Strengthening Family Relationships to Foster Children’s Development in Latino Immigrant Families

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Our focus today: low-income Latino immigrant families

This study is based on 20 years and 3 longitudinal intervention studies – the first two with working-class and middle-class couples:

The Becoming a Family Project:  
Second study: Of couples with a first child entering elementary school, followed until they entered high school:

Schoolchildren and their Families: 
TODAY, WE’LL FOCUS ON:

Supporting Father Involvement:

Couples group and fathers group interventions for:

- low-income families
- all of them Latino
- almost all Mexican American
- couples in which fathers or both parents immigrated to US between 1 and 45 years ago
THE QUESTION:

Can a preventive intervention program initially tested on primarily White, middle-class families and proven to work with low-income White and African American Families work with low-income Latino immigrant families who have all the stresses of middle-class families, plus poverty, minority status (now changing in California), and the strains of coping with immigration/assimilation?
Supporting Father Involvement:

- A preventive intervention
- To strengthen couple and parent-child relationships
- 800+ European American, African American, and Latino low-income families
- Sponsored by California DSS, Office of Child Abuse Prevention
- Randomized clinical trials
- Couples groups vs. Fathers groups vs. Control couples
IF WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN WHY FOCUS ON COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS AND FATHER INVOLVEMENT?
MAINTAINING COUPLE RELATIONSHIP QUALITY IS A CHALLENGE

• Marital satisfaction typically starts high but declines steadily over time without special help - more after having babies.

• This trend has been shown in more than 50 studies in the U.S., Canada, the U.K, Germany, and Israel.
Parents’ distress in their relationship as a couple has:
- Negative effects on their physical and mental health
- Negative effects on family stability
- Negative effect on children’s intellectual, social, and emotional development
WHY ENCOURAGE FATHERS’ POSITIVE INVOLVEMENT WITH THEIR CHILDREN?
HUNDREDS OF STUDIES SHOW THAT WHEN FATHERS ARE POSITIVELY INVOLVED WITH THEIR CHILDREN:

- **Children** are better off (emotionally, socially, academically)

- **Mothers** are better off (financially and emotionally)

- **Fathers** are better off (health, longevity, satisfaction)
WE ARE NOT SAYING that in order to grow up healthy children MUST have a father, but rather that the positive involvement of a father or a second parent has benefits for children.

WE ARE NOT ENCOURAGING violent or abusive fathers to become more involved with their children. The benefits to children come from positive father involvement.
THE SINGLE BEST PREDICTOR OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT IS:

- The quality of his relationship with the mother of his child

This is true in
- married, single parent, and divorced families
- high- and low-income families
- white and non-white families

And so, we approached father involvement through work with the relationship between the parents.
SUPPORTING FATHER INVOLVEMENT*

Development and Evaluation Team

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University of California, Berkeley

Marsha Kline Pruett, Smith College
Kyle Pruett, Yale University

Peter Gillette, University of California Berkeley
Data Manager

*Funded by California Office of Child Abuse Prevention
Ruth Bloch
Sculptor,
Israel
PHASE I PARTICIPANTS

• 289 families in 4 California counties completed Pre and 2 Post tests

• HERE WE REPORT ON THE 153 COUPLES IN WHICH MEN HAD IMMIGRATED TO THE U.S.

(Of these 153, 131 were couples in which both partners were U.S. immigrants)

• 84% Married
• 16% Not married but living together
SUPPORTING FATHER INVOLVEMENT

Random Assignment to:

- Informational session*
- 16 week Fathers groups*
- 16 week Couples groups*

*A Case Manager for every study family

Bi-monthly consultation for site staff

- Pre-intervention (baseline) assessments
- Post-intervention assessments 9 months after baseline
- Follow-up assessments 18 months after baseline
CURRICULUM FOR GROUPS

• 16 2-hour meetings
• Group leaders – clinically trained male-female teams

• Meetings focus on five aspects of life that are known risk/protective factors for family and child well-being
  • The individuals’ adjustment and mental health
  • The quality of the couple relationship
  • The quality of each parent-child relationship
  • Relationship patterns in the families of origin
  • The balance between life stresses and social supports outside the family
AGENDA FOR EACH MEETING

• Open ended check-in (on any topic: problems, successes)

• Theme for each meeting based on one of the 5 areas of risk

• Short presentations (e.g., parenting styles; carry-over from one generation to another)

• Discussions (e.g., what to revise from families of origin)

• Exercises (e.g., role plays, communication styles)

• Video (“Show your love”; clips from movies)

• “Homework” (e.g., Plan a date to nurture couple relationship – can’t spend more than $2)
PHASE I RESULTS
1-1/2 YEARS AFTER BASELINE

Results compared a one-time group meeting (control group) with ongoing groups for fathers or for couples:

• **Control group parents** didn’t change or got worse, and their children’s problem behaviors increased
• **Fathers groups** helped fathers become more involved in their children’s care, their children’s problem behaviors remained stable, **but couple relationship satisfaction declined**
• **Couples groups** helped fathers become more involved, reduced parenting stress, **kept couple satisfaction stable**, and children’s problem behaviors remained stable
PHASE II RESULTS

REPLICATION WITHOUT THE CONTROL GROUP

Very similar sample

Same positive changes for families assigned to fathers and couples groups
NEWEST PHASE III

230 total families in 5 California counties
Immigrant = 123 families:
- 99 both partners were immigrants
- 24 fathers were immigrants

50% CWS FAMILIES
-- referred by Child Welfare staff
-- couples assessed as safe to work with together; child not being abused now

50% NON-CWS FAMILIES
-- recruited as in prior phases
# Reasons for Referral to CWS (Not Necessarily Open Cases or Substantiated Claims)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>% of referrals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Physical Abuse</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Sexual Abuse</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Emotional Abuse</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Neglect</td>
<td>32%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental Absence</td>
<td>6%</td>
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RANDOM ASSIGNMENT TO:

COUPLES GROUP

NOW  DELAY

Intervention effect?

FATHERS GROUP

NOW  DELAY

Intervention effect?
## ADVANTAGES FOR LATINO IMMIGRANT FAMILIES OF IMMEDIATE TREATMENT VS. DELAY BY 2\textsuperscript{ND} POST-TEST (18 MONTHS)

### INDIVIDUAL
- Anxiety decreased (non CWS)
- Depressive symptoms decreased (CWS)

### COUPLE
- Couple relationship satisfaction remained stable
- Violent problem-solving decreased (non CWS, CWS)
- Collaborative prob-solving increased (CWS)

### PARENT-CHILD
- Father involvement increased to PO1 (CWS)
- Authoritarian Parenting Ideas decreased (non CWS, CWS)
- Positive co-parenting increased (non CWS, CWS)
## Intervention Effects (Now vs Delay Cont’d)

### Child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non CWS</th>
<th>CWS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DECREASE IN:</strong></td>
<td><strong>DECREASE IN:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Aggression</td>
<td>- Aggression</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Hyperactivity</td>
<td>- Hyperactivity</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Shy/Withdrawn</td>
<td>- Shy/Withdrawn</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>INCREASE IN:</strong></td>
<td><strong>INCREASE IN:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Social Competence</td>
<td>- Social Competence</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Cognitive Competence</td>
<td>- Cognitive Competence</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Nationally used questionnaire
77 parent-report items:

- History of child abuse
- Depression/Anger/Feelings of rejection, perfectionism, loneliness
- Authoritarian, negative view of parenting and child
- High couple/family conflict
• CHILD ABUSE POTENTIAL decreased (CWS)
• Family income increased ($8,0000+ per yr. (CWS)
TWO POLICY ISSUES
1. SKEPTICISM ABOUT COUPLE RELATIONSHIP INTERVENTIONS FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

“If couples are poor, why not give them money or help them increase their income?”

We are not aware of economic interventions that lead to improved relationship quality.

Our data suggest that enhancing couple and co-parenting relationships in low-income couples can lead to higher income.
THE “SILOS” PROBLEM

PROGRAMS FOR:
- COUPLES
- FATHER INVOLVEMENT
- PARENTING EFFECTIVENESS
- LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

are funded, planned, and administered in separate silos in government and social service settings.
The results of the Supporting Father Involvement intervention suggest that integrating programs from different silos –

• Couple relationships
• Parenting
• Father involvement

can provide an effective approach to enhancing children’s family environments.
DISSEMINATION

**California**: Strategies, a training organization, is disseminating the SFI program throughout California (State government funding)

**Canada**: Trial of SFI in 4 Alberta family agencies, monitored by Marsha Kline Pruett and Kyle Pruett (Foundation funding)
U.K. LAUNCHING NOW

PARENTS AS PARTNERS: BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS FOR CHILDREN

Trial of the SFI program in 5 London boroughs, monitored by Phil and Carolyn Cowan, and conducted by the Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships and Family Action

(British govt funding - DfE)
A FEW REFERENCES

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