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ABSTRACT

In December 1999, approximately 50 researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and other specialists in the field of fathers and families convened the Father Poverty and Social Vulnerability Roundtable. This report synthesizes the discussion of the themes of the roundtable and their implications for policymaking, the directions they indicate for future research, and the lessons they impart for practice. The first section of the report contains summaries of the research papers presented, as well as discussants' and participants' commentaries. The second section describes the current and emerging issues in father poverty and social vulnerability that emerged during the roundtable discussions. The third section explores the implications of the issues raised for policymaking. The fourth section offers new directions for research that arose from the discussion. The fifth section describes lessons learned for practice. The document concludes with the roundtable agenda and a list of participants. (KB)

The Father Poverty and Social Vulnerability Roundtable

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Introduction

On December 16-17, 1999, approximately 50 researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and other specialists in the field of fathers and families gathered at NCOFF to convene the Father Poverty and Social Vulnerability Roundtable. The discussion focused on a range of issues that low-income fathers and families face and which increasingly place children at risk—from intergenerational poverty, to the implications of welfare reform, to diminished economic opportunity. Participants also considered incentives for promoting father involvement in fragile families, and the role of research, policy, and practice in improving prospects for those who are most vulnerable.

The primary goals of the meeting, as for all of the roundtable discussions, were to:

1. Present a comprehensive analysis of issues and problems that have been identified in the literature;

2. Deepen the discourse between and among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers around the identified issues;

3. Engage participants in the development of a research agenda, as an initial activity in a longer-term research study;

4. Move the field and the roundtable past the discussion and presentation of ideas to focus intensively on sound research and sustain practice-driven research efforts; and

5. Involve practitioners in meaningful ways in the conceptualization of research projects pursued by NCOFF and others in the field.

Presenters delivered summaries of the key themes and findings from their research papers, after which discussants provided 15-minute responses. These responses broadened the papers' scope, placing the issues raised in a wider context or suggesting new ways of conceptualizing them. Moderators led a subsequent discussion among all roundtable participants on the themes introduced and deliberated new directions for research and practice, as well as implications for policymaking.

Several overarching themes, which are discussed in detail in the report, emerged from the discussion:

- To help move families towards self-sufficiency, welfare-to-work programs should consider how to promote increases in nonresident fathers' child support and increased participation in formal support systems, as well as find ways to make fathers' informal support count.

- Policymakers, politicians, practitioners, and civil authorities need to recognize that, for many in disenfranchised and impoverished communities, mainstream norms are not always applicable; in fact, younger unemployed or underemployed men are more likely to embrace these alternate norms as economic, legal, and social opportunities evaporate.

- Researchers and policymakers need to rethink and redefine measurements of paternal involvement when formulating research and policy agendas, in particular to encourage or gauge the involvement of unwed or nonresident fathers.

- Policymakers need to recognize that the success of welfare-to-work programs may be partially tied to the current economic boom; in the event of a downturn, having dismantled the social safety net will place former welfare recipients at even greater risk.

- The field must recognize that fatherhood needs to be defined within the contexts of race, age, developmental stage, and socioeconomic status.

- Researchers, policymakers, and legislators should explore the role of racial discrimination in perpetuating poverty.

- Father and family research needs to take on a broader, more comprehensive view when designing projects and drawing conclusions by improving "post mortems," joining various existing sources of information, and using qualitative data to supplement quantitative data.

- Researchers and policymakers should consider the issues of racism, community context, and intergenerational poverty, as well as the experiences of welfare recipients who moved off assistance prior to welfare-to-work reform, when conceptualizing studies and setting policy.

- Policymakers should take into account that fathers participate in ways currently not measured, that programs affect different communities and individuals in different ways, and that programs often have no link to complementary efforts by other agencies focused on the same population.

- Successful implementation of meaningful, dynamic social programs requires good communication: for example, between program participants and practitioners who are responsible for disseminating comprehensive program information on benefits and services; between researchers/policymakers and practitioners who can help to inform data collection and reporting on community values and norms; and between agencies and their staff who should receive effective training on the goals, methods, tools, and implications of the programs being administered.

This report synthesizes the discussion of these themes and their implications for policymaking, the directions they indicate for future research, and the lessons they impart for practice. The first section of this report contains summaries of the research papers presented at the roundtable, as well as discussants' and participants' commentaries. The second section describes the current and emerging issues in father poverty and social vulnerability that emerged during the roundtable discussions. The third section explores the implications of the issues raised for policymaking. The fourth offers new directions that arose from the discussion for research. The final section describes lessons learned for practice.

Summary of Roundtable Papers

NCOFF asked roundtable participants to explore the issues discussed in three papers: (1) "Nonresident Parents and Child Support: Initial Findings from the Wisconsin Child Support Demonstration Evaluation (CSDE)" by Maria Cancian et. al; (2) excerpts from *Code of the Streets: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City* by Elijah Anderson; and (3) "The Determinants of Paternal Involvement Among Unwed Fathers" by Waldo Johnson. The remainder of this section summarizes the three papers and the related commentary from research presentations. The cross-cutting issues raised during the discussion of these papers are described in the second section of this report.

"Nonresident Parents and Child Support: Initial Findings from the Wisconsin Child Support Demonstration Evaluation (CSDE)"

Presenter: Maria Cancian, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Discussants: Robert Boruch, University of Pennsylvania
John Bouman, National Poverty Law Center

Moderator: Tukufu Zuberi, University of Pennsylvania

Maria Cancian's paper focused on the initial results of the W-2 Child Support Demonstration Evaluation (CSDE) project, drawn from administrative data available through the third quarter after the first cohort of participants entered the program. In addition to presenting these results, she supplied preliminary analyses of other data collected for the demonstration from the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families.

Background on Wisconsin's W-2 Program

Wisconsin's W-2 program, Cancian argued, is an example of new policy approaches to child support enforcement under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) legislation. In September of 1997, the state of Wisconsin began implementation of W-2, which replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) cash assistance program. As Cancian explained, W-2 represents a dramatic departure from AFDC programs for assisting low-income families. The new program emphasizes work as a prerequisite for cash assistance and determines assistance levels independent of family size. It also attempts to link assistance to the "real world of work" by tying it to the actual hours of participation. In addition, resident parents participating in W-2 are allowed to keep all of the child support paid on behalf of their children—a 100 percent pass-through that is unique to Wisconsin.

Cancian makes a key distinction between formal and informal support when examining the impact of changes to welfare and child support policies, particularly since researchers and policymakers tend to focus on formal child support. In general, three policy options are open to states under TANF regarding child support:

1. The state retains all of the child support paid on behalf of welfare recipients in order to offset welfare costs, an approach that most states have adopted;

2. The state passes through a portion of child support to create an increased incentive for parents to cooperate with the formal system, a strategy that approximately one-third of states employ; and

3. The state passes through all child support and disregards the assistance in the calculation of benefits for recipients, an approach that is unique to Wisconsin.

Wisconsin's philosophy for W-2 avoids the problems inherent in measuring informal support and promotes the engagement of families with the formal system by disconnecting TANF benefits from child support and passing through child support dollars to custodial parents. The W-2 approach engages parents without a disability to enter the real world of work. It outlines the following requirements as incentives to parents both for working and for participating in the formal system:

1. **Benefit checks follow paychecks**. The recipient's first benefits check can only follow paid work.

2. **Family size is irrelevant**. The payment of benefits is not varied according to family size.

3. **Child support is passed through to families**. Participants receive all child support paid on behalf of their children.

The work component of W-2 is organized according to what Cancian calls a "self-sufficiency ladder," upper and lower tiers of employment or employment experience for which benefits vary. In upper-tier employment, participants receive no cash payments from the state. It includes two forms: the most job-ready applicants are provided case management services to find *Unsubsidized Jobs* on the open market or to improve their current job status; the second form, *Trial Jobs*, provides work experience in jobs for which the state partially subsidizes the employer. Lower-tier jobs are accompanied by cash assistance and other social services. These jobs include *Community Service*, or public service jobs, and *W-2 Transition*, which includes work activities, education, and training for those least able to work because of a disability or caring for a child with a disability.

W-2 is operating as a waiver demonstration program with a required evaluation based on the random assignment of participants to experimental and control groups. Cases in the experimental group receive all child support paid on their behalf. Since the state did not have to calculate the pass-through, families received their child support payments within 48 hours of fathers' payments. Under AFDC, the delay was up to two months.

Cases in the control group receive a reduced pass-through when they are in a lower-tier job and are eligible for a cash grant, but not when they are in the two upper job tiers. The pass-through is reduced up to $50 per month or 41 percent of what is paid, whichever is greater. While the delay was not a problem, Cancian believes one of the primary disadvantages of this approach is its lack of relevance to current policies, which tend to pass through all or none of fathers' child support payments. Its complicated nature confused both case workers and clients alike.

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Preliminary W-2 Evaluation Findings

The CSDE project monitored its effects on the payment of child support by nonresident fathers. W-2 was also intended to monitor the impact of welfare reform on families and their interaction with the social services system. Highlights from the evaluation's findings include the following:

Earnings of Female Former Welfare Recipients. Of the women who left welfare before the implementation of W-2, 35 percent were earning over the poverty line. After the initial implementation of W-2, only 25 percent of comparable women earned an income at that level.

Welfare Case Loads. As expected, case loads did drop: By 1997, the AFDC caseload in Wisconsin had already fallen by 80 percent over the previous decade—from over 100,000 cases to about 22,000. Even as officials developed final plans and budgets for W-2 agencies, caseloads declined at an even faster rate: for example, by 50 percent between December 1996 and December 1997.

Characteristics of Female W-2 Participants. As Cancian noted, the women who remained on the welfare roles in W-2 were those who experienced more significant barriers to employment.

Use of Services. Although social services were available to those who were not receiving cash assistance, these participants tended not to use them. "We wondered," Cancian said, "if it was because the program maintained the principle that everyone should work and that services shouldn't be pushed on them if they don't ask—or if it's really that the program wasn't telling participants what was available to them." For example, while assistance with child care and health care was readily available to participants who worked, Cancian described the program as being "less hospitable" to providing these services.

Payment of Child Support. The percentage of legal, nonresident parents paying formal child support in the last quarter of the evaluation represented only minimal variation: 33 percent of nonresident parents in the control group compared to 34 percent in the experimental group. The mean amount of child support paid per month did vary, however, by a small but statistically significant margin: $187 per month for the control group, and $199 per month for the experimental group. Overall, one-third of resident mothers are receiving child support; one-third have payment orders, but are not receiving support from nonresident fathers; and one-third either have established paternity but no support orders or have not established paternity.

Cancian concluded that W-2 is having an effect on moving welfare recipients towards self-sufficiency, but the magnitude of the difference is not substantial. However, she believes that more time is needed to assess with greater accuracy the effects of shifts in participation, child support payment, and outcomes for families and children.

Information on Nonresident Participating Fathers

Cancian and her colleagues were able to gather significant amounts of information on nonresident fathers participating in W-2's CSDE project through administrative data, through the first wave of administration of the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families, and through in-depth interviews with African-American nonresident fathers in Milwaukee. When considering these data, readers should note that the fathers responding to the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families were disproportionately white, were employed, and had a child living in an urban county.

Demographic Characteristics. A vast majority of the fathers (64 percent), as reported in the administrative data, were African American, followed by white (24.4 percent), Hispanic (7.8 percent), Native American (2.9 percent), and Asian American (0.9 percent) men.

Age. Age distribution among fathers in both the administrative and survey data was relatively even. Most fathers in the administrative data were aged 31 to 40 (33.1 percent), followed closely by young fathers, aged 25 or younger (30 percent). A fair portion, however, were aged 26 to 30 (23.4 percent).

Location of Child. A vast majority of the children whose fathers were participating in W-2 lived in Milwaukee (71.8 percent); 18.4 percent resided in other urban areas in Wisconsin, and only 9.7 percent lived in rural areas.

Fathers' Educational Attainment. According to the survey data, most fathers had finished high school: 36 percent had attained a high school diploma, 14 percent had pursued post-high school education with no additional degree, and 7 percent had earned a post-high school degree. A fair portion (26 percent) had not finished high school, and 17 percent had completed their high school graduate equivalency diploma (GED).

Employment. According to the administrative data, fathers were roughly split between those who were employed (47 percent) and those who were unemployed or whose employment status was unknown (53 percent).

Hours Worked. Although a fair portion of all fathers who responded to the survey were employed, not many were working full-time: only 34 percent of fathers worked 31 to 40 hours per week, while 13 percent maintained part-time hours. On the other hand, of those who did work full-time, almost 30 percent worked more than 40 hours per week.

Earnings and Wages. According to the administrative data, almost three-quarters of participating fathers earned $5,000 or less per quarter, with the largest percentage of fathers (42 percent) earning under $2,500. However, fathers in the survey data received relatively high wages: 57 percent earned $7.50 or more per hour, and 44 percent earned $8.50 or more. Although the wages fathers received seem to be higher than minimum wage, their overall earning potential was limited by working part-time hours.

Excerpts from *Code of the Streets: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*

Presenter: Elijah Anderson, University of Pennsylvania

Discussants: Aisha Ray, The Erikson Institute
William Darity, University of North Carolina

Moderator: Ray Lorion, University of Pennsylvania

Elijah Anderson discussed his ethnographic work on economic changes and their impact at "ground zero" on the lives of inner-city African-American communities, as reported in his 1999 book, *Code of the Streets: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City.* Based on extensive interviews he conducted with residents in working-class and impoverished black neighborhoods in Philadelphia, Anderson's book uses personal narratives to trace the growth and transformation of the inner-city "underclass" as it co-exists and interacts with law-abiding and working-class families within the same communities.

Anderson places the lives of residents in the context of diminishing access to economic opportunity, citing deindustrialization, the emerging global economy, and an emphasis on technology as the causes. These changes have led to a steady loss of the unskilled and semiskilled manufacturing jobs that had sustained the urban working class during the industrial revolution. At the same time, he explained, welfare reform has led to a much weakened social safety net for these communities, whose residents are increasingly at serious risk of violence, death, and incarceration and who do not have adequate protection from civil authorities. "For the most desperate people," Anderson writes, "many of whom are not effectively adjusting to these changes—elements of today's submerged tenth—the underground economy of drugs and crime often emerges to pick up the slack."

As economic changes undermine the stability of these communities and as their faith in the criminal justice system erodes, social behavior is increasingly organized around the code of the streets. Residents adopt this code to protect themselves from danger and take personal responsibility for their own security—to defend themselves physically and meet violence with violence. According to Anderson, "growing up in such environments, young people are sometimes lured into the way of the street or become its prey. For many of these youths, the drug trade seems to offer a ready niche, a viable way to 'get by' or to enhance their wealth, even if they are not full-time participants."

Adapting W.E.B. DuBois' description of the social organization of the black community in *The Philadelphia Negro*, Anderson identifies two groups living within these inner-city neighborhoods: those "decent" and law-abiding residents and their families and those residents who participate in the underground economy. In his presentation to the roundtable, Anderson described the experiences of men in these communities by embodying them in two characters: "Mr. Johnson," an older, retired, "decent" man who has worked hard to support his family and seen better economic days, and "Marvin," a younger man who tends to follow the code of the street. Marvin has been incarcerated and sold drugs, but is trying to support himself and his child with the meager wages he receives in a service-sector job. Like many younger men in these communities, Anderson explained, Marvin often must move back and forth between "legitimate" jobs and participation in the underground economy.

While they have both lived in the same community, the experiences of Mr. Johnson and Marvin are vastly different, and Anderson sees an increasing disconnect developing between younger and older generations. The social tender that these men seek to gain involves respect—in Mr. Johnson's case, that respect has been gained from his ability to support his family. For Marvin, whose access to economic opportunity is severely constrained, that respect is gained more through his ability to navigate the code of the streets.

In describing the ascendancy of the code of the streets, Anderson's work highlights the social dynamic at work within increasingly vulnerable inner-city communities and families. It is a dynamic Anderson believes is often misunderstood by liberals and conservatives alike, who "tend to stress values like individual responsibility when considering issues such as drugs, violence, teen pregnancy, family formation, and the work ethic. Some commentators readily blame 'welfare' for poverty and find it hard to see how anyone, even the poor, would deliberately deviate from the norms of mainstream culture. But the profound changes our society is currently undergoing in the way it organizes work have enormous cultural implications for the ability of the populations most severely affected by these developments to function in accordance with mainstream norms."

As economic changes undermine the stability of inner-city communities and as their faith in the criminal justice system erodes, social behavior is increasingly organized around the code of the streets.

Anderson believes his work points to an indictment of a system that has allowed the erosion of these communities to occur, for a profound and utter alienation to develop among residents at "ground zero." These communities do not have access to family-supporting jobs—or to the education and social capital necessary to land those jobs—in order to function in the new economy. To understand the conditions within these vulnerable communities, Anderson believes that policymakers, politicians, practitioners, and civil authorities must come to recognize the dynamics underlying the stress becoming widespread in low-income neighborhoods: the impact of structural and economic factors, racial discrimination, and increasing ethnic competition that have disadvantaged

members of these communities and have given rise to the violence and crime associated with the code of the streets.

"The Determinants of Paternal Involvement Among Unwed Fathers"

Presenter: Waldo Johnson, University of Chicago

Discussant: Margaret Beale Spencer, University of Pennsylvania

Moderator: Earl Johnson, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation

Waldo Johnson's study examines paternal involvement among young, unwed, nonresident fathers using data from the Fragile Families Survey for two cities: Oakland, California and Austin, Texas. Data collection for the study included interviewing new mothers and a large percentage of fathers at the hospital within 24 hours after their children are born. Fathers who were not present were interviewed as soon as possible after birth. Couples will be followed longitudinally at one year, two and one-half years, and four years. Data on child health and development, as well as child care, will be collected each year from the mother, in addition to in-home assessments of child well-being.

Johnson believes that the Fragile Families data provide an important opportunity to explore the relationship between fathers' presence at the birth of their children and their intentions for actual involvement later in children's lives, particularly for children born out of wedlock to young fathers. He analyzed and compared both mothers' and fathers' responses accordingly in two areas, paternal behavior and paternal intentions. In addition, he examined fathers' reporting of their paternal values.

The definition Johnson used for paternal involvement included two behavioral indicators: (1) whether fathers visited mothers in the hospital and (2) whether they contributed financially, or in other ways, during the pregnancy. Paternal intentions were benchmarked according to whether the father planned to be involved in raising the child, whether he planned to provide support in the child's first year, whether the child will have the father's last name, and whether the father's name will be on the birth certificate. Paternal values include dads' assessment of the value of being a father and having the opportunity for involvement in their children's lives. As follow-ups are conducted, Johnson and other researchers will be able to track if fathers follow through with their intentions, as well as how early involvement corresponds to later involvement in their children's lives.

Major Findings on Paternal Involvement

Johnson's initial analysis generated several major findings on paternal involvement:

1. Overall, paternal involvement at birth is high among the couples surveyed, ranging from 75 to 94 percent. In general, mothers as well as fathers also reported a high degree of father involvement during the pregnancy. This finding sharply contrasts prevailing assumptions about father involvement for children born to low-income, unwed parents—which often represents stereotypes of "deadbeat dads" who sever the relationship with the mother before the pregnancy goes full term.

2. Based on mothers' responses, fathers who were interviewed had more than double the rate of involvement than those fathers who were not interviewed. For example, only 44 percent of mothers without corresponding father interviews reported that fathers contributed financially during pregnancy, compared to 89 percent of mothers with corresponding father interviews. According to Johnson, since fathers who were present in the hospital were more likely to be interviewed, this variable not only corresponds to involvement at birth but also represents a good predictor of their later involvement.

3. Fathers' estimation of their participation and intentions is higher than what mothers report. The unwed mothers indicated that 76 to 78 percent of fathers contributed, financially and in other ways, during the pregnancy and that 79 percent visited mothers in the hospital at the time of birth. Fathers, on the other hand, reported much higher rates of participation for two of the variables: 92 percent said they contributed money and almost 90 percent said they contributed in other ways during the pregnancy. Johnson believes the discrepancy may be due to the positive feelings experienced by fathers at the time of the birth which may influence the estimation of their involvement. Regarding fathers' intentions, there was a consistent difference between mothers' and fathers' responses—although both of their answers were much higher than might otherwise be expected. For example, while 100 percent of fathers said they wanted to be involved in raising their babies, only 94 percent of mothers said fathers wanted to do so. While 85 percent of fathers pledged financial support in the coming year, only 75 percent of mothers said fathers promised to provide such support.

Prevailing assumptions about the involvement of low-income, unwed fathers often represent stereotypes of "deadbeat dads" who sever the relationship with the mother before the child is born.

4. Although differences exist, there is broad consistency between mothers' and fathers' responses. Johnson sees this consistency as important corroboration of the validity of mothers' estimation of fathers' behaviors—a key issue, since the field of fathers and families has relied on surveys and interviews with mothers for primary data collection.

5. The unwed fathers interviewed expressed strong paternal values. More than 90 percent of these fathers agree that fatherhood is fulfilling and that the potential loss of paternal involvement would be a devastating event. Johnson notes that, in a subsequent examination of these values, it would be interesting to explore whether and how the values of the interviewed fathers are different from or similar to those of the fathers not interviewed.

6. The couples' relationship status during pregnancy does predict paternal involvement. Nonresident fathers are less involved during pregnancy and at the time of birth than cohabiting fathers. Specifically, fathers in cohabiting relationships are more likely to visit mothers in the hospital: 93 percent of cohabiting fathers did so, while only 68 percent of fathers in "visiting" relationships did, and eleven percent of those who had ended their relationship appeared in the hospital at the time of their children's birth. In addition, mothers reported that fathers under the age of 20 are less likely to visit the hospital. Mothers' reports of financial contribution during pregnancy reveal a similar story.

Concluding Thoughts

Johnson believes that the results of his study lead to several points for further discussion:

1. The field should rethink how to measure father involvement. Traditionally, paternal involvement has been measured by paternal presence in the household, usually as an indication of co-habitation. However, as Johnson pointed out, family status within the communities served is often very different from the notions held by researchers and policymakers. Specifically, the notion that nonresidence equals non-involvement does not hold. The study also reinforces the importance of longitudinal tracking of involvement, since fathers are involved differently at various points in time. Such long-term study helps to determine what constitutes important and significant involvement at different stages of a child's life. In addition, because the status of couples' relationships are most predictive of involvement, establishing cooperative agreements between parents for sharing responsibility for the child is important.

2. The field should learn from the motivation of nonresident fathers who are involved with their children. Johnson asked, "Why would a father want to spend time with the mother and his children if the parents are not married or co-habiting, or even in a relationship?" He believes that his study, and others like it, could indicate how to encourage father involvement beyond fostering marriage, a strategy on which many policy efforts currently focus. Why are fathers involved? Johnson believes their motivation is driven by broader issues around socialization: for example, what they have been taught about being fathers; what social norms their specific communities promote regarding fatherhood and responsibility; the intrinsic personal satisfaction they may receive from being fathers; and, finally—independent of paternity establishment or relationship status—the fact that they care for the mothers of their children.

3. Examine other aspects of fathers' lives that promote involvement. Johnson found that the level of father involvement for the couples in the study corresponded to the extent to which the fathers engaged with their other children outside of the focal child. In addition, he wanted to pursue the extent to which religious and spiritual beliefs influenced participation. Ironically, in these data, higher church attendance corresponded to lower levels of paternal participation—a correlation that is most likely due to the fact that the sample consists primarily of very young fathers. However, Johnson believes that researchers should be cautious about how they frame the role of religion in promoting values around fatherhood and father involvement.

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Current and Emerging Issues in Father Poverty and Social Vulnerability

Based on the research presented in the three papers, roundtable participants raised five key topics regarding poverty and social vulnerability for poor fathers and their families: (1) the impact of welfare reform; (2) long-term effects of intergenerational poverty; (3) facts about racial discrimination; (4) experiences of fathers in low-income communities; and (5) incentives for father participation. This section summarizes the issues discussed for each topic.

The Impact of Welfare Reform on Poor Fathers and Families

While state legislators and agencies laud the significant drop in welfare caseloads in the wake of welfare reform, participants cautioned that the outcomes for fathers and their families may be less celebratory. Although many assume that the path from welfare leads to work, the transition may be more complicated, particularly for minority fathers, whose access to family-supporting jobs is more likely to be limited.

The Economic Steamship. Welfare reform is happening in the context of a unique economic period—the lowest, sustained rates of unemployment in the postwar era. The commonly held notion is that recipients are able to move from welfare to work, simply because more jobs are available. In many cases, former recipients may experience a stable transition; however, participants noted that this assumption can lead to a false conclusion. In a vigorous economy, those who cannot find work are often blamed for their own situations. Although unemployment is low, it is simply not clear if the jobs are indeed there for those with little work experience, low levels of occupational or behavioral skills, or limited access to the networks that could lead to employment. Moreover, it is unclear if the jobs that exist are, in fact, "good" jobs—ones that promise stable, full-time employment with benefits and opportunities for advancement. Given the growth of service-sector industries, which tend to offer low pay, part-time hours, no benefits, and no career ladders, new job seekers may not find the stable, family-supporting jobs necessary to move them out of poverty.

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The Competition Between Work and Education. In an economy that also increasingly favors workers with high levels of skill, it is essential for former recipients or for those transitioning off welfare to receive training and education to improve their employability and employment prospects. However, as Linda Mellgren of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services noted, an unfortunate tension has arisen between work and education. "The Parents Fair Share Demonstration indicated that men and fathers were so desperate for jobs," said Mellgren, "even when education and training were made available, they worked as much as they could when they landed a job and left education and training behind." Put another way, when a father must spend time and energy on earning wages, it is not that his motivation to upgrade skills decreases, it is that

the constraints to do so increase. In general, the current welfare-to-work environment is simply not conducive to workforce skills development for those who need it most.

The Economic Iceberg. In addition, few are considering the iceberg that looms ahead when the booming economy comes to an end. As social services and supports are systematically dismantled during this period of economic growth, nothing has been left to serve as a lifeboat. When the inevitable recession occurs, as John Bouman of the National Poverty Law Center pointed out, policymakers and legislators will no longer be able to ascribe unemployment to a lack of motivation.

Given the potential for increasing rather than reducing vulnerability, Bouman described what he sees as three groups of former recipients developing in the wake of welfare reform.

1. **Those who find work.** A fair portion of former welfare recipients may be expected to find work. However, as Bouman and others noted, little discussion focuses on establishing a path that leads up and out of poverty. "The first job after welfare ends is just a start," said Bouman. "What happens if the work is episodic or tied closely to business cycles?"

2. **Those who are hard to serve but still receiving benefits.** For these recipients—who do receive some benefits but are still not working—Bouman believes it is difficult to determine the source of the problem. What are the barriers that they face to gaining employment and self-sufficiency? He believes that a closer look at the realities of these individuals and their families may reveal a stark counter-argument to the notion that it is a lack of motivation keeping recipients dependent on assistance.

3. **Those who are hard to serve and not on aid.** Bouman believes that this group of former recipients share the same barriers to productive employment as those who are still receiving some benefits, but now face increased vulnerability. To understand empirically the extent of that vulnerability, as directly caused by welfare reform, he asked a simple question: In the ten years since Wisconsin initiated caseload reduction, has there been an increase in the number of families living below the poverty level? Bouman, along with other participants, believes that the answer would yield a substantial figure, and he hypothesizes that the bottom quintile and decile of families on the income distribution are quickly losing ground with respect to the poverty line due to the loss of benefits.

The implication of these three emerging classes of former recipients is that, rather than improving their outcomes, welfare reform itself may be exposing them to increased levels of vulnerability. As Bouman reiterated, even those who secure initial jobs have no guarantee that these jobs will provide sufficient hours or wages to support them or their families, will be long-term, or will provide the work experience necessary to enhance their employability.

The Long-Term Effects of Intergenerational Poverty

Compounding the current dangers that welfare reform may pose for those who are already vulnerable, issues of intergenerational poverty continue to place fathers and their families at risk. As Vivian Gadsden, Director of NCOFF, explained, unless the outcomes of programs and policies, at the state or federal level, have a long-lasting, positive effect on the lives of children in low-income households, the benefits of any effort will be short-lived.

"The fact that we have some families with up to four generations living in poverty demonstrates how they can become isolated in low-income communities and become highly vulnerable," said Gadsden.

Changing outcomes for children by improving prospects for their parents is an important first-order goal. However, Gadsden also sees the need to conceptualize current fathers themselves as children of an older generation of parents. How have family-of-origin issues affected the outcomes of current parents? How have they affected fathers' participation in programs and their reliance on public assistance? How have they limited access to the networks and opportunities that might help to improve their situations? What have they learned about parenting that has helped them to survive despite extreme, difficult circumstances? How does this knowledge assist or hinder their ability to move out of poverty?

"The fact that we have some families with up to four generations living in poverty demonstrates how they can become isolated in low-income communities and become highly vulnerable," said Gadsden. Although programs and policies must contend with immediate concerns, it is important to examine the impact of intergenerational poverty on vulnerable fathers and families in order to determine why a legacy of poverty might exist, how some generations or family members emerge out of poverty, and what interventions can assist in improving access to opportunity.

The Realities of Racial Discrimination

Roundtable participants noted that, while issues of poverty and social vulnerability are approached under the rubric of class, there is still a need to explore the subtleties of racism and how it intersects with access to opportunity. Clearly, issues of poverty are salient across race—not only for those populations labeled as "minority" but also for different ethnicities within racial categories. Some participants pointed out that the research presented focused almost entirely on the African-American community. However, others indicated that it was important to do so, since this community is so often misunderstood and misrepresented. In addition, race as an issue has become absent in many public conversations—instead, race is often contextualized according to income, education levels, and even geographic location. The result is that the role of racial discrimination in perpetuating poverty is rarely considered with the necessary intensity among researchers, policymakers, and legislators.

As an example of the too-often unexplored role racism plays in limiting access to opportunity, Gadsden cited a chapter in William Julius Wilson's *When Work Disappears*, which contains ethnographic accounts of interviews with employers stating why they do not hire workers from the inner city. "Employers' comments clearly show their racial prejudice," said Gadsden, "and even though they are included in a widely read work, the issue of race itself is rarely addressed or analyzed in scholarly or policy debates." The implications of such a conversation would range from barriers to employment, to effects on educational achievement, to cultural definitions of appropriate father roles, family structures, and community values.

Issues of poverty are salient across race—not only for those populations labeled as "minority" but also for different ethnicities within racial categories.

The Experiences of Fathers in Low-Income Communities

As Aisha Ray of the Erikson Institute commented, the definition of the "decent" father that is applied by agencies and policymakers to dads in many low-income communities has not been informed by real experiences within the communities themselves. In fact, the widely shared notions of what constitutes a good father often includes expectations that are difficult for advantaged fathers to meet. Ray suggested that there is a need to examine within high-risk communities how the role of "competent father" is constructed and how fathers attempt to fulfill those obliga-

tions, particularly given the tremendous pressures they face. Ray mentioned the notion of the "good enough" mother, who attempts to meet her responsibilities in a reasonable way, and believes that such a framework could also be used to benchmark fathers' participation.

Deborah Johnson of Michigan State University believes that young men in vulnerable communities may be involved in their children's lives in ways no researchers and policymakers—or even practitioners—are aware of or view as important. Not only could researchers' conception of fatherhood be misaligned with those of program participants, researchers could be observing a group of fathers who are not representative of the majority of fathers within a community. Fathers who require support or who are in arrears on their child support may overshadow the experiences of other fathers in low-income communities who are more engaged, but in more informal ways, in their children's lives.

It must be acknowleged that behaviors—fathering behaviors or others—do not occur in a vacuum, and that changes do happen over time.

Ray Lorion added that developmental issues must be addressed, particularly for young and adolescent fathers. He indicated that the most significant developmental predictor of behavior is life expectancy: that is, planning for the future is much different for those who believe that their future is limited. Citing psychologist Erikson, Lorion mentioned the disparate effects of ego integrity versus despair in vulnerable communities. He suspects that despair translates as a focus on the present. However, as fathers in communities at risk age, their expectations and motivation for becoming responsible fathers may change.

As Margaret Beale Spencer of the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education noted, the framework used to describe male development must be sensitive to context—in particular, the issue of a man's identity as a father, which is critical to the developmental process. It must be acknowledged that social behaviors—fathering behaviors or others—do not occur in a vacuum, and that changes do happen over time. According to Spencer, any research that explores father involvement from the developmental perspective must be sensitive to cultural context and situated within a life-course framework.

Consequently, it is essential to be more sensitive when defining the meaning of responsible fatherhood. It is equally important to ensure that the term "fatherhood" itself has a common understanding as it is used in research, across programs, and within the realm of policy. For example, it is necessary to refine the notion of who is a custodial and non-custodial parent particularly in light of nonbinding custody agreements—while this status often represents a window of opportunity for intervention, policymakers currently do not have the data necessary to make recommendations that are informed by the actual lives and norms for fathers within communities at risk.

Incentives for Father Participation in Fragile Families

Spencer suggested that a more inclusive theoretical framework should be used to capture fully the perspective of the individual father: that is, why fathers, particularly non-resident, young, and low-income fathers, become involved in their children's lives and how that involvement is developmentally determined. Spencer suggested that "a phenomenological variation of ecological theory with an identity focus and culturally relevant perspective is essential to remaining respectful of an individual father's experiences."

Such an approach must also consider lessons from Systems Theory, which posits that human beings are continually challenged by risks associated with gender, age, socioeconomic status, and structural issues. "The bottom line is that the risks are linked to a net effect and that social and economic supports

are needed to offset those challenges, particularly the developmental problem that is being addressed," said Spencer. These stresses lead to unavoidable coping strategies that can be adaptive or maladaptive. Ultimately, the important issue is to be sensitive with respect to different communities when defining what is normative parental involvement.

Reassessing Financial Support as the Primary Measure of Involvement. Beyond financial measures, there is a host of ways in which fathers can support mothers in the raising of their children. In particular, participants cautioned researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to be careful not to focus the definition of involvement exclusively on informal financial assistance or fathers' ability to pay child support—and to examine the dynamics around such support more closely. Although some fathers are only involved in their children's lives by providing financial support, many would choose to participate in other ways but are actively excluded by mothers or other family members serving as gatekeepers. On the one hand, it cannot be assumed that financial involvement will lead to responsible fatherhood. On the other, additional barriers to becoming involved may also interfere with establishing father-child relationships. This issue is particularly relevant for fathers at "ground zero" who are isolated from social and family structures, not just from financial empowerment.

The Importance of Father-Mother Relationships in Determining Father Involvement. According to Linda Mellgren, continued exploration of the implications of the relationship between mother and father on father involvement is vital to understanding how fathers in vulnerable communities can become more active, positive participants in their children's lives. Citing Waldo Johnson's study, she stressed that variables such as financial contributions and father presence at the hospital actually serve as indicators of the strength of the relationship between father and mother. Longitudinal studies can be used to indicate how the strength of the mother-father relationship can affect the strength of the father-child relationship. Most importantly, Mellgren believes these studies can help approximate the minimal father-mother relationship that is necessary for father-child attachment to be initiated.

Lorion suggested that understanding the correlation between father involvement and the relationship between father and mother can lead to key opportunities for intervention—possibly to help alter negative stereotypes that fathers might have about their role, which could prevent extended involvement over time. In particular, the notion of fatherhood may become more of a reality for men as the child's delivery becomes imminent; in that sense, the large percentage of fathers present at the time of birth in Johnson's study may indicate opportunities for intervention.

Participants discussed new directions for research in the field of fathers and families, identifying the following avenues for scholarship to pursue: (1) improving the quality of "post mortems"; (2) building bridges across existing information sources; (3) investigating outcomes for those former participants not involved in welfare-to-work programs; (4) using combinations of qualitative and quantitative data to examine the lives of fathers and families at risk; (5) examining the contexts in which vulnerable communities find themselves; (6) exploring racial discrimination as a legitimate research issue; and (7) investigating intergenerational poverty. The following section summarizes their recommendations.

Improve the Quality of "Post Mortems"

According to Robert Boruch of the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education, the positive aspects of program evaluations such as Cancian's work on CSDE offer lessons for conducting "post mortems" on a program's virtues and vulnerabilities:

- One positive aspect of the study was its ability to mount randomized control groups, a difficult feat for many evaluations.
- The study represents the seizing of a moment of opportunity around policy changes—having institutions and experiments ready to move when the time is right—which Boruch thinks is essential for building the field.
- The study demonstrates the necessity of using "policy manipulative variables" that relate to human behavior in welfare experiments.

However, Boruch believes that the field, in general, has not fared well when conducting post mortems on why the magnitude of the positive effects of welfare reform experiments tends to be lower than expected or marginal, at best. He wonders if there are problems inherent in the statistical power of the experiments, the differences between the treatment and control groups, or the theoretical strength of the treatment itself. For example, was the difference in dollars between the pass-through for the experimental and control groups sufficient to make a difference in outcomes for families? "Weak treatments are chronic in these areas," said Boruch. "In learning how to do post mortems better, we need to develop disattenuated versions of the treatment effect—to better inform legislative staffers as well as researchers. As a basic question, we must ask, 'Are the scenarios plausible?'"

The field, in general, has not fared well when conducting post mortems on why the magnitude of the positive effects of welfare reform experiments tends to be lower than expected—or marginal, at best.

John Bouman suggested a series of improvements and directions that these types of evaluations might follow:

- **Investigate the effects of privatization on service delivery**, particularly since for-profit service providers may have an incentive not to make program participants aware of all of their benefits.
- **Examine the real source of welfare reform's savings**. Are costs down simply because caseloads have been sheared or because other benefits have been realized?

- **Identify the impact of child support on welfare recipients**. Do mothers or custodial parents use child support to get off public assistance? How would the impact of child support on welfare recipients change policymaking regarding welfare reform?

- **Understand the impact of child support on fathers**. At its best, W-2 only achieved marginal success in its emphasis on subsidized work, and it did not inform the field about the ability of such work to foster child support payments. To understand this issue better, researchers should consider investigating the interesting models of publicly-funded jobs in Philadelphia and some cities in California. In these settings, fathers are paid subsidized wages during training and then transitioned into the unsubsidized workforce—all the while, formal child support arrangements are being initiated.

Build Bridges Across Information Sources

Much of the information available to the field is "balkanized" and disjointed. Data sets, in particular, produce widely ranging statistics on a variety of variables regarding fathering and family outcomes. Furthermore, because many of the surveys that collect this information do not focus on fathering *per se*, they are not recognized as being relevant to the fathers and families field. Participants identified a need not only to coordinate information across sources but also to ensure that practitioners have ready access to the data to help build holistic programming.

In particular, Burt Barnow of Johns Hopkins University pointed out the critical step of standardizing—to the extent possible—how terms and variables are defined across the field to improve measurement and the interpretation of data. Gauging many of these measures is a difficult task in itself; how those measures are defined and captured is directly related to how they are interpreted in analyses. For example, depending on the particular definition of often nebulous terms such as "father involvement" and "spirituality" that are used, causal relationships, spurious correlations, and counter-intuitive conclusions could result. As Barnow said, "Different definitions equal different conclusions." The field needs to attempt to reach some consensus on the definition of these terms and how they are measured.

Look at the People *Not* Served

Before initiating W-2, Wisconsin reduced its welfare rolls from 100,000 to 22,000 in only a few years. What happened to the 80,000 families forced off the rolls without transition assistance to work? In the effort to determine the outcomes of welfare reform, an entire segment of former welfare recipients have been overlooked, as researchers and evaluators focus on investigating the successes and failures of specific welfare-to-work programs.

Researchers must also look at the outcomes for those who left—or were forced off—the welfare rolls at different periods.

William Darity of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill suggested that, while it is important to track outcomes for recipients in the system when a program is launched, investigating their outcomes alone constitutes a limited look at the full effects of welfare reform. Researchers must also look at the outcomes for those who left—or were forced off—the welfare rolls at different periods: in the decades and years immediately prior to the onset of the program, as well as during the program's initial, intermediary, and advanced stages. Darity said, "We need to know the numbers of former recipients who still remain in poverty. What happened to women with children, for example, who left the rolls in 1985, compared to 1996, 1997, and 1998?"

Darity believes that only a longer-term view of recipient outcomes within

corresponding economic contexts will allow an accurate assessment of the successes or failures of current programs. These measures are also required to gain the whole story about the effects of welfare reform—in particular, determining whether time limits and ceasing benefits without transition assistance have further disenfranchised already vulnerable families. "Remember, welfare reform is not about bringing people out of poverty; it's about getting them off public assistance," Darity reminded participants, "and W-2 is in the third stage of welfare reform."

To gain a better understanding of which interventions might help, qualitative research is needed to illuminate and extend how statistical evidence or commonly held assumptions frame a community's experiences.

Rely on the Qualitative, Not Just the Quantitative

Researchers and policymakers must describe and affect real lives, not abstract distributions of populations. To be effective, both research and policymaking must be informed by the actual experiences, motivations, and associations made within the communities in question. To gain a better understanding of which interventions might help, as well as how best to implement those interventions, policymaking can draw upon qualitative research to illuminate and extend how statistical evidence or commonly held assumptions frame a community's experiences. Without such extended knowledge, both researchers and policymakers run the risk of misinterpreting needs and misdirecting avenues for assistance. At best, these wrong turns will render interventions ineffective. At worst, they can provide disincentives that actually diminish opportunities for father participation and for the establishment of productive mother-father relationships.

For example, Elijah Anderson suggested how the distinction between fathers' formal and informal contributions could best be captured through ethnography and other qualitative studies. Most researchers only have access to fathers who are active program participants. Although surveys may inquire about those fathers' informal involvement, they often miss an important perspective—that of fathers who are not formally engaged in the system but make informal contributions. Qualitative methods can help to provide critical data on how and why fathers outside of the system make contributions to their children's well-being.

Whether conducted alone or in conjunction with quantitative approaches, qualitative methods contribute to holistic studies of family situations and support that look closely at the complexities of different arrangements. Quantitative data provide easily digestible statistics about the extent of the arrangements that exist; however, they are often aggregated in ways that reduce the meaning of these arrangements into broader categories that limit interpretation. Qualitative research has the capacity to expand on the meaning of such arrangements and communicate more effectively to various audiences how those arrangements function. "As a result, there is a real argument for using multiple methodologies when investigating the outcomes of a program or a broad policy," Vivian Gadsden commented. "For example, what will be rich about the Wisconsin W-2 evaluation, when it is completed, is the ethnographic data that will tease out the issues present in the quantitative analysis. This combination of methods will enable researchers and policymakers to contextualize the problems more effectively than using a single approach."

Just as quantitative data require an explication of the context in order to render appropriate conclusions, researchers need to understand the context for the communities that they are studying.

Aisha Ray provided another example using Anderson's work—in this case the need to understand the dynamic of moving from "decent" to "street" for men in

Large-Scale Studies Informing the Father and Families Field

Since 1995, a number of national surveys have incorporated fatherhood issues as part of the Clinton-Gore administration's fatherhood initiative. They promise to produce a wealth of statistics that were previously unavailable to the field.

National Survey of Family Growth. In the past year, this survey has captured child well-being, fertility, and family formation issues from the perspective of mothers. Although it does ask questions about mothers' partners, it has not included fathers in the sample. In the next survey, for the first time, a representative sample of men and women will be included.

Early Childhood Longitudinal-Birth Cohort Survey. This survey will follow early childhood development from birth to age five. It will include information on resident fathers through an expanded component on father involvement and attachment and is seeking funding to also include nonresident, involved fathers.

Early Head Start Evaluation and Research Study. This effort will include a father studies component that measures father-child bonding during infancy, studies father-child attachment through videotapes of their interaction, and examines the roles of fathers through interviews and focus groups.

Fragile Families Survey (FFS). With funding from private foundations and the National Institute for Child Health and Development, the FFS is examining the dynamics of father involvement for young, unmarried parents in 20 medium-to-large U.S. cities.

National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. The 1997 cohort will follow adolescents as they make the transition to adulthood. In addition to employment- and education-related items, both men and women will be asked questions about fertility and family dynamics that were not included in previous surveys.

Adolescent Health Survey. This major survey includes specific questions about mother and father involvement. The second wave of the survey will follow adolescents as they make the transition into young adulthood, including those teens who become parents. This wave will allow an examination of how family structure and adolescent experiences are related to family formation in young adults.

inner-city and minority communities, as well as the implications of this dynamic for their children. Who makes it? Who does not, and why? What types of resources can services provide to help fathers fare better and, as a result, assist their families? What are the lifestyle and everyday outcomes of a change in income? Ray believes that researchers need qualitative studies mixed with other empirical statistics to understand these outcomes.

Qualitative studies can also help researchers and policymakers understand how the code of the streets and life in vulnerable communities are expressed across the life-course and for the same men over time. Is a gang member at 15 still involved in street activity at 30 or 40? Can men "age" out of crime? What made the difference for those men who did not participate or remain in the underground economy and who are able to keep jobs and take care of their children? In other words,

explained Ray, the field needs to understand the mechanisms that enable men to take alternative paths.

Other advantages of qualitative data collection include the ability to:

- Ensure, when performing longitudinal research over the developmental trajectory, that the interpretation is appropriately reflecting what is really happening in peoples' lives, not just a spurious assumption on the part of the researcher;
- Provide a better understanding of the father-child relationship—one that is based on sufficient research to support the kind of commitment needed from policymakers and legislatures to support programs and further research; and
- Determine what happens at particular ages or within different institutions to affect fathers' development—in this case, both longitudinal and cross-sectional qualitative and quantitative data would best inform such a change.

Look at the Community's Context and Not Just the Community

Quantitative data require an explication of the context in order to render appropriate conclusions; similarly, researchers need to understand the context of the communities that they are studying. It is insufficient to focus solely on the individual and his or her family relationships at ground zero. Instead, it is necessary to obtain the broader context of why ground zero exists and how it affects decisions in the lives of individuals.

As Anderson stated, if a lack of services from public agencies and a lack of responsibility from civil authorities have both contributed to a community's vulnerability, researchers must document and analyze that dynamic—particularly as it relates to an absence of services and increased exposure to violence for fathers. In addition, it is also important to look at how the code, the context, and the nature of a community's vulnerability have changed over time. Social scientists in particular could provide the quantitative data to complement ethnographic work such as Anderson's to understand the magnitude of change. For example, data describing the context would illustrate the effect of deindustrialization on certain communities—in particular, the presence or absence of jobs in certain industries and the levels of skills required for such jobs. Ideally these data would also contain a measure of livability: Are the available jobs offering family-supporting wages? Are residents relying on credit to survive, and what are the implications?

How does racial/ethnic competition contribute to the vulnerability and poverty of some communities over others?

Acknowledging and examining this context is essential for understanding developmental stages within communities as normative, and not as pathological. Margaret Beale Spencer discussed how behavior is linked to environmental stresses—to alienation, to isolation from mainstream society. However, she stressed that the youth who struggle with what she termed "noxious environments" are still engaged in normative development, only under adverse situations. According to Spencer, in this light what appears to some to be pathological behavior is shown to be reacting in appropriate ways to difficult circumstances.

The notion of context is particularly important when performing longitudinal work. As John Jeffries of The Vera Institute of Justice mentioned, researchers contact a subject at the beginning of the study and then follow-up at a later time, when the father has potentially relocated and definitely aged. They must acknowledge that subjects are in a different context or space—metaphorically and physically—as compared to their previous experience. Teasing out each context will help to deepen and improve the accuracy of the study's findings.

William Darity suggested that researchers should investigate the context in which individuals living in vulnerable communities make decisions, based on practical, functional, or situational ethics—keeping in mind that these ethics are no different than what is used in other contexts, whether mainstream, corporate, or academic. "The difference is that the stakes are not as high for other communities as they are for vulnerable, low-income, inner-city fathers and families," said Darity. "For example, white, middle-class youth often mimic the code of the street as part of an expression of oppositional adolescent culture, but not as much is at stake for their behavior in the context of their activity."

Darity believes researchers should examine what he calls the "cumulative context" for these communities—the sum of factors that have had an impact on a community's context over time. He suggests investigating a host of issues, such as:

1. The impact of the criminal justice system, the effects it has on family formation, and the political dynamic that causes a differential proportion of men from certain communities to be incarcerated above others;

2. The effect of hip hop music, media, and popular culture on norms and values;

3. Health and mental health issues;

4. Schooling, in particular administrators' and teachers' roles in helping students to negotiate peer pressure and remain focused on schooling;

5. The role of spirituality and the church; and

6. The impact of welfare reform, in particular the impact of TANF on communities that have depended on public assistance for access to resources.

Explore Racial Discrimination as a Legitimate Research Issue

As many participants noted, the literature has only begun to bear out the relationship between race and access. The fact that this relationship exists is clear to practitioners and community members, but has not been sufficiently explored by researchers or policymakers. In particular, the prevailing notion that racism has declined needs to be substantiated—given that the research which does exist, focusing mainly on employment discrimination, indicates that it has not. How do racism and racial discrimination affect the non-work-related, but equally important, aspects of the lives of minorities? For example, how does racism affect a person's access to services, influence how that person is treated by service providers, or limit his or her engagement with providers and therefore the information he or she can access?

The prevailing notion that racism has declined needs to be substantiated—given that the research which does exist, focusing mainly on employment discrimination, indicates that it has not.

Beyond the effects of racial discrimination on the lives of individuals, there is a need to examine racial discrimination effects at the level of the community. Geraldo Rodriguez of the Los Angeles Department of Community and Senior Services expressed the need to investigate ethnic tension and competition in inner-city neighborhoods, citing Los Angeles as an example of an urban area that experienced major transformations in the demographic composition of inner-city communities. "What were once predominantly African-American neighborhoods are now overwhelmingly Latino," said Rodriguez, "which causes tension between racial and ethnic minorities as they try to reach for the same small pieces of bread." How does racial/ethnic competition contribute to the vulnerability and poverty of some communities over others?

Investigate Intergenerationality

Vivian Gadsden stressed the need to examine the impact that the parents of fathers and mothers have had on dimensions of behavior such as paternal involvement. For young parents in particular, this issue is primary. As Gadsden mentioned, researchers such as Miller, Chistmon, and Sullivan have begun to look at the influence of the father's family of origin on his involvement. Other questions that need to be addressed include: In what ways does the mother's family of origin influence the father's involvement or serve as a barrier?

What are the intergenerational contexts and consequences of development? Overall, researchers must take into account the nature, character, and functioning of a father's family of origin, identifying the context for his development and tracking adaptation and change over time. From an intergenerational perspective, researchers can map the multiple streams of influence on fathers as they evolve into their roles.

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Similarly, how do older and younger generations of fathers influence each other? Based on his experiences with the men who participate in his program, Rodriguez explained that, while there is a distinction from a developmental perspective between men of different generations, he sees a role for older dads in helping younger ones to develop responsibility for their children. Researchers could assist practitioners in their understanding of how such intergenerational interaction shapes the evolution of young fathers.

Implications for Policymaking

As participants discussed the impact of welfare reform, isolation within inner-city communities, and father involvement on low-income and vulnerable families, they identified a series of recommendations to help policymakers conceptualize appropriate interventions. This section provides an account of the results of their discussion.

The roundtable's recommendations for policy included the following: (1) actively pushing for program expansion; (2) changing the policy mindset regarding human services and public assistance; (3) understanding the full impact of welfare reform; (4) reconsidering the fundamental purpose of interventions; (5) making links among schools, agencies and initiatives, vulnerable families, and their broader communities; and (6) investigating how policymaking can address the complex realities of families' lives.

A great deal of public policymaking around families focuses on mothers, but improved outcomes for children are unlikely if the emphasis is on one parent to the detriment of the other.

Actively Push for Program Expansion

"It is a reality in urban, poor communities that if there are child care centers and social service agencies, they do not serve fathers," said Aisha Ray. "Although some communities have limited programs to address adolescent dads, there are no pervasive, well-conceived strategies to address poor fathers, families, and the effect poverty and social vulnerability have on meeting their responsibilities as fathers." And while a majority of fathers say they are involved with their children, there are no services to anchor their involvement over time or coherent strategies to improve their own mental or physical health. A great deal of public policymaking around families focuses on mothers, but improved outcomes for children are unlikely if the emphasis is on one parent to the detriment of the other.

Linda Mellgren, a social science analyst at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services discussed the need for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to continue pushing for the expansion of programs serving children and families to serve fathers also. In the past, these programs were inaccessible to fathers—sometimes the barriers were programmatic, sometimes they were perceptual. In either case, they were not sensitive to drawing men in as participants, and they must be made more explicitly father-friendly. To accomplish this end, it is critical that policymakers understand the needs of programs at the grassroots level.

In the past, programs were inaccessible to fathers—sometimes the barriers were programmatic, sometimes they were perceptual.

Gregory Patton also warned policymakers to be aware that simply replacing mother poverty with father poverty will not improve outcomes for children. The same problems will remain—and perhaps be exacerbated—unless an entire community is strengthened with the goal of promoting child well-being.

Change the Policy Mindset Regarding Human Services and Public Assistance

According to Ray Lorion, the thrust of major policy changes in recent years represents the renegotiation of society's contract with the disadvantaged—what

have been seen historically as "entitlements" are being eliminated, and individuals are being asked to "pay their fair share." For example, the impetus for welfare reform is not to help move individuals and families from poverty but to eliminate welfare. In terms of the focus on fathers within public agencies, the purpose has not been to improve the relationship between fathers and mothers or fathers and children, but to "get deadbeat dads."

There is a great need to demonstrate the long-term advantages of improving and redefining the role of fathers in families in order to provide a better argument for what motivates fathers to help support their children. Not only are the outcomes for individual children's well-being improved, but also the perceived "drain" on society that results from negligence—whether in the form of community violence, incarceration, or the reliance on public assistance—can be addressed.

It is also essential to deconstruct and dispel the mindset that many policymakers and legislators maintain of welfare dependency—of the "welfare moms" who abuse the system and receive a "free ride." How can policies and programs be effective when the belief is that the problem lies in the individual or the family alone? One participant pointed out that existing health and human services policies developed out of the mindset of the Moynihan Report. If conditions have not improved, or even have worsened for the communities that have been served by public assistance programs, what does this say about policymaking itself and the mindset that informs it? Why have things not changed? It is imperative that policymakers re-examine these assumptions at this very critical time in the dismantling of the social safety net.

It is imperative that policymakers re-examine their assumptions about the communities they serve at this very critical time in the dismantling of the social safety net.

Part of that critical juncture is the study being mounted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on welfare retention as part of their TANF strategy to determine how to refine the system. Such policy-informing efforts can go a long way to dispelling these notions. At this stage of welfare reform, it is important for policymakers, and the studies that inform their work, to evolve beyond the mindset of dependency and to envision services as the provision of a set of supports to move people out of poverty.

As Tukufu Zuberi of the University of Pennsylvania reminded participants, it is also important for policymakers to take a step back—first to recognize what the problems are for poor fathers and vulnerable families before attempting to solve them. Furthermore, there is a complex relationship between fatherhood, parenting, schools, income, and child support systems. As Zuberi recommends, the field needs to understand the relationships among these elements to come up with strategies and systems to help fix the problems rather than blame the victims.

Understand that Welfare-to-Work Could Be Welfare-to-What?

Welfare reform has promised to make families self-sustaining, but there is mixed evidence about the outcomes for former recipients and no information on the consequences for those denied assistance before transition programs were implemented. Policymakers must be held accountable for the choices made in designing welfare reform policy and their repercussions on the most vulnerable and hardest to serve.

For example, allowing for-profit companies to conduct service delivery was seen as a move toward cost-effectiveness and efficiency. However, as Bouman stated, some for-profits may be cutting costs by providing fewer services. He believes policymakers and agencies

should keep a watchful eye on for-profits and consider docking fees paid to them when they fail to provide the full array of services for which they contracted. Other problematic outcomes have already been identified in welfare reform, and policymakers must attend to the consequences they are effecting, particularly since the reform is not specifically geared to moving people out of poverty.

Moving Out Versus Moving Up. In a changing economy, what is the impact of the loss in good-paying jobs on low-income fathers moving off welfare? Are the institutions and jobs available to help them meet their obligations? As Greg Patton explained, in W-2 and many other welfare-to-work programs, education and training are not mandatory activities; in many cases, when participants find work, they are hired into entry-level or front-line service jobs. Is there life after the entry level for these workers? The result is very likely that most recipients who move out do not necessarily move up. Policymakers need to consider welfare reform from different perspectives: there are those who move out successfully into the workforce, others who find work but are underemployed, and still others who simply cannot make the transition. In contrast to the arguments offered in recent years, states are now making the case to Congress that people *do* need services and that TANF funds should provide the support for those services. It may be a key time for policymakers to help make distinctions among populations, among their prospects, and among their needs.

Problematic outcomes have already been identified in welfare reform, and policymakers must attend to the consequences they are effecting, particularly since reform is not specifically geared to moving people out of poverty.

Remembering the Delay Effect. Bouman mentioned that the effects of caseload reductions in the move to eliminate general assistance in the 1990s may not be immediately observable. However, he warns that the outcomes will most likely be more subtle, delayed, complex, and unpredicted. In the wake of welfare reform, the negative effects may not be detected by policymakers or researchers, although they may be felt by community members. Too many longer-term questions remain: What will happen to former recipients if their family, friends, and networks fail? If they become homeless? "Will we be there, know what to look for, have supports ready to help?" asked Bouman.

Reconsider the Fundamental Purpose of Interventions

Determining what is an appropriate outcome and form of intervention for a father depends on a set of assumptions about his life and his community. Zuberi wants policymakers to ask themselves a fundamental question: Is the intervention intended to change an individual's behavior or to change the circumstances in which the behavior occurs? In other words, is it more appropriate to try to change the father or the institutions and systems that have an impact on his life? The key issue here is what is considered to be normative behavior from the perspective of framing policy and, subsequently, the programs it spawns. Do interventions fail when they attempt to change behavior in a way that is inappropriate for the circumstances—in a way that a community does not see as normative? On the other hand, if the purpose of an intervention is to change an individual or community's circumstances, then policymakers must understand the context in which the behavior is occurring.

Do interventions fail when they attempt to change behavior in a way that is inappropriate for the circumstances—in a way that a community does not see as normative?

It is equally important to understand that the contextual focus may vary, depending on the specific community involved. The discussion at the roundtable focused heavily on the concerns and contexts of African-American communities, but many participants

raised the issue of including multiple cultural impacts on vulnerable families. It is essential for policymakers to understand the different dynamics in different communities—what are the cultural differences that affect the "norms" of father participation and support? How is fatherhood defined differently in each community? Policymaking itself tends not to be sensitive to these differences.

Make Linkages Among Schools, Government Agencies and Initiatives, Vulnerable Families, and Their Broader Communities

Policy can play a critical role in forging links among all of the institutions, services, agencies, and initiatives that affect individual, family, and community well-being. Linking these domains—in particular, coordinating services among agencies—when developing policies and considering their impact are essential. Too often, each domain is seen as existing within a separate sphere and context. These domains may be conflated or interrelated from the perspective of the lives of individual children and families. In the case of major federal and state policies, efforts such as welfare reform, child support enforcement, criminal justice, health and human services, and workforce development are often conceived, developed, and initiated in isolation, when they could all converge to have an impact on one individual or an entire community. Participants mentioned three specific links that policymakers should investigate:

Linking Child Support Enforcement with Welfare-to-Work Participation. At the moment, welfare reform and child support enforcement are rarely linked, despite the obvious connection between a father's ability to pay support through gainful employment. Linda Mellgren suggested that, particularly for never-married but cohabiting fathers, the state could begin to keep a formal record of his support by garnishing his welfare-to-work wages and forwarding the payment to the mother. Because of the distinction in the system between formal and informal support, there is a danger that fathers who are contributing financially, but informally, will not have records of their contributions and may be subject to enforcement penalties. Linking welfare-to-work and child support enforcement in this way would create a permanent record that the father has been supporting a child, so that the potential for arrearages will be reduced if the couple breaks up. Mellgren raised the issue that, if these policies can be coordinated to benefit never-married fathers, what are the implications for other fathers?

Paralleling Welfare Reform with the Workforce Investment Act. In the same way that welfare reform can be linked to child support, it can also be coordinated with the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which represents a large coffer of public dollars that have not been distributed based on socioeconomic status or according to parental status. As Bouman mentioned, Pennsylvania is explicitly keeping its TANF and WIA classes separate. Yet, if the two efforts were linked, the policy would represent a major step forward for promoting child support and workforce development.

Policy can play a critical role in forging links among all of the institutions, services, agencies, and initiatives that impact individual, family, and community well-being.

Making Connections Between Health and Human Services and the Criminal Justice System. In addition to understanding better the effects of incarceration, policymakers need to untangle the complex interaction between health and human services agencies and the criminal justice system. The first step, according to Linda Mellgren, is to begin thinking about approaches to service delivery that cut across each regime and coordinate their efforts.

Investigate How Policymaking Can Address the Realities of Families' Lives

Wayne Salter, Associate Director of NCOFF, discussed his experiences with the mismatch between policies and programs, informal support, and the realities of fathers' lives during his tenure as director of the Parental Involvement Project in Chicago. Salter explained that, for cohabiting fathers or those with more than one residence, it is often difficult to calculate the support fathers provide for the household in which their children live; in some cases, these fathers are also supporting children that are not theirs.

Beyond missing calculations of informal support, other information on these fathers falls through the cracks in the system. "Policy and practice still identify these fathers as single, adult males, and not as men who have children," said Salter. "This mischaracterization is never factored in when looking at program success, policies, the design of evaluations, and intervention. As a result, system changes can leave families vulnerable when success is viewed through the lens of shrinking welfare rolls." Such an oversight also eliminates the possibility of collecting information about the impact of system changes on informal systems and child well-being.

How can legislation and policy initiatives be framed in order to capture and address the complexity of informal and formal systems? How can the two systems interact? As Robert Pitman commented, program staff often do not know how to approach the problems, and, in many cases, neither do policymakers. One group that is addressing this issue is the National Conference of State Legislators.

To ensure that policies are comprehensive enough to capture the complexities of family situations, but targeted enough to make a difference, policymakers must once again step back and ask themselves a set of basic questions: What do we think we are fixing? What are the goals, particularly regarding father involvement? How can policy put forward a new concept of families and a more complex understanding of fathers' roles within families? How can policymakers themselves be made receptive to this idea in the first place? As Jay Fagan of Temple University suggested, just as policy should consider a community's context, it should also understand an individual's experiences according to a life span/life course perspective—one that includes the notion of intergenerationality and the experiences of families of origin as well as procreation.

Lessons for Practice

During their discussion participants identified a series of lessons for practitioners and for program design. The following section summarizes their conclusions.

The roundtable identified the following lessons for practice: (1) ensure that staff are adequately trained on new demonstrations; (2) be aware of practitioners' skill sets; (3) provide information to families that is both useful and accessible; (4) make the "light touch" of intervention more substantial; (5) understand that norms within a community are not fixed or static; and (6) alert programs, policymakers, and researchers when changes in norms or other developments are occurring.

Ensure That Staff Are Adequately Trained on New Demonstrations Prior to Implementation

As Bouman stated, the implementation of W-2's child care component and its use by participants had an extremely slow start-up. In fact, the line item in the project's budget for child care was halved, simply because participants were not taking advantage of it. W-2 staff simply were not trained adequately to provide information on the full range of services available to mothers and fathers. While the information eventually reached participants, the delay represents an inefficient use of funds and services that could have altered employment outcomes for parents and, therefore, overall outcomes for children. It is necessary to build such training into the rollout of new initiatives to prevent staff from making such an oversight.

Be Aware of Practitioners' Skill Sets

Related to providing training for new initiatives, there is a need to identify the knowledge and skills that practitioners bring to their work, as well as what is required of them on the job. Are their skills adequate to assess individuals and households in order to identify and address the many issues and barriers that families may be facing? Are practitioners able to think "outside of the box"— to identify underlying causes, inconsistencies, or contradictions in services across agencies, as well as confounding issues that are not a focus of their particular program? For example, many practitioners do not receive training on domestic violence, even though it has serious effects on parental relationships and child well-being. Could these practitioners identify this issue as an underlying problem, given the reluctance by participants to discuss it? Even if the issue was identified, would the staff member know how to address it?

W-2 staff simply were not trained adequately to provide information on the full range of services available to mothers and fathers. Simple interventions taught in six-week courses will not realize lifelong changes for fathers.

Participants agreed that training should be designed and provided to help practitioners upgrade their skills—not only to improve service for the particular program but also to consider a host of issues and contexts that may be exacerbating a father's or family's concerns. In this regard, practitioners at community-based organizations (CBOs), who often have closer ties to the participants that they serve, have a distinct advantage over those at large state-run agencies. Programs, practitioners, and policymak-

ers should consider including the input of CBOs in the design of such training. The issue may need to be addressed not just through job-based training but in the preparation of practitioners at educational institutions. As one participant commented, "Simple interventions taught in six-week courses will not realize lifelong changes for fathers."

Provide Information to Families That Is Both Useful and Accessible

Several participants commented on the failure of Wisconsin's W-2 to provide clear and useful information to participants, informing them of the relevance of the full pass-through of child support payments. Both brochures produced by the state and additional project-based information were mailed to participants, but the publications did little to clear up the distinction between the full and partial pass-through for families—and even for program staff. Bouman reinforced the notion that programs and state agencies need to develop materials that will not only be accessible for participants—particularly fathers—but also provide guidance about promoting meaningful father involvement. If the brochure had more appropriately explained the incentive embedded in the pass-through for fathers to pay their child support, perhaps the demonstration would have had different outcomes.

Are practitioners' skills adequate to perform the assessment of individuals and households in order to identify and address the many issues and barriers that families may be facing?

Make the Light Touch of Intervention More Substantial

Salter noted how practitioners sometimes apply the "light touch" with the participants they serve—in other words, only telling participants the minimum that they need to know to satisfy a program requirement. "It is, in reality, a form of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell,'" said Salter. "There are millions of dollars in state coffers for child care, food stamps, education and training, but families aren't getting the resources. It's not new in practice—but you would think that programs and agencies would want to show a clear picture to participants of all the services they can access in order to move families forward." He suggests that programs and their staff make a concerted effort to make all of the information and services known to clients.

Understand That Community Norms Are Not Fixed or Static

Researchers and policymakers must acknowledge that fatherhood and family norms not only differ for each community but also change according to developmental patterns and shift over time. In much the same way practitioners must understand that norms are continually being redefined, based on the circumstances in which individuals and communities are situated. Edward Pitt of the Families and Work Institute suggested that practitioners keep the following items in mind. First, it is important to recognize there are group and peer behaviors with which individuals either want to or are pressured to identify. Second, practitioners cannot rest on their laurels even if they come to respect, as well as be respected by, the community they serve; the norms may shift. It is the responsibility of the practitioner to understand and adapt to those changes.

"[The light touch] is, in reality, a form of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell,'" said Salter. "There are millions of dollars in state coffers for child care, food stamps, education and training, but families aren't getting the resources."

Participants also suggested that practitioners can benefit from recognizing the role that popular culture plays as both a reflection and cause of norm changes. For example, images and messages are increasingly appearing in hip hop and rap music that reaffirm positive relationships between men and women and promote responsible fathering and

parenting. These new models of involved parenting are part of a larger cultural message that is influencing norms—in this case, spoken by voices that are respected within youth culture.

Consequently, practitioners may want to focus their efforts on promoting change in the norms expressed by their clients' communities. Yet, practitioners must keep in mind that these norms can only be redirected if the practitioners are sensitive to the context in which communities find themselves.

Alert Programs, Policymakers, and Researchers When Changes in Norms or Other Developments Are Occurring

Because practitioners sit at the front lines of agencies and service provision, they are best equipped to inform policymakers and researchers when changes in norms have occurred—long before the news would otherwise reach these stakeholders' desks. Practitioners must not only identify these and other issues as they emerge in fatherhood programs, but also play a critical role in getting the message out to legislators, evaluators, and researchers, as well as to the general public. They can identify salient needs and provide keen observations that are essential to refining program design, making good policy, and conducting rigorous research, as well as actively participate in conversations about research findings to foster an understanding of what is relevant and how.

Practitioners cannot rest on their laurels; they must understand that norms are continually being redefined, based on the circumstances in which individuals and communities are situated.

Roundtable Agenda

NCOFF Roundtable on Father Poverty and Social Vulnerability
Philadelphia, PA

Thursday, December 16, 1999

3:30 - 4:00 p.m.	**Introduction** Vivian L. Gadsden, Director, NCOFF
4:00 – 5:00 p.m.	**Poor Families and Fathers: The Issues within Welfare Reform** **Moderator:** Tukufu Zuberi, University of Pennsylvania **Paper Presentation:** Maria Cancian, University of Wisconsin, Madison **Discussants:** Robert Boruch, University of Pennsylvania John Bouman, National Poverty Law Center
5:00 – 5:45 p.m.	**General Discussion** **Discussion Leader:** Wayne Salter, Associate Director, NCOFF
6:30 - 9:00 p.m.	**Dinner Meeting**

continued

8:30 – 8:45 a.m.	**Review and Outline of the Day** Vivian L. Gadsden, Director, NCOFF
8:45 – 9:45 a.m.	**Poverty and Social Vulnerabilities: The Experiences of Fathers in Low-Income Communities** **Moderator:** Ray Lorion, University of Pennsylvania **Paper Presentation:** Elijah Anderson, University of Pennsylvania **Discussants:** Aisha Ray, The Erikson Institute William Darity, University of North Carolina
9:45 – 10:30 a.m.	**General Discussion** **Discussion Leader:** Geraldo Rodriguez, Central Maravilla Service Center
10:30 – 11:30 a.m.	**Fathers and Fragile Families** **Paper Presentation:** Waldo Johnson, University of Chicago **Discussants:** Tim Nelson, University of Pennsylvania Margaret Beale Spencer, University of Pennsylvania
11:30 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.	**General Discussion** **Discussion Leader:** Earl Johnson, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation

12:15 – 2:15 p.m.	**Lunch and Working Groups**
2:15 – 2:45 p.m.	**Roundtable Review and Synthesis: Cross-Cutting Themes and Their Implications for Policy and Practice** Linda Mellgren, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Tukufu Zuberi, University of Pennsylvania
2:45– 3:30 p.m.	**Next Steps and Concluding Remarks** Vivian L. Gadsden, Director, NCOFF
Related Event	
4:00 – 6:00 p.m.	**Public Forum** **"Risk and Redress in the Community: How Children, Families, and Schools Contend with Violence and the *Code of the Streets*"** Zellerbach Auditorium, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania

Participant List

Fathers and Families Second-Tier Roundtable Series

Father Poverty and Social Vulnerability Roundtable

December 16th and 17th, 1999

Name	Position
Elijah Anderson University of Pennsylvania	researcher
Burt Barnow Johns Hopkins University	researcher
Margaret Beale Spencer Director, CHANGES	researcher
Robert Boruch University of Pennsylvania	researcher
John Bouman National Poverty Law Center, Inc.	policy analyst/advocate
LaShana Briley Governors Project for Community Building	policymaker
Maria Cancian University of Wisconsin, Madison	researcher
Willam Darity University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	researcher
James Earl Davis University of Delaware	researcher
Frank Furstenberg University of Pennsylvania	researcher
Vivian L. Gadsden University of Pennsylvania	researcher
Preston Garrison National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families	practitioner
Nora Huddock Department of Revenue	policymaker
John Jeffries The Vera Institute of Justice	researcher/policy analyst
Sean Joe University of Pennsylvania	researcher/policy analyst

Name	Position
Deborah Johnson Michigan State University	researcher
Earl Johnson Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	researcher
Waldo Johnson School of Social Service Administration	researcher
Velma LaPoint Howard University	researcher
Cecilia McKnight Mayor's Children and Families Cabinet	policymaker
Linda Mellgren U.S. Department of Health and Human Services	policymaker
Maurice Moore The Annie E. Casey Foundation	program officer
Ellen Pagliaro The Annie E. Casey Foundation	program officer
Gregory Patton Family Support Coordinator	policymaker
Edward Pitt Families and Work Institute	practitioner
Hillard Pouncy University of Pennsylvania	researcher
Aisha Ray The Erickson Institute	researcher
Karl Rethemeyer University of Pennsylvania	researcher
Geraldo Rodriguez Los Angeles Department of Community and Senior Services	practitioner
Robert Rutman University of Pennsylvania	researcher
Wayne Salter University of Pennsylvania	policy analyst/practitioner
Kenneth Shropshire University of Pennsylvania	researcher
Diana Slaughter-Defoe University of Pennsylvania	researcher
Derrick Span Governor's Project for Community Building Commonwealth of Pennsylvania	policymaker

continued

Name	Position
Robert Sussen Mayor's Children and Families Cabinet City of Philadelphia	policymaker
Ronald Taylor Temple University	researcher
J. Neil Tift National Fatherhood Initiative	practitioner
Karen Titsworth University of Cincinnati	researcher
Clayvon Wesley Prince Hall Family Support Center	practitioner
Barbara Woodhouse University of Pennsylvania	researcher
Stanton Wortham University of Pennsylvania	researcher
Tukufu Zuberi University of Pennsylvania	researcher

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