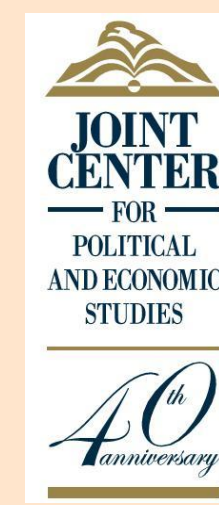


# Best Practices for Improving Research, Policy and Practice on Paternal Involvement in Pregnancy Outcomes



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### Introduction

Men are important to maternal and child health(MCH).<sup>1</sup> A large body of research exists on a father's influence on child health and development, but little is known regarding the role of the expectant father in pregnancy outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Investigators have documented that paternal involvement (PI) can have a positive influence on maternal health behaviors during pregnancy and that men can be a strong source of support or stress during labor and delivery.<sup>3</sup> More research is needed to better understand exactly what role the expectant father plays in pregnancy outcomes.

It is that potential for increasing involvement of expectant fathers that makes timely the convening of the **Commission on Paternal Involvement in Pregnancy Outcomes (CPIPO)** as we begin to define and explore paternal involvement in pregnancy outcomes (PIPO). **CPIPO's** purpose is to improve paternal involvement in pregnancy and family health by reframing debates and informing research, policy and practice to support greater involvement of expectant fathers in pregnancy.

#### Defining Paternal Involvement in Pregnancy Outcomes

Researchers have disagreed about what it means to be an "involved father." The Commission has defined PIPO as activities or practices by the male partner and a couple anticipating birth that ideally lead to an optimal pregnancy outcome. Those activities may include the three dimensions (i.e. engagement, availability and responsibility)described by Lamb and others but unique to the preconception and perinatal period.

#### Implications for Research, Policy and Practice

Despite the fact that several historical trends have presented barriers for many men to fulfill their roles as providers and protectors of their families, men are still very important to MCH.<sup>1</sup> During pregnancy, expectant fathers, like mothers, are particularly open to information, advice, and support.<sup>3</sup> It is essential to provide fathers with the necessary tools to improve their involvement not only during pregnancy, but before, between, and beyond pregnancies.

### Methods

**The Commission on Paternal Involvement in Pregnancy Outcomes (CPIPO)** was assembled in 2009, with funding from the Office of Minority Health in the Department of Health and Human Services. **CPIPO** is a trans-disciplinary working-group of scholars from the social sciences and public health community with a goal of raising public awareness for paternal involvement in pregnancy and family health by reframing debates, informing research, policies and clinical practice to focus more on the involvement of the expectant father in pregnancy outcomes.

**CPIPO** conducted a comprehensive review of the literature and issued 40 best and promising research, policy, and practice recommendations to improve paternal involvement in pregnancy outcomes.

### Results

#### BEST AND PROMISING RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

##### FOCUS AREA ONE: EXPANDING RESEARCH ON PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT AND PREGNANCY OUTCOMES

Research on PIPO is almost nonexistent. To date there have been few studies that have attempted to identify what it means to be an involved father in pregnancy. Studies often lack scientific aims and hypotheses specific to the roles of men and fathers; conceptual or theoretical frameworks (e.g. life-course perspective or the social ecological model). Measurements are often under-developed, as are methods for recruitment and retention of fathers, particularly men of color, in research.

- ❖ **Recommendation:** The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and other relevant agencies should expand current efforts in, and support for, research on PIPO, especially in communities with marked disparities in health and healthcare
- ❖ **Recommendation:** Funding should be made available for researchers to further develop theories and definitions of PIPO
- ❖ **Recommendation:** Funding should be made available for researchers to conduct research that advances measurement and methodologies for data collection and analysis
- ❖ **Recommendation:** The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and other relevant agencies should expand current efforts in, and support for, research on PIPO, especially in communities with marked disparities in health and healthcare
- ❖ **Recommendation:** Funding should be made available for researchers to conduct studies that advance the understanding of cultural variations in PI in pregnancy
- ❖ **Recommendation:** Funding should be made available for researchers to conduct research on fathers' perspectives of pregnancy and parenting
- ❖ **Recommendation:** Funding should be made available to develop a network of trans-disciplinary research centers of excellence in PIPO

##### FOCUS AREA TWO: ADDRESSING POLICY BARRIERS TO PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT

Balancing work and home life is a vital concern for expectant fathers. Reform of current tax, welfare, and child support policies – as described below – is needed to encourage family formation and father involvement. Current policies such as Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) often disallow fathers from full participation in caring for their children and families.

- ❖ **Recommendation:** Reduce the "marriage penalty" in the EITC to allow deductions on the second earner's income
- ❖ **Recommendation:** Amend the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) to include paid parental leave (maternal and paternal)
- ❖ **Recommendation:** Eliminate the distinction between single-parent and two-parent families in determining TANF eligibility
- ❖ **Recommendation:** Calculate the father's actual earnings as a percentage of child support payment
- ❖ **Recommendation:** Reauthorize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to improve PIPO
- ❖ **Recommendation:** Amend the requirements of birth certificates to include more paternal information

### Results

#### FOCUS AREA THREE: PROMOTING BEST AND PROMISING PRACTICE IN PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT

##### Preconception and Reproductive Life Planning

Preconception offers a critical window of opportunity to help men prepare for pregnancy and fatherhood. Preconception health and care have been promoted for women but not men. Best and promising practice in PIPO needs to be identified and disseminated.

- ❖ **Recommendation:** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) should convene an expert panel to develop a clinical care model and population-based strategies to improve preconception health and healthcare for men
- ❖ **Recommendation:** CDC, medical societies should promote awareness among healthcare providers that all men of reproductive age should be asked about their reproductive life plan at every routine clinical visit
- ❖ **Recommendation:** Congress and/or state legislatures should mandate that insurance plans cover preconception health for men
- ❖ **Recommendation:** Health plans, school health, and other public and private entities should expand current efforts to increase access to and quality of primary and preventive care for young men in middle school, high school, and in college

#### Pregnancy and Childbirth

Traditionally, men have not had a defined role in the pregnancy and childbirth. Today, an increasing number of expectant fathers want to be involved during the pregnancy and most are present at the time of birth.<sup>2</sup> Pregnancy offers many "teachable moments" for expectant fathers. Like mothers, expectant fathers are particularly open to information, advice, and support during pregnancy, and are more likely to change their health behaviors.<sup>2</sup>

- ❖ **Recommendation:** The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and other relevant organizations should expand antenatal education programs to include promotion of paternal involvement in pregnancy and parenting
- ❖ **Recommendation:** The Joint Commission, American Hospital Association, and other healthcare organizations should promote more father-friendly hospital settings, practices, and policies
- ❖ **Recommendation:** Health plans and healthcare organizations should promote early prenatal care that includes an integral role for the expectant father
- ❖ **Recommendation:** Health plans and healthcare organizations should aim to provide services that welcome and empower the expectant father, and develop education materials to help sustain paternal involvement after the newborn has been discharged from the hospital

### Conclusion

Research has demonstrated that men are important to MCH.<sup>1</sup> We know that PI can have a positive influence on maternal health behaviors during pregnancy,<sup>2</sup> but further research is essential to enhance our knowledge regarding specific roles of the expectant father in pregnancy outcomes. Subsequently, we also need to instill the understanding and admiration of equal participation of men and expectant fathers across all aspects of our clinical practice, funding agencies, and healthcare organizations.

### Literature cited

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