



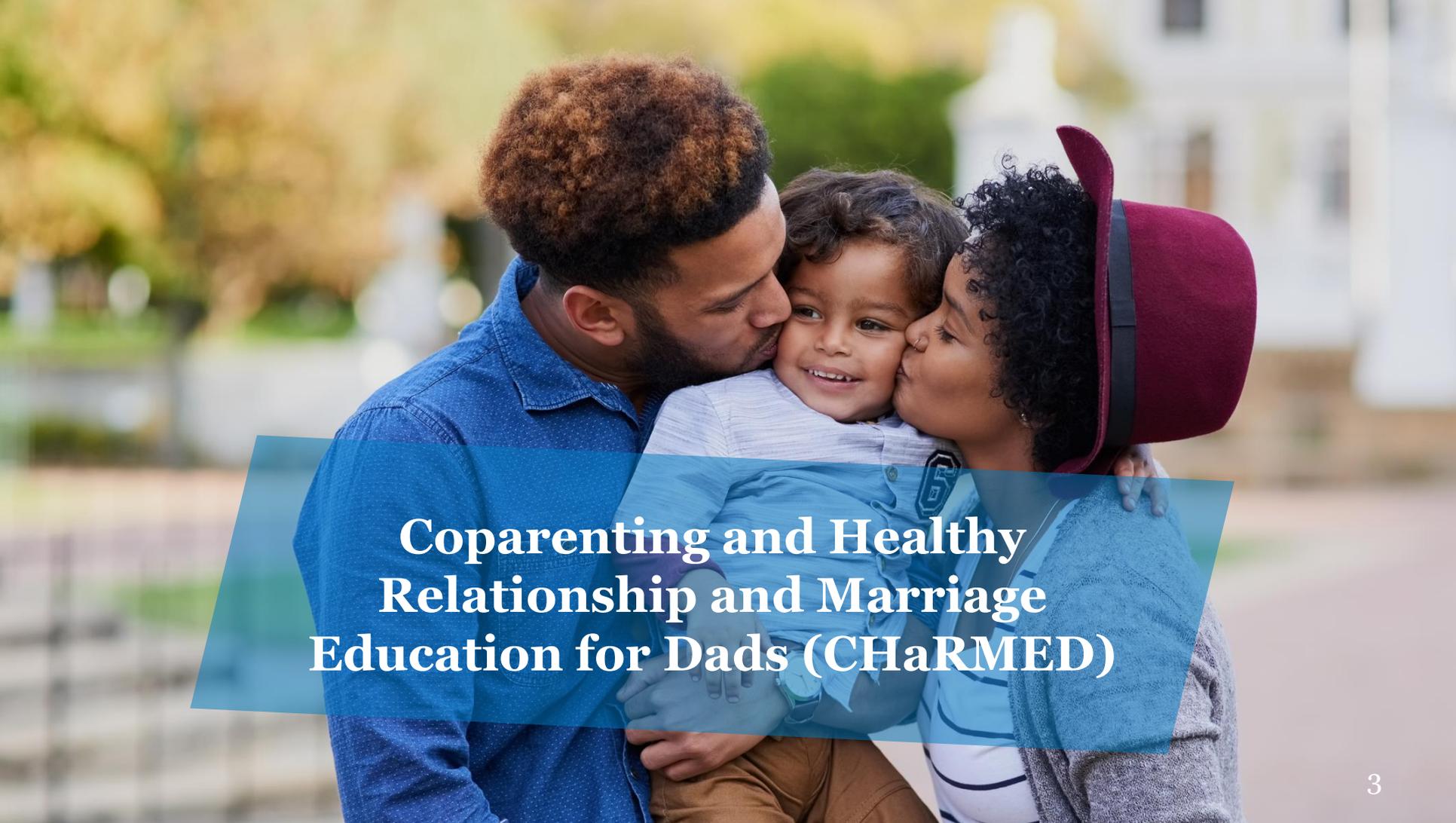
Strategies for Addressing Healthy Relationships in Fatherhood Programs – Lessons Learned from the CHaRMED Study

Presenters: Samantha Ciaravino,
Andrea Vazzano, and April
Wilson

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Presentation Overview

- The Coparenting and Healthy Relationship and Marriage Education for Dads (CHaRMED) study (Sam Ciaravino)
- Supporting fathers' coparenting and romantic relationships during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Andrea Vazzano)
- Strategies to support healthy relationships for American Indian and Alaska Native fathers (April Wilson)



**Coparenting and Healthy
Relationship and Marriage
Education for Dads (CHaRMED)**

Background

- Fathers, children, and their families benefit from healthy relationships (both romantic and coparenting)
- Many fatherhood programs aim to support fathers' healthy relationships
- It is unclear how fatherhood programs design and deliver healthy relationship content and whether the content is responsive to fathers' diverse relationship contexts and needs

A young man and woman with curly hair are laughing together in an urban setting. The woman is on the left, wearing a blue and white striped shirt, and the man is on the right, wearing a white t-shirt and red headphones. They are both smiling broadly and looking at each other. The background shows a blurred city street with buildings.

The CHaRMED Study

Study Objectives

- Better understand the approaches that fatherhood programs use to support fathers' healthy coparenting and romantic relationships
- Explore fathers' perceptions of and needs around relationship programming
- Examine whether and how programs respond to those needs

Key Terms

- **Coparenting relationships** are relationships between any two or more individuals as it relates to shared responsibility for raising a child. The adults may or may not be romantically involved.
- **Romantic relationships** are relationships among two individuals who are dating, committed, or married.
- **Healthy relationships** are high-quality coparenting and romantic relationships.

Data Sources and Research Methods

- Conducted a qualitative study with nine fatherhood programs, which consisted of phone interviews with:



Staff (24)



Fathers (36)



Coparents (6)

Study Sample – Programs (9)

Located in **four regions across the United States**, including Midwest (3), South (3), West (2), and Mid-Atlantic and Northeast (1)



Served fathers with a **variety of racial and ethnic identities** including serving a majority who identified as Black (3), White (3), Hispanic or Latinx (2), and American Indian or Alaska Native (1)



5 programs operated in **urban settings**, two operated in **rural settings**, and two operated in both urban and rural settings



6 programs **received funding** through OFA Responsible Fatherhood grants



7 programs **engaged coparents or spouses** in some way



Study Sample – Fathers (36)

The majority of fathers were either **married** or **currently in a romantic relationship (58%)** at the time of the interview



Most fathers reported **having 1-2 minor children (63%)**; Nearly one quarter of fathers reported having **3-4 children (23%)**



Over half of the fathers reported **coparenting minor children with one mother (56%)**; over a third reported **coparenting minor children with two or more mothers (36%)**



One third of fathers reported that **all their children lived with them all or most of the time (34%)** while another third were **living apart from all their children (34%)**





Study Findings

Addressing Relationships

Fatherhood programs support healthy relationships through multiple services and strategies

“

[Relationships are] definitely a priority for us because we know that at the end of the day, if this father has truly learned things from us through our group sessions, through our one- on-one sessions, through our components of the program, through our engagement...they will be better providers to their children.”

-Program Facilitator

Engaging Fathers

Fathers engage in healthy relationship content once they feel connected to the program

“

Once [fathers] get there, they're ready to talk about things that interest them and that they are living through and going through right now.”

-Program Director

Creating Safe Spaces

Safe group spaces invite discussions around healthy relationships

“

The [facilitator] did a fabulous job of maintaining relationships with them, creating an environment where we're all here, we're all here for similar reasons, we're all here to get better. Let's use our experiences. Let's be brothers in this and let's just be real and open with each other.”

-Father

Supporting Coparenting Relationships

Staff and participants view healthy relationship content as relevant and useful for fathers' coparenting relationships

“

We communicated before, but we weren't really opening up. You know what I'm saying? ... And by taking the [fatherhood program] course, we learned that we have to efficiently listen to each other so we can be open to listen to the children.”

-Coparent

Engaging Coparents

Meaningful engagement of coparents in relationship programming is seen as beneficial, but with important tradeoffs and logistical challenges

“

I feel like the way the discussions went, I really enjoyed them. I could give [other fathers] my opinion without being worried...Don't take that away from me.”

-Father

Navigating System Involvement

Fathers see access to children as a key challenge in their lives, which is complicated by challenging coparenting relationships and legal and social systems

“

I don't even get to coparent, that's what I'm saying. I go to court next month, and I don't even, haven't even seen my kids.”

-Father

A photograph of a family of three outdoors in winter. A woman is carrying a young child on her shoulders. The child is wearing a black beanie and a tan jacket. The woman is wearing a white sweater with a giraffe pattern. A man with a beard is wearing a yellow beanie and a dark jacket, smiling and holding the child's hand. The background is a bright, slightly overcast sky.

Implications and Products

*Report Released
in December 2021*



**Coparenting and Healthy Relationship and
Marriage Education for Dads (CHaRMED):**

*Results from a Qualitative Study of Staff and
Participant Experiences in Nine Fatherhood Programs*

Andrea Vazzano, Samantha Ciaravino, Mindy E. Scott, April Wilson, Lisa Kim,
Isabel Griffith, Huda Tauseef, Sydney Briggs, Michael Bradley, Victor St. John,
Anushree Bhatia, and Heather Wasik

Additional CHaRMED Products

- A **brief** of lessons learned from COVID-19 (Feb 2022)
- A **short article** highlighting study findings relevant for child welfare and other social service agencies (Jun 2022)
- A collection of **three resources** for fatherhood programs looking to better support fathers' relationships (Aug 2022)
- A **brief** providing considerations and practice-based strategies for fatherhood programs serving AIAN fathers (Aug 2022)
- A **brief** on stigma and discrimination, with practice-based resources (Aug 2022)



**Supporting fathers' coparenting and
romantic relationships during and
after the COVID-19 pandemic**

Introduction

- COVID-19 presented many obstacles for fathers that could affect their relationships
 - Increased unemployment, issues around child access and visitation, difficulties navigating work-from-home arrangements
- Also created unique hurdles for fatherhood programs
 - Shift from in-person to virtual services, less opportunities to foster safe spaces
- How can these experiences inform how fatherhood programs support healthy relationships moving forward?

Data Sources and Research Methods

- Added questions specific to COVID-19 to CHaRMED staff, father, and coparent interview protocols in March 2020
- Qualitative analysis of transcripts from interviews with 20 program staff, 36 fathers, and 6 coparents



How has COVID-19 affected fathers and their relationships?



COVID-19 and Fathers

- Many fathers faced economic and employment stressors
 - Relationships can suffer when basic needs are not met

“

[One father] lost his job because of COVID, and now his wife, or his child's mother, wanted him to leave. He had a job, and he was working. He had just come home [from prison]. He was moving kind of quick, and he got a nice job, and he'd been working the job for one month before his job shut down. And so now he's calling me and telling me that his child's mother wanted him to leave because he's no longer contributing to the household.”

- Program Staff

Covid-19 and Fathers

- Most fathers and coparents felt that their coparenting and romantic relationships were unchanged

“

Between trying to move and not being able to work, that was probably the most frustrating [thing]. But it didn't have a negative effect on our relationship. We understood what was going on, and we just stayed positive.”

- Father

COVID-19 and Fathers

- For some fathers living with their partners or children, COVID-19 led to improvements in their relationships

“

We are self-isolating, and it was a bit stressful. [But] we get along really, really well, so it's kind of a bonus to be able to spend time with your best friend.”

- **Father**

I'd say relationships got better from then to now. Because we're with each other all day and night now. No school. So we talk a lot more. So I'm finding out more about the kids.”

- **Father**

COVID-19 and Fathers

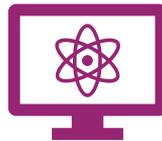
- For some fathers not living with their children, COVID-19 negatively affected their ability to spend time with their children

“

That's going to be her excuse until this thing is over... She's not going to trust me taking out my son while this is going on.”

- *Father*

How has COVID-19 affected Fatherhood Programs?



COVID-19 and Fatherhood Programs

- Programs used two main approaches to remotely deliver programming and foster safe spaces
 - Live video conferencing (e.g., Zoom)
 - Pre-recorded videos

“

Well, of course, in-person classes are in my opinion by far the best, but with us using Zoom and such and interacting the way we do, it's about as close as you can possibly get to in-person...we're still able to develop a rapport with them.”

-Program Staff

Covid-19 and Fatherhood Programs

Remote programming brought challenges, but also unexpected benefits

Challenges

- Some fathers were unfamiliar with the technology used
- Not all fathers had access to a computer or smartphone
- Many fathers were prone to distraction during video sessions

Benefits

- Quieter fathers seemed more comfortable participating virtually
- Remote programming mitigated transportation and scheduling issues

COVID-19 and Fatherhood Programs

- Staff also increased one-on-one outreach to build and maintain personal connections

“Our typical engagement strategy is to make sure that their facilitators are contacting [fathers] each week and recording the notes from those calls in our data system. So, we’ve ramped that up and put more oversight in that to make sure that was happening.”

-Program Staff

Strategies for fatherhood programs moving forward



Strategies for fatherhood programs moving forward



Continue delivering relationship programming alongside services that address immediate needs such as unemployment



Support fathers in learning to slow down and focus on the importance of their relationships with their family and children



Provide specific supports for fathers facing difficulty seeing their children amid strained coparenting relationships

Strategies for fatherhood programs moving forward



Deliver virtual programming with live interactions to increase program reach while still preserving the safe space necessary for discussions about relationships



Supplement programming with increased one-on-one support to help ensure strong connections and engagement in relationship programming



**Strategies to support healthy
relationships for American Indian
and Alaska Native fathers**

Introduction

- Fatherhood programs recognize that families have unique strengths and needs
- It is important to consider the diverse cultural traditions and histories of American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) fathers
 - Many AIAN cultures have core teachings and ceremonies that emphasize the importance of respecting and honoring relationships with family, community, and other aspects of one's environment
 - Historical trauma has harmed AIAN peoples, cultures, and traditions

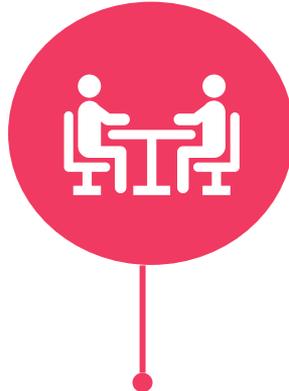
Purpose

Provide practice-based, contextually relevant strategies that fatherhood programs serving AIAN fathers can use to support fathers' healthy coparenting and romantic relationships

Data Sources and Research Methods



In-depth interviews with 3 fathers and 1 staff member from fatherhood program serving AIAN fathers



Interviews with three experts:

- Mike Duncan (Con-Cow/Wailaki/Wintun), Native Dads Network
- Albert Pooley (Navajo/Hopi), Native American Fatherhood & Families Association
- Jennifer Richards (Diné/Lakota/Taos Pueblo), Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health



Scan of existing literature, including from broader CHARMED study

Key Strategies

The strategies described in this presentation provide considerations for:

1

Selecting or adapting fatherhood curriculum content so that it is respectful and relevant to AIAN cultures

2

Enhancing the structure or design of fatherhood programs to promote engagement of AIAN fathers

3

Integrating the broader community into fatherhood programs to deepen connections within the fatherhood program and beyond

Strategies for selecting or adapting fatherhood curriculum content

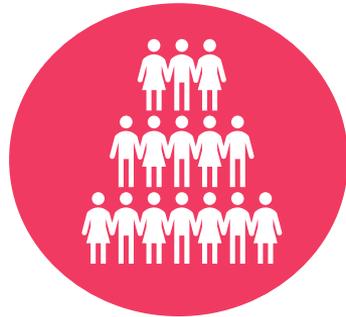
- Highlight the cultures, heritages, beliefs, and histories of AIAN peoples
- Emphasize the importance of fathers for child and family well-being
- Acknowledge historical and intergenerational trauma, and include an emphasis on healing
- Support fathers with strained coparenting relationships who may face challenges navigating multiple legal systems
- Focus on relationship skills that are applicable across different types of relationships

Strategies that enhance the structure or design of fatherhood programs

- Be intentional when hiring program facilitators
- Build trust between fathers and with the facilitator before addressing topics like trauma and healthy relationships
- Identify leaders within the AIAN community to serve as role models or guest speakers in program sessions

Strategies for integrating the broader community into fatherhood programs

- Engage community members in the design and implementation of fatherhood programs
- Support fathers' connections to each other outside of the fatherhood program



Future Needs



More research focused on supporting fatherhood programs that serve AIAN populations



Additional funding for culturally appropriate programming that honors storytelling, traditional teachings, and references to the Creator and the importance of prayer

Thank You!

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