



Working with the African-American Father: The Forgotten Parent

Trainee Content



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Transfer of Learning

This tool is an opportunity for you to record thoughts about the subject of **African American Fathers**. As we go through today's training, please take a few minutes to make notes to yourself, a co-worker, or to your supervisor. Often the thoughts that occur to us during focused learning or discussion reveal tremendous personal insight.

When you have finished recording your thoughts or observations, you have the option to share them with others or simply review them from time to time. Whatever your decision, be honest, direct, and open to the possibilities that sometimes become realities when we work together.

POINTS THAT RAISED DISCOMFORT FOR ME:

WHAT CAN I DO TO BECOME MORE COMFORTABLE?

SKILLS I CAN ADOPT RIGHT NOW:

WHAT DO I NEED TO PUT THESE SKILLS INTO PRACTICE?

HOW CAN I BECOME AN AGENT OF CHANGE IN MY OFFICE?

WHAT AM I TAKING WITH ME FROM THIS TRAINING?



Focus Group Transcript 1

Speaker 1: Tell me what; let's talk a little bit about... Let's take in what your perspectives are: What do you think Child Welfare Services' perceptions are about you as a black man? A black father?

Speaker 2: Worthless. Absolutely untrustworthy.
[Pause] Never around.

American Fathers

Father's Day¹

- Sonora Dodd; 1909
- Presidential Proclamation by Lyndon Johnson 1966
- Richard Nixon signed public law for permanent annual celebration 1972
- 66.3 Million Fathers²
- 102 million cards expected; 5th largest
- 50% purchased by son's/daughters
- 20% purchased by wives
- Remaining % purchased for; grandfathers, sons, brothers, uncles & someone special
- 73% of American's plan to celebrate/acknowledge Father's Day

Mr. Mom

- 143,000 stay at home Dads w/children under 15 yrs of age (out of labor force) caring for over 245,000 children³
- 20% are primary caregivers/preschoolers
- 32% worked evening/night primary caregivers for preschoolers during Moms working hrs
- 38% part-time Dads
- 52% Dads not working

Single Fathers⁴

- 2.3 Million
- 11% raising (3) or more children under 18 yrs of age
- 42% divorced
- 39% never married
- 15% separated
- 4% widowed
- 16% live w/relative or non-relative
- 22% income of \$50,000+
- 4.6 million provide child support
- 84% of all child supporters are men
- Median payments of \$3,600 annually

¹ Source: John Hunneman, North County Times, 2005

² US Census, 2006

³ US Census, 2006

⁴ US Census, 2006



Involving Fathers⁵

- Agencies learn important medical information impacting; insurance, survivors, child support benefits, etc.
- Potential caregiver, reunification/relative guardianship, and permanency options
- Information and effort was lacking
- Few considered nonresident fathers as placement resources
- Impacts of visitations or involvement of nonresident father in the lives of CWS children
- Extent of CWS policies and practices; fathers involvement of casework, and permanency planning
- Establishing paternity (alleged vs legal) and effort to locate fathers.
- Identify challenges to involvement, characteristics, circumstances, SW opinions of nonresident fathers
- Identify practices and initiatives that may increase father involvement
- Explore how other agencies, information resources may assist CWS in identifying and locating nonresident fathers
- Early identification of fathers from multiple sources
- Locate; multiple individuals of fathers, few sought help from support agencies
- Challenges; incarceration, homelessness, unstable housing, not in country, etc.
- Involve nonresident fathers; % of fathers expressed in having children live w/them, % of fathers considered as placement resource,% of fathers that visited children while in foster care.
- Barriers; % of fathers are substance abusers, involved with criminal justice system, noncompliant with CWS, difficulty w/mother, or multiple problems w/father
- Policies and practice; worker training working with fathers, worker characteristics, difference in methods to locate, work or engaging fathers, worker training, philosophical views and influences of administrators

⁵ (Source: U.S. Dept. of HHS: Urban Institute, 2006)



African American Men⁶

A review of the literature on African American men in the past 30 years (1968-1998) reveals a downward spiraling of the status and conditions of Black men. The following is a selected summary of social statistics:

The average life expectancy for Black men is 64.6 years vs. 72.9 years for White men.

The HIV infection mortality rate is 72.9% vs. 52% for White males: the HIV mortality rate for African American males has more than doubled in the past 10 years.

Homicide (especially gang-related violence in poor, urban areas) is the leading cause of death for Black males 15 to 34 old and the second leading cause of death for Black men 25 to 44 years old (eight times higher than the homicide rate for White males.)

Alcohol abuse, substance abuse, and depression have been recognized as the most significant mental health problems facing Black men. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for young Black men.

It is estimated that 44% of Black men are functionally illiterate.

There is a 40% to 70% high school drop-out rate for Black men, which is the highest drop-out or “push-out” rate of all racial and gender group classifications in the US.

In the past 20 years, the number of Black men receiving college degrees has not increased (less than 3% of all students who obtain 4-year college degrees are Black men).

Fifty percent of the prisoners throughout the United States and in federal prisons are African American, although Black men comprise only 6% of the total U.S. population (they are incarcerated at six times the rate of White males).

Ninety-five percent of all African American men are not in prison, but by the time Black males reach the age of 19 one in six will have been arrested.

Twenty-nine percent of all African American men live in poverty vs. 9.8% of White men: this percentage increases to 45% for minor Black males.

⁶ **SOURCE: Social Work Practice with African American Men (The Invisible Presence)**, 1999, Janice M. Rasheed, Mikal N. Rasheed. (pp. 3-4)



Twenty-three percent of Black men ages 20 to 24 and 12% of Black men ages 25 to 44 are unemployed-twice the rate of unemployment for White men.

Working-, middle-, and upper-class Black men are more likely to experience somatic stress reactions or ailments that include headaches, low back pain, diabetes, heart trouble and high blood pressure (Austin, 1996: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1986; Gibbs, 1988: Majors & Gordon, 1994; Parham & McDavis, 1987: Taylor, 1977).

Even more alarming and disconcerting than the previous overwhelming statistics is the fact that African American men are worse off today than they were 20 years ago (Gibbs, 1988: Taylor, 1987). In fact, African American men are the only racial or gender classification group that has experienced such a “downward spiraling” of social conditions as evidenced by the previous social status indicators.

“Researchers, social scientists, academicians, practitioners, politicians, and other public service figures have pondered these staggering figures relative to the plight of African American men..... All these professionals tend to agree that there are a myriad of factors operating within this contemporary scenario, and that racism, poverty, and a unique form of (Black male) gender oppression all play prominent roles.”

- Average life expectancy is 64.6 vs. 72.9 for white men
- HIV infection mortality rate is 72.9% vs. 52% for white men
- Homicide: gang-related, poor, urban areas leading cause of death; males 15-34 yrs old, the second leading cause for males 25-44 yrs old, 8 times higher than white males
- Alcohol, substance abuse and depression the most significant mental health problem for black males, suicide is third leading cause of death for young black males
- 44% are illiterate
- 40% – 70% high school drop out rate, which is the highest drop out-or “push out” rate of all racial & gender groups in the country
- Past 20 years number of black men receiving college degrees has not increased (3% of all students w/4 yrs degrees are Black males)
- 50% of U.S. Federal prison inmates are Black
- 95% of all Black males are not in prison, but by the age of 19, one in six will have been arrested
- 29% in live in poverty
- Increases to 45% for minors
- 23% ages 20 -24 and 12% of Black men ages 25-44 are unemployed which is twice the rate of unemployment for white men.
- Black men are worse off today than they were 20 years ago



Claudine

Please discuss:

What dynamics in this video impacted you most?

Discuss your feelings about how Claudine felt regarding the Social Workers visits.

Discuss the children's feelings.

Discuss Rupert's feelings.



Role Play

JESSIE:

You are an African American father. Your son has been incarcerated and his 6 year old son is being removed from his mother. You and your wife have applied to become foster parents. You have been informed by the foster care licensing social worker, Etta, that you were denied. You do not understand why and Etta will not tell you more than you had a file regarding your daughter. You are shocked.

MARIE:

You are the wife of Jessie. You work for a local Head Start program as a social worker. You have been approached by your supervisor inquiring about the past incident regarding Jessie and your daughter. They have concerns about the impact of the report on the agency.

ETTA:

You are a foster care licensing social worker. During the investigation a report was returned stating that 10 years ago, Jessie had a CPS report regarding his daughter. The report indicated that the finding was “inconclusive.” That is all you know. You have denied Jessie and Marie’s request to be foster parents.

SONJA:

You are the social worker for the child being removed. You were going to allow the child to go to the grandparents. Prior to releasing him, you learn about the report and denial from Etta. You have a meeting with Jessie and Marie to inform them there is a hold on the release of their grandson to their custody and care.

CHRIS:

You are the father of the child. You had been incarcerated for tickets, but released several months ago. You have a stable job and a good support system; you live with your parents in a stable household. You have petitioned to get custody of your son. Prior to your incarceration, you were involved with your son; however, your finances were sporadic. You are concerned that you and your son will suffer because of this issue from 10 years ago regarding your sister. You know what happened about your sister, but no one will listen to you.

Note: In the previous report, the sister was mad at her father for not letting her go someplace unsafe. She was disrespectful to him and he grabbed her arm and fussed at her. She went to school and told her favorite teacher something more. The teacher called CPS. There was no physical evidence of the daughter’s claim. The incident was reported as “inconclusive.”

Focus Group Transcript 2

Speaker 1: When I graduated from my master's program... keep in mind; I'm a black male, highly educated. All those statistics that you hear typically, and you know, in terms of being a black male...

Speaker 2: Being in jail eight times and prison...

Speaker 1: Being in jail and so forth. Being dead before or between... I'm gonna be dead between the age of 18 and 25, all these different things. As a black male, I heard all of these things. And yet, I'm educated. At this point, I got three children and my wife, being a Latina. I graduated from school and we were struggling. You know, I need to find some work. You know, trying to find some work in a time when the economy was hard. So, we had to rely a little bit on getting some help and support from services and so, hey, make sure my kids are getting fed, kids are eating... You know, that's a hard thing, the first, to sit down with the family and say, man, we really need some help right now. So, we go out to seek that help. My wife goes and takes to sign up for so we can get some aid, some assistance.

And when they were filling out the paperwork, the criteria, when they asked the ethnicity of the kids, the... the ethnicity wasn't Black/Latino. You know what they put on there? Latino.

My wife asked a question, "Why would you put Latino on there when their father is black?"

She said, "Well..." You know what the response was? "Well, typically, black males are not in the home or present during this time." Aren't in the home. And most likely, "statistically" [hand gesture], most black fathers don't stay in the home, so...

Speaker 3: So, just discount you altogether?

Speaker 1: So, to answer your question in a nutshell, it's still prevalent. I mean, I could go on and on about that and how it made me... I mean, hell yeah, I was angry as hell.

Speaker 4: Of course.

Speaker 1: I mean, when my wife shared that with me, I ... I mean, it took me back to being in the projects again. And I'm an educated black man. But yes, the anger is still there, and my anger is still there... I just have to find, I just find a way each and every day to channel my energy in a positive manner which... I've been doing that. And at the same time, finding ways to release some of that anger, whether it's being active, bein' in sports... you know, doing other things, being involved in other things, and talking about it, and being a part of my family and enjoying it. But it's quite interesting that that simple thing right there, just by that little comment or statement, has already discounted me and has took me back to, 'you still in the projects', 'you still nothing', 'you still...', 'you're just a black man', you know, 'you're not educated'...

Speaker 5: Stripped away your degrees...

Speaker 1: Stripped away my degrees, my quote-unquote manhood I guess or whatever manhood they saw in me. Or, just what I've learned, what I've overcome, all of that. Null and void.

Focus Group Transcript 3

Speaker 1: An interesting experience, background, that impacted my perceptions of the social service world... and I haven't really studied it, you know, but I do get a sense that a lot of the professors in social work are white women.

And, a lot of the papers that have been written, you know, about families, black families, Latino families, white families, are white women professors.

And, I was trained as a physician at UCSD. And, during the training process, there was times where you get to hang with social workers-in-training because you learn to ask some of the same investigative questions of a family when you're trying to figure out what, you know, the chief complaint is, what the issue is, what they need help with.

And what you're trained to do is to, you know, '18 year old black male with multiple gun shot wounds' or you know. You're trained to, kinda to, label folks and get them into one sentence to describe their situation.

[Group laughter in background]

Speaker 2: You got some resolve behind that one...

Speaker 3: In one sentence?

Speaker 1: Yep. And you see, what happens with young social workers... what I saw, is mostly young, white women who had really good hearts it seemed to me, but they get thrown into a system where they have a caseload of thirty-five folks where, like you say, they go out to a family, they don't have time to really get to know you. They are trying to collect; they are trying to get their little data sheet filled out so they can go back and figure out what the disposition: should they yank the child from the home? Should they, you know, go get the Sheriff and come back to the house?

They have, in a way, an agenda from the beginning because they don't have any time... and they're trying to make a difference. But, because they get thrown in with having a caseload of thirty-five families or whatever, they end up seeing some really horrific stuff. They do see some abuse and neglect.

And then they get tainted, it seemed to me, in a two-year period because they're overworked and they end up with really bad cases. And so then, they start to develop these pro-forma... these assumptions, stereotypes, and labels...

Speaker 3: And everybody goes in it...

Speaker 1: Exactly, and the next time they deal with a black man, no matter if he have a degree, no matter if he loves his mom and wants to have a close relationship with his mom, you know, their experience from their first two years in training... and you know, now they're a social worker supervisor...



Focus Group Transcript 4

Speaker 1: Well, ever since I could remember, we were... my family's probably not, well, we've been on top, in our, like in our hearts and in our thoughts and...

[Pause] But to the society, to the world, I guess we were, I don't know, lower-middle-class most of my life.

And being... being twenty and still young as I am, it's... I don't know... I don't really know what I'm trying to say, but...

Speaker 2: Well, take your time.

Speaker 1: Yeah. I... As long as I remember, it's like...

Speaker 2: Were you a resident at Toussaint?

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: Okay, why don't you speak to your arrival? How did you wind up being at Toussaint?

Speaker 1: Well, when I was...before then... I moved in when I was like 15. Before that, we had just been bouncing in and out of shelters and moving once a month. So, my family had been moving around from place to place, shelter to shelter, and just... and my brother was there, he can explain his story... but, I just felt like there was something that I needed to do.

And noticing that my mother was always in a tough situation, it was as my brain began to function and started to open up to new things and new thoughts and a new kind of look on life, and I would notice that it was really hard for her. And I would notice all the problems she'd go through.

And, it kinda dawned on me, that maybe I should try and do something because I noticed that, you know, the longer I was there; the harder it was for her to take care of all of us.

So, I just felt like, in order for me to leave, it would be helpful to her if I could leave, train to get a job, and stay in school, and then I would be able to help her because when I was there, it wasn't really something that I think I could achieve. So, once I left, it did become a lot easier. It helped her a lot.

It was kinda hard not living with her...it was definitely this homesick kind of feeling that I had for the 5 years that I was gone, so...

Speaker 2: So, Toussaint was a choice for you? You went to Toussaint as a choice?

Speaker 1: [Nods head yes]



Gallery Walk

I believe that Black fathers ...

I know that Black fathers ...

I have been taught that Black fathers ...

When I talk about Black men, I think ...

When I am close to Black men, I feel ...



Scenario 1

You are a new social worker and have been assigned your first case. The mother and her infant child need services to support their survival. The mother is new to the system. Her background is one of the upper middle class. The whole system is foreign to her and she is embarrassed to be there. Her child is the result of a one night fling; however, she did not believe in abortion and is currently considering giving the baby up and is ridden with guilt. As you are gaining information, the mother shares very little knowledge of the child's father; however, there are indications to the contrary. The client is white and informs you that the father is Black.

Typically, what would you do?

Alternately, what can be done?

Scenario 2



A young father (age 19) did not graduate from high school. His girlfriend (also 19) is pregnant; however, she and her family do not want to raise the child. The parents of the young mother are angry with the young father for “getting their baby pregnant” and call the authorities when the baby is born. The young father is committed to taking on the responsibility of his child. Although his only employment involves unsteady menial jobs, he is determined to make something of himself. He lives with his parents who are very supportive of him. The maternal grandparents are adamant about the child not being raised by the father. They do not have a particular reason for this decision, but feel if he raises the child, they would eventually become involved with the child’s life. That would get in the way of the future planned for the young mother.

The young father has come to get help for himself and the baby. A case is open. Now what?



Scenario 3

A mother with two children is receiving aid. The father has been in the picture off and on and the reason is not known why. The mother is a victim to drugs and the children are placed in foster care. The mother insists that the father has no desire to engage with the children, she reports that he has been abusive to them and she does not know where he is located. In truth, the father has been looking for his children for some time, and has become more diligent after hearing through the grapevine that the mother lost the children due to her drug use. The father has contacted CWS to assist him. He is African American. He has a job and a high school education. He lives in a one bedroom apartment. He wants to be with the children desperately and raise them himself. You have knowledge of the children's status, but the file says that he is abusive.

Discuss what usually happens.

Discuss what should happen.



Paradigm Shift

CWS

Program/Policy/Procedures:

- *Advocate eliminating the institutional approach to CWS in service delivery and CPS intervention.
- *Provide specific training for workers regarding absent fathers' involvement.
- *Case Planning: develop case planning with the inclusion of the nonresident father and his family where safety is not an issue.
- *Culturally appropriate support systems (afro-centric view); counseling, parenting, self-identity, other afro-centered professionals and services in and outside the immediate community of residency.

JUDICIAL

- *Paternity: Early identification and involvement with father ensures more effective outcomes for the child. Also begins an early bonding process for the child.
- *Mothers: Establish a trust building relationship with mother where appropriate to understand the dynamics between mother and bio-father.
- *Child Support: Assist fathers in support services; i.e. training, jobs, housing, and visitation in conjunction with financial needs for the child. Sending fathers to jail for non-support increases the inability for the father to engage with the mother to seek gainful employment, communicate with CWS and his child

SOCIETAL

- *Institutional: acknowledge fathers plight of the systemic factors impacting his involvement with his children. However, it is not an excuse for absenteeism.
- *Systemic: recognize the historical biases of the varying environments that must be navigated for the father to be engaged with CWS and his children.

OPERATIONAL

*Support Systems for Dads:

Provide information for Dads regarding local and community resources to assist him with his survival and involvement with his children.

*Research information on programs and assisting services to support the father in his quest for involvement and/or permanency for his child

INDIVIDUAL

*Personal bias inventory;

Truthfully take ownership of our emotional and cultural prejudices toward Black males

Seriously take action to address our biases toward Black males/fathers

Challenge what we have been told and taught to believe



Develop and maintain an empathetic holistic approach to Black fatherhood involvement
Question the applications of policies, procedures, and service delivery where the black child and father is concerned

APPLICATION:

*Trust must be established first.

*New approaches (respectful) to the Father must be employed, i.e. community partnerships and collaborations that are culturally and gender sensitive for the African American father.

*Allow the father to be heard regarding his experiences with the mother, CWS and his fears without judgment.

*Enforcement and maintenance of current Policies on the books:

Services must be equitable for both parents

Defaults to the mother must not be automatic.

Search efforts for the father must be effective and ongoing...