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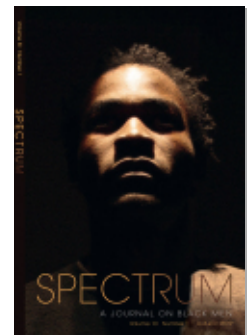
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# Daddy's Girl: Understanding the Impact of Black Fathers on the Social and Emotional Development of Raising Black Daughters

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**David Miller, Christopher Maith, and Eric Lee**

**ABSTRACT:** Historically, much of the research on Black fathers has focused on deficits and stereotypes (Connor & White, 2006). Whether it is deadbeat or disconnected fathers, these narratives seldom provide an accurate depiction of Black fathers' day-to-day lives. The purpose of this paper is to describe the role Black fathers play in raising their Black daughters and the implications of the following: Black fathers as role models to their daughters, Black fathers supporting their daughters' academic achievement, Black fathers' role in supporting healthy social/emotional development, and the impact of social policies on Black fathers. For Black fathers raising daughters, the roles and contributions have been marginalized within scholarly literature and society. Elevating research on Black fathers raising daughters is essential for better understanding fathers as a protective factor and the first line of defense in addressing promiscuity, drug abuse, anxiety, and depression (Byrd-Craven et al., 2012; Peterson, 2006).

Society today is plagued with an overwhelming number of negative images and stereotypical perceptions about Black girls and, ultimately, Black women

(Nunn, 2018). Many of these perceptions have to do with the social, emotional, and psychological stability of Black women. According to Reese et al. (2010), there is a strong correlation between the psychological stability of Black daughters and their single-parent mothers when they engage in quality interactions. A mother who feels adequate in her duties and consistently supported by kin and friends is more likely to positively impact her daughter's psychological stability than a mother who feels alone, overwhelmed, and overburdened by her responsibilities (Lowe, 2000). Could the same findings be said for single Black fathers raising their Black daughters, or even fathers who are integral influencers in their Black daughters' lives?

Historically, much of the literature about Black fathers being unmarried, uninvolved, deadbeat participants in the socialization of their children reinforced negative stereotypes (McAdoo, 1988; Wilson, 2003; Gary, 1981; Staples, 1982; Mincy & Sorensen, 1998; Johnson, 2010; Perry & Lewis, 2016; Bush & Bush, 2013; Lemmons & Johnson, 2019). According to Horn and Sylvester (2019), the United States led the world in the number of fatherless homes. In 2011, approximately 25% of children were being raised in households headed primarily by mothers or grandmothers (Wilson et al., 2015). As of 2016, 66% of African American children lived in single-parent families (Kids Count Data Center, 2018).

Over the past two decades, a paradigm shift within the absent-father research community has occurred. Researchers began focusing on the positive aspects of paternal involvement instead of focusing on the stigma associated with absent fathers (Wilson et al., 2015; McLoyd et al., 2000; Coles, 2001).

According to Jones and Mosher (2013), Black fathers (70%) were most likely to have bathed, dressed, diapered, or helped their children use the toilet every day compared with White (60%) and Hispanic fathers (45%). These data shatter the age-old historical myths and stereotypes about Black fathers being absent and uninvolved in the care of their families, which further supports that Black fathers emotionally invest in their children. The study involved over 3,900 fathers between 2006 and 2010 and found that Black fathers were more likely to bathe, dress, play, and dine with their children compared to their White and Hispanic counterparts (Jones & Mosher, 2013). Over the last two decades, research suggests that Black fathers play a significant role as breadwinners, disciplinarians, and protectors of the family (McBride et al., 2005), indicating a potential for reversal of negative stereotypes.

Although McBride et al. (2005) have identified the significant role Black fathers play in their families, more specifically the roles and contributions, little attention has been given to an examination of Black fathers' participation in raising their Black daughters. Historically the roles and contributions of Black fathers raising daughters have been marginalized within society and in the scholarly literature. The purpose of this paper is to gain a deeper understanding of the role Black fathers

play in raising their Black daughters. The paper will examine three key aspects: 1) Black fathers as role models to their Black daughters, 2) the role Black fathers play in promoting healthy social and emotional development within their Black daughters, and 3) examination of social policies that have negatively impacted Black fathers.

In this paper, the terms “non-custodial” and “non-residential” are used interchangeably to discuss fathers who do not reside in the homes with their daughters. The term “custodial father” depicts fathers who are the primary caregivers and male influencers in their daughter’s lives. Addressing the research gap around Black fathers’ social and emotional impact on their Black daughters is needed to understand better and support positive parenting practices among Black fathers raising daughters and supporting the healthy development and socialization of Black daughters.

### BLACK FATHERS DURING SLAVERY

Exploring the history of Black fathers and families during enslavement provides essential insight for understanding the physical and emotional challenges and roles of Black fathers raising children within contemporary society. Historically, the Antebellum slave trade in the South was built on the forced labor of Black men, women, and children, and southern plantations relied heavily on Black slaves to pick cotton, harvest tobacco, sugar, corn, and take care of livestock (Williams, 1944). Black slaves were forbidden to own property and get married (Burnham, 2005; Frazier, 1939; Blassingame, 1976). Many slaves participated in what was deemed illegal marriages. Gutman (1975) points out that these marriages often ended by force, with one of the slaves being sold to another plantation. Slave owners routinely disrupted families by selling family members to other plantations as a method of social control (Stevenson, 1997). Slave masters often verbally and physically disciplined Black children on the plantation in front of their parents (Stevenson, 1997).

Other forms of punishment included brutal whippings to the witnessing of the savage rape of Black women, often leaving Black men psychologically and physically emasculated (Akbar, 1984; Staples, 1978). The inability to protect Black women from rape on the plantations created psychological scars in Black men (Cross, 1998). The raping of Black women on the plantation by owners and their workers has been a well-documented occurrence (Cross, 1998). These forms of sexual violence targeting Black women also created a great deal of distress among Black men (Feinstein, 2019). Lewis Clarke, a former slave, declared that a slave “can’t be a man” because he could not protect his wife and daughters from being sexually assaulted by slaveholders and other White men (Foster, 2011). The phenomenon of enslavement has had a traumatic and generational impact on the Black family structure, particularly on the Black father.

While the inhumane treatment and degradation of Black fathers and families during enslavement are well documented in the literature and have had a disruptive influence on the Black family structure, many scholars point out the strengths of Black families because of having to endure the brutality during the period of enslavement (Gutman, 1975; Billingsley, 1968; Nobles, 1978). Black families emerging out of the period of enslavement had to recapture the core strengths of a strong work ethic, enduring belief in family, staunch spiritual orientation, tenacious achievement orientation, and adaptability of family roles (Hill, 1972, 1997; Chunn, 1975) that were systematically destroyed through the “religious mythomania” of White slave owners who characterized enslaved Africans as immoral and less than human (Martin & Martin, 2002). The critical strengths of work ethic, family, spirituality, achievement, and adaptability are seldom discussed in literature when examining slavery and the impact on Black fathers and families (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Roysse & Turner, 1980; Martin & Martin, 1995). Other researchers like Gutman (1975), Billingsley (1968), and Nobles (1978) refuted Frazier’s (1939) seminal work that slavery destroyed Black families. Similar research highlighted the Black family’s post-enslavement and Jim Crow (Hill, 1972, 1997; Chunn, 1975). Gutman (1975) also points out as a testament to Black fathers that most were present in their family’s lives even throughout the harshness of enslavement. Gutman (1975) estimated that 82 to 86% of Black fathers in rural areas and 69 to 74% of Black fathers in urban areas were actively involved in the lives of their families. The primary reason for the absence of fathers was not abandonment but death (Gutman, 1975).

Despite the horrific challenges faced by Black families during enslavement, many Black fathers found ways to emotionally support their children by demonstrating love and affection and providing extra food (Stevenson, 1997). Black fathers found ways to be role models and teach their children life skills like hunting, fishing, trapping, woodworking, and the practice of folk medicine (Stevenson, 1997).

## BLACK FATHERS AS ROLE MODELS TO THEIR DAUGHTERS

A growing body of research suggests that Black father involvement is a protective factor in the lives of Black children and supports positive child development (Volling & Cabrera, 2019; Johnson, 2013; Cryer-Coupet et al., 2020; Lemmons & Johnson, 2020). Thornton (2014) highlights the unique role Black fathers play in the lives of their daughters as providers, nurturers, and role models. The term “role model” describes the emotional investments and provisions Black fathers provide to their children (Cabrera et al., 2000). The concept of role modeling and terms like “responsible fathers” have historically been used to highlight the essential roles fathers play in families. Several scholars (Gadsden et al., 2003; Peart

et al., 2006; Doyle et al., 2013) have examined three important areas describing Black fathers as role models to their daughters: fathers' presence, emotional investments, and support of academic achievement.

### *Fathers' Presence*

Despite the societal challenges of harmful stereotyping, employment discrimination, and oppressive social welfare policies, Black men have historically embraced the role of fathering despite being characterized as absent when compared to the traditional Western model of the nuclear family structure of father, mother, and children in one household (Coles, 2001; Shears, 2007). Several scholars indicate that Black fathers' involvement includes hands-on caregiving, moral teaching, high levels of communication, and monitoring (Perry et al., 2012; Shears, 2007; Jones & Mosher, 2013).

An example we can draw from when thinking about Black fathers as role models is former President Barack Obama and his daughters, Sasha and Malia. Based on his narratives about growing up with a disengaged father, President Obama used the office of the presidency to uniquely position and display the positive role of Black fathers in society (Obama, 2016). In 2010, the Obama Administration launched the Fatherhood and Mentoring Initiative. The initiative was designed to strengthen existing fatherhood and mentoring groups. The initiative also focused on improving Child Support Enforcement Programs and allocating funding to the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Programs (The White House, President Barack Obama, n.d.). For many Americans, President Obama is an example of an endearing father figure who placed a high value on being present and promoting healthy relationships in the lives of his two young daughters.

Despite the many positive images of Black fathers in society that resemble President Obama's example, economic challenges remain a barrier for many Black fathers to be present in their children's lives. Throughout the literature, economic challenges emerge as a significant theme that hinders a Black father's ability to be present role models to their children. Black men face more inadequate employment conditions and higher incarceration rates than men of other racial groups (Lewis et al., 2007). Whether it is unemployment, underemployment, and/or the responsibility of child support, these factors are barriers for many Black fathers (Gadsden et al., 2003; McAdoo, 1993; Young, 2004). For many low-income Black fathers, incarceration has a tremendous impact on why they are absent from their families (Jordan-Zachery, 2009; Travis et al., 2005).

With over 2.1 million people in prison in the United States, incarceration remains a significant issue that impacts families (Walmsley, 2018). According to

the Pew Charitable Trust (2010), 93% of people incarcerated are male, and about 90% of incarcerated parents are fathers. Disproportionately uneducated African American men with unstable work histories make up a large percentage of the prison and jail population (Lindquist et al., 2018b; Haskins, 2014).

Additionally, low-income Black fathers are significantly challenged by the stressors associated with living in low-income urban neighborhoods (Threlfall et al., 2013), having a negative impact on them being present and positive in their parenting role. In a qualitative study of 36 low-income fathers, over half (57%) were unemployed and had contact with their children at least twice a month. The participants interviewed discussed the impact of the “hostile” child support system as a barrier in their attempts to fully parent (Threlfall et al., 2013). Many Black fathers in the study revealed that the financial burdens of child support payments left little money to pay bills and buy gifts for their children during visits (Threlfall et al., 2013). Other fathers interviewed discussed being behind on child support payments, which created an adversarial relationship with their child’s mother (Threlfall et al., 2013). Outstanding arrears (back amounts of child support owed) coupled with unemployment creates anger, frustration, and feelings of inadequacy among many Black fathers, impacting their ability to be present role models for their children.

A sub-theme in the literature examining the impact of Black fathers as role models for their children is the intergenerational impact of absent fathers (Madhubuti, 1991; Caldwell & Reese, 2006; Gadsden et al., 2003). Fathers who have grown up without their fathers can impact parenting styles, skills for managing relationships, and notions about masculinity (Caldwell & Reese, 2006; Roberts-Douglass & Curtis-Boles, 2013). These factors influence the amount of quality time Black fathers spend with their children (Julion et al., 2007) and can have a correlational impact on the emotional investment necessary to be a positive role model (Julion et al., 2007).

### *Emotional Investments*

In their study of Black fathers’ involvement with preschool children, Downer and Mendez (2005) point out that positive cognitive and socioemotional development are the primary benefits of Black fathers’ emotional investment regardless of their residential status. In a study featuring 64 young adults (98% African American), semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore relationships with the participants’ biological fathers (Peart et al., 2006). The study examined the types of contact participants had with their fathers from infancy to age 15. This quantitative study looked at fatherhood based on the father’s presence, material support, counsel, and guidance. These characteristics support Cabrera’s (2000) definition of a role model as an emotional investment. They are consistent with one

of the key themes that emerged from this study: fathers are involved role models in their children's lives (Peart et al., 2006). Other studies on Black fathers support findings that fathers play a significant role in their children's well-being. For example, Wilson (2018) and Brooms (2020) showed that Black fathers' roles include participating in schoolwork, taking an interest in extracurricular activities, setting high expectations, and teaching values.

### *Fathers Supporting Their Daughters' Academic Achievement*

Several studies determined that Black fathers have positive academic and psychosocial impacts and reduced risky behavior outcomes for daughters (Cooper, 2009; Barber & Armistead, 2003; Boyd et al., 2006). Nevertheless, the notion of a Black father being a role model to their daughters is relatively absent from most research and literature. One exception is Cooper's (2009) study of 122 Black adolescent females examining how a quality father-daughter relationship was associated with academic engagement. The term academic engagement was popularized by Skinner and Belmont (1993). In the study conducted by Cooper, the term academic engagement refers to student effort and attention in classroom-related activities. The study found that quality father-daughter relationships were positively related to girls' positive academic engagement (Cooper, 2009).

Cooper (2009) identified two significant themes related to increased academic engagement among adolescent Black girls. First, Black girls who have ongoing support and strong communication with their fathers also report having greater academic-related engagement. Second, adolescent Black females who have a positive relationship with their father report having higher self-esteem, which is related to higher academic engagement (Cooper, 2009). Cooper's findings are significant when examining Black adolescent female students' challenges, particularly considering the dearth of research regarding the relationship between Black fathers and their daughters. For example, in New York City, Black girls made up 28% of the student body population during the 2011–2012 school year but were 90% of all girls expelled (Crenshaw, 2014). In the last decade, Black girls have had the fastest growing suspension rates of all students (Losen & Gillespsie, 2010). Nationwide, Black girls experience discipline rates six times higher than White girls and suspension rates higher than 67% of boys (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014). These data are also essential when thinking about ways Black fathers, as role models, can be more involved in their daughters' school-related activities and impact the social and emotional development of their Black daughters.



## BLACK FATHERS' ROLE IN PROMOTING HEALTHY SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Black father's role in promoting healthy social and emotional development is defined as sharing child-rearing responsibilities, role modeling, providing emotional support, educating children about safety and survival tactics, and showing affection (Doyle et al., 2015; Threlfall et al., 2013). Additionally, several empirical studies have demonstrated the influence and impact fathers' roles have in two distinct areas of raising their daughters: managing risky behaviors and supporting healthy mental health practices (Peterson, 2007; Belgrave et al., 2000; Alleyne-Green et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2003).

### *Absent Father Outcomes*

Scholars suggest that father absence can be a risk factor for early adolescent sexual experiences and births (Ellis et al., 2003; Raneri & Wiemann, 2007; Boardman et al., 2006). Bereczkei and Csanaky (1996) found that women who experienced father absence during childhood were more likely to conceive children during adolescence (10–25 years of age) (Sawyer et al., 2018).

Barras (2000) explores the pain suffered by women growing up with an absent or disconnected father. In graphic detail, Barras describes the challenges she faced growing up without a father, which she believes led her to become a young, pregnant, unwed mother. For many Black girls and young women coping with the trauma, feelings of abandonment and worthlessness become their emotional and psychological landscape when Black fathers are absent and/or disconnected (Nielson, 2014). Daughters from absent-father homes were more likely to have a host of challenges, which include antisocial behavior, self-image problems, increased psychological issues, more instances of depression, abuse of drugs and alcohol, and higher rates of arrest than daughters who have a close relationship with their father (Nielsen, 2014). Barras's example sheds light on the adverse impact that Black fathers' absence has on the socialization and healthy development of Black girls and their maturation to Black womanhood.

Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention asserts that Black adolescent girls experience higher rates of sexual activity than girls from other racial and ethnic backgrounds (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2009). Several studies also suggest that Black girls who reside in urban communities are at risk for adverse outcomes such as unprotected sex, drug use, and early pregnancy due to absent fathers. (Cryer-Coupet et al., 2020; Belgrave et al., 2000; Boyd et al., 2006). However, a study by Peterson (2007) of 100 adolescent Black girls found that Black

fathers who communicated and educated their daughters about sex had reduced risky behaviors. The study pointed out that a close relationship between Black fathers and their daughters helped build self-esteem and shaped sexual expectations by reinforcing messages that girls are valued and loved (Peterson, 2007).

Peterson's (2007) research indicates that Black fathers' ability to communicate directly with their daughters before and during adolescence about family values, sexual protection, and abstinence influenced their sexual expectations and behaviors before marriage. One participant, who grew up with an absent father, said the pain and feeling of being rejected by her father led to her having her first sexual encounter with an older male (Peterson, 2007). The participant further indicated that she had sex with an older male to get attention from a father figure (Peterson, 2007). These examples highlight the need for healthy relationships between Black fathers and daughters.

### *Supporting Healthy Mental Health Practices*

Research also indicates that adolescent Black girls are at a high risk of suffering from poor physical and mental health (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Conversely, empirical studies demonstrate that Black fathers' connectedness with their daughters lowers levels of externalized behaviors, depression, and anxiety (Coley, 2003; Jackson, 2003; Ellis et al., 2003; Yoon et al., 2018). These findings are attributed to the Black father's emotional responsiveness, communication, and engagement with their Black daughters (Cryer-Coupet et al., 2020).

Similarly, another study of girls who have good relationships with their fathers found they are less likely to develop anxiety and depression and are better at handling everyday stress (Byrd-Craven et al., 2012). Girls who have a healthy relationship with their fathers are more comfortable sharing their feelings with others and talking about having future healthy relationships (Byrd-Craven et al., 2012). Additionally, girls who have healthy relationships with their fathers are better equipped to mitigate stress and more effectively navigate difficult situations (Byrd-Craven et al., 2012). The study further indicates that girls involved in negative father-daughter relationships are more likely to struggle in managing stressful and difficult situations (Byrd-Craven et al., 2012). These findings overwhelmingly support the role of fathers in the healthy development of their daughters.

The research, as mentioned earlier, reveals a changing trend in understanding the importance of the role fathers play in the emotional development of their daughters. In the past 25 years, American society has shifted its expectations for parental roles, including those of fathers (McBride et al., 2005). Research reveals that an increasing number of fathers actively contributing to their children's emotional

regulation and cognitive language development (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2004) more than previously understood improves their children's emotional stability. Healthy and consistent father involvement can significantly contribute to their daughter's self-confidence, social-emotional development, and academic achievement (Roopnarine, 2004).

For Black fathers raising daughters, factors such as parental communication, monitoring, supervision, and providing a nurturing and supportive environment can reduce risky behaviors, increase self-esteem, improve self-efficacy, and reduce mental health challenges (Cryer-Coupet et al., 2020). The shifting of expectations for parental roles and the increase in the father's participation in raising their children requires an examination of social welfare policies implemented under previously conceived perceptions of the family structure, particularly the negative perceptions of the Black family structure.

## SOCIAL POLICY IMPLICATIONS

### *Social Policy and the Black Father*

Social welfare policies in the United States have historically been and continue to reflect the ideologies of those who control political, economic, and religious institutions (Day & Schiele, 2013). Although researched and produced over 50 years ago, the controversial 1965 Moynihan Report (Moynihan, 1965) is an example of the continued practice, pattern, and influence the dominant society has on creating narratives that ultimately lead to the development of social welfare policies that criminalize segments of society most in need of assistance.

"The Negro Family: The Case for National Action" was a case study conducted by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the Assistant Secretary of Labor for the United States government (Moynihan, 1965). The Moynihan Report concluded that the structure of the Black family was unstable and characterized by a high percentage of broken marriages, unwed teenage births, unemployment, crime, disproportionate welfare recipients, and led primarily by female heads-of-household (Moynihan, 1965). According to Weaver (2012), the Moynihan Report concluded that single-headed female families in Black communities create a "tangle of pathology" that perpetuates intergenerational Black poverty. Moynihan (1965) postulated that the matriarchal family structure was responsible for poor youth academic performance, high unemployment rates, and increasing crime rates. The insinuating narrative implicates the Black father as being absent from the Black family structure. The negative characterization of the Black family by the Moynihan Report was foundational to how social welfare policies continue to be enacted.

Social welfare policies and laws like the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), state child support laws, and fatherhood initiative programs have been developed based on narratives created by the Moynihan Report and have a disparate punitive impact on minority communities perceived to have a preponderance of absentee fathers. Despite decades-long efforts of the federal government's creation and implementation of legislation to address what they believed would be strengthening families, the government has passed and, in most cases, increased current laws that create insurmountable barriers for keeping Black families together (Hodges, 2019). These laws have resulted in increased father absence within homes and have single-handedly added to the breakdown of successful co-parenting within the Black community. Additionally, Christensen (2019) points out that changing family dynamics, such as declining marriage rates and increases in female heads of households, puts women at greater risk of being poor (Cherlin, 1998). Black female-headed households are more likely to experience poverty than White female-headed households.

The child support system has been instrumental in the much-discussed breakdown and dwindling of the two-parent Black family household since the late 1970s (Boothe, 2018). Many of these legislative enactments pushed Black fathers into the shadows of hiding and from being legally accountable financially for their children (Grall, 2018). With this in mind, there has been an open debate on the needed legislation regarding the federal government's attempts to force these Black fathers into financial obligations to provide for their children or face the alternative of modern-day legislative slavery. Modern-day legislative slavery of Black men is the punitive impacts of the child support system and all its oppressive consequences of non-compliance: wage garnishments, loss of driving privileges (which creates another barrier to Black fathers having transportation to get to their jobs to stop the cycle of support non-compliance), garnishment of unemployment benefits, loss of joint custody of their children, and ultimately incarceration (Boothe, 2018; Mincy & Sorensen, 1998).

The US child support system has helped create the false "Deadbeat Dad" stereotype used by the mainstream media to describe Black fathers (Boothe, 2018). The absence of the Black father within the Black family and the relationship between incarceration and child support is an often-overlooked relationship when delving into the impact of child support legislation (Pearson, 2004). For non-custodial Black fathers who have experienced incarceration, the accrual of child support arrears causes an insurmountable financial barrier for them to pay down their child support debt and often get back into the good graces of a parental relationship with their children (Pearson, 2004). Thus, the child support program contradicts its stated goals of supporting and encouraging healthy families through financial support for the well-being of the child and the entire family.

Despite its ambitious mission, the US child support system, while promoting aspirations of reducing poverty among families, has become a financial burden for mostly Black fathers who experience employment barriers and possibly incarceration as a result of not being able to make their support payment obligations (Boothe, 2018; Chan & Adler-Baeder, 2019). When many Black fathers return home from being incarcerated, they face social and economic disadvantages that make it difficult to find employment and help contribute financially to their families (McLeod & Gottlieb, 2018). For low-income incarcerated Black fathers with existing child support orders, the inability to pay mounting child support arrears creates enormous economic challenges for Black families (Visher & Travis, 2011).

### *Policy Recommendations*

In this paper, we propose two significant policy recommendations to elevate many of the challenges faced by Black fathers related to the draconian practices of the US child support system. The first recommendation is to strengthen the relationship between Responsible Fatherhood Programs (RFPs) and child support enforcement agencies. The second is to enhance the Family First Prevention Services Act's (FFPSA) ability to support low-income fathers.

RFPs have emerged as an alternative to incarceration and a strategy to increase father involvement by teaching parenting skills and addressing the economic circumstances faced by many fathers to improve their child support payment compliance (Adler-Baeder & Chan, 2019). While different kinds of RFPs exist, offering services such as workforce development, educational services (GED), mental health, and parenting classes, few studies have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of the RFPs (Holmes et al., 2020).

Many RFP participants are unemployed at the time of participation. As a result, most unemployed fathers in these programs are not making child support payments (Holcomb et al., 2015). Data regarding payment non-compliance of fathers in RFPs and the fathers' financial difficulties substantiates the reality that current social policy does not support Black fathers' economic stability to the same degree that disadvantaged mothers are supported (Cancain et al., 2011). A meta-analytic study of the effectiveness of RFPs indicated a small but statistically significant impact of improving father involvement, parenting, and co-parenting (Holmes et al., 2020). The study also found evidence that fathers who were participating in the RFP reported an increase in consistent communication and visits with their children, positive changes within the relationship with their child's mother, and ultimately growth in improved co-parenting relationship with the mother. These findings illustrate more significant systemic issues related to employment

and wage earnings, which disproportionately impact low-income Black fathers (Cancian et al., 2011). Further, the relationship between Black male earnings and their ability to pay child support raises concerns about how much support should be expected from non-custodial Black fathers who experience prevalent discrimination in employment (Gould-Werth et al., 2012).

Through strengthening collaborations between child support enforcement agencies and Responsible Fatherhood Programs, greater support can be provided to low-income fathers to reduce large child support arrears, which often interfere with their ability to pay current child support. For example, implementing a debt-compromise initiative for low-income fathers who have accrued significant arrears would be monumental (Martinson & Nightingale, 2008). We propose that the debt compromise initiative consider child support deferment payment options for any father enrolled in a Responsible Fatherhood Program. The ability to defer payments while enrolled and actively participating in the RFP would allow these fathers to focus solely on gaining the needed skills and employment relationships required to support and care for their children financially. In addition, we would propose an employment apprentice program in which the fathers are referred to participating employers who partner with the Responsible Fatherhood Programs, allowing the fathers to work for four to six months while enrolled in the program. The fathers would be paired with a current employee of a company who would mentor the father and provide biweekly reports to the RFP about the father's progress within the apprenticeship program. In collaboration with the RFP, if, after six months of working with the company, and the father has done well, he would be eligible for full-time employment. Responsible Fatherhood Programs should be strongly considered an integral component of all social welfare policies addressing families at risk of children entering the child welfare system.

The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) was signed into law in February 2018 to provide services to families at risk of entering the child welfare system. FFPSA provisions Part I and II of the Prevention Activities under Title IV-E provide Black fathers with a path to become legal guardians of their daughters. Part I of the FFPSA supports the reunification of children in the custodial care of their biological parents first, subsequently placed in the welfare system, and provides supportive services for biological parents once the child reunifies into their care. In addition, the FFPSA supports Black fathers through the access of up to 12 months of in-home parenting training in attempts of avoiding an at-risk child's reentry into the welfare system.

While reviewing the different parts of the FFPSA, one can assume that the policymakers formulated the bill with the preconceived belief that the adults/parents stepping up to care for their children are already employed or have access to some form of job readiness or training program. This preconceived notion continues to

create the most significant barrier for Black fathers before they consider addressing the need to reunify, support, and become the legal guardian of their daughters/children while operating within the parameters of the FFPSA.

Enhancing the Family First Prevention Services Act is another way to increase fathers' involvement in families, thus potentially reducing the number of children and youth entering the foster care system. Enhancements of the FFPSA along with state-mandated financial earmarks would provide significant support to low-income Black fathers. We recommend that the FFPSA be enhanced to include employment services programs that will assist Black fathers with securing financial stability to care for their children in which they are pursuing custody/guardianship. This recommendation would provide up-front employment assistance when the Black father engages the child welfare system with the hopes of gaining custody/guardianship of their child. Furthermore, the policy enhancement would include a process that recognizes that the Black father is participating in employment services through the program and would thus remove time constraints to reunification with their children. These FFPSA enhancements would provide Black fathers with the necessary support to nurture and support their daughters from the inception of their relationship. In out-of-home placement, Black fathers support Black fathers in their desire for employment and to gain legal custody reunification with their child.

## CONCLUSION

For decades, most of the literature about Black fathers focused on deficits and inadequacies of Black fatherhood. Given the lack of empirical research on Black fathers raising daughters, greater emphasis is needed to better document and understand the experiences of Black fathers as parents and caregivers. This research would advance our knowledge about Black fathers, a population often marginalized in the research.

Scholarly literature that focuses on Black fathers as vital participants in their children's and families' lives is much needed to portray a more accurate story about Black family life, despite the trauma and vestiges of enslavement, Jim Crow segregation, institutional discrimination, and harmful societal characterizations as impediments to the establishment and maintenance of a solid and stable Black family structure—additionally, unearthing examples of Black fathers as nurturing parents and the first line of defense against drugs, early sexual activity, and other vices that trap too many young Black youth.

We must highlight the strong relationship between Black fathers raising daughters in the decades to come. Educators, social workers, and other helping professionals need to understand the importance of engaging Black fathers as assets to their Black daughters' healthy social and emotional development. It will

take bolder research efforts and advocacy to change contemporary narratives about Black fathers as unengaged and deadbeat dads. Black fathers are loving and involved parents who are challenging racial stereotypes and beating the odds in raising emotionally confident, academically assertive Black girls.

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