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We need our fathers: How welfare policies impact fathers

Lily Nwanesi

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Abstract

Fathers hold key roles in the lives of their children. Children who grow up with fathers in the home tend to remain in school, participate less in delinquent behavior, and have good emotional development. However, federal policies, such as the Aid to Families with Dependent Children Act (1935) and child support legislation before 1996, have indirectly (and perhaps unintentionally) led to a decrease of fathers in the home. Recently, the federal government created the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (1996) to reform these programs. From this policy, programs such as the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program and strengthened child support provisions were created to reverse the indirect effects caused by the aforementioned policies and promote two-parent family structures. Also, multiple states have adopted policies to help promote responsible fatherhood and two-parent families. In this paper, I study the key provisions and positive/negative outcomes of these policies and programs to show how they affected fatherhood either negatively or positively in America. I argue that the former policies (AFDC and child support pre-1996) indirectly affected the increase in absent father families on welfare. I show that TANF and post-1996 child support legislation does not do much to reverse the indirect effects or promote two-parent structured families. Finally, I analyze three state programs from Texas, Connecticut, and Illinois and show, overall, that state programs promote responsible fatherhood and two-parent family structures better than the analyzed federal programs.

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Political Science

First Advisor

Barbara Patrick

Second Advisor

Barry Pyle

Third Advisor

Jeffrey L. Bernstein

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WE NEED OUR FATHERS: HOW WELFARE POLICIES IMPACT FATHERS

By

Lily Nwanesi

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Supervising Instructor: Barbara Patrick Date: 17April 2020

Supervising Instructor: Barry Pyley Date: 17 April 2020

Departmental Honors Advisor: Jeffrey L. Bernstein Date: 16 April 2020

Department Head: David Klein Date: 16 April 2020

Honors Director: Ann Eisenberg Date: 12 May 2020

We Need Our Fathers: How Welfare Policies Impact Fathers

By Lily Nwanesi

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Abstract

Fathers hold key roles in the lives of their children. Children who grow up with fathers in the home tend to remain in school, participate less in delinquent behavior, and have good emotional development. However, federal policies, such as the Aid to Families with Dependent Children Act (1935) and child support legislation before 1996, have indirectly (and perhaps unintentionally) led to a decrease of fathers in the home. Recently, the federal government created the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (1996) to reform these programs. From this policy, programs such as the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program and strengthened child support provisions were created to reverse the indirect effects caused by the aforementioned policies and promote two-parent family structures. Also, multiple states have adopted policies to help promote responsible fatherhood and two-parent families. In this paper, I study the key provisions and positive/negative outcomes of these policies and programs to show how they affected fatherhood either negatively or positively in America. I argue that the former policies (AFDC and child support pre-1996) indirectly affected the increase in absent father families on welfare. I show that TANF and post-1996 child support legislation does not do much to reverse the indirect effects or promote two-parent structured families. Finally, I analyze three state programs from Texas, Connecticut, and Illinois and show, overall, that state programs promote responsible fatherhood and two-parent family structures better than the analyzed federal programs.

Introduction

Americans show considerable concern with the wellbeing of their children and this interest has only increased. Calls for policies that strengthen the family have grown over time, especially with the rise in welfare-dependant families. Part of this debate deals with the role of fathers in the lives of their children. As the number of children with absent fathers increased during the 20th century, activists called for more policies that keep fathers present and involved in their children's lives. Similarly, research concerning parental roles increasingly focuses on how fathers affect their children's lives. The literature points to fathers' significant impact on their children's emotional and social wellbeing, delinquent behavior, and academic success. Fathers help "to stabilize the family in relation to the real world" (Lacan, 1993, as cited in Botero, 2012) and gives his children a place to belong. Fathers' support provides security for children which benefits their academic growth and emotional development (Opondo et al., 2017; Bogels & Phares, 2008). In fact, children in poverty benefit more from paternal warmth as it mitigates the negative effects of poverty. Policymakers focus more recently on ways to keep fathers involved in their families lives as they seek to reduce the amount of single-mother families on welfare. However, the policies created have not effectively increased father involvement, especially amongst low-income families who are most in need of father involvement.

Child support policies represent an example of the aforementioned unintended consequences. Child support policies stemmed from the rise of single mothers who were recipients of the cash assistance program created in 1935 known as the Aid to Families of

Dependent Children. Child support policies are meant to promote father involvement by holding “absent fathers” financially accountable to their children while also counteracting the effects on the government of spending on welfare. Over the years, the policy has been strengthened in order to pull more support payments from fathers, which it has been successful in doing. However, the policy hasn’t taken into account the fact that many of these fathers with children on welfare are low-income just like the mothers. They may not be able to sufficiently support their children as is expected in court orders and support awards. Therefore, the stringent provisions of these policies can be harmful to the relationship the father has with their child.

This paper will be a policy analysis on welfare policies that affected father involvement and fatherlessness. For the purpose of this paper, I choose to focus on one policy area to create a focused analysis. I acknowledge that there are other policy areas that have impacted fatherhood in America, but they will not be discussed in this paper. I focus on welfare policy and assess the policies that have contributed to the issue of father absence. I further assess policies and programs created as an attempt to mitigate this negative effect. I assert that the policies contributing to the issue of father absence are the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (1935) and the child support legislation before 1996. The “solution” federal policies are the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program and child support legislation that were both part of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, otherwise known as the Welfare Reform Act. The “solution” state programs are Texas’s Empowering Fathers for Empowering Children Tomorrow program, Connecticut's Fatherhood Initiative, and

Illinois's Council on Responsible Fatherhood. Section 1 of this paper discusses the problem at hand and why fatherhood is important. Section 2 provides an analysis of the first two federal policies mentioned and their negative effects. Section 3 assesses the federal and state policies and programs created as a solution to the previous policies. Section 4 concludes the paper. I show that these policies are not as effective at promoting father involvement as expected and there is more that needs to be done on the welfare front.

Section 1: Problem Statement

Childhood development is influenced by a number of factors. Part of this development is biological. The other part is environmental. Parents hold a significant role in both areas and can provide different types of support and reinforcement for their children as they grow and develop. Historically, men were viewed primarily as breadwinners. A father's financial support for the family represented a major responsibility and expectation from society. This view changed significantly since the end of the 20th century as more emphasis has been placed on raising up nurturing, caring, and involved fathers. The structure of the family is an increasingly contested issue as the percentage of single-parent families has increased. As a result, the literature for paternal influence has expanded as questions of the significance of fatherhood have been raised. Studies tend to center around three important aspects of adolescent growth that father

involvement has a significant effect on: delinquent behavior, emotional/psychological well-being, and academic success.

Delinquency is motivated by several factors, but fatherhood can be a significant factor that helps reduce this type of behavior. While some research has found that the presence of fathers rather than their involvement can reduce the likelihood of adolescent delinquency (Cobb-Clark & Tekin, 2014), more of the literature points to involvement as being a factor of reduction as well. Higher amounts of father involvement relatively reduce delinquent behavior over time (Coley & Medeiros, 2007). Researchers have found that the risk of first delinquent behavior can also be reduced by more paternal-involvement, especially in male adolescents (Cobb-Clark & Tekin, 2014). Supportive behavior from fathers was found to be more strongly related to delinquency than mothers in one study (Hoeve et al., 2009), although the connection of both parents is stronger in preventing delinquent behavior (Carlson, 2006). Implications of involvement in families of lower socioeconomic statuses reveal that the effects of father involvement are stronger in these families. Children that are experiencing poverty are already susceptible to the negative outcomes associated with poverty, including delinquency (Simmons et al., 2017). Children with absent fathers were found to engage in delinquent behavior just as much as those with harsh fathers (Simmons et al, 2013). This makes the need for high-quality father-child interactions even more important for these youth. A review of qualifying longitudinal studies on the impact of father involvement found that many of these studies showed that for families with low socioeconomic status “high father engagement in poor families (with stable marriages) predicted lower incidence of

delinquency during the early adult years for both sexes,” (Sarkadi et al., 2007). The connectedness with fathers helps to decrease the overall delinquency rates at significant levels, but it is also an effect of parental monitoring on young children that can help decrease delinquency at significant levels (Fosco et al., 2012).

Children’s emotional and social wellbeing is an important factor that fathers can affect. As children develop emotionally, it affects how they relate to others in their environment. Fathers and mothers together giving high amounts of care have been associated with the highest amount of wellbeing in children (Stafford et al., 2015). Together, their roles can help children develop confidence and strength from a young age that will give them the ability to become independent mentally and socially. However, fathers are still a significant contributor to emotional development in their own right. In infants, fathers tend to be involved in a more playful manner and the security of this relationship can give infants confidence when interacting with adult strangers when they are 11 and 13 months old (Bogels & Phares, 2008). As children grow and develop into adolescents, high levels of father involvement is correlated with lower levels of internalizing behavior (i.e. negative feelings) (Carlson, 2006). Father involvement during early childhood is also associated with fewer reports of depression symptoms from their children in their adolescent years (Opondo et al., 2017). Nonresident fathers have a significant impact with their involvement in their children’s lives. When nonresident fathers have positive relationships with their children and are responsive in their parenting, children tend to have fewer internalizing and externalizing behavior (Simmons et al., 2017). However, it is important to note that the effect of nonresident fathers

involved in their children's lives does not overstate the role of the mother. Both parents are crucial to the child's wellbeing, as they can both support the child's mental health and encourage emotional wellbeing (King & Sobolewski, 2008; West & Honey, 2015).

Academic success is another crucial area that can have positive effects on a child's development. Doing well in school can lead to pursuits of higher education which can lead to better job prospects and financial stability. Parents' investment in a child's academic journey is more than just monetary support. Children need help with schoolwork, the confidence to succeed, and correction for maturity, all areas that fathers can be involved in. Paternal warmth is linked to academic competence in young children when they are engaging in solvable and unsolvable tasks (Bogels & Phares, 2008). Paternal warmth is also linked to more confidence in a child's "abilities and effectiveness as students" (Suizzo et al., 2017). Higher levels of support from fathers and mothers are associated with higher commitments to school and learning since students have resources at their disposal within their primary environment, their families (Fridman-Teutsch & Attar-Schwartz, 2019). Low-income fathers especially are pivotal in the academic prospects of their children. These fathers' involvement have positive effects on their children materialized as a determination to continue pursuing their academics and more hope for their futures (Suizzo et al., 2017). It is important to keep fathers involved in emotional development and all other areas for their child's overall development, but policymakers have yet to fully capture this in their policies and programs. With high rates of father absence (Lipscomb, 2011) and barriers to involvement for nonresidential

low-income fathers (West & Honey, 2015), it is important to address policy areas that need to be updated in order to best assist fathers in their roles.

The problem addressed in this paper centers on the issue of fatherlessness in America and government policies affect on fatherlessness. Specifically, unintended consequences caused by the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Child Support legislation have indirectly increased the percentage of fatherless families in America since 1935 when the AFDC was first created. These policies created incentives for single-mother families to live without connection to the father of their children. As a result, many children in these programs rarely, if not ever, see their fathers. The absence of fathers can be detrimental to the wellbeing of a child, especially one in poverty. To combat the issue of fatherlessness, the federal government and states adopted welfare reforms like the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families and state programs like Texas's Empowering Fathers for Empowering Children Tomorrow were created respectively to disincentivize formation of single-parent families and promotion of father involvement. However, there is still much of a need to address the issues that fathers of low-income families face, such as low job prospects and financial instability, that can prevent positive father involvement or any involvement at all. These issues and more are discussed in the analysis.

Section 2: Aid to Families with Dependent Children and Child Support

Policy

Aid to Families with Dependent Children

Governmental policies have affected the family in many spheres of life, but for the purposes of this paper, the focus will be on welfare policies. The most important welfare policy that affected families was the Aid to Families of Dependent Children (AFDC), originally called Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). This federal policy was part of the 1935 Social Security Act. It came out of a movement that called for greater support of single mothers who were raising children on their own (Lurie, 1974). These moms were mainly widowed women in 1935, but others were women whose husbands were incapacitated or absent. With the Great Depression looming overhead, single-mothers found it difficult to provide for their children in the same way their husbands had (Lurie, 1974). Employment was increasingly low and the nation was attempting to come out from under the depression's hand (Lurie, 1974). Prior to 1935, many states had voluntarily adopted pension policies for mothers that provided cash or in-kind benefits to these single-moms.

In 1935, however, this effort was made national through the signing of the Social Security Act. For the first time, the federal government focused on aiding single-moms in a time when women did not have equal access to the same opportunities as men. The act provided federal support to states to provide financial support to children of single-parent families, typically single-mother families (Page & Larner, 1997). The Social Security

Board, who would supervise appropriations for this program, were allotted a certain amount of money each year that was subject to change (Social Security Act, 1935). In order for states to receive money from the government, they needed to show that they had a plan to establish administration over the program, contribute to financing the program, and did not impose any unfair requirements on the children who were eligible to receive aid (Social Security Act, 1935). Most importantly, the program was a matching program in which the federal government matches state expenditures on AFDC recipients, up to \$18 for the first dependent child and up to \$12 for each one after that (Social Security Act, 1935). If states went over their planned budget for AFDC expenditures, the federal government would match up to a certain amount of the extra expenditures (United States Health and Human Services, 1998). This allowed states to continue funding the program during a given fiscal year. The program grew and the stream of funding increased over the years as more families became eligible for receipt of AFDC funds (Page & Larner, 1997).

Key Provisions of the AFDC program

The AFDC program focused on providing support to children who were missing financial support from a parent. Specifically, the children were dependents who were “under the age of sixteen who [had] been deprived of parental support or care by reason of the death, continued absence from the home, or physical or mental incapacity of a parent...” (Social Security Act, 1935). As dependent children, they would receive monthly cash assistance from the government to ensure their needs would be met (Page

& Larner, 1997). The provisions in the AFDC focused on instances where the primary earner was not available and the parent or caregiver could not provide adequate financial support for the child. The child/children had to be living with this relative, although extensions were made to children living in foster homes (Lurie, 1974). This definition made room for any type of single-parent family to receive funding from the program. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services (1998), however, the origins of this program saw an overwhelming majority of families headed by the mother, and this primary demographic did not change even when the AFDC program was replaced in 1996.

The most significant component of the law was who qualified for aid. As mentioned previously, the AFDC program originally assisted children from families with widowed mothers (US Department of Health and Human Services, 1998; Lurie, 1974). However, more children with divorced/separated or unmarried absent parents became recipients of AFDC assistance over the course of the 20th century (Page & Larner, 1997). As a result, lawmakers wanted to create incentives to keep families together. In 1961, an amendment was added that would incorporate two-parent families into the AFDC program. Children with a parent who was unemployed were eligible to receive cash assistance under the AFDC-Unemployed Parent (AFDC-UP) program (Lurie, 1974). The AFDC-UP program was created in response to the recession in 1960 to support two-parent families (Lurie, 1974). The parents did not have to be married, but the program was geared towards families that had two primary caregivers living in the home (Winkler, 1995). The goal was to help keep two-parent families from poverty, but also

incentivize families to stay together amidst the recession (Winkler, 1995). The program was state-optional until the 1988 Family Support Act was passed and UP benefits were extended to all states (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1998). The AFDC-UP program signaled the focus legislators would have in regards to reforming this program, with a focus on incentivizing two-parent families.

Positives and Negatives of the Aid to Families of Dependent Children

The Aid to Families of Dependent Children program was helpful in certain areas. This program did set a precedent for providing a safety net for children living in poverty. The amount of cash received through the program was not a lot, but it was a good starting point for families as they qualified for other public assistance programs such as Medicaid, Earned Income Tax Credit, and more (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1998; Page & Larner, 1997). Important implications were made of the responsibility the federal government had for the children of America. The second positive outcome was that the program provided an opportunity for two-parent families to receive benefits. Expanding the program in this way was helpful for two-parent families, as it provided the support they needed to remain together and protected from poverty (Winkler, 1995). Finally, the AFDC benefits are adjusted to the family size and needs (Dear, 1989). This allows for families to continue receiving the support they need even when situations are changing. It is important for these families to be provided for as they work through their situations and seek to be financially independent.

The program experienced some unexpected consequences as well. There was a rise in AFDC families that qualified because of absent or divorced/separated fathers (Page & Lerner, 1997). There is much literature regarding the effect that the AFDC policy had on family stability, with some bodies of literature stating that there is an effect and others stating that there is not. Some studies found that receiving cash assistance from AFDC was merely a cushion for single-mother families and did not make it an attractive “alternative” to marriage. However, there are studies that have pointed to the positive correlation that AFDC assistance has on single-mother families (Southwick Jr., 1978; Honig, 1974). That is, as the level of AFDC cash assistance increased, so did the amount of single-mother families on the AFDC program, with the effects being the strongest for young mothers (Ruggles, 1997). This is because younger mothers tended to have lower levels of education and lower earnings. Higher levels of cash assistance would have been an incentive for young mothers to be part of the program. This meant separation from the fathers since their presence would deem these young mothers ineligible for aid. As a result of the rather mixed findings in the literature, the argument being made in this paper is not that the AFDC program was the primary reason behind those choices of female headship of families. Rather, the effect of AFDC is on the margin where “the individuals who change their decisions are those whose inducement was originally just less than the necessary amount” (Southwick Jr., 1978). The addition of the AFDC-UP program was found to have no effect on increasing two-parent families (Winkler, 1995). Furthermore, evidence of this argument is shown in both the rise of

single-mother families in the AFDC program and the creation of child support laws meant to slow down the rate of AFDC.

Furthermore, many single mothers who were receiving AFDC benefits were unemployed, with 87.6% of them unemployed in 1993(Bureau of the Census, 1995). Given the provisions of Title IV of the Social Security Act, it was difficult for these women to have jobs and sustain their children because having a certain level of income would put them over the top of the poverty level which would make them ineligible to receive benefits. Even if their income did not put them over the poverty level, their benefits would be taxed as these women began working to provide a sort of payback to the state for the cash assistance (Lurie, 1974). In fact, one interview case study conducted in Cook County of Illinois found that of the women who were receiving AFDC benefits, few were able to receive income from absent fathers (Edin, 1991). Those that did receive income did not report it to the government since the government would establish paternity and then take a significant portion of the nonresident father's payment (Edin, 1991; Rangarajan & Gleason, 1998).

Child Support Legislation Pre-Welfare Reform

The impact of AFDC on family stability (i.e. the amount of two-parent families) is best understood in relation to child support policy. One of the most important additions to the AFDC program was the child support enforcement amendments added to Title IV of the Social Security Act. Child support enforcement was enacted as a way for states to demand payment from nonresidential fathers that would support their children on

welfare. This came as the core demographic of AFDC recipients increasingly became children from families absent fathers (Bureau of the Census, 1995; Lurie, 1974). With more and more single mothers utilizing the AFDC program, states wanted to reduce the growth of the program. State agencies believed that the financial support of the father would be enough to help these children get out of poverty. The child support policy was also a way for states to compensate themselves for the rise in welfare payments to these families. The provisions and amendments to this policy have strengthened over time and were part of the welfare reform in 1996. These provisions and amendments are discussed next.

Key Provisions of the Child Support Legislation

One of the first manifestations of child support enforcement on the federal level came in 1950. Congress established procedures that would allow them to be notified when a child was receiving aid from the AFDC for being abandoned or deserted by a parent (Cahn & Murphy, 2000). They could keep track of those families who had parents, specifically fathers, who were alive and had the ability to work. Then in 1967, Congress mandated that all states participating in the AFDC program set up state agencies that would help with child support enforcement (Yarrow, 2009). These agencies served the purpose of establishing paternity amongst single-mother families receiving aid. Establishing paternity meant that these agencies, with the required cooperation of the mothers, would find the supposed fathers of the children under the AFDC program and get a court-ordered paternity test done (Calistri, 1990). Once the fathers were deemed the

biological (i.e. legal) guardian of the children, the fathers would be required to make child support payments to the families. This mandate became an amendment of the Social Security Act in 1974 entitled the Family Support Act, but most commonly known as Title IV-D (Cahn & Murphy, 2000). The Office of Child Support Enforcement was created in 1975 as part of the Title IV-D amendment and housed in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare which today is the Department of Health and Human Services (Cahn & Murphy, 2000). The strongest changes were still to come.

In 1984, Congress passed the Child Support Enforcement amendments that strengthened child support enforcement agencies as they sought to retrieve payments. The amendments allowed for more punitive actions that would incentivize noncustodial parents to pay as they were required to (Cahn & Murphy, 2000; Calistri, 1990). For example, agencies were to institute mandatory wage withholding when there were overdue payments for at least a month. They could also withhold income tax returns and hold property as collateral until payments were made. Agencies also had the right to have child support court cases handled quicker in order to have paternity established faster and to enforce payments. In 1988, the passing of the Family Support Act brought stricter enforcements of the 1984 amendments. Wage withholding became an immediate backlash from the agencies. Rather than wait a month after the deadline for payments, agencies could immediately withhold wages from noncustodial paying parents (Calistri, 1990; O'Donnell, 1990). Paternity establishment standards were created that the courts needed to abide by in order to continue to receive funding from the federal government (Calistri, 1990). There were also changes made to the guidelines for updating child

support award levels that were insufficient for families. Changing circumstances meant that award levels needed to change, and the FSA accounted for this.

Positive and Negatives of Child Support Legislation

With the changing demographics of AFDC families, many state programs wanted to slow the rate of providing benefits while also making noncustodial parents, who were mainly fathers, to pay their fair share. Securing higher amounts of child support payments meant extra financial support for the child. However, this policy prior to the Welfare Reform policy of 1996 (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act) had more negative outcomes. One negative outcome of child support policy is that policymakers created this policy from a perspective that noncustodial fathers could pay, they just didn't want to (Cabrera & Peters, 2008). This perspective has painted an image that all noncustodial fathers who don't pay child support are deadbeat (Hansen, 1999). The literature does not support this popular image. Existing research on nonresidential fathers finds that a significant portion of nonresidential fathers are young, uneducated, and economically disadvantaged when they first have nonmarital children (Hakorvita et al., 2019; Sorensen, 2010). As these fathers get older, it makes it harder for them to provide payments since their earnings tend to be less than the earnings of fathers who did not have children at a young age (Hakorvita et al., 2019). If these fathers do provide payments, it can make them worse off economically (Rangarajan & Gleason, 1998). Increases in the amount of child support payments for these fathers may increase the mother and her child's wellbeing, but decrease the father's wellbeing.

Since many of these fathers tend to be low-income themselves, having strict punishment tactics for not paying was not helpful. Provisions such as withholding wages or tax return income can prove detrimental to the father even if it is successful in securing payments. It doesn't just affect the father's wellbeing, but it could also affect their relationships with their children. Nonresidential fathers tend to associate economic support with social support (or father involvement) (Rangarajan & Gleason, 1998). Ermisch (2008) found that those who are able to pay tend to be more involved with their children's lives. However, payments do not have a significant effect on the frequency of a father's contact with their children, suggesting that other barriers to involvement are at play (Ermisch, 2008). Furthermore, Ermisch's (2008) study found that higher binding court orders on child support had a negative effect on a father's involvement in their children's lives. Although the claim was that child welfare may still be better, there was not enough evidence to effectively pursue this claim.

Another negative effect with the child support policy was that there was not much encouragement from states for paternity establishment to occur voluntarily. Some states had provisions in place that allowed noncustodial fathers to establish paternity voluntarily. However, these volunteer opportunities for establishment were not always advertised well. If states were to make paternity establishment voluntary, there tended to be higher rates of establishment by these states, about 43 percentage points more than states who did not have voluntary paternity establishment (Sonenstein et al., 1994, as cited in Cabrera & Peters, 2008). Voluntary establishment may also help fathers become more involved with their children relationally (Mincy et al., 2005). Fathers taking

avenues to voluntarily provide support may want to have more positive influences on their children which can lead to good bonds later on (Mincy et al., 2005). The concept of voluntary paternity establishment was captured in the welfare reform policy of 1996.

Section 3: The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity

Reconciliation Act and State Fatherhood Initiatives

Welfare Reform in 1996

With a growing number of children on the AFDC program without involved fathers, policymakers decided to take action. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 (i.e. welfare reform policy) was a bipartisan policy that overturned the AFDC program and strengthened child support laws. The law was heavily backed by President Bill Clinton at the time and was seen as a good solution to the rising number of single-mother, father-absent families on the AFDC program. The policy, most commonly referred to as the Welfare Reform Act, would completely replace the AFDC with a new program known as the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). This program would limit the amount of time participants would receive aid. There would also be more interaction between child support agencies and TANF recipients. Child support agencies would be given more resources at their disposal to use to establish paternity and collect payments. Below is an analysis of these two components of PRWORA including key provisions and outcomes of the policies.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families

The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families was a significant change to welfare. In 1996, the number of AFDC cases was around 4.41 million and government spending on the AFDC program was around \$24 billion (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1998). Furthermore, 89% of the children receiving assistance from the AFDC program lived in families where there was “no father present” (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, 1996). Many government officials were worried about increasing spending and the number of single-mother families on welfare as some significant reasons to reform the AFDC program. They wanted to disincentivize this program in hopes that single mothers would see the benefits of father involvement. As a result, the TANF program was created as a replacement for the AFDC program. The TANF program would be a stop to the open-ended cash assistance that families of AFDC were privy to. The objective for lawmakers was that this program would discourage out-of-wedlock births and encourage the formation of two-parent families (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, 1996). In fact, the first section of TANF in the PRWORA (1996) states that Congress finds marriage is key to a “successful society”, an essential institution beneficial to children. With this in mind, TANF was created to slow the rate of and eventually decrease the amount of single-mother families on welfare which would in turn decrease the amount of spending on welfare. By making TANF a block grant as opposed to an open-ended cash assistance program like AFDC, resources would be limited and benefits would, therefore, be minimal. The goal was that in having a limitation on benefits

available, mothers would be encouraged to get financial support from the fathers which could lead to more father involvement and two-parent family formations.

Key Provisions of TANF

Essentially, the program would provide cash assistance to needy families while also moving recipients into the workforce, helping them to become independently sufficient. The most significant feature of the TANF program was that it was a block grant. As a block grant, states would be given a specific amount of funding from the federal government that would be used for the states' TANF programs (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, 1996). Once states ran out of funds, they were not entitled to replenishment from the federal government. The limitation of this program helps in understanding the rest of the important provisions of TANF and also Title III of PRWORA which dealt with Child Support Reform (this will be discussed later). Under TANF, recipients were entitled to 5 years of receiving cash assistance through the program (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, 1996). After these 5 years, recipients would no longer be eligible to receive cash assistance. In these 5 years on the program, recipients would need to be actively seeking jobs. In fact, individuals were required to be engaged in work-related activities 2 years after they began receiving assistance or when the State deemed them eligible to begin working (Martin & Caminada, 2012). States were also given the option to use TANF grants to set up "responsible fatherhood" programs, initiatives, and councils that would help promote father involvement in families. These programs could be

directly engaging fathers, such as curriculum-based programs teaching men how to be fathers, or indirectly engaging fathers, such as affordable child care for those fathers who can't afford child care. States would also receive a bonus from the government if they were able to show that they were reducing out-of-wedlock births and discouraging the formation of single-mother families (Martin & Caminada, 2012). This meant that states were allowed to use part of their grants to fund programs that were helping to encourage two-parent families such as family planning groups. This policy was used as an indirect tactic, but strengthening child support enforcement laws served as a direct tactic. Together the two policies would hopefully simultaneously decrease welfare dependence of single-mother welfare families and increase two-parent family formations.

Child Support Enforcement (Welfare Reform 1996)

As part of the goal to strengthen two-parent family structures, Congress further strengthened child support policies in PRWORA. Lawmakers wanted to focus on promoting “responsible fatherhood” and the involvement of fathers in these single-mother families. In regards to TANF, lawmakers made it essential that recipient mothers receiving welfare had to help in locating the father of their child. They needed to help with paternity establishment efforts if they were going to receive TANF funds. Since this program was limited in how much and how long recipients would receive assistance, establishing paternity and receiving child support payments was perceived by lawmakers as a benefit to these families (as well as the States). When mothers transitioned off of welfare into the workforce, they would have these child support payments that would

supplement what they spend on their children. As a result, mothers who do not cooperate in paternity establishment are subject to reductions in their cash assistance (Curran, 2003). This action was a cornerstone of these lawmakers' goal of decreasing the number of families on welfare while promoting father involvement.

Key Provisions of Child Support Legislation (Welfare Reform 1996)

With the stronger child support policy, states could secure more payments and increase the amount of child support collected. States are authorized to have automated systems in which they could track the payments of the fathers. The PRWORA extended to all states the requirement of the New Hire Directory. Essentially, states had to have a directory of all employers within the state in which the employers report to the directory of their new hires. As a result, States could use this information to locate non-complying fathers in order to establish paternity and enforce child support obligations. Furthermore, the automated systems are linked to employers of these fathers and the State can retrieve payments directly from the fathers' employers. All states under the PRWORA were authorized to use aggressive tactics in order to hold fathers responsible if they failed to make a payment or were attempting to elude the system. These included withholding income from their jobs, suspending driver's licenses, suspending passports, and even jail time. Despite these "crackdown" measures, the PRWORA included measures that would help establish paternity voluntarily. States had to include voluntary establishment opportunities in which fathers voluntarily agreed to pay child support for their children. States are supposed to publicize these opportunities to fathers so that they know they

have an option. In accordance with TANF, legislators hoped that the two measures, as well as some of the other measures, would increase father involvement in families. However, the success of these two measures is questionable and yet to be discussed thoroughly in the literature.

Positives and Negatives about the Welfare Reform Act

One of the pitfalls of welfare reform was its lack of focus on the core demographic group affected by welfare. Single-mother families are a majority of recipients on welfare and they are the group that is most susceptible to being low-income on the verge of poverty, if not already impoverished (Dear, 1989). These are women who have low levels of education and struggle to find work as a result. Many of the fathers who have children on welfare also have low levels of education and poor job prospects. Much of the welfare reform still assume recipients of welfare reform are lazy and there is evasion of responsibility on the part of the father. This is not an accurate perspective of single-mother families on welfare and why these absentee fathers are not paying child support. The “solutions” created in PRWORA did not bolster two-parent families as much as legislators would’ve liked. The provisions have not significantly increased father involvement nor have they addressed key issues associated with father involvement in regards to welfare (Curran, 2003). This is to be expected since the primary reason for the reform was to lower the number of welfare cases. This goal was achieved, but there is still much to be done if lawmakers wish to see an increase in two-parent families.

Focusing on disincentivizing welfare assistance will not automatically incentivize two-parent family structures.

Analyzing the provisions of TANF, the program was not set up to successfully promote two-parent family structures. TANF has been effective in moving families off of welfare. The caseload for TANF had gone from “5 million in 1993...to 1.95 million in 2011” (Wang, 2015). However, TANF’s usefulness comes when recipients can find better-paying jobs and can secure financial involvement from the co-parent. TANF has no effect on the incomes of the recipients, meaning that it does not increase recipients’ earnings prospects (Grogger, 2001, as cited in Ozawa & Yoon, 2005). Single-mother families who are recipients of TANF are still one of the most vulnerable to poverty. For those who have been recipients of TANF, moving from welfare-to-work does not increase their financial stability as many of them still depend on public assistance programs such as Medicaid (Martin & Caminada, 2012). Furthermore, Ozawa and Yoon (2005) found that TANF leavers compared to AFDC leavers experienced a lower increase in child support payments. Forcing recipient cooperation with child support agents is meant to help them secure payments for child support that will help them after leaving welfare. However, if these payments are not increasing after leaving welfare, this places families at a disadvantage apart from those who are on TANF.

What is especially interesting is that many states have not used portions of their TANF funds to fund state programs promoting fatherhood or helping fathers. There is much emphasis in the provisions of TANF placed on state efforts to combat the rise in absent fathers (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, 1996), yet the relative

use of TANF funds at the state level has not focused on this yet. Pearson & Fagan (2019) found that as of fiscal year 2016, only 20 states were using some portion of their TANF grants to fund fatherhood programs, with the average usage rate at .5%. The Office of Family Assistance (2019) that puts out yearly reports on TANF usage for fiscal years found that the average usage rate of TANF funding for fatherhood programs in 2018 increased by .2%. Although TANF requires states to keep some leftover funds as obligatory to be used for the next fiscal year, 35 states had unobligated funds leftover from fiscal year 2018 (The Office of Family Assistance, 2019). There was a total of \$3.6 billion in unobligated funds for the US in FY 2018 (The Office of Family Assistance, 2019). These funds could have been used to fund programs that help noncustodial parents find jobs, navigate the child support system, and engage nonresident fathers.

Child support payments have increased since the strengthening of the policy. It helps that voluntary paternity establishment was set up at hospitals under PRWORA, as well as the encouragement of voluntary establishment in other arenas. One study found that this helped increase establishment rates to 70% with 6 in 7 establishments due to voluntary establishment in hospitals (Mincy et al., 2005). In terms of father involvement and child-well being, there is mixed evidence in the literature that voluntary paternity establishment actually has an effect on either (Mincy et al., 2005; Rossin-Slater, 2017). Furthermore, payment securing of nonresident fathers with children on welfare compared to those who don't have children on welfare is still low even with the voluntary measures. In 1998, the securement rate of welfare families was 14% compared to their counterparts which was 28% (McLanahan & Carlson, 2002). There are still provisions in place

making child support payments less appealing. Most of the money collected is still being used to pay welfare expenditures, which disincentivizes payments. As a result, welfare families can receive support in different ways from fathers. This can look like in-kind support providing essentials or gifts (Curran, 2003). It is also more beneficial to keep these payments under wraps so that they are not forced through official channels that lower their amount of support (Edin, 1991). As reforms of this bill occur, it is important that there is more focus on noncustodial parents' ability to pay and lowering barriers that are preventing them from paying. Restructuring the time limits of TANF for mothers should also be a focus with an emphasis on helping mothers and fathers with attaining higher levels of education and securing better paying jobs. In doing so, policymakers can do a better job of helping fathers and mothers become financially stable as well as increasing two-parent families.

State Programs Targeting Fatherhood

Many states have adopted programs focused on helping disadvantaged fathers get the help they need to be more involved in their children's lives both socially and financially. Some of these programs receive funding from TANF while others receive funding from other revenue streams. The Children and Family Research Partnership (2017a) put out a policy brief detailing some of the state fatherhood initiatives. These programs differ in objectives and reflect state perspectives on father involvement for welfare families. Three states' programs from the brief will be evaluated below. The first is Texas's Empowering Fathers for Empowering Children Tomorrow Program that is

funded by Texas's Department of Family and Protective Services. Next is Connecticut's Fatherhood Initiative that is a broad-based, statewide, multi-agency program. Finally, Illinois's Council on Responsible Fatherhood will be evaluated. The key provisions of each state program will be assessed along with outcomes that have been reported by each program and shortcomings of the programs.

Texas

In 2013, the Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) Division of Texas's Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) created the Empowering Fathers for Empowering Children Tomorrow (EFFECT) program. The main goal of EFFECT is to help fathers become more involved in their children's lives (Child and Family Research Partnership, 2017a). In doing so, it will hopefully increase protective factors like family functioning in order to protect children against maltreatment and abuse (Child and Family Research Partnership, 2017a). EFFECT is a broader program receiving funds from DFPS through the PEI division (Texas Department of Family Protective Services, n.d.). In return, the program funds local fatherhood programs in Texas. These programs are subsets of EFFECT and utilize EFFECT's model of programming. EFFECT recognizes the need to provide programming that is beneficial to helping men become the fathers they want to be. As a result, they utilize a classroom-style model to educate the fathers who take part in the program (Children and Family Research Partnership, 2017a). Facilitators can choose from several different evidence-based curriculum to use in their specific programs, but they also engage fathers in group discussions. Evidence-based

means that the programs utilizing the curriculum have been tested to see if the goals of the curriculum have been met.

The evidence-based curriculum is a major part of the EFFECT program and its ability to monitor its outcome. There are four specific curriculums that EFFECT gives subprograms to choose from. However, only two were utilized by subprograms of EFFECT evaluated in a study conducted by the Children and Family Research Partnership (2017b) and the University of Texas, Austin. The 24/7 Dad Curriculum, which was curated by the National Fatherhood Initiative, is a 12-week series of sessions that target five areas of skill development for fathers: fathering, relationships, parenting, self-awareness, and self-care. It was designed for fathers with kids 18 years and younger and can be equally beneficial for fathers who are noncustodial parents, underemployed, and/or unemployed (Children and Family Research Partnership, 2017b; Lewin-Bizan, 2015). These are fathers who tend to have children on welfare and have to pay child support (Rangarajan & Gleason, 1998). The evidence for this study comes from one empirical study and many descriptive studies that point to one general conclusion (Lewin-Bizan, 2015; Children and Family Research Partnership, 2017b). With the 24/7 Dad Curriculum, fathers develop a better understanding of their roles as fathers, but there is not much evidence that they are applicably growing in their relationships with their children and partner (Children and Family Research Partnership, 2017b).

The second curriculum used is the Nurturing Fathers Program that is a 13-week long program. As the title assumes, the program is focused on helping fathers become aware of their children's needs and acknowledging the relationship with their own fathers

(Children and Family Research Partnership, 2017b; The Center for Growth and Development, Inc., 2020). Men learn how to create a nurturing environment, build healthy family relationships (especially with the mother), and how they can be more involved with their children. This curriculum is good for fathers who are living with their children or living apart from their children and has proven useful in helping them grow in both their knowledge of and abilities as fathers. The evidence for this study comes from an empirical study conducted in Florida (Child and Family Research Fellowship, 2017b). For the most part, fathers improved in several areas such as understanding how they should be involved in their child's development, ability to show empathy to their kids, and alternative strategies to corporal punishment (Children and Family Research Partnership, 2017b; The Center for Growth and Development, Inc., 2020). This program was shown to be less effective in less educated individuals than more educated individuals and in those that were separated or divorced than in those who were married (Children and Family Research Partnership, 2017b).

With these two tests in mind, it is important to discuss the outcomes of Texas's EFFECT program. As previously mentioned, a study was conducted by the Children and Family Research Partnership (2017b) in accordance with the University of Texas, Austin, and PEI on EFFECT to measure its effectiveness. The focus was on the four contracted programs of EFFECT. Each program had to use what is known as the Protective Factors Survey which analyzes "multiple protective factors against child abuse and neglect" pre- and post-program completion (Children and Family Research Partnership, 2017b). The programs which utilized the 24/7 Dad curriculum also took the 24/7 Dad Fathering Skills

Survey was designed to assess how well the curriculum and program are shaping fathers to meet the goals of the 24/7 Dad curriculum. Findings for the program point to a success in retention due to positive and engaging facilitators that create a safe space for the fathers (Children and Family Research Partnership, 2017b). EFFECT programs overall improved fathers confidence and self-awareness of their roles and their relationships. Another important finding is that co-parenting skills improve with the program. Some fathers state that they can better understand their co-parent's perspective which improves the father's relationship with that co-parent. Although these effects are good, there are areas for improvement that are noted in the study.

There were many suggestions made by both participants and researchers of EFFECT concerning areas of the program that could improve. For example, many fathers were suggesting that the program focus more on providing fathers the support they need to navigate governmental systems and agencies like the Child Support Agency (Children and Family Research Partnership, 2017b). This is crucial for fathers involved with the welfare system especially. This system is bureaucratic in nature and can be difficult for less educated individuals to move through and understand it. Focusing programming in a way that targets these men and other underprivileged men would improve the effectiveness and outreach of the program. Fathers would be more situated and prone to partaking in the program since they would be receiving the support they need. Another important suggestion was that state and local agencies take part in collaborative forums in which participants could express their concerns and these agencies could implement them. Researchers talk about how many of these participants lack adequate transportation

to and from meetings, and agencies could provide discounted or even free transportation for these men to continue to attend these fatherhood programs (Children and Family Research Partnership, 2017b). Eliminating physical barriers to participation will improve the program's overall effectiveness. Finally, this program could benefit from becoming more of a hybrid between a classroom environment and a counseling session. Dedicating more time and space to letting men talk about their fears, their struggles, and the challenges they face as fathers can encourage paternal warmth within fathers and can be used to encourage these men to remain involved in the program and with their kids. Overall this program has much room for improvement, especially with targeting the neediest fathers, but it is a solid program that leans on evidence.

Connecticut

Connecticut's Fatherhood Initiative was created in 1999 after state representative John S. Martinez doctored and pushed for the bill to pass. The bill received bipartisan support as it became increasingly aware that Connecticut was dealing with a father-absence issue within its state. This initiative also came on the heels of the Welfare Reform Act which, as mentioned previously, was pushed by lawmakers to reduce the amount of father-absent families on welfare specifically, but also in general. The 1999 legislation set up the Fatherhood Initiative to be a program that promotes the positive involvement and engagement of children. It placed an "...emphasis on children eligible or formerly eligible for services funded by the temporary assistance for needy families block grant..." (The State of Connecticut, 1999). The initiative itself is a broad-based,

statewide, multi-agency coalition and therefore is focused on changing systems that can be barriers to father involvement in the lives of children, especially those on welfare. The agency provides programs such as economic stability services and intensive case management (The State of Connecticut, 2016). For those low-income fathers with children on welfare (and any parent), the initiative focuses on promoting services that help increase a father's ability to meet the financial and medical needs of the child as well as helping them develop good parenting skills to engage better with their children (The State of Connecticut, 1999).

The Fatherhood Initiative also identifies exemplary services and fatherhood programs that align with the goals for the initiative. In 2003, the act for the Fatherhood Initiative was updated with provisions discussing certification of eligible programs in Connecticut (Connecticut Department of Social Services, 2014). This measure was created so that exemplary fatherhood programs could be recognized and in doing so, boost their repertoire as a credible and reliable resource for low-income fathers especially. Certification is a viable goal for fatherhood programs as there are many benefits for those programs that become certified. For example, certified programs can offer a special type of program known as the State of Connecticut Child Support Arrearage Adjustment Program for eligible participants (Connecticut Department of Social Services, 2004). This Connecticut program reduces the amount of overdue child support payments that a noncustodial parent owes (Connecticut Department of Social Services, 2004). To be eligible, noncustodial parents must meet a number of criteria including being part of an eligible Parenthood Program, which the Fatherhood Initiative

helps establish. Certification also enhances a program's applications for funding and gives them a better chance at securing funding for their program. It can also strengthen the services that it provides to low-income, non-custodial fathers which is beneficial to these men (Connecticut Department of Social Services, 2014). There are many steps in the process, and each level adds an additional layer of scrutiny. Only 11 programs have been certified since 2003, and it is those programs that were subject to evaluation of the effectiveness of the Fatherhood Initiative.

In 2013, an evaluation was conducted on the effectiveness of the Fatherhood Initiative. The study was conducted on 6 certified programs under the Fatherhood Initiative by Yale University's School of Medicine, the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) (Gordon & Brabham, 2013). Each of the 6 programs were enrolled in a network under a funded project by the DSS called the Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Project meant to conduct research on these certified programs (Gordon & Brabham, 2013). They are referred to as Responsible Fatherhood sites. Participants at each of the 6 sites voluntarily participated in the research which was done in the form of an evaluation of the services offered by each site. More specifically, the programs were analyzed for how much the participants reported changes in their experiences, knowledge, skills and abilities as they relate to parenting (more focus on fathering amongst low-income, nonresidential fathers) (Gordon & Brabham, 2013). Participants completed an intake, assessment and child form for each child they have, and the information was recorded on a computer database that all the certified programs had access to. The program assessed the strengths and weaknesses of participants in three core areas (healthy marriage skills,

responsible parenting, and economic stability) and some other sub-areas (like substance abuse and employment) (Gordon & Brabham, 2013). Participants expressed needs were recorded through a case plan in which they identified goals for the program and any activities or sessions they did were assessed and evaluated to see if the service providers met their objectives with the activity/session.

The study was conducted in five waves as a general assessment of the six programs with a different core area of development assessed with each new wave. Findings showed that the average age of men serviced with these programs are around the age of 34 (Gordon & Brabham, 2013). The target group of men was much younger than this, and although referrals were made to these men of these services, the referrals were not working (Gordon & Brabham, 2013). There was also diversity across the group of men who were serviced. For example, in areas where white men were the largest racial group, they were the racial group with the highest enrollment at the fatherhood program in their area. The same was true for black and Latinx men. Researchers pointed to a need for more complex care of men that addresses their needs, such as a fatherhood program that focuses on support tailored to African-American men (Gordon & Brabham, 2013). Many of the men participating addressed financial barriers in regards to outstanding debt, many of whom attributed the debt to child support payments that were being made. This was indicated as an area for further focus in the Fatherhood Initiative and other fatherhood programs. One form of improvement could be to relax the requirements of programs that can offer the State of Connecticut Child Support Arrearage Adjustment Program so that more programs can offer this resource to struggling noncustodial parents

who are paying child support. The Connecticut Department of Social Services (2015) and its partners created the Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative Strategic Plan which was a 4-year plan that would strengthen the Fatherhood Initiative by addressing the issues mentioned above and more.

Illinois

The Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood is different from the other two state programs evaluated, both in form and implementation. The council was established in 2003 by the Illinois State Legislature through the Council on Responsible Fatherhood Act (2003). The Council seeks to promote the positive involvement of both parents in the child's life while significantly increasing the number of children growing up with involved and responsible fathers/father figures (Council on Responsible Fatherhood, 2003; Children and Family Research Partnership, 2017a). The Act targets a focus group on populations of "children whose families are receiving public assistance" (Council on Responsible Fatherhood, 2003), however, it is also clear that their initiatives will be beneficial for all children growing up in all types of family situations. The Council seeks to promote responsible fatherhood through numerous outlets like raising public awareness of the impact of father absence and changing perceptions within state agencies on the impact of father involvement (Council on Responsible Fatherhood, 2003; Children and Family Research Partnership, 2017a; Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood, 2020). Some of the duties of the council are to evaluate and make recommendations of state fatherhood programs, policies, and initiatives to the Governor and General

Assembly and hold a statewide symposium discussing and resolving issues related to responsible fatherhood while also using it as an opportunity to raise awareness for the issue (Council on Responsible Fatherhood, 2003; Children and Family Research Partnership, 2017a). They also submit an annual report by January 1st to the Governor and General Assembly outlining the Council's findings and recommendations (Council on Responsible Fatherhood, 2003). The Council members are appointed by the Governor for 2-year terms and must have "an interest in and experience with children and families" (Council on Responsible Fatherhood, 2003).

There are two key tasks the Council carries out that are subject to this analysis. The first is the annual symposium which is free and open to the public. The aforementioned purpose of the symposium is to discuss how the Council's agenda of responsible fatherhood is manifesting in policies, programs and initiatives. The Council encourages fatherhood program workers, community leaders, faith-based leaders, social workers, fathers and anyone else who can be impacted by their message of responsible fatherhood to attend. There are keynote speakers featured at these symposiums, one of which is always a Council member who is discussing matters the Council wants to have shared with the general public, like a bill or new program they are supporting. Typically, there is also a message regarding the importance of responsible fatherhood as well as one regarding practical ways fathers can involve themselves in their children's lives which are shared by guest speakers who are either passionate about or have careers dealing with children and families. These symposiums serve as a verbal update to the public on what the Council is doing, but it is not solely for this purpose.

The second task carried out by the Council is the aforementioned annual report. This report gives a fairly detailed description of the tasks and events the Council engaged in over the past year. In more recent reports, the discussion of year's events has become increasingly shorter. It is difficult to tell if it is a lack of engagement or a lack of funding that leads to a lack of engagement. Nevertheless, these reports are filled with mentions of all the ways the Council worked to reach its ultimate goal of increasing the number of children with involved fathers/father figures (Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood, 2017). Usually, there is mention of the events that took place at the annual symposium and the impact on the overall goal. In the 2017 report, which is the most current report, there was mention of the Council working within the key areas of issues concerning fathers' ability to be involved in their children's lives, including health/wellness and employment (Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood, 2017). They also stated that they reached out to community partners, especially those who do work in the key areas of concern, and they drew attention to reform that was needed in legislation. They stated that since one of their main goals is to raise awareness of responsible fatherhood, they were able to do that through the symposium that generated good public attention (Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood, 2017). One of the final components of all the annual reports details the plans for the following year. They have mentioned the pursuit of funding, continued outreach, and planning for the next symposium as their main goals (Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood, 2017). Unlike Connecticut and Texas, Illinois's Council is a bit less involved in local programs which makes it difficult to analyze its success as will be discussed.

Since the Council on Responsible Fatherhood is merely just council, it is expected that there would be less of a hands-on approach to fatherhood programming than an initiative. However, this program seems to lack efficiency and consistency in its planning. For starters, the Act that created the Council does not designate funding for this council. Furthermore, the Council struggles to find a steady stream of funding each year (City of Minneapolis Health Department, 2014). A program without funding struggles to serve its purpose since it cannot “enhance its efforts in promoting positive fatherhood involvement in the lives of children in Illinois” (Illinois Council on Responsible Fatherhood, 2017) without the necessary resources. This is most likely reflected in the fact that the annual reports the Council is commissioned to give stop in 2017, however, there is no evidence that the Council has disbanded.

Additionally, the Council states that its goal to increase the number of children with involved fathers/father figures is a measurable one. However, there is no empirical measure that the Council itself has contributed to any change in the amount of father involved families. There are some accomplishments that the Council speaks of in its most recent report, but no detail is given as to what the Council accomplished. The only form of measurement that the Council has produced besides the report is the symposium’s Public Relations. They can count the number of people in attendance and they can count the number of people who stream the symposium online. However, there is no survey asking attendees if they’ve learned anything, asking community leaders if they feel equipped to tackle the issue in their own communities, or getting a general sense of how

much awareness has changed. Although the Council is a well-intentioned program, there is more that needs to be done if it is going to achieve its goals.

Shortcomings of PRWORA and State Initiatives

PRWORA had the good intention of encouraging fathers to be involved with their families. Wanting to combat some of the negative effects of growing up without two parents, the act focused on getting welfare families to bring fathers into the picture. However, the methods used are not necessarily the most helpful. While trying to get mothers to seek the support of fathers, they are giving a limit on what could help them right now: welfare cash assistance. This is detrimental to these families as they are still in danger of poverty. Child support payments on their own do not increase for TANF leavers, and if this is expected to bring much of the financial independence for mothers, then it leaves these families in a place of struggle even after leaving TANF. Additionally, child support payments can increase children's well being, but it doesn't necessarily increase father involvement which can have a more significant effect on children's wellbeing. Furthermore, many states are not actively using TANF funds to fund fatherhood programs which can be a place of growth for fathers. Having unobligated funds leftover after the fiscal year is money that can be spent in these areas.

Illinois, Texas, and Connecticut each had well-intentioned programs. The one in need of the most reform is Illinois's Council on Responsible Fatherhood, although the other two could use more reform as well. The lack of consistent funding of Illinois's program is problematic as it prevents the program from achieving the goals of the program. However the Council could do more to accurately measure its impact in the

state. The current measure does not do much to show their impact which does not enhance the credibility of the program, especially as they are seeking funding. Texas and Connecticut could benefit from creating more complex programs that focus more on the barriers that prevent noncustodial and nonresident fathers from providing support. However, the programs they have now have been able to increase fathers' knowledge and understanding of the roles they can have in their families. In the analysis given by both programs there was a stated need for the programs to focus more on the applicability of the knowledge gained, so hopefully, they can both do this. Overall, state programs have had better results in promoting father involvement than PRWORA, something that federal legislators should take into account.

Section 4: Conclusion

Concluding Statement

In conclusion, the fatherlessness has been affected by welfare policies in different veins, but most importantly with the AFDC program, child support policy, and PRWORA. The AFDC program incentivized single-mother families to remain apart from fathers as the program provided cash assistance to these families. With increased spending on the program, policymakers created child support policies to combat the rise in both spending and single-mother families on AFDC. Although the policy was meant to increase the number of fathers financially involved in their kids' lives, it failed to account

for barriers to involvement. PRWORA, which replaced the AFDC program with the TANF program, focused on increasing the amount of two-parent families by disincentivizing welfare and cracking down on child support payments. There is not much evidence showing that PRWORA has succeeded in its goal and more importantly

Further, states were implored to use portions of their TANF grants to fund state programs aimed at helping fathers become more involved with their families. However, there is not much focus on funding these programs as the rate of usage of TANF grants to do so remains low at 0.7% nationally. Despite this, there have been state programs created to focus on father involvement. Texas, Connecticut, and Illinois have all created initiatives to increase the number of involved fathers within their states. Texas and Connecticut focus on funding curriculum-based subprograms that teach fathers how to be confident in their roles and help them to apply it. Illinois has a council of individuals who focus on creating partnerships with community organizers and bring awareness of responsible fatherhood to the State. Although, all three initiatives are in need of improvements that will help them accomplish the goals of their respective programs.

One of the connections in the literature regarding father absence and welfare was criminality. Specifically, criminal backgrounds were stated as a barrier for fathers. I would like to further examine the connections between criminality and welfare as affecting fathers. It would be particularly interesting to study the negative effects of the PRWORA child support provisions on poverty amongst men and incarceration rates considering a study found 14% of noncustodial fathers with child support debt were incarcerated (Cozzolino, 2018). I would also like to examine how child support payments

affect academic success and child development in children. There also needs to be more research concerning what other variables combined with welfare can impact father absence. Although the AFDC program, child support laws and PRWORA were significant, there are more public assistance programs that can be explored in relation to father absence. Combining those with the aforementioned programs may create a stronger argument for the negative impact these policies may have on fatherhood. Finally, there needs to be more research on how AFDC and TANF affects those who are on the margins of choosing to receive benefits. This will lend itself to a stronger argument as to why AFDC users were incentivized to be apart from the fathers of their children and why TANF was not a solution to AFDC.

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