

The experiences of low income  
non-resident African American  
fathers with parenting and  
depressive symptoms



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# DISCLOSURE



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# Introduction



- Low income non-resident African American fathers are a vulnerable group of parents who experience barriers and stressors that affect parenting, and put them at risk for depressive symptoms
- Parental depression is associated with less favorable parenting practices (Caldwell et al., 2010; Hamer & Marchioro, 2002; Julion et al., 2007)

# Purpose of the study



- The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of low income non-resident African American fathers with regards to parenting and depressive symptoms

# Research aims



- 1. Describe the parenting practices of low income non-resident African American fathers
- 2. Reveal their challenges and barriers to parenting
- 3. Disclose their resources and supports with parenting
- 4. Examine their experiences with depressive symptoms

# Research Design



- Interpretive Phenomenology or Hermeneutics: Facilitates everyday understanding; appropriate for studying human phenomenon (Benner, 1985)
- Protection of human subjects: approved by Saint Louis University, Institutional Review Board. Informed consent, confidentiality, incentive

# Sample



- Fourteen fathers
- Ages ranged from 25 to 46 years (mean age 34)
- Number of children ranged from 1 to 10

Employment	N	Education	N
Employed Part-time Temporary	8	HS Diploma	8 (6 some college)
Unemployed Student	3 1	GED	4
Disabled	2	No diploma or GED	2

# Data Collection Schedule



Visit 1	Visit 2	Visit 3
Consent	Childhood Experiences Interview	Work History and child support Interview
Demographic Questionnaire	Adverse Childhood Experiences questionnaire	Gotland Scale for Male Depression
Fatherhood interview	Culture Interview	Center for Epidemiologic Depression scale
Parenting Practices Interview	Parenting Practices Interview (repeat)	Clarification of data

# Data analysis



- Interview transcripts coded
- Themes, exemplars, and paradigm cases identified
- Responses to scales enriched data analysis
- Interpretive summaries
- Interpretive sessions

# Parenting practices of low income non-resident African American fathers



## Parenting practices:

- Parenting differently (than they had been parented)
- Spending time with their children
- Support and encouragement
- Being there: significant events, important milestones
- Teaching
- Family legacies

# Exemplar: Teaching what you know

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- “Being able to teach my daughter stuff she need to know to make a good life. Make sure she know how to conduct herself being a good, decent person. She need to know the basic, like your common sense, like your values and morals” Carl

# Parenting challenges and barriers from childhood



- Adverse childhood experiences (7 fathers had a score of 4 or higher)
- Socio-economic disadvantages
- Parental absence
- Exposure to violence
- Disrupted education
- Difficult adolescent years

# Exemplar: Disrupted education



- “High school was confusing, because I ended up thinking I’m in tenth grade, finding out I’m a freshman, by the time I found out it was late and that’s what made me drop out. I was always behind but I was thinking that I was passing” Paul

# Parenting challenges and barriers in adulthood



- Employment
- Challenges with child support: connected to TANF benefits, penalties, barriers to employment
- Difficult co-parenting relationships and multiple partner fertility
- Discrimination and negative stereotypes

# Exemplar: Challenges with child support

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- “Now they trying to give me probation, the state, for child support. They suspended my driver’s license already, so...I don’t know, guess I keep praying. If I get arrested I could lose my house. I don’t want to lose that, that’s most important to me besides myself and my family.....” Paul

# Low income African American fathers experiences with depressive symptoms



- CESD and Gotland male depression scales
- Four fathers scored in the possible depression range & three of these fathers scored a 4 or greater on the ACE questionnaire
- Three fathers scored in the at-risk range
- Some childhood trauma not captured by ACE questionnaire

# Experiences with depressive symptoms



- Feelings of anxiety and uneasiness
- Trouble sleeping “nightmares”
- Loneliness
- Worried: about being arrested, losing home, losing everything, no support, having to start over
- Feelings of failure, despair over losses, fear of relapse
- Anger, irritable, frustrated, more aggressive when stressed
- Unpredictable and uncertain world

# Parenting resources and supports



- Family support
- Spirituality
- Community agencies: job training, peer support

# Future plans and finding hope



- Future plans: Education, job training, employment, start new businesses, family
- Gaining hope: discovering talents and gifts
- “I want to go back to school for sociology and get a job working in an institution like foster care. I want to work with people and help people like me” Bill
- Bill was enrolled in college classes by end of study

# Implications for practice, research, and policy



- Educate: parenting skills, coping with stressors and past childhood traumas. Provide resources: referrals
- Develop programs to aid fathers with parenting life skills, education, job training and placement
- Adverse Childhood Experiences questionnaire
- Education and employment. Justice system, discrimination and child support policies

# Conclusion



- **Strengths:** the lived experiences of the sample, captures fathers' parenting practices, barriers and supports. Multiple data sources, interpretive sessions
- **Limitations:** Small sample size, limited to one region, exclusion of other mental health disorders

Findings expand the knowledge of the challenges and supports faced by low income non-resident African American fathers