

Healthy Relationships & Marriage

**Among Fragile Families
in Baltimore City**

A Synopsis of Conversations and Findings
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Center for Fathers, Families,
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synopsis

On May 28, 2004, the Center for Fathers, Families and Workforce Development (CFWD)

convened a Community Conversation on Relationships and Marriage among Fragile Families to engage the Baltimore community in a social welfare policy discussion focused on family formation and its implications for children and communities. Currently, legislation to reauthorize the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) is pending in both the United States House of Representatives and the Senate. Each contains provisions to address family formation by providing resources, services and education programs for unwed low-income mothers and fathers. Public policy, through welfare reform and reauthorization proposals, is attempting to combat the almost 40-year increase in the number of children born out of wedlock.

In 1960, 56 million children lived in homes with a married mother and father and 5 million lived in mother-only households. Of those, only 1 percent lived in homes where the mother was never married. However, by 1970, 7.4 million children were reared in homes with only a mother present; 527,000 children were born out-of-wedlock; and the number of children living with a divorced parent had increased significantly (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). In the African-American community this phenomenon was even more pronounced as in 1965; 24 percent of black infants were born to single mothers—a number that would rise to 64 percent in 1990 (Brookings 1996).

Healthy Relationships and Marriage Among Fragile Families in Baltimore City: A Synopsis of Conversations and Findings documents the changes in family formation, welfare policy and most importantly community insight on the issue of healthy relationships and marriage among fragile families.

In 1960, 56 million children lived in homes with a married mother and father and 5 million lived in mother-only households. Of those, only 1 percent lived in homes where the mother was never married. At that time, very few American families formed as the result of out-of-wedlock births. Typically, single parent homes were born as the result of divorce or the death of a spouse. However, ten years later, the characteristics of America's families would change dramatically.

According to data provided by the United States Census Bureau in 1970, 7.4 million children were reared in homes with only a mother present; 527,000 children were born out of wedlock; and the number of children living with a divorced parent had increased twofold. While the phenomenon of out-of-wedlock child-rearing would reverberate throughout American society, its occurrence would be more pronounced in the African-American community. Information provided by The Brookings Institution states that in 1965, 24 percent of black infants were born to single mothers, a number that would rise to 64 percent in 1990 (Brookings 1996). In 2003, there were slightly more than 11 million African-American children, of those, 51 percent lived in single female-headed households. Of those African-American children who are in households with no father present, 30 percent of the children were born to never-married mothers (U.S. Census Bureau 2004).

Shifts in child-bearing and rearing practices would have significant implications for child well-being. Generally, research has indicated that children who are reared in two-parent homes benefit significantly from the emotional and financial contributions of their parents. Moreover, when children are reared in homes with both parents, and the environment is free from violence (even control-

background

The notion of the “deserving poor” shaped early welfare policy.

ling for poverty), children in two parent families realize better outcomes than their single-parent-reared counterparts.

What has become clear through research is that the effects of parental involvement have both social and economic dimensions. However, for more than 60 years public policy focused solely on the economic issues associated with single parent homes. With the creation of the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program, through the enactment of the Social Security Act of 1935, the federal government began to provide financial support for those families whose male head of households were dead, absent, or unable to work. Thus, ADC was intended to be a short-term measure that would counter the circumstances of family poverty not a strategy that sought to remediate the structural aspects of poverty.

The notion of the “deserving poor” was included in the ADC program as benefits were designated to support the individuals such as widows and the wives of the disabled. Conversely, the “undeserving poor,” mothers with children born out of wedlock, could be subject to denial or reduced benefits. The impetus of ADC was that children should not have to rely solely on the income of mothers when families were deprived of their male breadwinners. By 1942, seven years after ADC’s creation, the numbers of unwed, separated or divorced mothers receiving ADC equaled those who were widows. A further indicator of changing societal attitudes regarding welfare is represented in the federal government’s 1967 decision that required states to provide employment training services for welfare recipients. ADC would undergo a number of evolutions and by 1962 the program was renamed Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). However, societal attitudes regarding welfare began to change and in 1967 the federal government

Welfare caseloads have changed dramatically in the past 30 years.

required states to provide employment-training services for welfare recipients. In 1970, welfare caseloads were no longer comprised primarily of widows, divorcees, and families with a disabled breadwinner. The overwhelming number of those on welfare would be never-married mothers and their children—a trend that continues to the present.

During the one-year period between October 1993 and September 1994, slightly more than 5 million families received cash welfare benefits. According to data provided by the Administration for Children and Families, of the 5 million families who received AFDC almost 12 percent reported that they were divorced or legally separated and 58 percent reported that they were unmarried. By 2001 the number of families receiving cash assistance decreased to 2.1 million. The adults of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Program (TANF) numbered 1.4 million. Of those, 66.9 % reported their marital status as single (never married).

By 1994, never-married mothers and their children accounted for 58 percent of welfare caseloads and in 1994, the proportion of never-married single female heads of household increased to 66%. The available data indicates that the proportion of never-married mothers on welfare has increased while the overall welfare caseloads decreased. TANF caseload data indicates welfare is a transitional experience, however, there were many perceptions of the nation's welfare population including long-term welfare use and pregnancy to gain assistance. A combination of perceived and actual characteristics of America's welfare recipients contributed to the reformation of our nation's social welfare system.

America's welfare system was grounded on the premise that the challenges experienced by low-income families were economic in

Early welfare policy paid little attention to the role of fathers.

nature. As such, social influences such as family formation, community conditions and racial stratification were not imputed into the welfare policy framework. The lack of consideration for social factors in the analysis of welfare policy may have created conditions that actually perpetuated poverty, exacerbating the very ills it sought to eradicate. Among politicians, many practitioners and the general public, an uneasy consensus existed on the need to overhaul the nation's welfare system.

welfare reform and low-income families

Welfare Reform and Low-Income Families

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 brought about the most sweeping changes to America's social welfare system since the enactment of the Social Security Act of 1935. Among the changes brought about by welfare reform were the replacement of the entitlement based Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Program (TANF) which included benefit time limits, work requirements and family size benefit caps.

The TANF program would form the foundation for our nation's new view of social welfare. Through its four goals, TANF would impact not only income security policy but also the functional definition of low-income families. Prior to welfare reform, the prevailing view of low-income families was that they were comprised of only mothers and children. Little consideration was given to fathers, as conventional wisdom held that low-income fathers did not possess the ability and most importantly the desire to be involved in the lives of their children and families. Through the research of the National Center for Fathers and Families and others, many of the misconceptions about low-income fathers have been dismissed.

Today, fathers are being brought into the process more than ever.

Welfare reform changed how low-income families were viewed and through practice supported by research the various initiatives and programs of welfare reform were implemented. The strategies used in welfare reform yielded many successes, including decreases in welfare caseloads and increases in wages as source of income for the bottom two-fifths of female-headed households. However, it must be noted that there were significant differences in the percentages of married and single female-headed households that lived in poverty. Furthermore, in a synthesis of research conducted by Sawhill (2004) and Sawhill and Haskins (2003) the most effective poverty reduction strategy is identified as full-time work and doubling cash welfare, the least effective.

One of the most significant and exciting changes brought about by the “new” approach to welfare were provisions that allowed for the engagement of fathers. As a result of the programmatic flexibility created by TANF, many states across the country began to engage fathers to increase both their capacity to parent and obtain employment. Moreover, the legislative mandate offered through TANF to support and empower fathers was part of a larger strategy to impact the patterns of family formation in our country. Of the four goals that encompassed the TANF program, three relate directly to family formation. After PRWORA’s enactment, debate began on a number of questions including whether or not government should be involved in family formation, should the focus be on marriageability rather than marriage, and should resources be offered to support co-parenting among parents who are no longer in romantic relationships?

For many, governmental involvement in the family life of Americans raises red flags. Discussion on issues of privacy and social engineering served as a mechanism for the further evolution of

What role should the government play in marriage and family issues?

the government's approach to impacting family formation. Through the active engagement of stakeholders and numerous public conversations, many concerns were allayed and others dismissed. However, with strong support from the community and faith-based family advocates, and under the auspices of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the federal government has moved forward with the implementation of a number of initiatives that seek to increase the ability of low-income parents to consider marriage and also strengthen the relationships of already married low-income mothers and fathers.

Once it was established that government would play a significant, albeit intermediate, role in family formation, contrasting arguments arose on marriage and marriageability. The center point of this polemic hinged on identifying the best strategy for the use of government resources. The questions on the table are simple. Should resources and services be used on marriage preparedness and education or would government intervention be better suited to mediating the social and economic factors that sustain poverty? The realities of being poor often make marriage appear unattainable to many low-income couples.

Marriageability proponents held that low-income families needed assistance in their journey to the altar and that marriage education alone could not resolve the social and economic issues that limit the success of their relationships. While the larger argument has not been resolved, a sort of *détente* has been achieved as both sides have recognized the benefits of supportive services, relationship counseling and marriage education. The common ground reached between the varying points of view are critical as the findings of the Fragile Families and Child Well Being Study (FFCS) indicates that at the birth of the

Many low-income parents have high expectations for their relationships.

child 81% of unmarried mothers and fathers were romantically involved and 51% lived together. The presence of romantic relationships and the living arrangement types among low-income parents illustrate a foundation for building strong relationships and thus strong families. However, low-income families face challenges that significantly impact their ability to form families or manage parenting relationships and although keenly aware of the challenges still have high expectations for their relationships. According to data from the Louisiana Fragile Families Study (LFFS), 60% of mothers and fathers want to get married, however, they are unsure about the benefits of marriage and face challenges such as multiple partner fertility and finances. Of particular interest are the challenges and characteristics of low-income African-American fathers.

It is generally agreed that welfare policy and income supports such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) have contributed greatly to improving the economic wherewithal of low-income mothers; the same cannot be said for their male counterparts. Research conducted by Holzer, Offner, and Sorensen (2004), Raphael (2004) and Levitan (2004) illustrates the precarious social and economic situations that challenge low-income fathers. Incarceration, low educational attainment and poor work histories stymie low-income men from attaining the role of provider traditionally ascribed to fathers. Improving these conditions in the face of limited public services for fathers has been the role of the Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development (CFWD).

Taking on the Issue of Healthy Relationships and Marriage: CFWD's Approach

While discussion among policymakers and researchers ensued on the national level, CFWD's entry into the marriage debate began with a personal request from a long-time client. In 2001, Dwayne

cfwd's
approach

Dwayne and Brenda's story inspired talks on marriage and family.

Grimes, a former Men's Services client, contacted CFWD President and CEO Joe Jones. He informed Joe that he and the mother of his six children, Brenda, were planning to marry and not only did they want the organization's help but they wanted to marry in CFWD's offices. With CFWD's assistance, the Grimes' had overcome a number of challenges including substance abuse, child support debt, and lack of employment. Joe challenged the couple to receive premarital counseling, meet with a member of the faith community and gain the faith leader's blessing of their union. Dwayne and Brenda took on Joe's challenge and on January 13, 2001 were married at CFWD's 3002 Druid Park Drive location.

Dwayne and Brenda's desire to marry propelled CFWD to confront the issue of marriage and relationships among low-income families. As a result, the organization's response to this public policy issue is based on the needs of those who it serves. Prior to disseminating the organization's standing on the issue of marriage to the wider community, CFWD convened its staff to 1) educate them on the issue of healthy marriages and its relation to welfare reauthorization and 2) gain their insight and input to develop its stance on the issue.

The working group was comprised of representatives from all of CFWD's departments and was charged with developing the organization's guiding principles, values and assumptions relative to family formation. The product of the group's efforts serves as the foundation for CFWD's participation in the national debate on marriage promotion issues as they relate to low-income, never-married parents.

As a matter of reality, the organization recognized that marriage is a widely shared ideal that crosses class and ethnic bound-

Co-parenting recognizes that marriage isn't the only choice.

aries. Additionally, the group recognized that low-income parents must navigate a number of issues that act as stressors on their relationships. In particular, financial and economic issues can significantly impede the ability of fragile families to sustain themselves. These core understandings served as fuel for CFWD's internal conversation.

Further, the organization understood that not every parenting relationship would result in marriage. With this reality, the group included in its deliberation strategies that promote co-parenting among low-income families. This "shared" approach to parenting can ensure that children are able to benefit from the involvement of both parents regardless of their romantic relationship. CFWD's 50/50 parenting program and co-parenting approach, in addition to serving those couples interested in marrying, serves those couples who are not moving toward marriage, but are working toward forming a well-functioning and healthy family unit.

The working group's process included reviewing extensive literature on the subject and participating in many national forums. Additionally, the group heard presentations by national family formation and marriage experts, who presented their research findings. This provided the group with the information necessary to give clear thought and attention to this delicate and sensitive issue.

The product of CFWD's internal conversations was used in venues on both the national and local level. To this end, CFWD's President and CEO, Joe Jones, has contributed to the development of the State of Oklahoma's Marriage Initiative. Also, CFWD has been contracted by the State of Louisiana's

Community voices can help to shape a new understanding of the issues.

Department of Social Services to develop a relationships and marriage curriculum to be used by organizations that work with low-income, never-married parents. The findings of CFWD's internal working group were used to fully develop the 50/50 Parenting Program model as well as the 50/50 Parenting and the Examining Relationships and Marriage for Fragile Families curricula.

community conversation

Community Conversation on Relationships and Marriage Among Fragile Families

PURPOSE

In May 2004, CFWD gathered 80 community members, practitioners, representatives of the faith-based community and researchers at the nationally renowned Great Blacks in Wax Museum in historic East Baltimore. The goal of the event was to garner the community's perspective on 1) the effect of the lack of healthy relationships and marriages on the low-income Baltimore community and 2) the structure, goals and implementation of potential marriage education programs in the city. The Community Conversation served as a time to hear from national figures as well as from couples who have previously participated in CFWD's programs.

PRESENTERS

JOE JONES, President and CEO of CFWD, opened the event with remarks before introducing four experts in the field. Presenters and topics follow:

RON HASKINS, Senior Fellow in Economic Studies

The Brookings Institution

Topic: The national overview of welfare reform legislation and background on how fatherhood and marriage provisions have impacted welfare reauthorization.

The state of Maryland is committed to strengthening families.

DIANN DAWSON, Director of the Office of Regional Operations
Department of Health and Human Services,
Administration for Children and Families (ACF)
Topic: *ACF's Healthy Marriage Initiative and what's happening around the country.*

CHRISTOPHER MCCABE, Secretary
Maryland Department of Human Resources
Topic: *Maryland's current plans around the issue of relationships and marriage.*

RON MINCY, Professor of Social Policy and Social Work Practice
The Columbia University School of Social Work
Topic: *Key findings from the research on fragile families.*

Highlights from the presentations included Secretary McCabe indicating Maryland's commitment to low-income families, noting his support for Maryland child support agencies' proactive engagement of fathers and championing the State's progress in the area of child support enforcement. McCabe also brought attention to Baltimore's recent family tragedy, where due to a lack of resources and intervention a child's life was lost, and emphasized the continuing need for family and fatherhood programs.

While McCabe shared information on the state's priorities, Diann Dawson informed the audience of programs and activities on the national level designed to address the issue of healthy relationships and marriages. Dawson highlighted activities

Studies have shown that kids from married homes do better in school.

associated with ACF's healthy marriage initiatives, including the African-American Healthy Marriage Initiative (AAHMI), which promotes strategies for fostering healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood, improving child well-being and strengthening families within the African-American community.

Ron Mincy delivered an emphatic speech and imparted findings that support the need for developing healthy relationships and marriage programming for low-income, and specifically African-American, parents. Studies have shown that children raised in married households do better in school and are less likely to engage in drug activity, become teen parents or live in poverty. Mincy presented statistics from the Fragile Families and Child Well Being Study that indicated that at the moment of conception 65% of parents are in a committed relationship. However, after 2-5 months that number drops to 42%. These findings indicate the necessity of engaging low-income parents around marriage at the “magic moment”—at conception or very near.

Ron Haskins delivered statistics on the overall effects of marriage on children and families. After providing a brief synopsis of the history of welfare laws, Haskins explained the current shift toward reducing the number of children in poverty by focusing on 1) connecting parents to the labor force and 2) reducing the number of children in single parent households. Haskins illustrated the effectiveness of the five factors used to reduce poverty. Full-time work reduced poverty by 42%, increases in marriage by 27%, increases in education by 15%, reduction in family size by 13% and doubling cash welfare by only 8%.

Couples who have experienced challenges share important insights.

The agenda also included a panel of two couples that had previously engaged in three of CFWD's programs: the STRIVE Baltimore Employment Training program, the Men's Services Responsible Fatherhood Program, and the 50/50 Parenting program. The couples each discussed the road they had traveled in deciding to commit to marriage. The couples follow:

DOMINICK WALKER AND CHARICE DIGGS

Participants in CFWD's 50/50 Parenting Program

Topic: *From 50/50 Parenting to considering marriage*

DWAYNE GRIMES AND BRENDA GRIMES (absent)

Former Participants in CFWD's STRIVE Baltimore Employment Training Program and Men's Services

Topic: *From drug addiction to self-sufficiency and marriage.*

Dominick and Charice, a young couple with a newborn child, had participated in the 50/50 Parenting program, which works with unwed parents in various stages of relationships around communicating effectively and working cooperatively in the best interest of the child. During their participation in the program, Dominick and Charice made headway with techniques for effective communication and positive collaboration. They are currently engaged to be married.

Though Brenda Grimes was unable to attend the event, Dwayne represented the couple, talking about his and her former issues with substance abuse, unemployment and child support, which all served as barriers to maintaining a healthy relationship despite the couple's six children. Married in 2001, Grimes notes that without the intervention of CFWD, they may not have been able to overcome the obstacles in their way of becoming a strong and healthy family.

Programming designed to support families makes the difference.

After the panel, several questions were chosen from the dozens received from the audience to be addressed by the panelists. The questions and answers focused mainly on clarifying the overall benefit of marriage for couples, children and the community; on identifying current resources for information on healthy relationships and marriage; and on defining the role of government and community organizations in the process. The event ended with remarks from Joe Jones and CFWD's Chief Operating Officer/Director of Men's Services, Johnny Rice II.

community roundtable

Community Roundtable on Relationships and Marriage

PURPOSE

After reviewing the findings from the larger community conversation, CFWD decided to explore some of the more pressing issues in a small roundtable discussion with key stakeholders. In July 2004, the twelve roundtable attendees addressed core questions and began to develop a strategy for moving forward with healthy relationships and marriage programming in the city. The attendees included representatives from the domestic violence prevention community, family and child services, health and community services, the faith-based community and CFWD staff and programs.¹

THE QUESTIONS

During the roundtable discussion participants were asked to give their views on key issues surrounding the implementation

¹ Attendees for the community roundtable included: Leon Henry, Maryland Regional Practitioner's Network for Fathers and Families; Stanley Fuller, Grace Baptist Church; Lisa Marah, House of Ruth Maryland; Traci McLemore, Success by Six Partnership; Melanie Styles, The Abell Foundation; Terri Wurmser, House of Ruth Maryland; CFWD staff: Delshan Tyette Hanks, Johnny Rice, Donald Malcolm Smith, James Smith; and CFWD program participants: Jerome Lyles, 50/50 Parenting; Kelli Lewis, 50/50 Parenting; and Justen White, Men's Services.

Marriage is fundamental to greater social issues, but intensely personal.

of healthy relationships and marriage activities in low-income Baltimore communities. The following discussion questions were posed to the audience. The discussion centered on answering these questions and tackling any issues that arose.

1. How important is marriage to the well-being of children, families and communities?
2. What is the definition of a healthy marriage?
3. What should government's role be in marriage activities?
4. Who do we want to be at the table (involved in the project) at the time of implementation?
5. How should these activities be conducted?
Through campaign, media, counseling, etc.?
6. How do we help people get their personal affairs in order before considering marriage?
7. How do we identify the population to serve?
8. How should we engage the faith-based community?
9. When should we engage participants?
At the hospital, prenatally?

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

In answering the above-mentioned questions, the participants touched repeatedly on core issues. The attendees noted the very personal nature of relationships and marriage and questioned the viability of legislating or incorporating into public policy acts that are considered substantially private and individual for many involved. Participants also considered the need to first change current social norms and move toward a marriage model as an essential component before being able to engage young people.

Much of the discussion centered on establishing working definitions for “healthy marriages” and “healthy relationships.”

What is a “healthy marriage?” Our participants had answers.

Participants defined a healthy marriage or relationship, among other things, as one in which there are positive means by which to address conflict. As community advocates, some trepidation about the encouragement of marriage was brought to the forefront, citing the immense responsibility and influence that community practitioners have in the lives of the people they serve. The main idea is summed up in the statement that “we don’t want to promote marriage for people that it might not be healthy for.”

Though there were expressions of trepidation and doubt around the issues, the group shortly came to the conclusion that marriage-related activities are on the horizon and that Baltimore, as a community collective, needs to prepare and plan for this initiative. Practitioners placed extreme emphasis on serving both parents of a child, and of approaching any initiative with a whole family mentality, providing services for mother, father and child(ren.)

Key organizations needing to be involved in the process include faith-based organizations, domestic violence prevention organizations, family support services and workforce development intermediaries. Additionally, potential partnerships with Baltimore schools was mentioned as an avenue to explore.

Some other notable points posed by the group included the following:

Those in the marriage conversations should be careful about making the assumption that marriage is intrinsically positive. When designing and implementing initiatives, the focus should be on *healthy* relationships and marriage.

Education, job skills, and personal finances affect readiness to marry.

Practitioners must stay aware of outside factors that may contribute to a couple's readiness (or lack thereof) to explore marriage. Levels of maturation—including education, job skills, personal finances, social skills—are all areas which contribute to marriageability and if underdeveloped can create problems in a relationship. Barriers such as low educational attainment, involvement in the criminal justice system, and disengagement from the labor market need to be addressed.

A main focus of any initiative should be on setting up social and support services for people who want to talk about relationships and marriage, for those who are seriously considering marriage, and for those parenting parents who have yet to consider marriage as an option. Non-institutionalized means of support—like families, churches and marriage models—should be sought in addition to programs.

We are talking about shared values. Marriage is about raising healthy children and developing healthy communities. Having healthier and stronger people in a community will lead to higher rates of marriage. To better understand how healthy relationships and marriage programming should be structured, we must explore the ways in which we promote healthier people.

Questions about the benefits of marriage over co-habitation were raised. Some feel that many of the advantages that children in married households are known to have may be related to the benefits of living in a two-income household rather than directly related to the marital status of their parents or caregivers. It was noted, however, that two-parent, unmarried households tend to operate with two independent income streams, and a major benefit of marriage is the pooling of resources.

The faith-based community plays an important role in supporting families.

Engaging the faith-based community is key. In many communities, faith-based institutions are the only providers of marriage education and counseling services; in addition, faith-based institutions are often the places where people feel most comfortable talking about this issue. People who are not part of a faith-based community traditionally do not have ready access to marriage counseling services.

In engaging the faith-based community, however, practitioners must be aware of the parameters. Getting churches involved might be as simple as reaching out to them, but we must be advised that faith-based leaders will advocate *marriage*, not co-habiting or other types of relationships.

Couples are influenced toward or away from marriage largely based on role models. If they do not see people around them getting married, or if they witness family members or friends having marital issues, then marriage may become less of an ideal for them.

Many were skeptical about government's role and motives in healthy relationships and marriage initiatives. Some believed that other than providing community-based organizations with resources, government should take a "back seat" in the process.

Multiple partner fertility is a critical issue in the low-income population. In many cases, children exist with partners outside of the relationship in question. Before considering marriage, men and women must be equipped with the tools necessary to positively negotiate the situation.

Meeting people where they are is an important part of outreach.

Marketing and message delivery are essential. The message must be digestible and consistent. In order to reach out to people, information must be available in a variety of places, i.e. barber shops, beauty parlors, corner stores, WIC offices, hospitals, prenatal clinics, etc. Additionally street or door-to-door outreach should be employed as a technique to raise awareness about the campaign. Hosting additional community forums and dialogues and soliciting celebrity sponsorship may also help to connect with community members around the issue.

Some notable points offered by participants in CFWD's 50/50 Parenting and Men's Services Responsible Fatherhood follow:

Though mothers and fathers in Baltimore City may need help, some couples are (rightfully) not on the road toward marriage. As a result of her involvement with the 50/50 Parenting Program, a participant realized that marriage was not the right choice for her and her co-parent.

If there were seminars or counseling sessions available, people in need would take part. There are lots low-income mothers and fathers interested in help who are unaware of where to go. For the purposes of recruitment, providers should connect to social service systems.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the group's comments and suggestions, CFWD believes that the major difficulties in developing and starting relationships and marriage activities in Baltimore hinge on negative reactions from some community members and providers who may believe the public policy agenda is imposing marriage on the population.

Faith communities can partner with public institutions for social change.

faith-based roundtable

Faith-Based Roundtable on Relationships and Marriage

PURPOSE

In December 2004, as a follow-up to the May conversation and July 2004 stakeholder's roundtable, CFWD convened a breakfast roundtable attended by nine faith-based leaders² from Baltimore's Christian and Muslim communities in order to gather specific information on the faith-based perspective on potential healthy relationships and marriage programming.

The facilitator opened the event by asking all attendees what people working together positively would mean for their congregations and communities. Among the responses were productivity, empowerment, healing, reconstruction, rebuilding, purpose, togetherness, unity and wholeness.

Attendees were focused on strengthening families and particularly concerned with the state and role of African-American men in the church and in the community. Faith-based leaders were not only interested in helping people find a moral center and connect to shared values, but also emphasized the need to address issues such as substance abuse, unemployment, health and mental health with individuals before moving toward marriage-related activities with couples.

For healthy relationships and marriage activities to be effective, the attendees noted that partnerships are essential. Connections to financial institutions, resources for housing and home own-

2 Imam Hassan A. Amin, Masjidul Haqq; Min. Jacqueline Powell/Angela Smith, New Psalmist Baptist Church; Stanley Fuller/Maxine Reed Vance, Grace Baptist Church; Larry Covin, Mt. Olivet Christian Worship Center; Dr. Anthony Chandler, New Bethlehem Church; Aggie Brown, 1st St. Stephens Baptist Church; Marvin McFadden, Mt. Zion Hill Baptist; Joseph T. Jones, CFWD; Julia Hayman-Hamilton, CFWD; Afra Vance White, CFWD; Donald Malcolm Smith, CFWD; Delshan T. Hanks, CFWD.

Domestic violence cannot be ignored in discussions about marriage.

ership, healthcare and dental care, employment resources, crisis intervention services, child support enforcement and courts were listed. Also, access to information was emphasized and like the practitioners, faith-based leaders also noted an interest in becoming involved with the school system. Additionally, attendees talked about the need to specifically address the issues of incarceration and AIDS in the community. Grant funding for community and faith-based organizations conducting the work was also mentioned as a needed resource.

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

There must be a clear definition of the couples to be served by these initiatives. Faith-based organizations are interested in working with biological parents who have a child in common.

Premarital counseling is a necessity for the success of couples considering marriage. Normally 4-6 sessions are administered and couples are required to have been together for six months to one year. Faith, finances, family and future are normally covered in these sessions. It must be noted that everyone who requests to be married in a particular congregation is not granted that request.

In Baltimore City, there are many people attached to those in a relationship, for instance, family members, parents of children outside of the relationship, friends, etc. When serving those considering marriage, these relationships must also be addressed.

There are significant issues of domestic violence that need to be addressed. The faith-based community must look at what it is saying by not talking about domestic violence.

Policy and community sentiment have intersected.

Marriage lends itself to health. Married men are healthier and more self-sufficient. A strong woman and a strong man will make a strong child. Strong families make strong communities.

CONCLUSIONS

The Baltimore faith-based community is eager to be involved in community-based initiatives that promote education on healthy relationships and marriage. Leaders in faith-based communities would like to be engaged fully and from the beginning of the process. The parameters of the programs must be clear, including what populations will be served, what the overall goals are, and what roles government, community agencies, and churches will have in the process.

**moving
forward:
the future**

Moving Forward: The Future of Marriage Promotion Activities in Baltimore City

There is considerable agreement that something must be done to strengthen low-income families. Past approaches have been economic in focus and thus have ignored the dire social consequences of intergenerational poverty and public policy that ignored the potential contributions of all family members, especially fathers. Nonetheless, we are at a crossroads where policy and community sentiment have intersected. CFWD's Community Conversation on Relationships and Marriage and subsequent roundtables were held to guide the confluence of community want and policy decision to a united course that strengthens low-income mothers, fathers and, most importantly, children.

Since the enactment of welfare reform in 1996, we have learned much about low-income fathers and their families. We learned that low-income unmarried fathers care and want desperately to be involved in the lives of their children. Additionally, we've

Parents who care may lack the “know-how” to make it all work.

learned that unmarried mothers and fathers, at the birth of their children, are romantically involved and many cohabit. From these two crucial core discoveries, we can surmise that low-income fathers and mothers care deeply for their children and about sustaining their relationships—but may lack the “know-how” to make it all work. In the face of challenges like poverty, low-educational attainment, and incarceration, low-income mothers and fathers struggle to keep their financial and familial lives together. But, more often than not, they are unsuccessful.

The findings of the *Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study* and *Fragile Families in Focus* indicate that after the birth of the child there are significant shifts in the relationship status of low-income unmarried parents. Once where there was a romantic or romantic-cohabiting relationship there is now a single mother and absent father. The reality of the evolution of fragile family relationships is reflective of the overall decline in marriage in American society. Although there are significant social and economic stressors that cause fragile family relationships to deteriorate over time, the marriage institution remains an ideal and an aspiration for low-income couples. Therefore, the future for low-income communities and marriage lies in creating a framework to ensure the strength and vitality of the relationships among low-income unmarried couples; a framework grounded upon the wants and aspirations of low-income mothers and fathers—which the data indicates is to be in a stable long-term monogamous relationship.

While there is agreement that children fair better when reared in violence-free homes where both parents are present, there is no consensus on how to make this a reality for low-income children. Low-income parents, because of their economic

65% of mothers and 66% of fathers: “few people have good marriages.”

circumstances, often view marriage as an unattainable ideal. Moreover, there is considerable uncertainty about the benefits of marriage and the institution itself. In *Focus on Fragile Families*, a telephone survey of 2,000 low-income mothers and fathers, 65% of mothers and 66% of fathers indicated that very few people have good marriages. Therefore, there is the feeling that not only is marriage an unrealistic ideal because of economics, but that marriages are often unsuccessful and not worth the work.

Low-income parents clearly understand the challenges that confront them and are open to receiving help. Also, parents who are no longer in romantic relationships are deeply interested in co-parenting services—services that assist them in navigating and managing the parenting relationship with the other parent. Parents also want marriage education services, but would prefer it in a community setting, such as a faith-based organization, rather than through government welfare offices. However, it must be noted that overwhelmingly low-income parents want assistance in resolving their economic issues.

What begs for attention in deciding how we move forward is what types of partnerships and support are needed to strengthen the relationship possibilities for low-income parents? Given the complexity of the circumstances that impact the lives of low-income families and their advocates, government, community institutions and organizations must come together to provide the economic and social support to strengthen low-income families.

From the comments of the CFWD-hosted *Healthy Relationships and Marriage Roundtable*, there is the feeling that if healthy marriage and relationship education is provided through

Working together, advocates for strong families can change Baltimore.

government offices the community may perceive that public policy is being imposed upon them and respond negatively. Therefore, services that are directed to improving the relationships and making marriage a viable option for low-income families must begin with the community acknowledging that marriage and healthy relationships are ideals for families and children. Communities and their advocates must initiate conversations to increase the level of comfort with discussing this sensitive issue. Stakeholders ranging from faith leaders, health practitioners and politicians must be brought to the table to clarify the issue and carve an agenda that has as its center point the strengthening of families to better the outcomes of children. Most importantly, those who will be impacted by healthy relationship and marriage initiatives must be in leadership roles to ensure that the work is grounded in the community's wants and needs. Moreover, financial and human resources must be provided.

Individuals and groups who share the goal of strengthening low-income families will create and provide the energy necessary to ensure that support and education services are available to those who are most in need. Although human resources are central, there must be funding in place to ensure the viability of a community-lead venture. Currently, the opportunity exists within the reauthorization of welfare to provide communities with the resources necessary.

Resources will be needed to ensure that a sound communications strategy is implemented. Communications and marketing are key to delivering the message that low-income mothers and fathers who want to form families will have access to services

The challenge is enormous, but not beyond our reach.

and assistance to make their families thrive. Important also will be resources for services. Low-income parents have a number of needs including employment training, housing and transportation to name a few. For any family-building initiative to be successful, it must mediate both social and economic needs.

Building strong families by promoting healthy relationships and marriage is a gargantuan undertaking. It will require the active input of a number of stakeholders. At this time, we have the opportunity with public social welfare policy to strengthen families by enhancing their ability to manage their relationships. Given the direction of public policy and the resources associated with the reauthorization of welfare reform, government's role will remain significant. However, for healthy relationships and marriage to take hold it must emanate from the community, reflecting its values and priorities.

Removing structural and institutional barriers to low-income family formation and serving as a convener of diverse stakeholders should be the role of government in advancing a healthy relationships and marriage agenda. Advocates must create within the community of those whom they represent and serve a sense of urgency that building strong families is a priority. Moreover, advocates must objectively address their concerns and communicate the benefits of two-parent families. The focus of the energy of advocates and government must be the formation of a diverse coalition that will seek to spur attention, organize stakeholders and create structure to address the issues of low-income families.

Together, we can create a new future for Baltimore City and its families.

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Targeting for Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood

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and

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Rutgers University

Marriage vs. Fatherhood Services

- Unfortunately healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood have been posed as competing agendas.
- Marriage + argument did not prevail
- I was part of a panel of experts that participated in an effort to structure the forthcoming healthy marriage demonstrations
- Goal: Position programs to win healthy marriage competitive grants

Early decisions

- Couples
 - romantically involved
 - express interest in marriage
- Services
 - Marriage promotion media campaigns
 - Relationship education and counseling
 - Little or no
 - Employment and training
 - Substance abuse
 - Mental health
 - Legal intervention
 - Policy reform

Targeting for Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood

- These early decisions can help us re-frame the debate about restoring families in terms of targeting for outcomes
- For individuals and childless couples:
 - Anyone who is interested in marriage can receive healthy marriage exploration services
- For couples
 - Married people should receive marriage maintenance services
 - Unmarried parents with children who are romantically involved and interested in marriage should receive marriage prep and maintenance services
- Others should receive responsible fatherhood/team parenting services
 - Not romantically involved
 - Facing significant barriers to marriageability

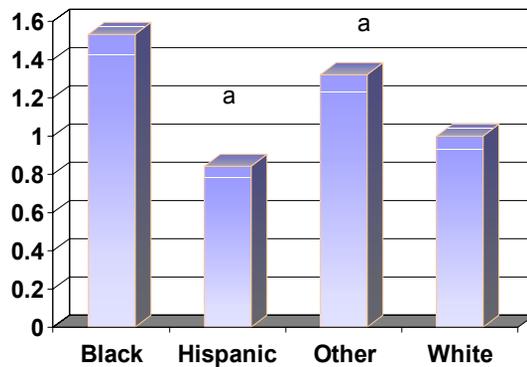
To be eligible for Healthy Marriage Services The Couple Would have to be romantically involved.

What does that mean?

Table 1 - Characteristics of all Unmarried Parents (2515)		%
Parents Relationship at Follow-Up		
Romantically Involved		64
Not Romantically Involved		36
Race/Ethnicity of Mother		
White non-Hispanic		15
Black non-Hispanic		57
Hispanic		25
Other Race		3
Mean Age of mothers at baseline		24 (5.6)
Mean Age of fathers at baseline		26 (7.1)
Education		
HS Diploma or More - Mother		61
HS Diploma or More - Father		62
Employment Status		
Mother worked one year before birth		68
Father worked one week before birth		77
Fertility		
Multiple Partner Fertility - Mother		43
Multiple Partner Fertility - Father		42
Total Fertility with Father		1.5 (0.8)
Father Contributed during Pregnancy		85
Relationship Indicators		
Father's Support Index at Baseline (0-2)		1.6 (0.4)
Disagreement about Pregnancy (0-2)		0.3 (0.6)
Paternity Establishment		72
Policy Indicators		
Maximum State AFDC Grant Amount (\$100)		3.33 (1.24)
State Child Support Effectiveness		.26 (0.03)

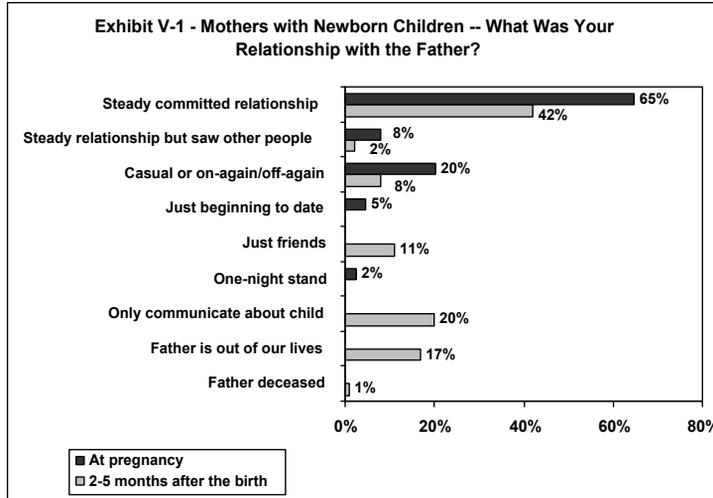
What Excludes Parents From Healthy Marriage ?

Odds Being Excluded and Race/Ethnicity

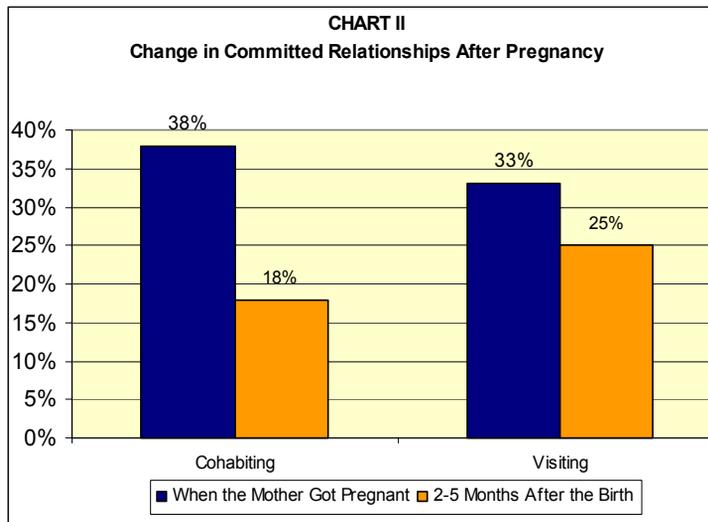


a not statistically significant

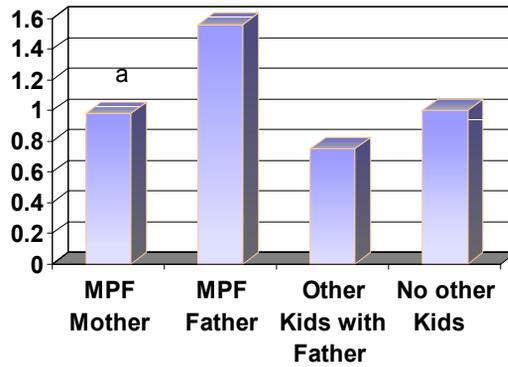
Committed relationships are the norm at conception



But many collapse within 14 months of conception

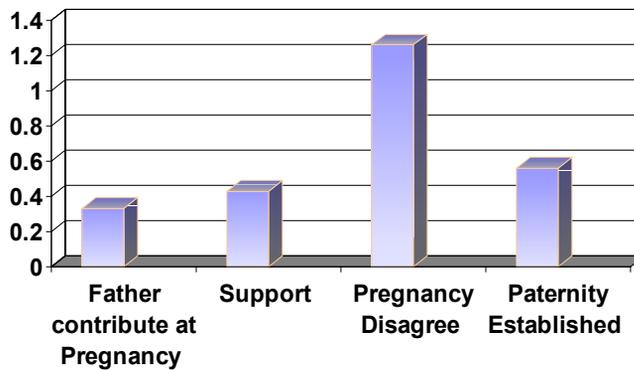


Odds of Exclusion and Fertility



a not statistically significant

Odds of Exclusion and Father Quality



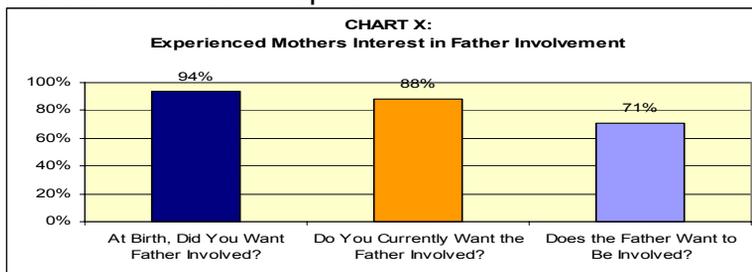
a not statistically significant

While couples are likely to be excluded if

- They are black
- He has outside children
- Did not contribute during pregnancy
- They disagreed about the pregnancy
- Failed to establish paternity and if
- He was non-supportive

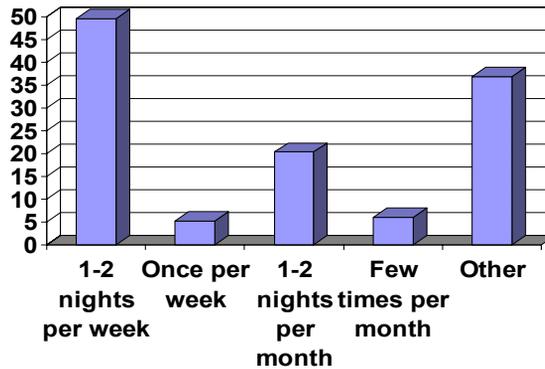
Does that mean that they are poor candidates for Responsible Fatherhood Services?

■ Almost all want father involvement, but unlike committed relationships, father involvement continues, long after the committed relationship ends.



- 70 percent of the experienced mothers who did not live with the father, reported that he had seen the child once or more in the past month.
- Almost 50 percent reported that he had visited the child at least once a week.
- Both mothers and available fathers also report high levels of interaction during these visits with such things as playing, feeding, reading stories, putting the child to bed or visiting relatives

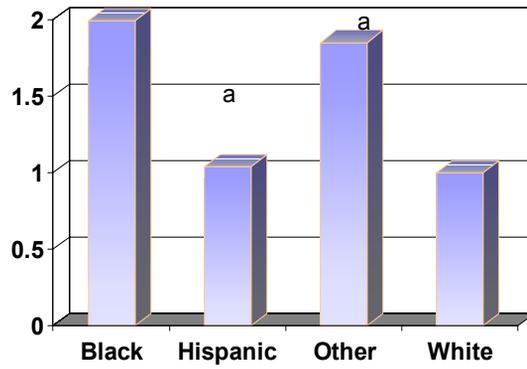
Overnight Visits Reported by Non-resident Experienced Fathers



What Predicts Overnight Visits by Non-resident/Non-Romantically Involved Fathers?

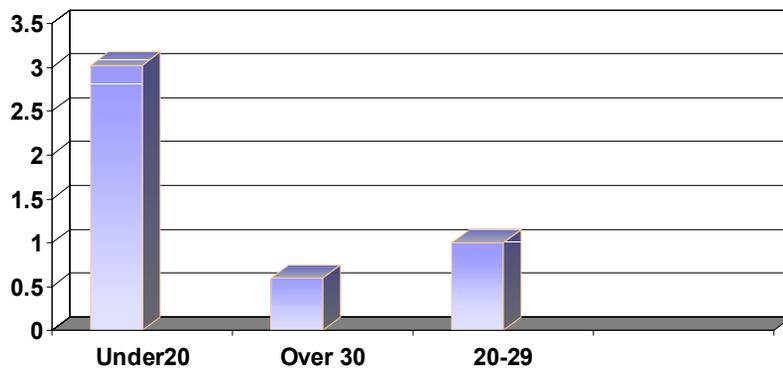
Used Overnight visits because they are more autonomous

Overnight Visits and Race



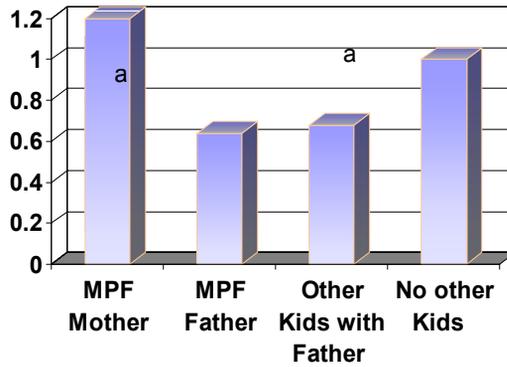
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Overnight Visits and Father's Age



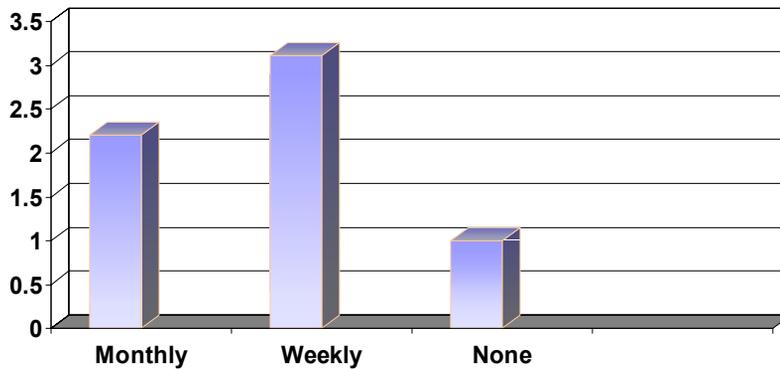
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Overnight Visits and Fertility



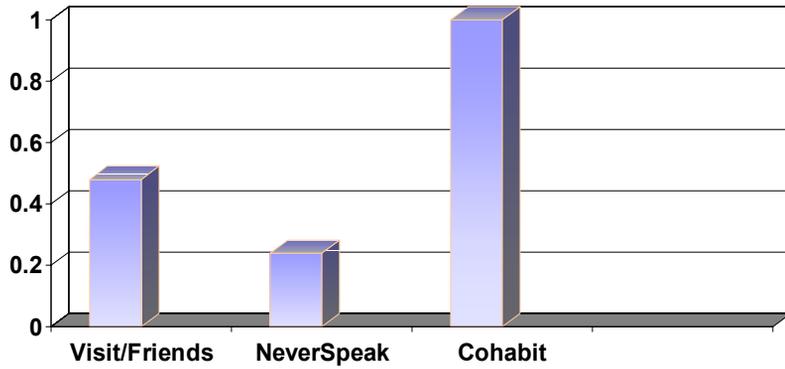
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Overnight Visits and Gate Keeping



a not statistically significant

Overnight Visits and Baseline Relationship

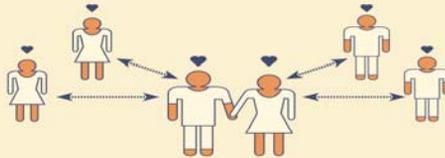


PHASE I: Fragile Family Dating



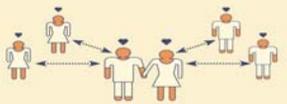
Single Partner Pairing

or



Multiple Partner Pairing

PHASE II: Surprise Pregnancy



Multiple Partner Pairing



Single Partner Pairing



Unplanned Pregnancy

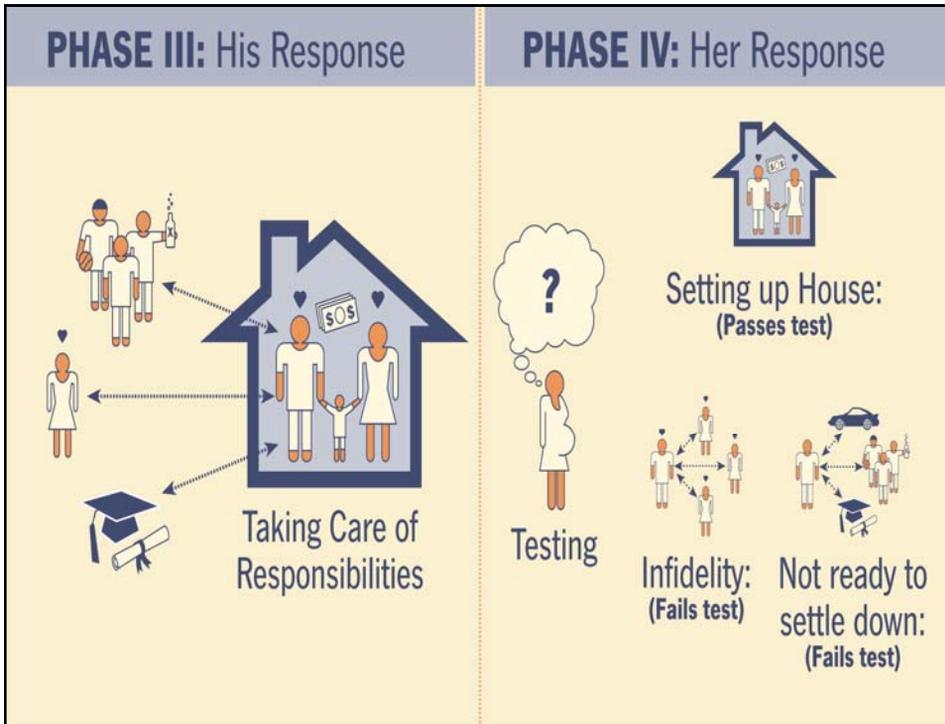
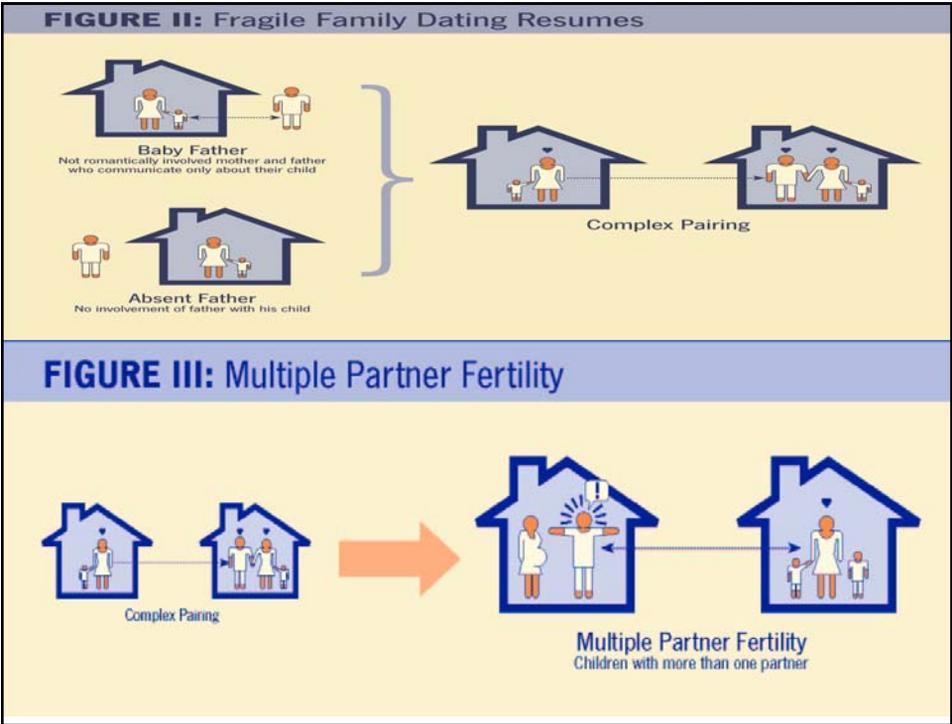


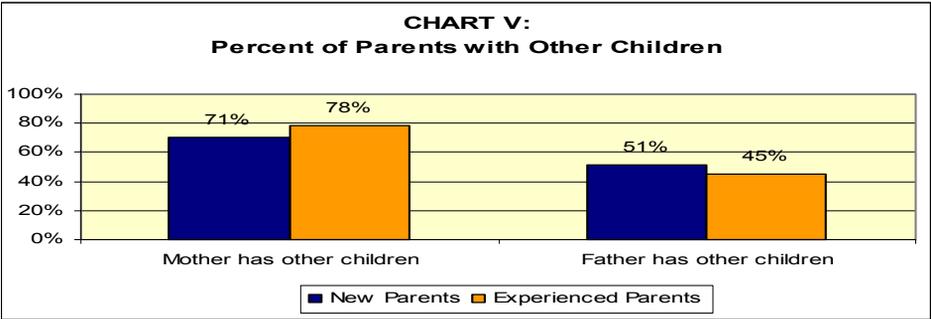
FIGURE 1: Fragile Family Relationships

	New Mothers 2-5 Months %	Experienced Mothers 2-3 Years %
<p>Cohabitation Romantically involved mother and father who live together</p>	19	7
<p>Visiting Romantically involved mother and father who visit each other frequently</p>	33	14
<p>Baby Father Not romantically involved mother and father who communicate only about their child</p>	31	49
<p>Absent Father No involvement of father with his child</p>	17	28

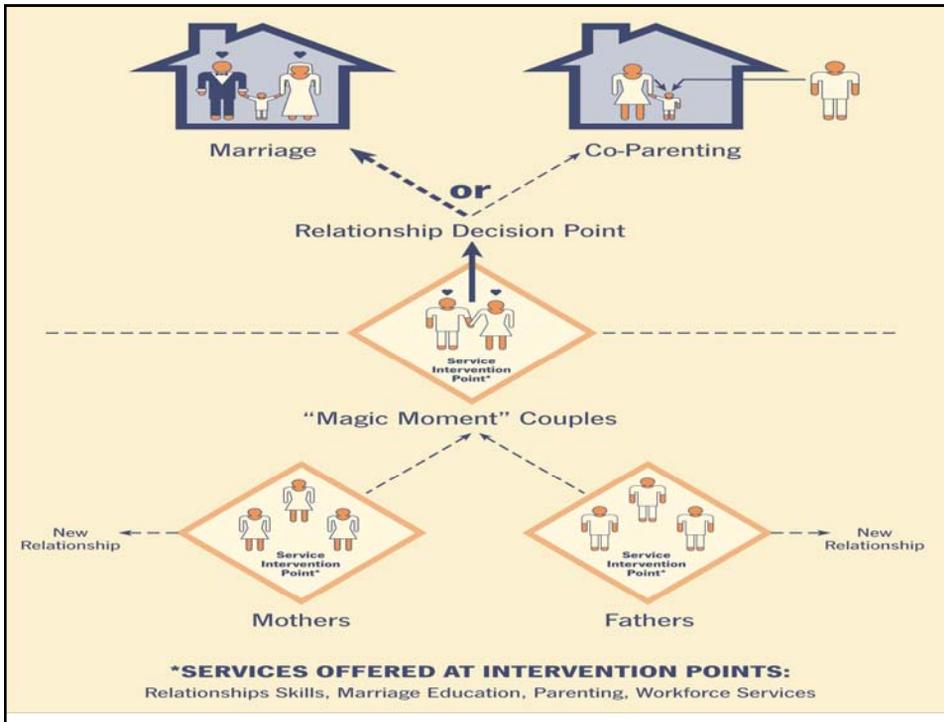
2



Incidence of Multiple Partner Fertility is Much Greater Than Expected



This probably reduces marriage prospects for mothers and fathers
 And reduces likelihood of sustaining committed relationships,
 visitation, and informal support for fathers



Summary

- Healthy Marriage and responsible fatherhood are not in fundamental conflict
- Through targeting they can find common ground
- Healthy marriage requires romantic involvement, which has clear predictors
- Responsible Fatherhood + can
 - screen for potential effectiveness of healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood services and
 - increase responsible fatherhood, even where there is little apparent potential

Goals of Welfare Reform

1. **Help needy families so their children can be cared for at home**
2. **End welfare dependence by promoting work and marriage**
3. **Prevent non-marital births**
4. **Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families**



Prepared by The Brookings Welfare Reform & Beyond Initiative, May, 2004



Five Components of TANF

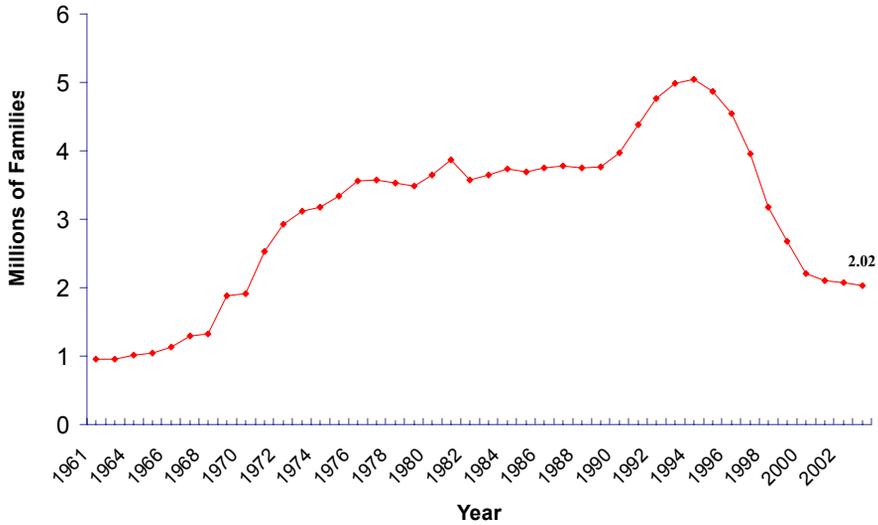
1. **End Cash Entitlement**
2. **Block Grant Funding**
3. **Work Requirements**
4. **Sanctions**
5. **5-Year Time Limit**



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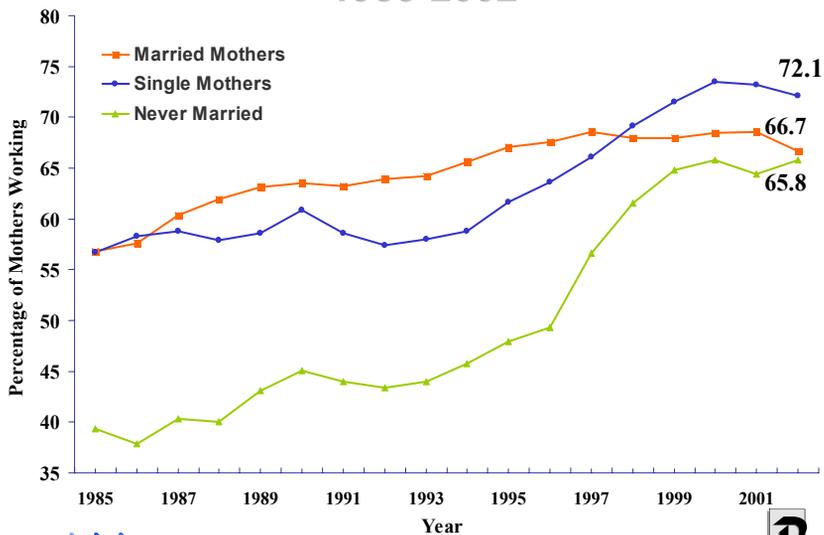
AFDC/TANF Caseload, 1960-2003*



*Note: 2003 data based on preliminary data from January-September 2003.
 Prepared by The Brookings Welfare Reform & Beyond Initiative, May, 2004
 Source: Congressional Research Service and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



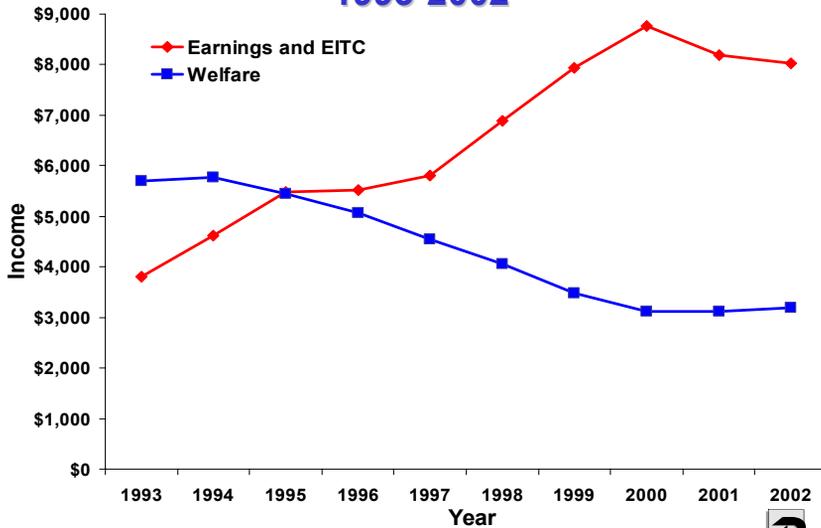
Percentage of Married, Single, and Never-Married Mothers Working, 1985-2002



Prepared by The Brookings Welfare Reform & Beyond Initiative, May, 2004
 Source: Gary Burtless, The Brookings Institution, 2002



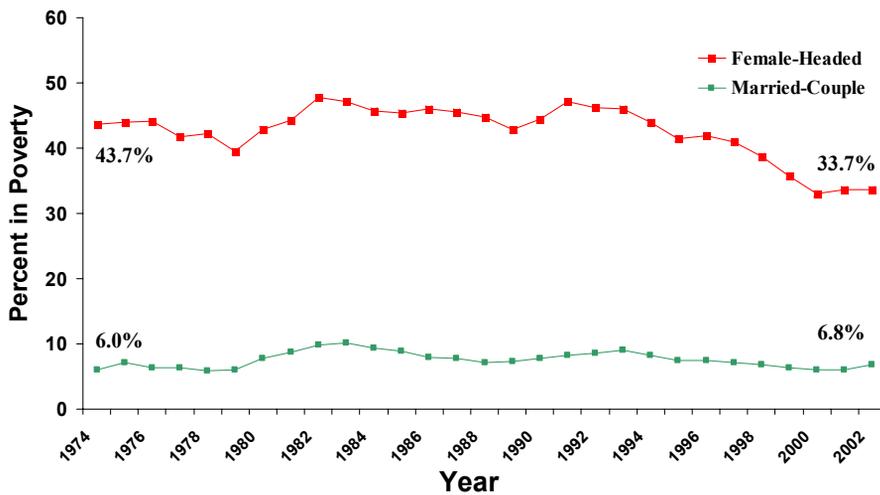
Earnings Increase, Welfare Income Falls for Bottom Two Fifths of Female-Headed Families, 1993-2002



Prepared by The Brookings Welfare Reform & Beyond Initiative, May, 2004
 Source: Richard Bavier with U.S. Census Bureau data (Welfare income is cash, school lunch, food stamps, and housing; constant 2002 dollars).



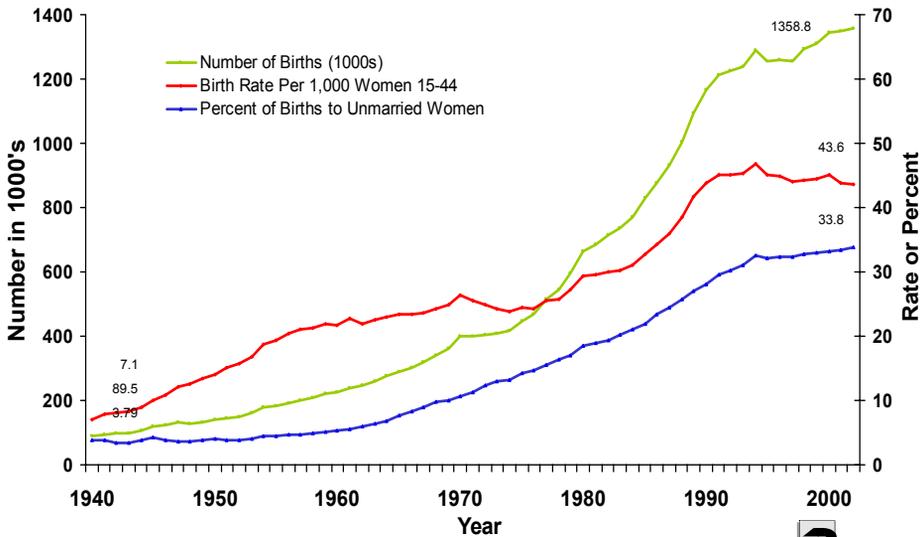
Poverty in Female-Headed Households and Married-Couple Households, 1974-2002



Prepared by The Brookings Welfare Reform & Beyond Initiative, May, 2004
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau



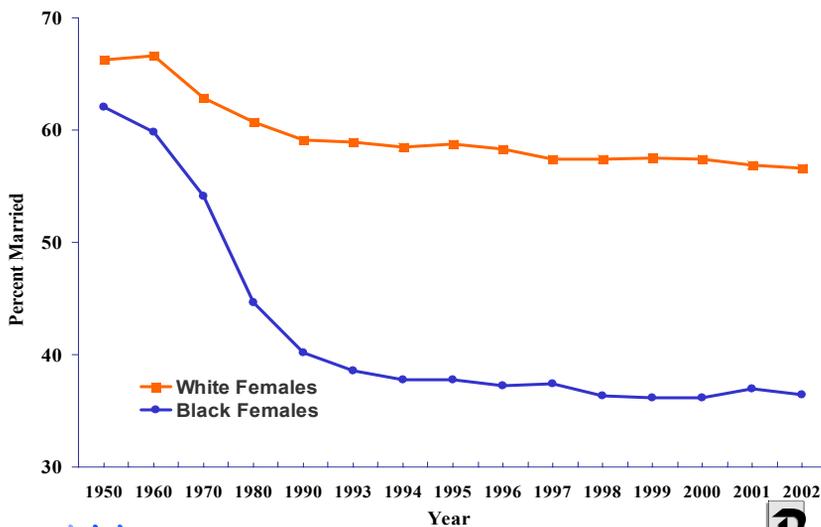
Number of Births, Birth Rate, and Percent of Births to Unmarried Women, 1940-2002



Prepared by The Brookings Welfare Reform & Beyond Initiative, May, 2004
 Source: National Center for Health Statistics, various years



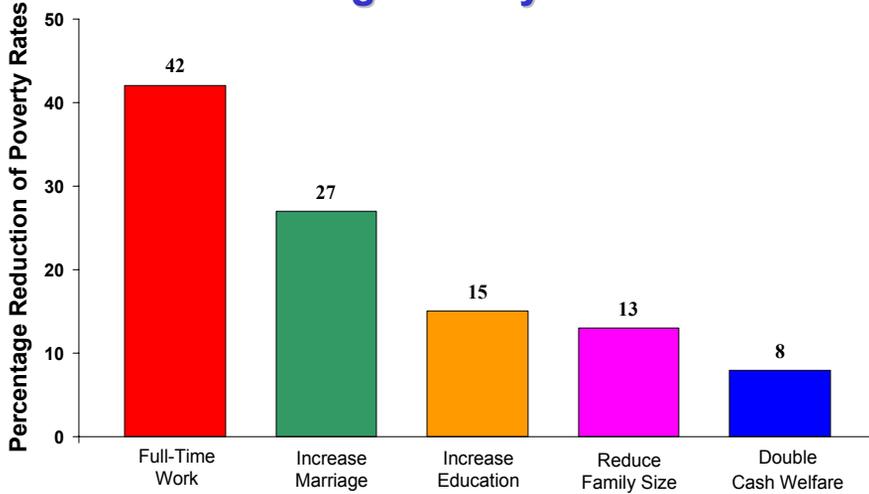
Marriage Rates for White and Black Females 15 Years and Older, 1950-2002



Prepared by The Brookings Welfare Reform & Beyond Initiative, May, 2004
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau
 Note: 1950 and 1960 data is for 14 and older. Nonwhite data is shown for Black for these years.



Effectiveness of Five Factors in Reducing Poverty Rates



Prepared by The Brookings Welfare Reform & Beyond Initiative, May, 2004
Based on Thomas and Sawhill, 2002; and Haskins and Sawhill, 2003.



Mathematica Model of Marriage Promotion

- 1. Marriage education and skills development**
- 2. Marriageability services**
- 3. Family Coordinators**
- 4. Marriage disincentives in state welfare and tax policies**



Prepared by The Brookings Welfare Reform & Beyond Initiative, May, 2004
Source: Mathematica Policy Research, 2003

