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Journal:	Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education
Article Title:	<i>Nonresidential Never-Married Fathers: Policy Advocacy Opportunities</i>
Author(s):	<i>Glenn Stone</i>
Volume and Issue Number:	<i>Vol. 5 No. 1</i>
Manuscript ID:	<i>51057</i>
Page Number:	<i>57</i>
Year:	<i>2002</i>

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Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education is published three times a year (Spring, Summer, and Winter) by the Center for Social Work Research at 1 University Station, D3500 Austin, TX 78712. Journal subscriptions are \$110. Our website at www.profdevjournal.org contains additional information regarding submission of publications and subscriptions.

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ISSN: 1097-4911

URL: www.profdevjournal.org

Email: www.profdevjournal.org/contact

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Glenn Stone, PhD

Introduction

Researchers, practitioners, and policy makers have become increasingly concerned about the recent rise in childbirths outside of marriage, as approximately thirty-one percent of all births in the United States occur outside of wedlock (Moore, 1995). Never-married fathers now represent one of the fastest growing segments of nonresidential fathers (Dudley & Stone, 2001). Unfortunately, a great deal of misinformation and misunderstanding exists about this particular group of fathers. For example, it is a commonly held belief that most never-married fathers do not desire any contact with their child. However, in a study of unmarried fathers in Minnesota, it was found that while less than one-third of the fathers lived with the mother and child following birth, nearly two-thirds were in attendance at the child's birth (Resnick, Wattenberg, & Brewer, 1994). The same study found that the majority of fathers indicated ongoing attachment to their child(ren) (p.292).

It is the purpose of this paper to provide a clearer picture of the nonresidential never-married father, as well as to suggest micro and macro practice opportunities that exist for social workers. The paper will explore the issues and special needs of never-married fathers in order to provide information to educate policy makers, program developers, and practitioners. These special challenges include: (1) Challenges nonresidential never-married fathers face in establishing paternity; (2) Negative societal stereotypes of never-married fathers, such as "deadbeat dads"; and (3) Socioeconomic hardships characteristic of never-married fathers.

In addition to an exploration of the issues faced by this special population, this paper will offer practical recommendations regarding specific micro and macro approaches to use when attempting to help never-married fathers. Program and policy examples will also be presented. It is possible that social workers engaged in efforts to promote

professional development in social work practice can take information presented in this article to educate practitioners about ways to help never-married fathers. By educating practitioners engaged in micro- and macro-level practice, we may be able to help ensure that subsequent policies and programs are father-friendly, as well as child- and mother-friendly.

This paper will present specific suggestions regarding areas in which policy makers and direct practitioners could exert a positive influence on behalf of never-married fathers. These suggestions include such issues as workplace policies, developing policies and programs that assist never-married fathers connect emotionally with their children, economic assistance programs, as well as other policies designed to promote continued involvement of never-married fathers with their children. It is hoped that by exploring these various issues, policy practitioners will develop an increased understanding of the special needs of nonresidential never-married fathers, and with this understanding, become effective advocates for policies and programs that will improve the likelihood of positive parental involvement.

Who are these fathers?

In order to improve services to these fathers, it is critical to understand their situation. To date, very little research has been devoted to studying never-married nonresidential fathers. This has left a societal void in our understanding of this population, which, in turn, assists in the promotion and perpetuation of negative stereotypes. Not all never-married fathers are "dead beat" or "love-em and leave-em" dads (Braver & O'Connell, 1999)—common images the media employs to portray these fathers. Much of the relatively small amount of research that has been completed on adult, never-married fathers indicates that they are disadvantaged both educationally and in terms of work experience.

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Many of these fathers have not completed high school at the time of their child's birth. And, while many are employed, the jobs are often only part-time and low paying (Danziger & Radin, 1990).

These disadvantages are even more evident among minority fathers. Although smaller in number as a total group, greater percentages of young African American men are low-income, never-married fathers, as compared to Latino and European American fathers (Lerman & Ooms, 1992). Roy (1999) notes that the "new degrees of economic marginalization brought on by the post-industrial economy threaten the regular involvement of African American men with their children" (p. 6). Many never-married, African American fathers express that being an involved father is their greatest priority (Allen & Connor, 1997; Allen & Doherty, 1996). However, their wish for involvement may be complicated by local, state, and federal mandates that make child support a prerequisite for child contact (Roy, 1999).

Given their disadvantaged state, it may come as little surprise that many of these unmarried fathers are at-risk for higher rates of various physical and mental health problems as well (Wilson & Brooks-Gunn, 2001). In general, data indicates that nonresidential, young, unwed fathers are less well-educated, have lower academic abilities, commit more crimes, and are more likely to have been raised in a family that was poor compared to other young men (Marsiglio, 1995). Robertson (1997) found that never-married non-custodial fathers were less likely to hold a job than other men. Robertson attributes this difference in work effort to the poor health status of these men, as well as their involvement in high-risk behaviors (e.g., drug use and criminal activity).

While there is limited research on the shared characteristics of never-married fathers, it is apparent that there is no "one" type of never-married father. It is also important to note that there seems to be a wide range of social arrangements that are termed "never-married," but may bear little resem-

blance to each other. For example, Blankenhorn (1995) uses the term "sperm father" to describe a group of very emotionally disconnected fathers. These fathers may be providing a favor to a female friend who wants to get pregnant, or actually selling or donating their sperm to a sperm bank. Blankenhorn sees these men as the least responsible of all fathers, and a serious threat to the future of fatherhood. He estimates that "sperm fathers" may represent as many as thirty percent of all fathers of small children. On the other extreme are the never-married fathers who provide emotional and financial support to their child, even though they are not married to the child's mother. These fathers could be living with the child's mother in a couple relationship, or living as nonresidential fathers (Dudley & Stone, 2001).

Despite the varying types of nonresidential fathers, we do know that many nonresidential never-married fathers are often disadvantaged and may engage in risky behaviors that could prove harmful to themselves and limit their ability to fulfill their responsibilities as fathers, such as unemployment, drug use, and low educational achievement (Vosler & Robertson, 1996). There seems to be growing evidence that despite these many problems, many nonresidential unmarried fathers desire contact with their children, and many find ways to contribute to their child's well-being (Danziger & Radin, 1990). However, there are substantial numbers that do not seem to be involved with their children in meaningful ways. The challenge for those working with this at-risk group of fathers is to complete a thorough assessment of their situation and develop appropriate social policies and program interventions.

Father-Child Relationships

In terms of the characteristics of the father-child relationship, research has indicated that many of these fathers are more involved with their children than previously thought (Danziger & Radin, 1990). Analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of

Youth-Child Supplement (NLSY-CS) data suggest that half of the nonresident never-married fathers see their child at least once a week, and most of these relationships are relatively stable (McLanahan, 1997). In addition, many more of these unmarried fathers might be involved, but they report feeling unsure of their ability to do so, particularly because of unemployment and their financial limitations (Allen-Meares, 1984; Roy, 1999).

It has been proposed that the relationship between never-married fathers and their children is analogous to the relationship between divorced fathers and their children. However, researchers have identified distinct differences in these relationships. First, whereas formal child support agreements are much less common among never-married fathers, informal support, especially the purchase of goods and services for the child, appears to be very common among the two groups (Edin & Lein, 1997). Therefore, children of never-married fathers are less likely to receive regular forms of financial child support. This tendency may be partly explained by the unmarried fathers' low levels of income (Johnson, 2001; Mincy & Sorenson, 1998).

Secondly, although the initial rates of contact may be similar between never-married fathers and their children, in comparison with divorced fathers and their children, this similarity may not hold up over time. Some speculate that the high level of involvement of new, never-married fathers is due to the fact that many of these men are still romantically involved with the mothers. When and if the relationship with the mother ends, the unwed fathers' involvement may drop off rapidly. Other studies have suggested that the level of contact between never-married fathers and their children is vastly lower than the contact between divorced fathers and their children. For example, Seltzer (1991) found that while forty percent of the never-married fathers had no contact with their children in the past year, only eighteen percent of divorced fathers had no contact.

In summary, the similarities and differences in the relationships between never-married fathers and their children and divorced fathers and their children must be considered when developing effective policies and interventions for unmarried fathers. Never-married fathers are much less likely to provide consistent financial support to their children, and they are much less likely to maintain consistent contact with their children. It is also important to note that while many never-married fathers lose contact with their children, a large portion of these fathers do find ways to remain connected with their children. Though the Seltzer (1991) study found that forty percent of these fathers had no contact with their children within the first year, sixty percent of the sample did have some contact.

Special Challenges Faced by Never-Married Fathers

Never-married nonresidential fathers face many issues that can create barriers to ongoing contact with their children. As was stressed earlier in this article, it is important to assess the special needs of this at-risk population of fathers before planning and developing interventions. In addition, as one considers the continuing education needs of social workers, it may be helpful to provide information about these challenges to practitioners.

Disadvantaged Social Position

A large number of never-married nonresidential fathers are poor, have few job skills, and limited education. For the adult, nonresidential unmarried father, having a low paying job and little economic power may lead to a sense of failure and hopelessness. In essence, these fathers may be responding to a societal view that stigmatizes the man who cannot support his children, regardless of his plight (Roy, 1999). In addition, his inability to pay child support may also place restrictions on his access to his children. With no job and little income, his chances of sustaining meaningful contact with his child may be severely restricted.

A recent study of noncustodial fathers in

Wisconsin provides a startling picture of fathers whose children have been receiving welfare benefits. These fathers had few economic resources and many barriers to providing for themselves and their families. More than one-third of the fathers reported earnings of less than \$5,000 in 1998, and half had annual incomes less than \$10,000. About one third had less than a high school diploma, seventeen percent had fair or poor health, and almost forty percent did not have their own residence, but lived with friends or relatives, or on the street (Meyer & Cancian, 2001).

The "Dead Beat Dad" Stereotype

While all groups of nonresidential fathers fall victim to the dead beat dad stereotype, never-married nonresidential fathers may be the group most clearly connected with this stereotype. Unfortunately, upon initial perception, this label may seem earned. As was stated earlier, if we compare visitation and child support rates between divorced fathers and never-married fathers, we discover that unmarried fathers often do not stay as involved as divorced fathers (Braver & O'Connell, 1998). To date, little research has been conducted to gain a better about why these differences exist. Such an understanding might help practitioners appreciate special issues that never-married fathers encounter, which contribute to their absence.

There are a significant number of never-married fathers who strongly desire to stay involved with their child, yet are barred from doing so by the mother. These fathers may still be lumped into the category of dead beat dads by society. This stereotype also overlooks the never-married fathers who contribute to the welfare of their child in "nonfinancial" ways, such as providing child care, love and attention to the child, or forms of "in-kind" contributions to the mother, that is, clothes for the child, transportation to and from appointments, groceries, etc. (Greene & Moore, 2000). Finally, there are a significant number of unmarried fathers who defy the "dead beat dad" stereotype by contributing financially to their child and staying involved as

loving fathers (Christensen, 2001).

Establishing Paternity

The act of establishing paternity can be a very challenging issue for never-married fathers. If a never-married father is to "legalize" his paternal rights, he must establish paternity. When paternity is established, there are potential benefits for both the mother and father. Once established, the mother can obtain a child support enforcement order to pursue financial support from the father; in turn, the father can legally pursue ongoing involvement with his child. The establishment of paternity can be attained without much difficulty, if both the mother and father are willing. Unfortunately, there are often mediating factors that make the establishment of paternity and subsequent father involvement a challenge. The following are five common barriers to paternity establishment.

Barriers created by the mother and her family. Some mothers may not want to establish paternity, because this action gives the father the right to maintain ties with their children, even after the relationship with the mother has ended. Some mothers may not want to be "tied down" by this type of relationship (Danziger, 1987). The mother's family may also support breaking ties with the child's father (Wattenberg, 1987). In a survey conducted by Sonenstein, Holcomb, & Seefeldt (1990), it was found that an uncooperative mother was one of the most significant barriers to paternity establishment.

Financial disincentives. For mothers receiving TANF assistance, there is little financial benefit to be gained when the father establishes paternity and pays child support. Typically, only the first \$50 of collected support per month is allowed to "pass through" to the mother to supplement TANF benefits. This may be seen as a poor trade-off for both the unwed mother and father. For example, if the father was not identified legally, he could provide "informal" assistance (cash) directly to the mother, perhaps beyond the mandated \$50 under TANF regulations. This type of informal support is likely to stop once paternity is established, and the father is

required to pay child support to the state to offset the cost of TANF provisions for his child. Wattenberg (1991), found that most never-married parents disliked the idea of the father's child support payments going to the state to offset costs.

Protecting the partner. In the interest of protecting their partner, some mothers simply fail to push for paternity establishment. They hope to shield the father from the financial obligations and the hassle of the child support system. There is often a mistrust of social service agencies, and therefore, a strong motivation to avoid cooperating with these agencies. This mistrust leads to an increased willingness to conceal personal information.

Unaware of the benefits. Never-married parents are often not told about the potential benefits of establishing legal paternity, apart from child support obligations. Research has consistently shown that social service workers repeatedly fail to inform mothers and fathers about the advantages of establishing paternity (Brown, 1990; Wattenberg, 1987). This omission may be due to the worker's own ignorance of the benefits of paternity, or perhaps due to issues of gender bias, in which the worker may consciously or unconsciously devalue the role of fathers in the lives of children.

Bias from service providers. Weinstein & Rosen (1994) suggest that some males are stereotyped as "not mature enough, capable enough, or interested enough in providing responsible care for very young children" (p. 724). It is quite possible that these negative stereotypes have perpetuated a situation in which only the needs of the mother have been consistently served by parenting programs (Foster & Miller, 1980). Other writers (Allen-Meares, 1984; Robinson, 1988) have noted that societal responses to young, unwed fathers have typically been limited to punitive actions, such as denying them access to their child unless they provide financial support. Kiselica and Sturmer (1993) suggest that our current approach to young, never-married fathers is paradoxical: "We expect you to be a responsible parent but we won't provide you

with the guidance on how to become one" (p. 489).

In summary, never-married fathers face numerous barriers to maintaining contact with their children. These barriers may exist at the personal level, the relationship level, or even at the societal level. Regardless of the source, the end result seems to be that never-married fathers often lose contact with their children to the potential detriment of the child, mother, and the father himself. In order for social workers to provide effective services to these fathers, they must be informed of the special challenges these fathers face.

What can we do?

Efforts to help never-married fathers maintain a healthy relationship with their children need to be administered from numerous system levels. The most obvious level of intervention is to provide direct service to help these fathers learn to overcome their various personal and relationship barriers. However, it is also important to remember that it is possible to help never-married fathers through "policy practice" efforts, and in turn, recommend methods for educating social workers about these practice efforts. This section will deal with both micro and macro practice opportunities.

Jansson (1999) defines "policy practice" as "efforts to change policies in legislative, agency, and community settings, whether by establishing new policies, improving existing ones, or defeating the policy initiatives of other people" (p. 10). Jansson further notes that most social workers engage in a special form of policy practice called "policy advocacy." According to Jansson, policy advocacy refers to policy practice efforts with a special emphasis on helping relatively powerless groups improve their resources and opportunities. Given our current knowledge of the disadvantaged state of many of these never-married fathers, it seems appropriate that social workers expand their "policy advocacy" efforts to help this particular group. By helping these fathers maintain a positive relationship with their child, practitioners also pro-

vide indirect assistance to children. Ultimately, advocacy in this context concerns ensuring that changes are in the child's best interest.

The following section will explore the various areas in which social workers can advocate for policy and program changes to help address the special challenges faced by never-married fathers. In some cases, examples of policies that fostered programs with a positive impact on the father-child relationship will be provided. In other cases, the author may only be able to present a vision. It should be noted that the following information could be incorporated in continuing education efforts.

Challenge #1: Disadvantaged Social Position of Never-Married Fathers

At times, advocacy efforts need to be directed toward changing macro social issues. For example, social workers could make efforts to challenge and change federal and state policies or engage in program development. These types of modifications can have a dramatic impact on the lives of individuals in a community and across the entire country. Macro policy advocates and program developers might consider pursuing the following issues to assist never-married fathers overcome their disadvantaged social position.

Advocate for tax reform policies. The Earned Income Credit (EIC) is a federal policy that was created to reduce the tax burden on workers who earn low or moderate incomes. For example, in order to qualify for EIC in 1999, an individual's combined earned income and modified adjusted gross income needed to be less than:

- a. \$26,928 if the individual had one qualifying child, or
- b. \$30,580 if the individual had more than one qualifying child.

Further expansion of the earned income tax credit would help increase the incomes of economically disadvantaged, never-married fathers and potentially assist in their transition toward self-sufficiency.

Advocate for minimum wage increases. The sharp decline in the minimum wage occurred in the 1980s,

when Congress failed to adjust the wage floor for nine years. Even with the recent increases in the 1990s, the inflation-adjusted minimum is twenty-one percent lower today than in 1979 (Bernstein & Brocht, 2000). Mandatory federal increases in the minimum wage can have positive effects for all family members. With regard to never-married fathers, increased wages can lead to additional available resources to provide essential items for their children. This may assist never-married fathers in making regular child support payments, as well as maintaining a higher standard of living.

It should also be noted that a disproportionate share of minorities would be helped by an increase in the minimum wage. While African Americans make up 11.7% of the overall workforce, they represent 15.7% of those affected by an increase; similarly, 10.8% of the total workforce is Hispanic, compared to 19.2% of those that would be assisted by a minimum wage increase (Bernstein & Brocht, 2000). Therefore, this increase would help those fathers most in need of economic assistance.

Explore other ways to enhance the economic well-being of never-married fathers. Given that Child Support Enforcement agencies only collect support from about thirty-seven percent of their cases (Office of Child Support Enforcement, 2001), and that many of these non-paying fathers are never-married, low-income fathers, it seems imperative that social workers develop strategies to promote economic family sufficiency. These strategies could include such endeavors as: (1) Providing employment and training programs for low-income and unemployed fathers, perhaps funded by TANF or Welfare-to-Work funds; (2) Enhancing paternity establishment methods; (3) Training staff at state and local service agencies (e.g., Head Start) in Child Support Enforcement procedures; and (4) Advocating for a state earned income tax credit (EITC) to be given to low-income families.

The Parent's Fair Share (PFS) program is an example of a successful job training program that includes support for positive fathering. According

to program materials, it was designed as an alternative to standard child support enforcement (Miller & Knox, 2001). Implemented in 1994 in seven sites, the program was to help low-income, non-custodial fathers find stable and better-paying jobs, pay child support on a consistent basis, and become more involved parents. Preliminary reports on programmatic effectiveness suggest that many of the fathers involved in PFS visited their children regularly, although few had legal visitation agreements. In addition, men who participated in the PFS program paid more child support than men in a control group (Miller & Knox, 2001).

Challenge #2: Challenging the Dead Beat Dad Stereotype and Enhancing Father Involvement

Social workers can play a significant role in helping to combat stereotypes in their practice. As noted earlier, never-married fathers can be victims of negative stereotyping. Social workers can take action to promote public policies and social service programs that take into account the knowledge of the challenges and obstacles faced by never-married fathers. Included in this discussion will be policy and program recommendations to reduce the negative stereotyping of never-married fathers.

Promote public awareness about responsible fatherhood. Initial strategies for challenging negative stereotypes about never married fathers involves activities such as: (1) Sponsoring conferences, forums, or summits on responsible fatherhood; (2) Using sports teams to bring the message of responsible fatherhood to the public; (3) Using public service announcements via posters, radio, television, and/or the Internet; and (4) Using special publications on fatherhood to inform the public about the importance of positive fathering. Social workers could certainly take the lead in helping the public to better understand the role that never-married fathers could play in enhancing the well-being of their children. The Center for Successful Fathering (<http://www.fathering.org/>) of Austin, Texas is currently attempting to enhance public awareness about fathering. In addition to its father-

ing programs and workshops, this organization collaborates with other associations and community leaders to present conferences on fathering.

Strengthening fathers as nurturers. Since the male socialization process may fail to assist males in learning how to nurture (Berman, 1987), it seems appropriate that social work practitioners be involved in the development of policies and programs to assist men in exploring and refining their nurturing qualities. As nurturing can be a key factor in helping fathers connect with their children, and therefore avoid "dropping out of the picture" after divorce and/or separation, it would seem that efforts to improve nurturing skills could help combat the deadbeat dad stereotype. Potential strategies include: (1) Using access and visitation projects supported with federal welfare funds as an opportunity to reach at-risk fathers and help them increase their nurturing behaviors, (2) Sponsoring divorce and conflict mediation or counseling for divorcing or never-married couples, (3) Providing nurturing training programs for incarcerated fathers, (4) Promoting father-friendly workplace policies, and (5) Incorporating nurturing training programs into child support enforcement efforts.

The workplace would seem to be a logical starting point for strengthening fathers as nurturers. Social workers may also find opportunities to help never-married fathers by exploring how businesses, corporations, and other institutions can make efforts to change the work environment to be more "father-friendly." Since work is often an important construct of a man's identity, it follows that changes in the work culture may be needed to help bring about changes in norms related to fatherhood. It should be noted, however, that a common misconception is that "family-friendly" work policies are automatically father-friendly (Levine & Pittinsky, 1997). In reality, family-friendly work policies may really be "mother-friendly," and not geared toward the specific needs of the working father. In many cases, this emphasis leads working fathers to avoid participating in supportive work

programs, because they may view the programming as focused more on the needs of working mothers.

Perhaps one of the more obvious ways in which social work practitioners could assist working, never-married fathers is to provide on-site, father education and training programs. In essence, practitioners can demonstrate that a family-friendly workplace is also a father-friendly workplace.

Social workers interested in learning more about this option might want to explore the National Center for Fathering (<http://www.fathers.com/>).

This organization has developed workshops specific to fathering issues in the corporate/business sector. They provide seminars for groups of men and women or "fathers-only" groups. Presentations range in length from forty-minute overviews to in-depth, highly intensive, eight-hour workshops. Topics include: the impact of fatherlessness on America, the impact of a father, practical tips on fathering, and the various life stages of fathering.

Preventing "too-early" fatherhood. Social workers could also take the lead in promoting initiatives to help prevent unwanted or too-early fatherhood. It is often these fathers who are more likely to drop out of the picture, and subsequently be labeled "dead-beat dads" (Johnson, 2001). Strategies include developing: (1) Middle and high school initiatives, such as a curriculum to help young men prevent unwanted fatherhood; (2) Community-based programs funded or entirely run by the state; and (3) Specialized direct-service programs that teach father responsibility through either case management, mentoring, or peer education. Social workers could also devote time to working with incarcerated youth on fathering issues, developing task forces on unintended pregnancies, developing plans for interagency collaboration around preventing unwanted or too-early fatherhood, and working with businesses to promote positive youth development.

Some communities have approached the issue of addressing the problems associated with young fatherhood by engage teens in pregnancy prevention programs. Historically, these types of programs

have primarily targeted young women. Over the past decade, however, there has been an increase in prevention programming for young males.

Philadelphia's Male Pregnancy Prevention Program (MPP), supported by Workforce 2000, is an example of an exemplary initiative. One of the unique features of this particular program is that it has an accompanying website that serves as a resource for adolescent males throughout the country (<http://www.mpp-online.org/home.html>). Given the large number of teens using the Internet, the presence of pregnancy prevention materials aimed at young men seems highly appropriate.

MPP is designed to help adolescent males understand their role and responsibility in pregnancy prevention and parenting. The program includes various intervention activities, such as workshops, peer-counseling forums, and community outreach. Activities are structured to help participants develop greater self-esteem, a sense of empowerment, and ownership of their responsibilities. The MPP program focuses on sexually active adolescent males, and acknowledges the physiological changes they are experiencing, the conflict these changes impose, and the impact these changes have on personal growth, development, and economic security.

Policy initiatives. Although the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Act of (PRWORA) contained many sections that were simply designed to get money from nonresidential fathers and place women on TANF into work, an important provision was included to develop "access and visitation" programs for nonresidential fathers. In an apparent effort to increase non-custodial parents' involvement in their children's lives, the policy included grants to help states establish programs that support and facilitate non-custodial parents' (most often the father) visitation with, and access to, their children. This provision represents a minor revolution in the way that the Federal government has historically viewed nonresidential fathers. In essence, this policy allows states to

explore creative ways to involve never-married nonresidential fathers. Several states are presently exploring alternative ways of involving nonresidential fathers in their children's lives, beyond the mandates of child support enforcement.

Challenge #3: Increasing Paternity Establishment

Enhance the co-parental relationship. It would seem logical that if never-married parents learned to cooperate as co-parents, than higher rates of paternity establishment would occur. Unfortunately, research indicates that never-married fathers, who are no longer romantically involved with the mother of their child, are less likely to sustain contact with their children (Johnson, 2001). Fathers not only lose interest in involvement, but mothers too may also be less interested in the father's continued involvement (Perkins & Davis, 1996). As romantic involvement dissipates, it is critical that the father and mother find a new basis for their relationship, ideally co-parenting. Research on divorced parents has consistently suggested that when parents are able to co-parent after separation, fathers are more likely to stay involved, and child well-being is positively effected (Arditti & Bickley, 1996; Johnston, 1994). Similar outcomes should exist for never-married parents.

The Dads Make a Difference program in Lafayette, Indiana, was designed to enhance the co-parental relationship between never-married parents. This court-mandated, ten-week program targets non-custodial fathers who fail to comply with child support orders. The fathers meet once a week during this period to cover a variety of topics related to non-custodial parenting. This program is unique in that both the nonresidential fathers and the custodial mothers are required to attend. Mothers must attend five group sessions, in which they learn about the potential positive impact that fathers can have on child development as well as co-parenting strategies. There are two "conjoint" group meetings with both fathers and mothers to help facilitate open, co-parental communications.

In an extensive program evaluation, Baily (1998) found that fathers who attended the Dads Make a Difference program achieved more positive outcomes on several measures than fathers in a comparison group. These measures included paying the full amount of the child support award and maintaining contact with their children. The fathers reported higher levels of confidence in their parenting skills and their ability to take care of the emotional needs of their children. Fathers also reported better co-parental relationships than fathers in the comparison group. They seemed to get along better with their child's mother and expressed less hostility, and increased the amount of contact they had with their children and the amount of child support that they paid. It seems imperative that social work practitioners and policy makers learn more about such programs and explore ways to replicate the effectiveness of these programs in their own communities.

Enhance the father-child relationship. There is still much to be learned about the reciprocal nature of the father-child relationship, and how this relationship affects ongoing father-child contact. Stone & McKenry (1998) found that divorced fathers were much more likely to stay involved with their children, if the fathers felt a sense of support and love from their children. It is safe to assume that never-married fathers would respond in a similar manner, and that paternity establishment could be increased, if the never-married father felt that a positive relationship existed between himself and his child.

The Parents and Kids in Partnership program, located in DuPage County, Illinois, is an example of a program that addresses the quality of the father-child relationship. The program is designed to help never-married parents engage in cooperative co-parenting, with a focus on the needs of the children. The program designers recognized that there is often little or no relationship between non-custodial parents and their children, which represents one of the major differences between non-custodial divorced fathers and non-custodial never-married fathers. As a result, the non-custodial never-married

father may have very limited parenting skills and/or is a stranger to the child. It is unfair to both the father and the child to place them into a relationship that might be destined to fail.

In an effort to improve the likelihood of success, and to ensure the child's safety, a supervised visitation program was initiated. In essence, this program provides a "bridge" to normal and regular visitation for these fathers. The presence of a professional, who can both monitor and teach parenting skills in a safe environment, satisfies the needs of both parents. The non-custodial father is given the opportunity to begin building a relationship with his child, and the custodial mother is assured that her child is safe and protected.

Enhance relationship with maternal grandparents. As noted earlier, the mother's immediate family may support breaking ties with the never-married father (Wattenberg, 1987). For example, one never-married father shared how frustrating it was to be confronted by his partner's mother about child support. He felt humiliated when she would yell (loud enough for many neighbors to hear), "When are you going to bring some money?" For the never-married father, this type of public humiliation can be very difficult and lead to decreased contact with his child and partner. A relationship with the maternal grandparents may be even more critical for the never-married father, as their house may be a common pickup and drop-off location for the child. It is critical that efforts be made to improve and enhance this relationship. Unfortunately, there is little literature that explores this topic, and little documentation of programmatic efforts to deal with this challenge. Improving this relationship could lead to an increased willingness on the father's part to establish paternity.

Address worker bias. If a young mother is working with a service provider who holds negative stereotypes about young fathers, it is unlikely that this worker would assist the mother in finding positive ways to involve a never-married father, including the establishment of paternity. Some reasons

why social service workers are reluctant to pursue father involvement may be similar to the reasons Phares (1996) identifies as to why fathers have not been included in therapy efforts. Phares asserts that a form of worker bias exists related to fathers, wherein workers erroneously assume that: (1) Fathers are not involved in the lives of their children, (2) Fathers would not participate in prevention or intervention efforts, (3) Fathers are not important factors in positive child outcomes, and (4) Divorce/separation means that fathers no longer have much contact with their children. Social workers need to offer continuing education programs to provide practitioners with information and training in overcoming these biases and to learn skills in working with fathers.

Policy challenges. It has been noted that both never-married fathers and mothers are rarely cognizant of the financial advantages of establishing paternity (Wattenberg, 1991). To address this trend, Wisconsin began experimenting with allowing welfare families to keep all the child support paid by absent parents (Meyer & Cancian, 2001) as part of the state's W-2 welfare reform program. The changes in child support provisions were designed to encourage mothers to establish paternity and for fathers to pay support. In a recent evaluation, Meyer & Cancian (2001) found that W-2 increased the likelihood that fathers would pay support and establish paternity.

Social workers could be educated to advocate for similar policy initiatives within their own state. While the PRWORA of 1996 contained many policy changes antagonistic to social work values, it is possible that social workers can take advantage of their ability to advocate for special local and state needs through this act which decentralized welfare. The policy advocacy opportunities open to social workers in the area of never-married fathers and their children are numerous. The profession must educate its members on ways to bring about positive change for this special population.

Summary and Implications for Continuing Education

The challenges faced by never-married fathers are numerous and varied. While some of these fathers may exhibit behaviors consistent with the stereotype of the "dead beat dad," others have a desire to maintain a positive relationship with their child. As social work practitioners and policy advocates, there are numerous ways in which we can assist this at-risk population. Whether it be advocating for policies to improve the financial situation of this group of fathers, or seeking support for programs to establish an emotional bond between fathers and their children, social workers can play a valuable role in improving conditions for these fathers, as well as enhancing the well-being of their children.

As we look toward the continuing education needs of social work practitioners, it seems clear that much can be done to educate the profession about the special needs of never-married fathers. The information presented in this article should serve as an appropriate starting point for informing social workers about the population's special needs, as well as provide guidance to social work advo-

cates as to how they can direct their activities to assist never-married fathers. Given the amount of misinformation that exists about these fathers, it seems vital that continuing education efforts, focused on serving never-married fathers, include a component that relates common facts and misconceptions about this population. Such information is vital to presenting an accurate picture of these fathers, as well as helping social workers overcome any biases that they might hold toward never-married fathers.

In addition to providing accurate information about these fathers, it is critical that continuing education efforts present workers with a range of intervention strategies. This range should include examples from both direct service activities as well as policy advocacy efforts. While interventions at the micro-level of practice may seem most inviting to many workers, it is imperative that practitioners engage in macro-level policy advocacy activities to create lasting social and political changes. We know this to be true in our work with many at-risk populations, and it is no less true when we are making efforts to assist never-married fathers.

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