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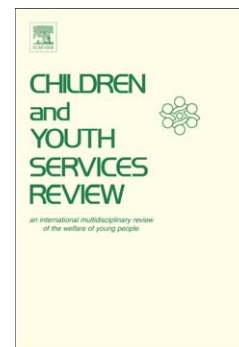
Connecting father absence and mother blame in child welfare policies and practice

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Title:

**Connecting father absence and mother blame in
child welfare policies and practice**

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Abstract:

This paper reports the results of research about fathers and child welfare conducted in a mid-size Canadian city. The overall study uses a variety of modalities to assess the current state of child welfare policy, practice and discourse with fathers of children who

come to the attention of child protection authorities, with particular attention to fathers of the children of mothers who were adolescent at the time of at least one child's birth. Our research includes birth/biological fathers, stepfathers and men providing emotional, financial or social support to a child or children. This paper reports on the first phase of the study, in which we reviewed a random sample of child protection case files utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods. Our analysis and discussion is informed by a review of recent child welfare literature related to fathers and by related research team members have completed or are currently engaged in, including studies about young mothers in care, kinship care, risk assessment, failure to protect and the narratives of child welfare workers. Our intention is to contribute to reframing child welfare practice, policy and discourse in ways that are more inclusive of fathers and less blaming of mothers.

Text

Child welfare disproportionately engages with poor single mothers. Under neo-liberal economic policies, the poor are getting poorer while also having fewer resources to draw upon; the poverty rate for single mothers in Canada is four times that of the general populace (O'Connor, Orloff & Shaver, 1999) and even when mothers are working full-time they struggle financially (Swift & Birmingham, 1999). The poorest of these poor are single mothers (Baker & Tippin, 1999), who are significantly over-represented in child protection investigations (Jones, 1994; Trocmé et al., 2005). Because they are poor and otherwise marginalized, these mothers find it difficult to secure adequate housing, feed their children or live in a safe neighbourhood.

Although all children who come to the attention of child welfare authorities have fathers, men are curiously absent from child welfare interventions. For example, even when children have two parents, investigations into child neglect tend to focus solely on mothers' behaviour and responsibilities even though fathers are very much present in situations of child neglect (Coohey & Zang, 2006; Mayer, et al, 2003). A father or father figure can leave his children without being seen as abandoning them, and can fail to feed, clothe or otherwise care for them without being seen to be neglectful (Scourfield, 2003; Swift, 1995). When physical abuse is the problem, workers focus on mothers and ignore fathers and father figures, even when they were the source of the family's difficulties (Radhakrishna et al, 2001; Scourfield, 2003). In cases of childhood sexual assault, what mother did not do is seen as more serious and more blameworthy than what father (or another male perpetrator) did. Child protection workers in these situations commonly focus on the mother's alleged failure to protect or even possible collusion with the abuser while ignoring the perpetrator (Krane, 2003; Carter, 1999). Although the father may be perceived as a threat, the onus is still on the mother to remove him from the scene or else place herself at risk of losing her children (Dominelli, et al, 2005).

When men batter mothers, the 'problem' is also defined in terms of what mother alleged 'failure to protect' rather than in terms of the actions of the perpetrator (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Magen, 1999; Nixon, 2001; Strega, 2006). Mothers are also held to be at fault when children are physically assaulted by a father or father-figure (Radhakrishna et al, 2001). The child protection gaze remains firmly fixed on mother's 'availability' and parenting skills, while "assailants and fathers of the children have been virtually ignored" (Sullivan et al, 2000, p. 590). The work of Peled (2000) and Sullivan

et al (2000), which consider the abuser's relationship to the child as an important variable in understanding children's adjustment, are notable exceptions.

Although it is theoretically possible that men as well as women could be accused of 'failure to protect', men are not, in practice, subject to this accusation. In the United States, where the notion of 'failure to protect' has been most vigorously deployed, researchers did not find a single instance in which a man had ever been prosecuted for his failure to protect his children from an abusive mother (Davidson, 1995, cited in Kopels & Sheridan, 2002; Fugate, 2001). Lothian (2002), in her research about how ideas of failure to protect are used in Canadian criminal prosecutions, also failed to find a single instance in which the concept had been deployed against a man. More commonly, social workers ignore dangerous men when assessing risk and family functioning (Munro, 1998; Stanley, 1997) and also fail to engage with men who may be assets (O'Hagan, 1997; Trotter, 1997).

Contributors to father absence and mother blaming

Professional discourses

The lack of attention to fathers in the general social work literature has been well documented, most recently by Strug & Wilmore-Schaeffer (2003). The voluminous literature on adolescent pregnancy and parenthood focuses almost exclusively on mothers (Bunting & McAuley, 2004); Glikman (2004) is a notable exception. The literature on substance-misusing parents is also almost exclusively concerned with mothers (McMahon & Rounsaville, 2002). More than ten years ago, Phares and Compas (1992) noted the lack of attention given to fathers in research examining antecedents of child and

adolescent psychopathology, a situation that has changed little in the past fifteen years. Although there has been a trend in the literature towards the gender-neutral language of ‘parents’, this often masks the reality that research participants are primarily or solely mothers; for example, Akin & Gregoire (1997) use ‘parents’ in the title of their article and throughout, only revealing at the end that no fathers participated in their research. Cowen (1999) reviewed research about factors that may lead to neglectful parenting but failed to note that only mothers participated in most of the studies she cited. Similarly, Roditti (2005) writes about neglectful ‘parents’ based on a sample of nine mothers and one father. Jones, Gross and Becker’s (2002) research about child protection practice and domestic violence fails to make clear that the victims of violent incidents were women while men were the perpetrators.

Risley-Curtiss and Heffernan (2003) note the over-representation of mothers and under-representation of fathers in the literature specific to child welfare, and confirm that research about child abuse and neglect generally ignores fathers and focuses on mothers. These trends appear to be continuing. A recent (February 2006) keyword search of the (U.S.) National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect library holdings found 3031 “mothers” documents and 1023 “fathers” documents, a 3:1 ratio. A search limited to items published in 2005 found 56 “mothers” documents and 28 “fathers” documents, still a 2:1 ratio. In Canada, a recent keyword search of the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence (Public Health Agency of Canada) Child Abuse and Neglect library found 1419 “mothers” documents and 300 “fathers” documents, close to a 5:1 ratio. The (Canadian) National Clearinghouse on Family Violence keyword database includes three terms for mothers: “mothers”, “abusive mothers” and “neglectful mothers” but only one term for

fathers, the generic “fathers”. A recent keyword search of library holdings at The (Canadian) Centre for Excellence in Child Welfare revealed 55 listings for “mothers” and 22 listings for “fathers”.

The numbers only begin to tell the story of father absence and mother-blame. The child welfare literature is full of what Risley-Curtiss & Heffernan (2003) call “covert ways of blaming” (p.398): holding mothers responsible even when fathers, or men, are either the source of the problem or, minimally, equally responsible. For example, mothers are expected to assume some responsibility for positively nurturing the relationship between father and child (DeLuccie, 1995; Ram, Finzi & Cohen, 2002) while no similar expectation is outlined for fathers. Similarly, as Daniel and Taylor (1999), Scourfield (2003), Swift (1995) and others have noted, the everyday discourse of child welfare workers is a gendered discourse. Women are constructed as solely responsible not just for the care of children but for protecting children from threats that men may pose, and are judged harshly if they fail to perform these tasks adequately (Dominelli et al. 2005). Alternatively, workers expect little from men, even when they are biological or social fathers. When not threatening or abusive (and sometimes when they are) men are generally constructed as irrelevant or rendered invisible, while men who take even the slightest responsibility for parenting are frequently regarded as heroic figures (Daniel & Taylor, 1999; Swift, 1995).

Policy and practice

Much child welfare interest in father involvement has focused on men’s role as financial providers. However, child support guidelines, in Canada and particularly in the U.S., lead even impoverished mothers to be reluctant to pursue fathers for financial

support. Mothers receiving social assistance often receive informal financial support from their children's fathers but conceal this information from authorities because they need this support and fear losing it (Ash, 1997; Edin, 1995; Johnson & Doolittle, 1998, all cited in Curran, 2003). Mothers are purposefully non-compliant in identifying biological fathers for many reasons: they receive more financial support informally than through state regulated payments; they fear abusive fathers; they are sensitive to men's often marginal economic status (Edin, 1995, cited in Curran, 2003); and, in Canada, Indigenous mothers are motivated to maintain their child's legal status as an Indian in order to ensure access to entitlements (Mann, 2005).

Poor mothers are, at best, ambivalent about child support enforcement. They often see it as dangerous because it continues contact with an abuser, and they fear his retaliation if he is made to pay child support (Edin, 1995, cited in Curran, 2003; Mink, 1998, 1999, cited in Haney & March, 2003). Mothers may also conceal financial and other support received from fathers because it can disqualify them for social assistance benefits or from access to social housing or services. In our research with young mothers in care (Callahan, et al, 2005), we found that mothers often hid even their positive relationships with men for fear of losing money or supports such as respite care. These findings correlate with those from Glikman's (2004) qualitative study of 25 low income young American fathers that showed how young men wanted to be financially supportive of mothers and children, but lacked education and were otherwise economically disadvantaged. Young fathers report feeling unsupported by social workers (Speake et al, 1997) and hindered by housing and welfare policies (Allan & Doherty, 1996) in their efforts to be involved with their children; this is especially true for young fathers who

have been in government care (Bunting & McAuley, 2004) . As Tyrer et al (2005) note, social workers rarely encourage marginal (young, poor, from care) men to be involved with their children, focusing on their weaknesses and failing to assess their potential or their strengths.

The practice of organizing child protection case files through the mother's name is a significant contributor to practices that negatively focus on mothers while ignoring fathers. Male perpetrators of abuse, who often move from family to family, do not appear in child abuse databases. However, it should be noted that even in jurisdictions such as the UK where case files are designated by the child's name, engaging only with mothers while avoiding fathers has been well documented (O'Hagan & Dillenburg, 1995; Scourfield, 2003). These policies and practices reflect child welfare's ongoing reluctance to engage purposefully with fathers, either as risks or as assets. In the present research, we set out to document this lack of engagement through quantitative measures, as well as to begin to theorize about how it is accomplished by qualitatively analyzing anecdotal data in case files. To begin to redress the paucity of information available about the fathers of children born to adolescent mothers, we also collected demographic, descriptive and historical data about fathers.

Method

Study sample

282 child welfare case files were randomly chosen from a total of 476 case files from a child welfare agency in a mid-size Canadian city. The files were dated between 1997 and 2005 and were restricted to those files where the mother was an adolescent (19

years of age or younger) at the time of the birth of at least one child. Of the random sample files selected, 163 were for expectant parent services¹ only, 116 were child protection services files and 3 were omitted from subsequent analyses because the service type was missing. All of the expectant parent services cases were closed files. Of the child protection files, 98 cases were closed and 18 remained open. Only the child protection files were used in the proceeding analyses.

Data collection

Study data were derived from a review of case file recordings and other case file materials, including court documents, parenting and risk assessments, social worker logs, referral letters and various official documents. The files were examined for data relevant to fathers. Information had been gathered by social workers from multiple sources, though frequently it had been obtained from the mothers and rarely from fathers. As no standard case file format is in existence in the jurisdiction from which we gathered data, the type and quality of materials varied from file to file. A standard instrument for capturing the data from the file reviews was developed and pre-tested on a small sample of files. This tool enabled the researchers to purposely examine files for information on all fathers relevant to the children. In addition to specific data (e.g. demographics, use of alcohol, history of violence), the instrument was designed to enable gathering qualitative descriptions of how fathers were constructed in the files.

Analysis

SPSS statistical package (2005) was utilized to analyze the data. Inferential statistics were used to determine the extent of fathers' involvement with the mother and

¹ In the jurisdiction from which we gathered our data, hospitals and other health care providers are required to notify child welfare authorities of all adolescent pregnancies. Policy requires that a child welfare social

children. Frequencies revealed socio-demographics for both mothers and fathers.

Frequencies showed fathers as risks or assets to mothers or children. Crosstabs indicated social workers' involvement with a family when fathers were identified as a risk or child protection concerns were identified.

Results

Descriptive data

Of the 116 child protection files reviewed, there were a total of 128 fathers mentioned: 107 were the biological fathers of the first and sometimes subsequent children (first biological fathers); 19 were the second men to biologically father children with a particular mother (second biological fathers); 2 were the third men to biologically father children with a particular mother (third biological fathers); and 4 were non-biological fathers. There was a paucity of data for all fathers. In particular, third biological fathers were excluded from subsequent analyses because most of the data on these fathers were missing.

When the first child was born, the mean age of the first biological fathers was 19 years compared to the mean age of 16 years for the mothers. When the children of the second biological fathers were born, the mean age for fathers was 25 years compared to an average age of 17 years for the mothers. The average age for non-biological fathers was 22 years.

Table 1 illustrates socio-demographic characteristics for both mothers and fathers. When socio-demographics were stated, the majority of mothers and fathers in our random sample were Indigenous and had less than a high school education. Most fathers and

worker assess all these situations for potential child protection concerns.

mothers were girlfriend/boyfriend with each other or with another individual. Of interest, was that 27% of second biological fathers were more likely to be common law with the mothers compared to only 9% for first biological fathers. No mothers and fathers were found to be married, separated, divorced or widowed.

25% of first biological fathers and 9% of second biological fathers and over 70% of mothers had a history of childhood involvement with child protection services. Over 40% of the mothers had been in care themselves as children compared to less than 9% of the fathers.

<Inset Table I here>

Across all categories of fathers, 25% to 30% were contributing financial support to the mother and/or child. 49% of first biological fathers had involvement with their children and close to 68% of second biological fathers were found to have some involvement with their children. First biological fathers provided informal or in-kind support to mothers and children about 30% of the time, second biological fathers provided informal or in-kind support to mothers and children about 22% of the time and data was missing for non-biological fathers.

Fathers as irrelevant, as risks and as assets

Table 2 shows the history for fathers and their relevance to mothers and children. Raters' assigned categories of 'risk', 'asset', 'both risk and asset' or 'irrelevant' to fathers. Those categories were based on social workers' expressed description of fathers (in both formal and informal file recordings), actions taken or not taken by social workers in relation to fathers (e.g. instituting or not instituting risk assessment procedures, including or excluding father in parenting assessments) and the number and type of social worker contacts or attempted contacts with fathers.

Of interest was that almost 50% of all fathers were considered irrelevant to both mothers and children. Nearly 20% of fathers were viewed as a risk to both mothers and children while 20% of fathers were considered an asset to both mothers and children. When first biological fathers were considered a risk to children, social workers contacted fathers only 40% of the time, and 75% of the time when they were considered assets to children. When first biological fathers were considered a risk to mothers (and not specifically to children), social workers contacted fathers 50% of the time. This 50% chance of contact also held true for fathers who were considered assets to mothers.

<Insert Table II here>

Fathers, violence and financial support

Out of 29 first biological fathers identified as being violent towards mothers, 34.5% were currently contributing financial support and 44.5% had contributed financial support in the past. Of those same fathers, 53.8% had supervised visits with their children, 30.8% had unsupervised visits and 15.4% of the data were missing. A similar trend was found for second biological fathers and non-biological fathers. The only exception was that non-biological fathers who were violent towards mothers tended to not have contact with the children. A significant percentage of fathers in all categories had histories of incarceration, alcohol misuse or drug misuse.

Fathers with history of child protection concerns

Child maltreatment concerns were noted for about 35% of first biological fathers. The data for child maltreatment concerns were missing for second biological and non-biological fathers. 47.4% of first biological fathers with child maltreatment concerns were not interviewed by social workers about those concerns. Of those fathers, 52.6% had supervised visits with their children and 38.8% had unsupervised visits.

Discussion

Data for this study were drawn from a single site, which limits our ability to generalize the findings. The research also relied on retrospective file reviews and thus may not accurately reflect actual social work practice with fathers. In addition, due to social workers' failure to contact fathers directly, and/or record data about them, considerable data is missing. The problem of under-recording has been noted in other

research utilizing case file reviews (see, for example, Jones, Gross & Becker, 2002). In the current phase of the study, we are conducting and analyzing qualitative interviews with fathers whose children have been involved with child protection services to add richness to the case file data.

The data in this study is congruent with qualitative data that we have collected in related research projects, as well as findings from other researchers. Our grounded theory study with young mothers in care, while not focused on fathers, found that men were involved with the children of these mothers in a variety of positive and negative ways but mothers often concealed these relationships from social workers for many reasons, including fear of child protection investigations and concern about loss of benefits and services (Callahan, et al, 2005). We noted that social workers rarely asked about or involved fathers in their casework with young mothers (Rutman, et al, 2002). These findings are echoed in Franck's (2001) study of outreach to birthfathers of children in out-of-home care and in McKinnon, Davies and Rain's (2001) examination of how agencies that provided support to adolescent mothers failed to engage with the men in their lives. Strega's (2004) cross-national (Canada/UK) study of child welfare practice in cases where men beat mothers found that social workers confronted mothers while avoiding male perpetrators; this accords with findings from similar studies in various jurisdictions (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Humphreys, 1999; Jones, Gross & Becker, 2002; Nixon, 2001; O'Hagan & Dillenburg, 1995).

Demographic data about the age of mothers and fathers is limited in this paper to the specific subset of cases where there was child protection involvement but is congruent with findings from non-protection samples in other jurisdictions. Coley and Chase-

Lansdale (1998) and Thompson and Crase (2004) found that fathers of children born to adolescent mothers tend to be about 2-3 years older than the mother; Lindberg, Sonenstein, Ku and Martinez (1997) found that most of these fathers were five or fewer years older than the mothers. However, all these studies, as well as Taylor et al.'s (1999) California research and McKinnon, Davies and Rain's (2001) Canadian qualitative study, noted that there is a significant subset of older men who father children of adolescent mothers, a result echoed in our own findings.

Data about educational attainment and source of income, while limited by missing data, is congruent with that found by other researchers. Fagot, Pears, Capaldi, Crosby and Leve (1998) found that lack of education and income was predictive of early fatherhood among adolescent fathers. Glikman (2004) and Weinman, Smith & Buzi (2002), in their qualitative research, found that most of the young fathers they interviewed struggled with education and employment, as did the young fathers in and from government care interviewed by Tyrer et al. (2005) in the UK. It is important to note that findings in the current paper and other studies (Glikman, 2004; Speake, Cameron & Gilroy, 1997; Tyrer et al., 2005; Weinman, Smith & Buzi, 2002) indicate that, despite these difficulties, a small but significant proportion of young fathers provided either financial or in-kind support to mothers and/or children.

We note that, in comparison with population demographics in the jurisdiction where data were collected, a disproportionate number of both first biological fathers (30.4%) and mothers (40.8%) are of Indigenous ancestry. These findings are congruent with other research about the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care (Trocme, et al, 2004). Data from our sample also indicate disproportionate rates of childhood

involvement with child protection services and in-care histories. Of first biological fathers, 25% had a child protection history as children and 8.6% had been in substitute care. The proportions for mothers are even more unsettling: 71.6% had a history of childhood involvement with child protection services and over 40% had been in care. As we have commented elsewhere (Callahan, et al, 2005) such findings must also be viewed with caution for three reasons. One is that adolescent pregnancy and parenting may reflect culturally appropriate choices and behavior on the part of certain ethnic, racial or cultural groups. Secondly, adolescent pregnancy and parenting may be a positive choice within the range of choices available to racially, economically and otherwise marginalized adolescents. Finally, we propose that these findings position the state as a dysfunctional parent rather than implying any inherent dysfunction within the children it cares for (Dominelli, et al, 2005).

What is troubling in our findings, though perhaps not surprising, is the lack of social worker engagement with fathers. As we noted, almost 50% of fathers were considered irrelevant to both mothers and children. A greater concern is that over half (60%) of fathers who were identified as a risk to children were not contacted by social workers and similarly not contacted 50% of the time when they were considered a risk to mothers. Additionally, many fathers (38.8%) who were the source of child maltreatment concerns had unsupervised visits with their children, as did a significant percentage (30.8%) of fathers identified as being violent towards mothers. Given the considerable evidence on the co-occurrence of child maltreatment and domestic violence (Hartley, 2004; Jones, Gross & Becker, 2002; Peled, 2000), it seems unreasonable that such a significant proportion of men who had or were at risk of maltreating children had

unsupervised access to them. Although the nature of the data leaves us unable to demonstrate the reasons for social workers' failure to engage with fathers, our findings about the lack of social worker contact with fathers, whether they are perceived as risks or assets, are congruent with other studies of social work practice with fathers. This research has been summarized by Daniel and Taylor (1999) and Risley- Curtiss and Heffernan (2003). The considerable evidence from other researchers, (see, for example, O'Hagan & Dillenburg, 1995; Scourfield, 2003; Swift, 1995) as well as our own data suggest that blaming mothers while ignoring fathers is so deeply embedded in child welfare discourse and practice as to be more or less routine.

Among the anecdotal evidence we collected during the file review were samples of file data illustrating social work practice with fathers. This example of worker failure to appropriately engage with a dangerous father is taken from a closing summary recording¹.

The prevailing opinion regarding [biological father two] was that he was a risk to young children and that he was denying that he had committed sexual abuse himself, this is a further indication of risk. The abuse registry confirmed that [biological father two] had been placed on the registry once regarding his sister and second listing on the registry was regarding a cousin. There were two times sexual assault and three times sexual interference charges. [Biological father two] had been found guilty and was placed on probation for two years. I consulted with several people and the abuse committee regarding this matter. It was felt that we would offer counseling to [biological father two] through his former counselor.

¹ We initiated a child maltreatment report based on this file recording to the appropriate child protection authority.

This offer was made to him in the mother's presence. He never followed through with this offer. As well the couple was referred for couple counseling however, they did not follow through on this offer either. Mother became somewhat irritated at [biological father number two]'s attitude at not receiving further counseling and stated he was not living with her. Things were going fairly well for mother when we learned she was again pregnant this time by [biological father two] and that she was continuing to see him. At the same time she became very non-compliant and evasive in dealing with [agency] refusing to see us.

Problems unresolved and recommendations for future intervention.

The relationship with [biological father two] is still problematic. Mother refused to meet with [agency] worker. She has now turned eighteen.

Reason for closure

The case will be closed as clients refused to meet with worker and mother is now eighteen years old.

Alternatively, workers also fail to engage with men as potential assets, as illustrated by this summary file recording, in which the worker failed to contact a father described as 'involved' and 'supportive'.

Father [biological father two] of expected baby is aware of pregnancy and is said to be very supportive however mom doesn't assume they will live together at this point as she isn't sure about their relationship. Both mother and maternal grandmother describe father as a kind and gentle person who has never displayed violence. The father is somewhat involved. Both mother and maternal

grandmother indicate he does not pose any danger to the baby. As a precaution his name was checked with police and although he does have a record his crimes do not appear to be an issue for child protection. In any case mom has no immediate plans of cohabitating with father.

While file recordings corroborate our quantitative data they do not explain workers' failure to engage purposefully with fathers. Recent research with social workers in two jurisdictions focused on 'failure to protect' (Strega, 2006) suggests that purposefully involving fathers requires shifts in practice, policy and education.

Implications for child welfare practice, policy and education

Despite contemporary discourses about the importance of the 'involved father', fathers remain largely absent in child welfare. As we have noted, data from our case file review is congruent with a considerable body of other literature describing father absence and mother-blaming in child welfare policy, practice and discourse. The dominant discourse that mothers are primarily responsible for the safety, wellbeing and care of children is routinely enacted in child welfare even when fathers are present and involved. The widespread use of gender-neutral words such as 'parent' or 'family' masks the gender-specific nature of most child welfare interventions. Fathers whose children are involved with child welfare continue to be seen through a lens of absence, dangerousness and marginality (Ferguson & Hogan, 2004; Scourfield, 2003).

Children, mothers and fathers suffer when workers fail to engage purposefully with fathers and father-figures. To move toward true inclusiveness in both protecting and

supporting children, practitioners need to proactively assess and engage with all significant men in a child's life, understanding that some may pose risks, some may be assets, and some may incorporate aspects of both. This requires practitioners to hold similar expectations for mothers and fathers, building on their strengths and challenging them to make changes. Workers must not give up on men who disengage or behave abusively until they have done as much as they can to bring about change. Men who leave or who are separated from one family often attach themselves to another family and the difficulties are repeated (Strega, 2006). It is critical that workers – and policy makers – understand the sources and reasons for men's disengagement. Working with men who are not violent may mean enhancing their caring ability, developing their parenting skills, and helping them see beyond the 'a good father is a good provider' paradigm. Roy (2004) points out that under- and unemployed fathers 'provide' in other ways than financially and are often involved in providing both nurturance and presence for their children.

When fathers are known to be violent, engagement must begin with safety and accountability; intervening with men must not place mothers or children at more risk. Violent men need to be engaged on multiple levels (Goodmark, 2004), as batterer intervention programs rarely focus on parenting or the effects of violence on children and anger management programs rarely focus on violence. Fleck-Henderson (2000, cited in Hartley, 2004) suggests that child protection workers must 'see double' when dealing with violent men in families, drawing from both child protection and domestic violence perspectives. Child welfare supervision and service plans need to focus primarily on the batterer rather than mothers (Strega, 2006) and claims of failure to protect must be substantiated against batterers rather than mothers. Workers need to determine not just

whether fathers want to continue relationships with their children but their reasons for doing so. As Goodmark (2004) notes, different intervention strategies must be applied with fathers who care about involvement with their children, fathers who don't care and 'unrelated boyfriends'. At the same time, encouraging father involvement must not become a substitute for continuing to engage with mothers in supportive and empowering ways.

Reforming practice requires concurrent changes in policy. Housing and welfare policies particularly impact poor marginal fathers who wish to maintain relationships with their children. Unless they are designated as sole custodial fathers, they do not qualify for social housing that might accommodate their children and are unlikely to qualify for additional social assistance support. Conversely, employment preparation and training programs may restrict their ability to take part in parenting, substance-misuse or anti-violence counseling programs. As Wiemann et al (2006) point out, "policies advocating father involvement without concomitant programs intended to address their many needs may be doomed to fail" (p.631) and may adversely affect mothers and children. In this regard, we must ensure that we continue to advocate for better resources for poor single mothers in concert with efforts to increase father involvement. Work with violent men must be institutionalized in ways that facilitate perpetrators of violence being held accountable for the outcomes of their violence in ways that also ensure child safety (Goodmark, 2004). This requires the development of routine and effective assessment procedures to screen for the threat a violent father may potentially pose to children. Child welfare workers must be required to show that they have attempted to find and work with the perpetrator of violence concurrent with intervening with mothers. North American

policy makers might look to the United Kingdom, where the National Framework for Children, Youth and Maternity Services (Department of Health, 2004) has been key in ensuring that services for families address both parents as both caring and contributing, in both intact and separated families.

Social work educators also have a role to play in changing the father absence-mother blame paradigm. Given the rapid turnover in child protection workers, many of the workers whose case files we reviewed may be recent social work graduates. Little evidence is apparent in the case files that their texts and classroom experiences encouraged them to include fathers and resist blaming mothers for family difficulties. Our preliminary survey of Canadian social work course syllabi (Walmsley, et. al., 2006) would seem to confirm that social work students are learning a great deal about mothers (although this is often masked by the use of the gender neutral 'parents') and little about fathers. Family practice and child welfare courses need to include information on men and fathers and how to engage with them. In revising social work education about families, it is critical that we not reify the white two-parent middle-class heterosexual family in the process. An inclusive approach to social work education about families must not only include fathers but acknowledge the strengths of single mother-led families and other non-dominant family forms such as gay and lesbian families, extended family models that are common in Indigenous and other cultures and the multiple-mother families that occur in African-Canadian communities.

There are hopeful signs that child welfare may be entering a period of critical engagement with fathers. Since 1999, the UK government has sponsored a national information centre on fatherhood, Fathers Direct (<http://www.fathersdirect.com/>). Family

group conferencing and other alternative dispute resolution processes that require the involvement of all significant individuals in a child's life are beginning to be used in child welfare. Peled (2000) and Bancroft and Silverman (2002) have tackled the thorny issue of violent men as parents, and Daniel and Taylor (2001) have written more generally about how social workers can engage with fathers. Given the existence of the Fathering Involvement Research Alliance (<http://fira.ca/>) and similar groups, policy makers, practitioners and educators will soon have considerable research to draw on in making change.

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- National Clearinghouse on Family Violence (Public Health Agency of Canada) Child Abuse and Neglect:
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- National (US) Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect: <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/>

Table I: Socio-demographics for fathers and mothers.

Variables	First biological fathers n = 107 (%)	Second biological fathers n = 19 (%)	Mothers n = 116 (%)
Age			
13-18 years	46.9	7.7	99.1
19-23 years	45.9	53.9	0.9
24-28 years	5.2	15.4	-
29-33 years	-	15.4	-
34 plus years	2.0	7.6	-
Education			
less junior high	1.9	-	18.6
junior high	0.9	-	9.7
less high school	14.2	4.5	35.4
high school	0.9	-	0.9
community college	0.9	-	0.9
university/other	0.9	-	3.5
not stated	80.3	95.5	31.0
Variables	First biological fathers n = 107 (%)	Second biological fathers n = 19 (%)	Mothers n = 116 (%)
Marital status			
single	2.7	4.5	17.4
girlfriend/mother/boyfriend/father	48.6	40.9	53.9
girlfriend/other/boyfriend/other	1.8	-	4.3
common law/mother/father	9.0	27.3	11.3
common law/other	0.9	-	0.9
not stated	36.9	27.3	12.2
Living situation			

with parents	27.1	4.5	60.5
in foster care	2.8	-	6.1
CPS supported independent living	-	-	1.8
on own	4.7	13.6	1.8
with girlfriend/boyfriend	9.3	27.3	7.0
incarcerated	7.5	-	-
other	9.3	-	20.2
not stated	39.3	54.5	2.6
Financially supported by			
parents	14.0	-	50.9
CPS independent living	-	-	0.9
social assistance	0.9	4.5	3.5
child's mother/father	0.9	-	2.6
other	10.3	4.5	12.3
employment	15.9	13.6	5.3
not stated	57.9	77.3	24.5
Race			
Caucasian	13.4	9.1	17.2
Indigenous status	25.9	18.2	35.3
Indigenous non status	4.5	9.1	15.5
other	8.0	9.1	7.9
not stated	48.2	54.5	24.1
CPS history	25.0	9.1	71.6
In care history	8.6	-	40.9

Table II: Percentages showing history of fathers

Father Variables	First Biological fathers (n = 107) %	Second Biological fathers (n = 19) %	Non-Biological fathers (n = 4) %	Total for all fathers (n = 130) %
Incarceration history	15.5	31.8	25.0	18.16
Drug history	20.7	27.3	25.0	21.78
Alcohol history	22.4	40.9	75.0	26.71
Solvent history	0.9	-	-	0.00
Violence towards mother	25.0	31.8	50.0	24.31
Violence towards children	2.6	-	25.0	2.90
Sexual abuse of children	0.9	-	-	0.00
Father described as risk to children	20.8	18.2	25.0	20.53
Father described as asset to children	17.9	27.3	25.0	19.48
Father described as risk and asset to				

children	11.3	9.1	25.0	11.39
Father described as irrelevant to children	50.0	45.5	25.0	48.56
Father described as risk to mother	18.7	19.0	25.0	18.93
Father described as asset to mother	18.7	23.8	25.0	19.63
Father described as risk and asset to mother	9.3	9.5	50.0	10.57
Father described as irrelevant to mother	53.3	47.6	-	50.83