

Amplifying fathers' perspectives, needs & recommendations to facilitate paternal involvement during pregnancy and childbirth

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Center for Men's Health Equity team

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CMHE Projects

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Thank you:

- To all of the men who participated in the focus groups
- To the site staff who helped recruit focus group participants and provided member checking feedback and
- To the National Healthy Start Association leadership team



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Goals

- Describe the media and professional narratives regarding fathers' involvement in pregnancy and childbirth
- Discuss the AIM CCI project and our findings from focus groups with fathers
- Provide an overview of potential implications of our findings and next steps



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Good Times (aired 1974-1979)



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I told them [the producers] I couldn't compound the lie that Black fathers don't care about their children. I was proud of the family life I was able to introduce to television.

— Esther Rolle —

AZ QUOTES

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From the first time the doctor placed you in my arms, I knew I'd meet death before I'd let you meet harm. Although questions arose in my mind, would I be man enough?
-Will Smith
www.DeSulMama.com

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Allo et al. BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth 2013, 13:60
http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2393/13/60

BMC Pregnancy & Childbirth

RESEARCH ARTICLE Open Access

A community perspective on the role of fathers during pregnancy: a qualitative study

Amina P Allo¹, Cindi A Lewis², Kenneth Scarborough³, Kenn Harris⁴ and Kevin Fiscella⁵

Abstract
Background: Defining male involvement during pregnancy is essential for the development of future research and appropriate interventions to optimize services aiming to improve birth outcomes. Study Aim: To define male involvement during pregnancy and obtain community-based recommendations for interventions to improve male involvement during pregnancy.
Conclusions: Individual, family, community, societal and policy factors play a role in barring or diminishing the involvement of fathers during pregnancy. Future research and interventions should target these factors and their interaction in order to increase fathers' involvement and thereby improve pregnancy outcomes.

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Background

- The Alliance for Innovation on Maternal Health Community Care Initiative (AIM CCI) is a federally funded agreement awarded to NHSA to inform, develop, and pilot strategies to improve maternal health outcomes using Maternal Safety Bundles (MSB) in non-hospital settings.
- There are few evidence-based programs designed to support expectant and new fathers, and even fewer programs for new and expectant fathers are informed by the voices and experiences of expectant and new fathers.
- National Healthy Start Association was funded by HRSA (grant number U7BMC33635) to lead the AIM CCI Cooperative Agreement.

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Fatherhood Focus Group Aims

- Examine social, cultural and environmental factors that influence behaviors among new fathers
- Explore the experiences that expectant and new fathers had when seeking care and providing support leading up to, during and following the birth of their child
- Center the voices and knowledge of expectant and new fathers to inform the creation of new AIM CCI quality improvement bundles to help reduce maternal morbidity and mortality in the U.S.

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Methods

- Recruitment largely completed by site staff via email, flyers and word of mouth
- Fathers were eligible if they were 18 years or older and had a child born within the past 2 years
- Twelve virtual focus groups completed November 2021-April 2022
 - Two focus groups per site in each of 6 AIM CCI sites**
- Audio and video recorded and transcribed focus groups for analysis in qualitative analysis software
 - Codebook
 - Phenomenological thematic analysis
- Participants received \$100 gift cards as an honorarium

**Note: we were unable to use data from one site, this presentation provides data and results from 5 sites/10 focus groups

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Completed Focus Groups

Site	Number of Focus Groups	Number of Participants
Atlanta, GA	2 groups	16 participants
Fresno, CA	2 groups	16 participants
New Orleans, LA	2 groups	18 participants
Tulsa, OK	2 groups	10 participants
Newark, NJ	2 groups	20 participants
Total	10 groups	80 participants

Demographics

- Average age: 34 years
- 86% African American
- 44% first biological child
- 71% employed full time
- 80% married

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Themes

- Importance and meaning of Fatherhood
- Accessibility during pregnancy and childbirth
- Engagement during pregnancy and childbirth
- Responsibility during pregnancy and childbirth



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The Importance and Meaning of Fatherhood

- Excitement and passion for being a father:
"Being a father gives purpose and mission in life, looking towards having a goal and fatherhood."
- Concerns and fears
"You're going to be a great dad' was a scary challenge."



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Accessibility During Pregnancy and Childbirth

- Shifting focus
"...I was really independent, so now, it's like it ain't all about me. It's about him too, so it's like stuff like that I'm still adjusting to."
- Being available for the birthing person, not just the child
"Being pregnant is not one person's duty - it's not just for the woman, the man should be actively involved too."



Thought about quitting.
Then I noticed who was watching.

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Accessibility During Pregnancy and Childbirth

- Time Management
"Give more time to family, create time"
- "My greatest fear was time because of my work schedule"*
- "Bond between father and child just as important as bond between mother and child but have to make the time for it - had to make time to create that bond."*



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Accessibility During Pregnancy and Childbirth

- Pregnancy Participation Challenges
 - COVID-19 protocols/restrictions
 - Mediating pregnancy side effects
 - Transportation concerns

"Only one person allowed in delivery room, came down to me and her mom. Mom tried to persuade me not to be there and I had to stand strongly there. I wanted to be there to cut the cord. I was there every single second. I was the first face he saw when he opened his eyes. And that's exactly how I wanted it."

"No mode of transportation to make sure wife gets to hospital on time and safely - most times she took public transport."



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Engagement during pregnancy and childbirth

- Active Engagement during pregnancy
"I was in, all the way in, day in and day out."
- Find and provide support and *"words of encouragement, always carry encouragement"*
- Positive experiences with medical staff
"I made out time to go with my wife to some of those visits and I think I was received very well. And the doctor, he gave me words of encouragement, guide[d] me through during my wife's pregnancy. Also, he gave me advice from how to guide my wife throughout that stage."




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Engagement during pregnancy and childbirth

- Missed Opportunities
"Okay, all this information is great to care for the baby, then you guys have extra information that's in regards to the mother, but then what about the father?"
- "Hospital didn't teach or give anything but a little pamphlet book - and I didn't know nothing about a newborn."*













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Responsibility During Pregnancy and Childbirth

- Duty to ensure safety, health, and well-being of birthing person and child
"Some guys feel bringing up a child is the work of the girl, the wife, but it's not supposed to be that way. It's the work of both parents. That's why they're both called parents..."
- "Adapting was a challenge"*
- Financial Responsibility
"Now that you're going to be a dad, you should check your wallet. You should check how much you have in your account."













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Resources Expectant and New Fathers Used

- Resources expectant and new fathers used depended on the type of question they had
- The most common resources talked about by men were medical providers/doctors and parents/family.

"If I have medical challenges, I will consult my healthcare provider."
"Whenever I had a question about my kid, I usually called my mom."
"I signed up for... Healthy Start - they would send me text messages to let me know little tips and things like that far as dealing with postpartum and everything - very helpful."







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Where Did Fathers Say They Went For Help?

Needs	Subtopics	Resources Sought
Fathers and birthing person's needs	<input type="checkbox"/> Support from family and friends (moral/emotional support; information) <input type="checkbox"/> General questions <input type="checkbox"/> Education on newborn <input type="checkbox"/> Fatherhood involvement	<input type="checkbox"/> Family (mother, father, siblings, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Friends with children <input type="checkbox"/> Friends with medical backgrounds <input type="checkbox"/> Dr. Google and other internet resources
Baby or infant development and needs	<input type="checkbox"/> Counseling/therapy services <input type="checkbox"/> Financial advice <input type="checkbox"/> A broken system	<input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare professionals <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy Start messages and resources <input type="checkbox"/> New father's class <input type="checkbox"/> Dr. Google and other internet resources <input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare professionals
Financial needs and family planning	<input type="checkbox"/> A lack of information from state or federal agencies <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnancy changes/complications	<input type="checkbox"/> Financial advisors and experts <input type="checkbox"/> Legal Counseling <input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare professionals
Legalities and the system	<input type="checkbox"/> Stress and anxiety <input type="checkbox"/> Navigating relationships <input type="checkbox"/> Role Transition	<input type="checkbox"/> Dr. Google and other internet resources <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health resources and counseling <input type="checkbox"/> Experienced individuals
Stress Management		











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Recommendations from Fathers to Professionals

- Fathers talked a lot about the resources that they felt would have been helpful to them and feel would be helpful to others related to their fatherhood experience.

"There needs to be more systems in place to allow you to know that as the father you matter, as the father you're there when you want to be there, the idea of the dead beat goes around so much is like, they all assume that's a possibility within all men, and it's just not true."
"In the birthing process, don't forget the fathers... try to include us in the process as much as you can (to healthcare providers)."













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Discussion

- Men are willing to seek support and face challenges and barriers with encouragement, social support, information, and policies and practices that seek to engage and involve them
- Our work adds fathers' perspectives to the "accessible, engaged, and responsible" framework
- DO NOT assume that fathers are not invested in the pregnancy and the health of the birthing person and child: *Many fathers are quite invested and committed but do not have the adequate resources or support*



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Implications for Policy and Practice

- In order to provide support to birthing persons, fathers need support themselves
- Expand the definition of fatherhood and services for fathers to include the prenatal period
- Engage fathers as early as possible, monitor mental health, and provide resources







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Implications for Policy and Practice

- Disseminate and promote utilization of *The Father Advocacy Toolkit* and other resources that provide basic information fathers need
- Offer financial expertise to guide individuals in their decision making and family planning needs
- Provide legal counseling and resources to facilitate fathers during their role transition





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Limitations



- Only two groups per site and convenience sampling strategy limited our ability to identify unique population and site specific factors.
- Not all participants had access to reliable internet connection at the time of their scheduled focus group.
- Some individuals were familiar with each other, potentially limiting the participants comfort in sharing their opinions.
- If a participant dominated the discussion, it prevented the voices of others from being heard.
- The inability to interpret participants facial cues and body language if the participants camera was off.


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Application to AIM CCI & Next Steps



- Integrate the perspective of fathers seeking care during pregnancy and delivery into new programs and practices.
- Target quality improvement goals that serve as the building blocks for the needs and resources new or expectant fathers are currently lacking.
- Create mechanisms to provide information, support, and a sense of community and togetherness for fathers (socially, mentally, financially, or legally).
- Incorporate resources fathers are currently lacking into the pre and postnatal period and make them standard practice of care.

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BLACK FATHERS
Believe me, they're Everywhere! ...They're just too busy with their kids to respond to society's Slander.

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