



Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project

Initial Implementation
Report

Bernardine H. Watson

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Public/Private Ventures is a national, not-for-profit corporation that designs, manages, and evaluates social policy initiatives aimed at helping youth whose lack of preparation for the work force hampers their chances for productive lives. P/PV's work is supported by funds from both the public and private sectors.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public/Private Ventures' Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project is an attempt to focus the attention of policymakers, the employment and training field, and the public on disadvantaged young men who become fathers at an early age, by testing strategies for increasing their capacity to form families and care for their children as providers and parents.

The project is supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, The Ford Foundation, Levi Strauss Foundation, Kaiser Family Foundation, Scott Paper Company Foundation, AT&T Foundation, the United States Department of Labor and the United States Department of Agriculture's Division of Food and Nutrition Services.

As of February 1992, six sites had completed 10 to 12 months of the project's initial 30-month pilot phase. The sites are: Cleveland Works in Cleveland, Ohio; Goodwill Industries in Racine, Wisconsin; the Fresno Private Industry Council (PIC) in Fresno, California; the Pinellas County PIC in St. Petersburg, Florida; Friends of the Family and the Department of Social Services in Annapolis, Maryland; and the Philadelphia Children's Network in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

THE CONTEXT

The economic, personal and social position of millions of young men from poor families in America--primarily in its cities--has only recently become a prominent part of the nation's social policy debate. The lack of connection between these young men and the labor market is increasingly seen to be near the heart of at least three large issues of current concern:

- Children born out of wedlock now constitute the majority of children receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC); and it is estimated that more than 40 percent of never-married women who enter the AFDC system by age 25 with a child less than three years old will spend 10 years or more on welfare.
- While teenage pregnancy and childbearing rates are going down, the United States still has the highest rates among developed Western countries and the rates for unmarried teenagers continue to rise (up from 68,000 births in 1960 to 348,000 in 1989).
- The percentage of families headed by women has grown, from 21 percent to 31 percent of all families between 1970 and 1988, and fewer than half the nine million women with children who maintain single-parent households report getting support from the fathers. Never-married teen mothers are among the groups that are least likely to receive child support and most likely to be poor.

To date, most of the policy response to adolescent childbearing, and its relationship to poverty and welfare dependency, has focused on the mothers and babies, ignoring the fathers of the children. These young men have generally not been eligible for income support programs, especially with the reductions in state General Assistance rolls over the past several years. Few public employment and training programs have been designed specifically to attract and serve them.

Increasingly, advocacy groups like the Children's Defense Fund and social scientists like William Julius Wilson, who have studied the relationship between economic conditions and family formation, have hypothesized that growing joblessness--and other trends related to incarceration and mortality--particularly among black men, has played a key role in increasing the incidence of single-parent families by reducing the pool of "marriageable men." Over the past decade, the earnings of black males between the ages of 20 and 24 fell by more than half as structural changes in the economy increased their joblessness; one in four of these young men (more in inner cities) are in jail, on probation or parole; and their mortality rates are high compared to those of other groups. Nevertheless there has been no significant public policy response.

THE PILOT PROJECT

Given the limited experience that programs have had with young fathers, and the field's limited knowledge about the type of services that would engage and benefit them, P/PV determined that a test of various local service delivery approaches was needed to provide comparative information for policymakers and the field. Therefore, participating sites were given broad flexibility in designing programs. However, based on the knowledge available about programming for high-risk young men, and the issues we wanted to explore about this population, we hypothesized that programs would be most likely to produce benefits for young unwed fathers if they incorporate the following five principles:

1. Use of the JTPA system to provide young fathers with training services that would lead to good jobs. We define good jobs as those that provide benefits and opportunities for advancement and have the potential for enabling fathers to support themselves and their children.
2. The delivery of education services designed to improve the earning capacity of young fathers.
3. The delivery of "fatherhood development" activities that encourage parental values, capabilities and behavior in young men, including a *Fatherhood Development Curriculum* developed by P/PV, "leadership" activities, and work with fathers to establish paternity and pay formal child support.
4. The provision of counseling and other ongoing support designed to help fathers achieve employment, parenting and personal goals.

5. The establishment of an 18-month connection with fathers so that services and support continue after job placement.

The six sites vary in their service delivery mechanisms, resource levels, geographic locations and models for implementing the project requirements. In keeping with our desire to test local systems' response to serving young fathers, P/PV provided a small seed grant of \$55,000 to each site: \$50,000 to support project operations and \$5,000 to stimulate fatherhood development activity. The pilot phase will determine which models and/or program elements appear to produce the best outcomes for this population, and whether an impact analysis of any one model would be useful.

This interim report documents the sites' early experiences with recruitment, retention, service delivery and establishment of linkages with employment/training and child support enforcement agencies; presents a profile of the 228 young fathers who had enrolled by the end of February 1992; and explores issues raised by the sites' early experiences. Outcomes and cost analyses will not be available until the final report on the pilot phase, to be published in Fall 1993.

EARLY FINDINGS

- **The recruitment experience thus far confirms that attracting and enrolling young fathers, even in programs specifically designed for them, is difficult and resource-intensive, at least in the initial operating period.**

The first challenge to the project was attracting a group of young men who traditionally have little connection with education, employment and training agencies. Each pilot site was required to enroll 50 young unwed fathers.

Each site relied primarily on one of three strategies: mandatory referrals from the Child Support Enforcement (CSE) agency (Racine), voluntary referrals from CSE (Fresno and St. Petersburg), and community outreach (Cleveland, Philadelphia and Annapolis). The program effort and resources required by the six sites to attract even modest numbers were initially significant and daunting. By the end of the first year of operation, only one site had reached the enrollment goal.

Over time, young fathers did enroll and referral agencies did refer--in increasing numbers as the programs became better known. But even increasing success did not provide strong evidence that enrollment would ever be a low-cost function or that large numbers could ever be easily enrolled. There are indications, however, that the recruitment of young fathers is facilitated when the agency or its staff has already established "credibility" with the population; and/or the agency's ability to generate good jobs is well known; and/or its collaboration with the CSE and employment training (JTPA) agencies has been lengthy and proven mutually useful.

Nearly half (46.3%) of the enrollees were referred to the sites by other institutions: 27 percent by their local child support office; another 9.3 percent by other agencies, juvenile court or a probation officer; and another 10.1 percent by a counselor or social worker. Close to one-quarter (22.5%) of the fathers cited personal contacts as the source of information--either another father (10.6%), friend or relative (11.9%). Program staff and flyers also played an important role in attracting fathers (22%). Less significant across the six sites was the role of media; only 7 percent said they heard about the project from newspapers or television. Very few fathers (2.2%) said they learned about the project from their girlfriends.

Many fathers responded to the project's fatherhood focus. Close to 40 percent indicated that they enrolled to improve their relationships with their children, and nearly half said they wanted to improve their parenting skills. Staff credit the fatherhood focus for the project's initial retention rate of 81 percent across the six sites.

- **The demographic characteristics of the project sample corroborate findings from the National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Force Behavior of Youth, which found that young men who are African American, have educational deficiencies and come from poor economic circumstances are disproportionately represented among those who become fathers at an early age.**

Close to three-quarters of the young men in the study sample are African American. More than half (52.8%) report that they live in households with annual incomes below \$10,000; the average household size is four; 61.5 percent of the households are on welfare; and half receive food stamps.

Forty-three percent of the sample has less than an 11th-grade education; 24 percent had earned a high school diploma and 11 percent a GED at the time of program entry. The fathers reported very sparse labor market experiences: the majority (77%) were unemployed on program entry, and those who were employed expressed dissatisfaction with pay, benefits and opportunities for advancement. As evidence of their distance from the employment and training system, 84 percent reported that they had not been involved in a training program in the past three years, though 23 percent were at entry in an education program or still in high school. More than half (58%) said they had male family members or friends in their 20s and 30s who were neither in school or working.

- **The living arrangements of a significant portion of the project sample are indicative of fragile economic circumstances and uncertain job prospects, but also point to their connection to their families. Their living arrangements also vary significantly by race.**

More than half (55%) of the young men reported that they lived in households with at least one of their parents or other relatives. Twenty-eight percent lived in households with at least one of their children, and 23 percent lived with their girlfriend and

child(ren). White fathers were less likely (44%) to live with parents than African American or Latino fathers (56% and 54% respectively). Also, more Latino fathers (44%) reported living in a household with one or more of their children, compared with 25 percent of African American fathers and 28 percent of white fathers.

- **The information reported by the fathers does not support the view that young fathers are responsible for multiple births; that their relationships with their children's mothers are casual; and that they are "absent" from the lives of their children.**

Among the fathers in the sample, 63 percent reported having only one child; 82 percent reported that they had children by only one mother. Although only 3 percent of fathers reported that they were married to the mother of their child at the time she became pregnant, half (50%) said they had been in a "serious romance" with the mother and nearly one-third (30%) said this relationship was current. Only 1 percent said they had not been in a relationship with the mother at all; 3 percent reported they knew the mother "only a little."

When asked about contact with their children, a large majority of respondents (75%) reported visiting their child in the hospital when he or she was born; 85 percent said they were listed on the child's birth certificate. As mentioned earlier, 23 percent indicated that they lived in the same household with their child and their child's mother, and 26 percent reported living in the same household with their child.

Additional data were collected on fathers' involvement with their children and some of their attitudes about fatherhood. Of those who do not live with their children, 39 percent responded that in the past month they had seen their children "almost every day"; 70 percent said they had seen them at least once a week. Even more revealing of the role that many of these fathers play in the lives of their children are their activities when they are together. More than 50 percent said they took their child to the doctor; and large percentages reported bathing (46%), feeding (81%), dressing (73%) and playing with (87%) their child.

- **The young fathers in the sample reported spending significant amounts of money on their children, often over and above formal child support payments.**

The fathers were asked about the kind and amount of financial support they provide for their children. Thirty percent reported having child support orders; the average order reported was \$118 a month. Seventy-one percent of these fathers said they were behind in their child support payments.

Not including formal child support payments, fathers reported paying directly for food, clothing, diapers and medicine. Also, 49 percent of the fathers indicated that they gave additional money each month to the mother or person caring for their child.

Although these data are all self-reported, and should therefore be viewed cautiously, the findings are significant in that fathers with and without child support orders, and in spite of their own poor economic circumstances, indicate a willingness to provide support to their children.

If the reported figures are even close to accurate, it appears that fathers whose children are receiving AFDC (49 percent in this sample) and who do not have child support orders, may be able to provide a substantial supplement to the AFDC grant, at least on an irregular basis. However, by declaring paternity and taking on formal child support obligations, as this project encourages such fathers to do, they become open to legal liability if they fall behind on their payments. They also may reduce the income of the household in which their children live because the "pass through" of the total child support payment collected from the father is only \$50 a month, substantially less than the fathers in our project report providing for their children's care. One of the many challenges this population presents to the project and to public policy generally is how to convince economically insecure young fathers to establish paternity and pay legal child support when they may already be providing what they can "off the books," even on an irregular basis.

- **The most established and experienced site operators with strong access to the local public employment/training agency have done the best overall job so far of delivering employment and training services to young fathers. But even in these cases, the services offered have been constrained by public agency rules that work against the long-term goals of financial self-sufficiency for fathers and their families.**

The sites were required to use the federal employment and training system (programs funded by the Job Training Partnership Act) to provide fathers with training and good jobs. Only the most established program operators (in Cleveland, Racine and Fresno) with experience working with high-risk populations and strong ties to the JTPA system have been able to package services for this population. But even they have not been able to provide large numbers of young fathers with promising jobs or skills training.

Limitations in the usefulness of JTPA-funded programs for these young men include local eligibility criteria or practices that screen out many needy fathers, the lack of viable skills training options (including on-the-job training) for these men, and the lack of in-program financial support that forces fathers to take jobs before they improve their job-related skills.

Limitations also result from the common CSE agency practice of pressing even those young fathers enrolled in programs to "pay up" on their child support arrears. This often causes the young men to leave programs and take jobs too soon, in order to avoid accumulating large debts to the state or, in some jurisdictions, face jail for noncompliance.

Whether passage of the 1992 JTPA amendments will strengthen services for young fathers or facilitate the participation of organizations with access to young fathers remains to be seen, as does the usefulness for this population of the Family Support Act's Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program--something that is being tested in the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration.

In sum, the young men who have enrolled in P/PV's Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project are, for the most part, doing too poorly economically to support their children on a regular basis, but provide sporadic support and are eager for better jobs and for contact with their children. In attempting to respond, the six sites' early experience shows that access to public employment/training (JTPA) resources is critical. Current regulations and practice in both JTPA and Child Support Enforcement agencies, and the limited coordination between the young fathers' programs and the public agencies, and between public agencies like CSE and JTPA, present serious barriers both to enrollment and service delivery.

As the project's pilot phase continues through August 1993, particular research emphasis will be on assessing the effects of the fatherhood focus on both retention and outcomes for the young men, identifying specific barriers to enrollment and interagency coordination issues that can be resolved, measuring the sites' ability to help participants move toward permanent employment, and understanding better both the strengths and problems of the young men themselves.

