ABCs for Healthy Families: Supporting fathers in improving birth outcomes for African American babies

COLOGO FOR HEALTHY FAMILIES

Healthy Babies through Healthy Families

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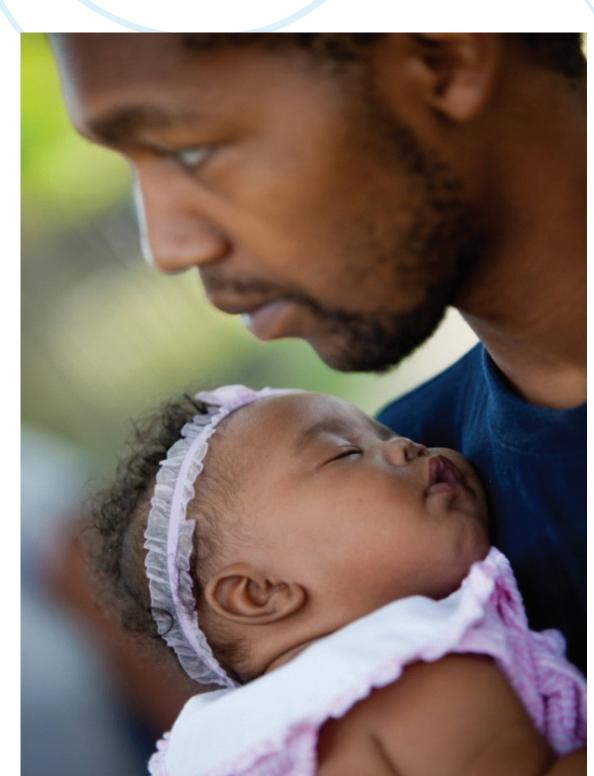
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Background:

Wisconsin's African American infant mortality rates have been among the worst in the US. ABCs for Healthy Families is a social marketing program focused on improving birth outcomes among African Americans using life-course messages. As part of this program, we examined the perceived role of fathers during and after pregnancy and the potential for social support to facilitate and improve their involvement with mothers and children. We also examined experiences with racism.

Methodology:

During Spring 2009, community interviewers administered surveys to nearly 300 African American adults that included questions on the importance of fathers to birth outcomes. A subset of questions was developed as part of the Experiences of Discrimination (EOD) scale (Krieger, Smith, Naishadham, Hartman, & Barbeau, 2005) in order to capture the extent to which respondents reported lifetime experiences of racial discrimination in one of 9 domains. Additionally, support circles for men were held in Racine (10 sessions with 18-23 fathers) and Milwaukee (8 sessions with 4-6 fathers) between June and September 2010. Most of the sessions lasted 2-3 hours and were held at a local community center. Sessions began with a relaxing atmosphere and an affirmation, followed by guided discussion and skills-building activities. Topics covered included family planning, STDs, HIV, co-parenting, resume writing, interviewing skills, financial literacy, and exploring "the father within me". The Sessions on co-parenting and sexual health were combined and offered jointly with mothers and fathers. Participants also completed Life Course Action Plans.





Results:

Nearly all survey respondents (94%) agreed that emotional support from the father of the baby was important to whether a woman has a healthy pregnancy and baby. However, fewer respondents felt that fathers would be involved after the birth compared to during pregnancy. African American males were more likely to report experiences with some types of racial discrimination than African American women. Pre- and post-session surveys from the support circles revealed that the fathers perceived it to be important for men to be able to sit in a group, open up, and share feelings. They noted that this process led to growth, maturity, an increased feeling of responsibility, and feeling less self-centered and more focused on their child. The financial literacy and job readiness skills were also reported to be very important to participants. Most of them wanted to continue meeting after the last session concluded.

Table 1: Summary of Support Circles Life Course Action Planning Focus

Participants developed Life Course action plans around these topics by setting goals, identifying barriers and strategies for overcoming barriers, and persons who will support them in meeting their goals.

POSITIVE PARENTING QUALITIES	THE PARENT WITHIN ME	NEGATIVE PARENTING SKILLS	CO-PARENTING	REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH PLAN
Positive Parenting skills that I already have and plan on keeping	Positive Qualities that I aspire to have (The parent within me)	Negative parenting skills that I will throw away (discontinue)	This is how I'd like to raise my children with their mother	I only want to father a child again under these circumstances
 Patience Time Be a real father Taking care of my children Help his mother Play with them Giving him Support Money 	 Patience Good father Caring Helpful Do more things together Hardworking Loving Understanding Responsible 	 Cursing Not working Stop smoking weed Being tough on him Not being there Fighting Talking bad about others Not taking care of them Letting him watch videos Yelling 	 Loving relationship In a stable home Respectful relationship Happy Together Smart Have fun Healthy Being a leader Hanging out 	 Cooperation Get along with mother Getting married Financial stability We plan for it
STD'S	HEALTHY LIFESTYLE	STRESS	DEPRESSION	CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR ME AND MY FAMILY
I want to know this new information about STD prevention and treatment	I want to maintain a healthy life style that include the following	This is the type of stress reduced life that I envision for the mother of my children	These are the signs of depression	I want to ensure a safe living and sleeping environment for my infant and my family that includes the following
 Everything AIDS How many people are infected Pamphlets Condoms and what happens when you don't protect against STD s How to hold out on sex 	 Exercise Not smoking around children Physically active Stress free No drugs Eating better No drama Get plenty of sleep Have a more balanced life 	 Happy Less arguing Trust Restful Loving Family outings Laughter Caring Healthy 	 Lazy Argue Sad Fatigue Mad Sad Fighting Loss of appetite Loneliness Quiet Loss of weight 	 Get out the hood Make sure you check everything Shelter Warm house Baby bed Leaving Wisconsin Make sure you have food

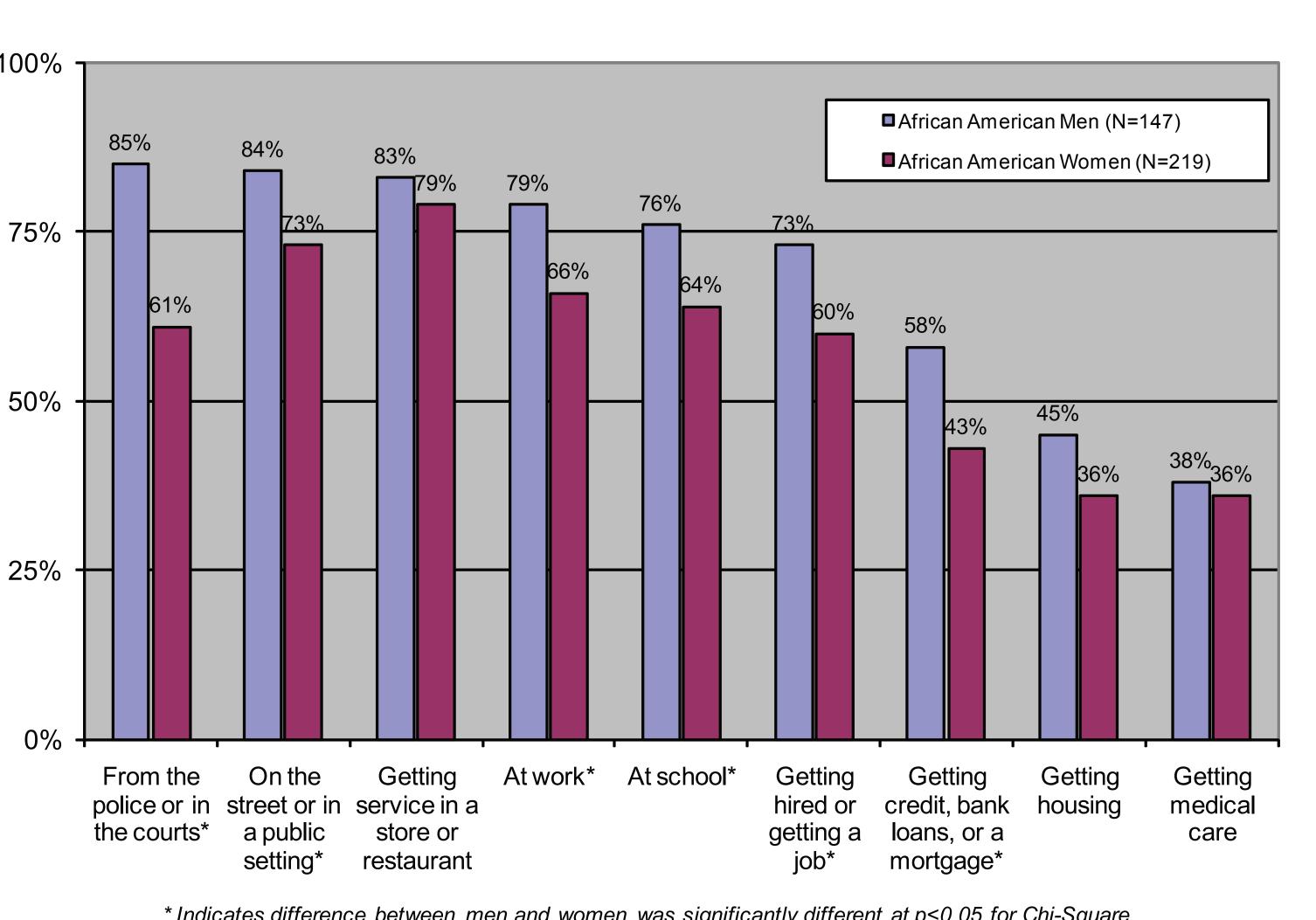
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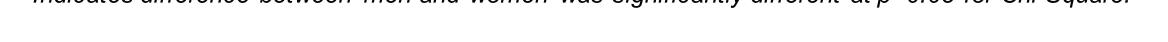
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TABLE 2. Experiences with Racial Discrimination.

Nearly all respondents (95%) reported racial discrimination in at least 1 of the 9 categories presented, with 19% reporting discrimination in all 9 categories. When these same survey questions were asked of participants of the support circles for fathers and mothers, similar results were achieved.

Have you ever experienced racial discrimination in the following situations? (N=370)





Discussion and Conclusions:

African American men are open to receiving information, skills, resources, and social support to be actively involved as fathers and co-parents. African American men were more likely than African American women to report experiences with racial discrimination. This could indicate one example of external forces that might provide stress or create barriers to father involvement.

Support circles for African American men can provide them with an opportunity to discuss how to overcome barriers, including racial discrimination, that may prevent them from being fully engaged in the lives of their children. Support circles also provide safe space for African American men to reflect on the parenting they received, explore feelings on parenting their own children, and to engage in life course action planning that supports father involvement.







