIE” results each at the 18 month follow-up reveals five associations that are significant at the trend level (policies and procedures, how fathers are treated, agency’s position and reputation, organization support for fathers, and general staff preparation). Because the findings are correlational it is not possible to ascertain whether involvement affected father friendliness or the other way around; however it is interesting to note that of the



five categories mentioned, the fathers' subjective view of themselves (as reported by their PIE measurement) is among the most closely correlated (at the trend level) with an agency's policies and procedures ( $r=.134$ ;  $p=.07$ ), which in some ways serves as the subjective view of an agency. This association alludes to the importance of intervening in how fathers view themselves and impacting how agencies view themselves as manifest in the actual policies and procedures of the organization.

Not surprisingly, another finding of equal strength shows that fathers' view of themselves as parent is associated with how fathers are treated in the agency ( $r=.139$ ;  $p=.08$ ). The findings do not show a direction (whether more involved fathers impact agency practices, or visa versa), but it seems likely that if fathers are treated well in an agency their view of themselves will improve. Other researchers and clinicians have also highlighted the importance and impact that respectful empathetic staff exchanges have on fathers' participation in programs and their subsequent involvement with their family (Cowan et al., in press; Duhig et al., 2002; Fabiano, 2007; Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006).

A theme the five OSA categories correlated at the trend level with father involvement share in common is that they all involve/impact the face-to-face delivery of services to fathers, suggesting that if fathers have a positive experience with an agency and the staff, they may tend to become more involved with their children. Duhig et al. (2002) have found that one of the most effective ways to foster an agency's inclusiveness toward fathers to raise the awareness of staff members of the importance of fathers, and to better equip them with the skills they need to work more effectively with fathers is through continuing education. In their work, they found that the clinicians who are most likely to include fathers in treatment are new, male clinicians with flexible hours, and

those who took family-oriented courses in their graduate school training (Duhig et al., 2002).

The importance of empathic staff interactions with fathers is further reinforced by the findings in connection with the various components of father friendliness. For example, the baseline correlational OSA findings quantify and reinforce intuitive concepts such as: an agency where fathers are treated well is going to have a better reputation within the community for serving fathers. Interestingly, there is not a significant correlation between the program's approaches to fathers (i.e. the manner in which it is implemented) and the agency's reputation, which seems to suggest that how a client perceives his interactions with staff, is more related to an agency having a positive reputation than how the actual program actually looks on paper, or it may be that the particular kind of approach is not the aspect that matters, rather the fact that they have one. This dynamic further highlights the importance of staff treating fathers with respect and empathy.

The 18 month findings suggest that well trained and prepared staff make meaningful contributions to the overall construction and implementation of father friendly policies. The staff's preparedness is also highly related with an agency's reputation in the community, giving further credence to the findings of other researchers emphasizing the importance of improving father friendliness training efforts in agencies (Fletcher & Visser, 2008; Phares et al., 2006; Raikes & Bellotti 2006). All of the correlations among the various categories at the 18 month follow-up were statistically significant. This seems to suggest that when an agency becomes aware of father friendliness and is interested in improving its own attentiveness and skill level in

working with fathers, there is a domino effect such that all areas of father friendliness improve. This dynamic points out the interconnectedness of the various components of father friendliness, and suggests that intervening in a few areas may have a positive impact on the others.

Looking at the correlation results from baseline to the 18 month follow-up create a hopeful picture for agencies. Based on this data, where an organization starts (in regards to their level of support for father involvement) is not a barrier to where they can go. If an agency scores low in the various categories of father friendliness, changes can be implemented and progress can be made. A meaningful intervention, like SFI, makes a difference and agencies do not need to be hindered by their past. Although the correlation results indicate change is possible, the regression results add additional considerations for agencies to make. The regression indicates a strong correlation between the two OSA time periods, which suggests that if an agency is going to change 1) the intervention will have to be deliberate and meaningful (like SFI) and 2) looking at individual OSA categories will give an agency more meaningful information that comparing overall scores on the OSA across time periods.

The findings of this study indicate there is still a gap between agency father friendliness and increased father involvement. Part of this divide may be understood within the context of the statistical limitations of this study, discussed below. However, statistical limitations aside, since this gap does in fact appear to exist, there may be ways agencies and fathers can strengthen their connection. An agency, as the analysis in this paper suggests, could start by developing and implementing a specific program which reaches out to, involves, and supports fathers and their families. The type of programs

which are successful are based on a needs assessment, include fathers in the design of the program, focus on fathers' assets rather than deficits, link them to additional resources they may need, and encourage fathers who have completed the program to serve as mentors to future groups. As part of providing culturally sensitive services, agencies could also provide continuing education and training opportunities in conjunction with the new program addressing the special considerations staff should be aware of when working with fathers. These findings support the suggestions made by previous researchers to explicitly invite fathers to participate, maintain flexible service hours, create a father-friendly environment, to not focus on deficits, have clinicians sensitive to fathering issues, and allow fathers to determine certain aspects of the interventions (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Cowan et al., in press; Duhig, et al., 2002; Fabiano, 2007; Phares et al., 2006; Rosbenberg & Wilcox, 2006).

In addition, agencies can also take a more targeted approach to close the individual-agency gap and improve the degree of father friendliness in their organization. For example, the SFI team has developed a strategic agency improvement process that organizations can utilize which will help them measure their current level of father friendliness and then provide them with specific interventions which will help the agency improve (S. Braus, personal communication, June 7, 2009). The interventions are tailored to the specific needs and resources of the agency and the SFI team provides technical assistance and support as needed. Based on the assessment, the agency uses tools provided by SFI to make a "Strategic Father-Friendliness Plan." Goals are made, deadlines are decided upon, and then the agency tracks their progress as they make efforts to improve within the various OSA categories. At the decided upon deadline, the

agency can then be reassessed to provide the agency feedback on how they have improved since the implementation of their strategic plan. This process of conducting a needs assessment, making realistic goals, constructing a specific plan, implementing and monitoring the plan, and then gauging progress is a promising way of closing the gap between father friendliness and father involvement in a programmatic way.

### *Limitations*

This study contains several limitations. First, the measures used for this analysis (the OSA, WDW, and “The PIE”) were not all collected at the same time. The OSA assessment was conducted on a yearly basis, usually in the fall, while the father involvement measures (WDW and “The PIE”) were conducted in various waves throughout the year. In order to more closely match the father-involvement responses to the applicable OSA data, we chose to use the responses from fathers who were assessed 3 months before or 3 months after the OSA baseline assessment was conducted. This limited the portion of the actual sample used for this analysis. Though thoughtfully considered, it is difficult to gauge how compartmentalizing the respondents this way has influenced the results. In addition, the selected cut-off method may not have been the most effective manner to match the father involvement/father friendliness data. Statistical procedures that allow measurement of data collected at different time points, and at different levels (individual versus group mean), will need to be employed in subsequent analyses.

Second, the father involvement instruments were self-report questionnaires and only fathers’ responses were used for this analysis. Though the instruments used to gauge father involvement for this analysis are valid and reliable (Cowan & Cowan, 1990;

Cowan et al., 1978), using the partner's responses to the father involvement questions as well may have contributed to a more complex measure of involvement. This data has been collected for the SFI study and also may yield interesting results in further analyses. Third, the statistical model used for this analysis did not account for how the role of the SFI intervention impacted both father involvement and father friendliness. Future analyses should assess the role of the intervention in results, or at least control for it statistically. Fourth, the data used for this analysis are taken from the SFI study, for which a sample of volunteers was recruited for a randomized clinical study. Although the sample size is large for a study of this type, parents who chose not to participate are not represented in the study (Cowan et al., in press). There are several different groups who may have opted out of the study: those parents who feared being reported to Child Protective Services, parents who felt like their current parenting efforts was sufficient and did not feel like they needed to participate in the intervention, parents whose work schedules conflicted with participation, and so on. Finally, it should be noted that all correlational data are not causative. The regressions, measured longitudinally, suggest but do not prove causation; they provide the basis for more detailed analyses that could be conducted with this randomized clinical trial design.

#### *Future Research*

Additional research on the interplay between an agency's policies and procedures toward fathers and its subsequent impact on father involvement (or vice versa) is needed, as evidenced by the limited bank of existing literature. It would be interesting to break down the OSA data into its raw components (i.e. having each key informant category separate rather than the agency sum used for this analysis), and use a linear statistical

model to see which OSA categories are most significant with the various key informant categories. It is possible that running the statistical analysis with the raw data would yield more significant results.

In addition it would be interesting to do further analysis using a wider variety of father involvement measures (e.g. including partners' report of father involvement). Future analysis examining if marital status, racial/ethnic identification, and differing levels of income or education, have differential impacts on the relationship between father involvement and agency father friendliness are also of great interest.

#### *Implications for Future Interventions*

The social science literature reviewed for this thesis reinforced the principle that involved fathers have a positive impact on their children's development (Allen & Daly, 2002; Cabrera et al., 2000; Coley, 2001; Lamb, 2000; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001), and involving fathers in services improves intervention outcomes for children (Bagner, & Eyberg, 2003; Lee & Hunsley, 2006; Lundahl, et al., 2008). Using tools such as the OSA, agencies – as well as private clinicians -- could evaluate the level of father friendliness in their organization and intervene to better engage fathers. Administrators should provide continuing education opportunities to staff members, sensitizing them to the special considerations they should be aware of in their work with fathers. These include involving fathers in the process of developing programs which will appeal to men, focusing on the assets a father brings rather than on his deficits, and ensuring that the agency environment is welcoming to mothers and fathers. Interventions such as SFI are effective ways of improving father involvement and increasing father friendliness.

## *Conclusions*

The once general lack of research investigating the impact of father involvement on positive child development has changed greatly over the last 30 years (Almeida et al., 2001; Cabrera et al., 2000; Lamb, 2000). A large body of literature has accumulated demonstrating the important and unique contributions fathers make in the overall cognitive, emotional, physical, and relational development of their children. Some agencies, clinicians, and researchers have readily acknowledged that there are potential barriers which keep fathers from actively participating in community interventions aimed at increasing father involvement, and have provided various recommendations to increase agency father friendliness (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Cowan et al., in press; Duhig, et al., 2002; Fabiano, 2007; Phares et al., 2006; Rosbenberg & Wilcox, 2006).

Instruments such as the OSA have also been developed to help agencies assess the father-friendliness of their organization, so they can make adjustments to be more inclusive in their practices. This thesis has been an initial attempt to advance the understanding of the intricacies of the interchange point between fathers and agencies, to examine if there are any relationships between agency father friendliness and father involvement found in these data, and to provide better understanding about the various components of father friendliness and how they may relate with each other. This thesis raises awareness--as do other studies (Cowan et al., in press; Fletcher & Visser, 2008; Phares et al., 2006; Raikes & Bellotti 2006), of the importance of agencies being cognizant of their explicit and implicit practices, procedures, and policies towards men, and how these aspects of agencies collectively impact father involvement.



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