



BLACK FATHERHOOD LEGACY

An evaluation of a doula-informed pilot workshop to strengthen paternal involvement during pregnancy among Black fathers in Fresno, CA


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BACKGROUND

Increasing paternal involvement is an important opportunity to improve social support during pregnancy, especially for Black women/women of color. Studies have shown that supportive relationships between fathers and pregnant women can increase prenatal care utilization, reduce smoking, alcohol use, and pregnancy anxiety, or even improve breastfeeding outcomes and mitigate the impact of depressive symptoms on preterm birth risk among African Americans.³⁻⁷ Men living in Fresno, CA, have a strong desire to provide comfort and security, to give support and be a foundation for their partners, and play a role as supporter and nurturer.⁹ However, these men also expressed several unmet informational needs and a desire for additional support services, particularly when making decisions during pregnancy and delivery with their partners.⁹ In addition, from other findings, we learned that there is a need for tailored guidance that is relevant to the lived experiences of these men. Findings mirror others that indicated men experience challenges with barriers in the healthcare system and prenatal care settings that inhibit their involvement.¹⁰⁻¹³

There are several evidence-based programs to improve paternal involvement. Despite these findings and recommendations from the Commission on Paternal Involvement in Pregnancy Outcomes and guidance on how to engage fathers, very few interventions have emerged to address barriers to paternal involvement during pregnancy in Fresno, CA, especially among Black fathers.¹¹ Our pilot program addresses this gap by developing and evaluating a doula-informed fatherhood workshop that incorporates doula support strategies during the perinatal period into an existing evidence-based fatherhood curriculum to emphasize the importance of paternal involvement beginning at conception. We focus specifically on doula strategies to enhance a fatherhood curriculum because doula support services provide emotional, physical, and educational support to birthing people before, during, and after pregnancy.

From our 2019 needs assessments with 15 Black/AA fathers from Fresno about their role during pregnancy and receptivity to support programs to build capacity to engage in the pregnancy process, we learned that:

- Before training men about being supportive during pregnancy, men need to understand better the power of a father's involvement in their children's lives from conception.
- Many fathers do not have the skill sets to be effective fathers because of their own experiences.
- Aspects of doula training may be helpful for men to gain knowledge of the pregnancy process and support their partners during pregnancy.
- Some struggled to see the relevance of increased knowledge of the birthing process to fatherhood.
- Some reflected on poor experiences with birthing classes and stressed the importance of structural factors (lack of father-figures).

Coupled with evidence that suggests men in Fresno have a strong desire to be a support system for their partners during pregnancy, addressing barriers to fatherhood and framing support of pregnant persons as father involvement from conception is a critical need among Black fathers in Fresno.

These insights informed our decision to co-design the workshops with fathers in Fresno to ensure that the framing of the workshop and the workshop content is relevant and connects the importance of partner support during pregnancy to the health outcomes of birthing persons and their infants.

The purpose of this exploratory study is to assess the acceptability of an evidence-based fatherhood workshop, adapted to incorporate support strategies during pregnancy and postpartum for new and expectant Black fathers. We employed a mixed-methods approach to test whether the adapted workshop improved fathering knowledge, skills, self-efficacy, and knowledge of support strategies after participating in a 12-week virtual fatherhood workshop (Black Fatherhood Legacy - BFL). Upon completion of the workshop, participants were invited to focus groups discussing the acceptability of the workshop content, format, delivery, and relevance to the target population.

We used pre- and post-surveys to assess whether and how the workshop impacted Black men's fathering knowledge, skills, self-efficacy, and awareness of support strategies during pregnancy.

Fathers or expectant fathers who identified as Black/African American and were available on a weekday between 5pm and 8pm were invited to participate.

MEASURES

1 Survey

- a. National Fatherhood Initiative® - 24/7 Dad® AM - 24/7 DAD® A.M./P.M Fathering Skills Survey, a multiple choice survey about parenting knowledge and skills
- b. Subscale from the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC) (Gibaud-Wallston & Wandersman, 1978) about self-efficacy
- c. A single item to measure awareness of support strategies for moms during pregnancy and postpartum

2 Focus group discussion

- a. Workshop elements
- b. BFL content and materials
- c. Format and delivery (e.g., length of sessions, the timing of sessions, the structure, title of workshop)
- d. Facilitation
- e. Specific adaptations (e.g., experts, affinity group approach)
- f. Suggestions for improvement
- g. Relevance to AA Fathers
- h. Personal experiences /utilization of skills and strategies

PREPARATION

WORKSHOP CO-DESIGN PROCESS

We engaged the experiences of Black fathers in Fresno to drive adaptations of the fatherhood curriculum and workshop format. Three of the four fathers were able to attend both sessions.

During these co-design sessions we:

1. Prioritized the most pertinent curriculum content
2. Discussed relevant pregnancy support strategies that can be incorporated into the curriculum
3. Gathered feedback on a structure and format that would be most accessible to Black men in Fresno, CA.



FATHERHOOD CURRICULUM

Session Structure Feedback

Feedback from the co-design sessions resulted in a set of adaptations that we incorporated into the program. The adaptations included:

- Black fathers in Fresno as facilitator and co-facilitator
- Racial concordance among program participants
- To uplift and celebrate Black fatherhood: a name reflecting positive views of Black fathers; short video segments of Fresno-based Black fathers sharing positive memories with their fathers; for pregnancy-related sessions include a video of a Fresno-based couple
- Invited experts for information and Q+A sessions on specific topics (pregnancy, mental health, discipline, communication, etc.)

- Re-order some topics to be discussed later in the program once trust among the group is established

Additionally, recommendations related to specific curriculum topics included:

- Mental health topics should be discussed in the context of structural racism and external factors (e.g., quality of mental health facilities, stigma, cultural norms, etc.) that shape men's willingness to ask for help and seek care
- Session topics on discipline should recognize cultural aspects in the Black community that may differ from norms in other communities
- Discussions on the "ideal father" should encompass a process for developing a shared definition of "non-negotiables" or core traits that men feel are essential

Adapted BFL workshop.

We delivered a 12-week pilot workshop that met virtually once per week for 2 to 2.5 hours. Participants received compensation for family meals during all sessions via meal delivery gift cards.

Table 1. Workshop Discussion Topics

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session 1: Family History • Session 2: What Does It Mean to Be a (Black) Man? • Session 3: The Father's Role • Session 4: Getting Involved • Session 5: Communication • Session 6: Mental/Emotional Health Focus (Guest Expert) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session 7: Discipline (Guest Expert) • Session 8: Children's Growth (Guest Expert) • Session 9: Showing and Handling Feelings • Session 10: Dads and Work • Session 11: Working with Mom and Co-Parenting • Session 12: National Fatherhood Initiative® -My 24: 7 Dad Checklist® |
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FINDINGS

We found that parenting knowledge and parenting self-efficacy increased among the participants by the end of the workshops.

Overall, acceptability of the workshop and the adaptations were favorable among participants. One interesting theme that emerged was related to the overall impact of a racially concordant workshop for Black fathers in Fresno. Several of the focus group participants expressed that the workshop itself represents something beyond fatherhood and parenting skills. It holds space for Black fathers to explore the intersections of race in their experiences as men and fathers,

It is a space for building social capital through network building and relationships, and it ultimately combats the societal stigmas around Black fatherhood.

Some fathers reflected on how some of the discussions during the workshop transitioned to discussions with their partners. Others reflected on how few spaces there are for Black men to share and receive guidance on their experiences as Black men. This made many participants feel that the workshop would be an important asset to other Black fathers in Fresno.

PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES:

"If I'm struggling with something as a Black Father, I'm not going to come to somebody that's NOT a Black father. I mean, yes, they may be able to get some advice on parenting. When it comes to tying my color into it, no disrespect, but I'm not going to go that way."

"But man, bringing in the **special guests for particular things**, we have questions for like birthing, consultants, dealing with children, how to help our wives when pregnant, you know, I felt like that was extremely useful."

"I like the name. And I love everything with Black-owned. Because for the simple fact, yes, **normalize us**. We know we are Black and we know we are fathers and all that but it's, it's letting everybody else know that! Man, we, we, we got this. You know, **we are Black fathers**. Black fathers are out here. I think it empowers us even more. So I wear my shirt [Black Fatherhood Legacy shirt] proud."

"I can't really say if there isn't anything I didn't like, or like the least. Because all information is good information. Because it was the first one, it can only be uphill from here. So, you really can't necessarily say areas of improvement, because it was just the first one. Of course, as far as more individuals are in attendance, with more individuals, you have more different background. Then you have individuals that are much older than me, such as X years old, I can learn from them. Having individuals that are younger than me, Y or Z years old, and they go to be taught. So, **it is pretty much like a ladder, just pass on wisdom up and down.**"

"I think this workshop reaches beyond what it's intended for. In the sense that like, so a lot of us in the group even said, we never even did this. There is no platform for Black fathers to just talk about being Black fathers, you know. And, even just in that, there's, **there's a whole another lane, other than just equipping young Black, fathers or, or guys about to beef up.** It goes beyond that."

- Workshop name: Some expressed hesitations with the workshop name Black Fatherhood Legacy. Although most liked the name, others expressed concern that the name may single out Black fatherhood instead of normalizing it as any other parenting experience. Considerations for keeping or changing the name should come from an open discussion with men from the community.
- Virtual, shorter workshop lengths options: several of the participants work many jobs, are working students, or are in single parent households where regular attendance may be difficult or less convenient. Providing virtual options may help alleviate these barriers.
- Group heterogeneity: Participants in this study reflected on the value of having other participants from diverse backgrounds in the group, particularly as it relates to age and prior parenting experiences. However, currently National Fatherhood Initiative® - 24/7 Dad AM/PM® curricula are for either first time fathers or seasoned fathers which poses challenges for an intergenerational mix of participants.
- Racial concordance: racial concordance among participants and workshop facilitators is not a new concept in fatherhood programming, however, at the time of our pilot, it was not offered in Fresno, CA. Future implementation should consider offering an option for Black fathers to join racially concordant workshops should they choose. Additionally, there is a clear need to create opportunities for Black men and fathers to build community and network—adding these spaces in creative ways could enhance any fatherhood program.
- Invited experts: Given that families of color, and in particular Black families face challenges with equitable access to information, or culturally informed resources, bringing experts to them at every opportunity is a critical component.

NEXT STEPS / RECOMMENDATIONS

The next steps of this pilot could be to expand the number of participants and sessions in order to gain more insights. With the ongoing global pandemic, we are prepared to pilot additional strategies for delivering the workshop (i.e. virtual sessions and meal delivery). Another next step may be offering more workshops with various session times to accommodate more participants.



*Footnote: The National Fatherhood Initiative® 24/7 DAD® A.M. curriculum consists of 12 group-based sessions covering family history, what it means to be a man, showing and handling feelings, men's health, communication, the father's role, and co-parenting. For more information, visit: <https://www.fatherhood.org>.

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For referencing this work and more information about the research and manuscript, contact : info@black-enterprises.com.

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ABOUT

BLACK Wellness & Prosperity Center is a catalyst to improve well-being and prosperity in the Black community with sustained efforts to improve Black Maternal and Child Health outcomes, and effectively unite and elevate the Black voice, and build sustainable infrastructure to strengthen Black capacity.

Headquartered in Fresno, CA BLACK Wellness & Prosperity Center serves families throughout California. For more information visit - www.blackwpc.org



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