

# ARCH Fatherhood Engagement

May Workgroup  
May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021



**Updates & Reminders**



**Caseworker Perspectives  
& Biases Overview**

# Project Background: What is ARCH?

## Who We Are

The 'Applied Research in Child Welfare' Project is a **16-year collaboration between SWRC, CDHS, and County Departments of Human Services**

**Counties:** CDHS, Arapahoe, Adams, Broomfield, Boulder, Denver, Douglas, Jefferson, Garfield, Larimer, Pueblo, El Paso

## What We Do

Conduct **applied research** on child welfare interventions and **amass evidence** on best practices in social work

**Inform social work practice** across Colorado and the US

## Why It Matters

Cross-county collaboration **facilitates knowledge sharing** and allows for **diverse perspectives** in decision-making and research prioritization

Research-practice partnerships **facilitate data translation and application**

***More information about ARCH can be found at SWRC's website:  
<https://www.colostate.edu/ssw/research/social-work-research-center>***



# Caseworker Perspectives: Biases, Concerns, and Opportunities



# Caseworker Perspectives: Topics for Today

- Trends in Caseworker Contact w/Fathers
- Psychological Considerations for Caseworkers
  - Perceived Hostility from Fathers & Contributing Factors
  - Female Caseworkers' Perspectives
  - Assumptions & Stereotypes of Fathers
  - Societal Biases about Families
  - Self-Efficacy & Ties to Training Opportunities

# Trends in Caseworker Contact w/Dads

## Key Stats<sup>1</sup>

- **68%** of non-resident fathers are identified at case-opening
- **55%** of nonresident fathers have at least one contact with a caseworker
- **40%** of nonresident fathers were never identified
- **20%** of nonresident fathers who were identified and had a known location were still never contacted by child welfare agency
- When the father's location is unknown by the mother, no additional sources are consulted in **44%** of cases

## Racial Disparities<sup>2</sup>

- Agencies were **less likely to identify, locate, and contact Black fathers**, relative to White fathers
- Agencies were **less likely to locate identified Latino/x fathers** and less likely to contact them, upon locating them
- Agencies were **less likely to identify fathers of multiracial children**



# Contributing Factors to Hostility: Caseworkers' Perspectives

## **'PART OF A SYSTEM'**

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Caseworkers report feeling like fathers perceive them as 'part of a system,' and that **many fathers feel like that system is set-up for them to fail**<sup>3</sup>

## **LACK OF EXPERIENCE WITH SOCIAL SERVICES**

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Caseworkers explain that fathers oftentimes have less experience with other social services organizations, which **makes them more easily frustrated with the logistical burdens**<sup>4</sup>

## **CO-OCCURRENCE WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

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Many caseworkers expressed fear or concern with engaging fathers and described many fathers as coming across as angry or violent. The known **co-occurrence of child maltreatment and domestic violence is described as contributing to this fear**<sup>5</sup>

## **COMBINATION OF FACTORS**

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Some caseworkers suggested that the **combination of criminal histories, substance use or abuse concerns, and co-occurrence of domestic violence make them feel uncomfortable**; researchers suggest that this may contribute to perceptions of fathers as violent or hostile<sup>5,3</sup>

# Perceived Hostility Towards Caseworkers: Domestic Violence Considerations

## CO-OCCURRENCE WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- One study found that **57%** of families who had alleged child maltreatment **also had male-perpetrated partner violence** in the home<sup>8</sup>
- Men who are violent towards their partners are **more likely to be harsher with their children** (e.g., spanking, yelling)<sup>9</sup>
- **1 in 4 women** in the US have experienced intimate partner violence<sup>10</sup>
- **~80% of social workers** in the US are female<sup>11</sup>

*While these yield important safety considerations, **they could also led to generalizations** towards fathers, and/or men in general*

*This implies that ~20% of US social workers are women who have experienced IPV, which **could impact the way that they perceive fathers***

# Honing in on female caseworkers' perspectives

## Verbal Abuse

One female child welfare professional shared that **some fathers who have maltreated their children are verbally abusive** and threatening towards female child welfare professionals<sup>12</sup>

## Romantic Interest

Another female caseworker described how **her male clients have developed romantic feelings for her**, which she attributed to frequent interactions<sup>12</sup>

## Perceived Resentment

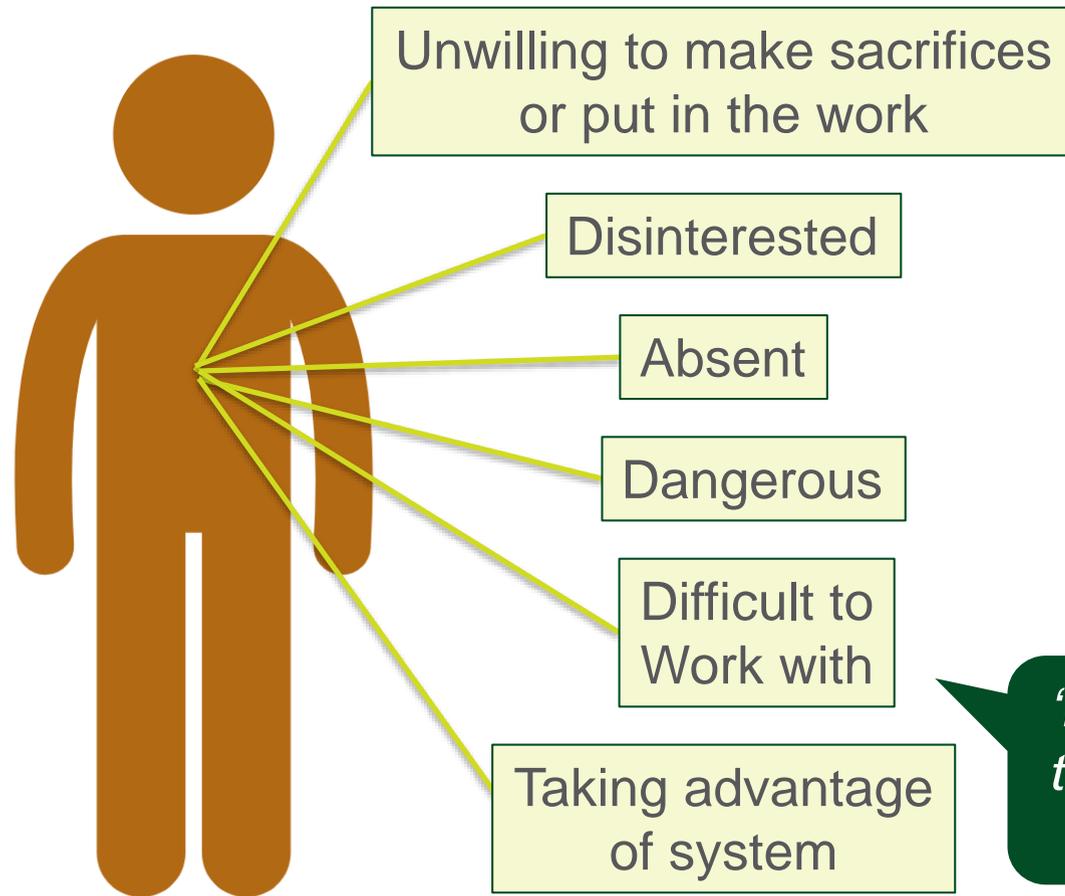
A survey of 34 direct line caseworkers found that female caseworkers, in particular, felt like **fathers resented and/or disparaged them because they were young women**<sup>3</sup>

## Differing Communication Styles

Some interview participants **expressed that men and women oftentimes have different communication styles**, with men oftentimes expressing more anger and/or emotion, which can be misinterpreted<sup>12</sup>

# Caseworkers' assumptions about dads

## Common Caseworker Assumptions<sup>3,16,17</sup>



## Relevant Quantitative Data

One recent study found that **only 53% of caseworkers believed that nonresident fathers wanted to be a part of the decision-making** about their child<sup>1</sup>

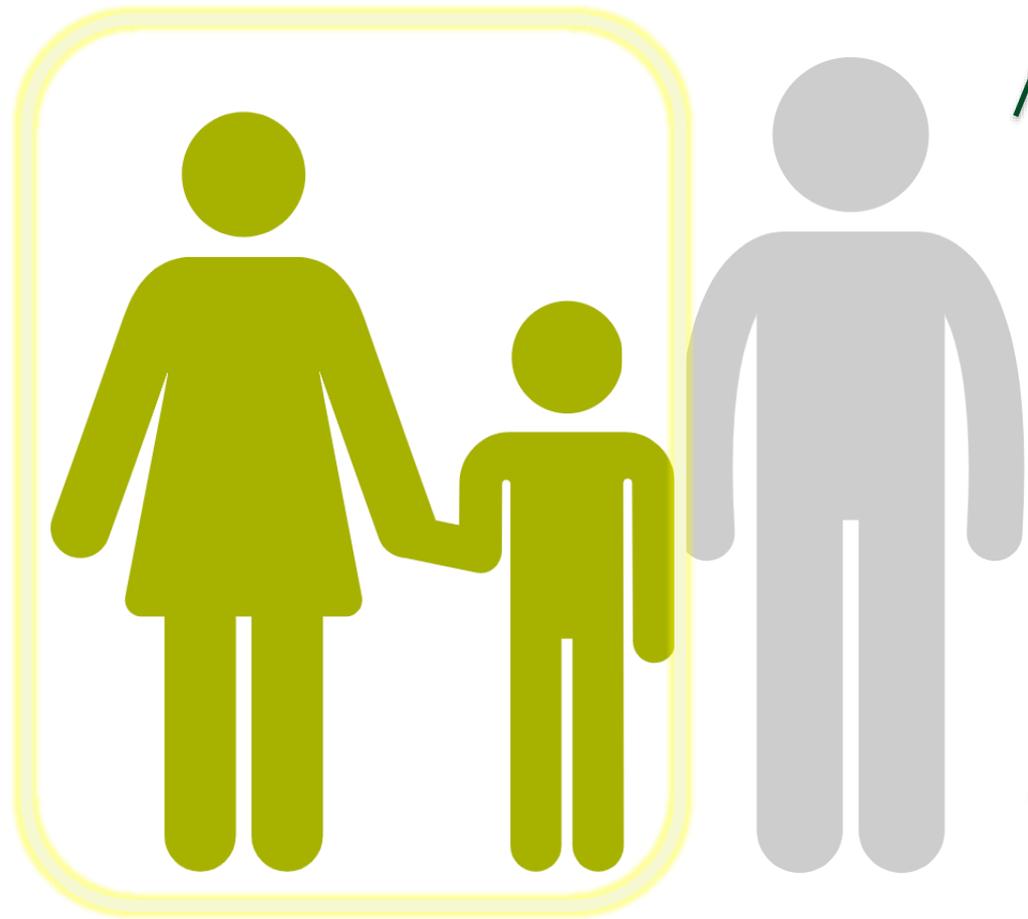
In the 'What About Dads' study, more than 75% of nonresident fathers had never participated in programs or services, but **the majority of caseworkers did not identify the lack of father engagement as a problem** in their cases<sup>18</sup>

*'Dad expects mom to be the reliant one. She does the services, gets the kids back, and then he can visit when he wants without having to pay child support.'*

## Impact of Assumptions

*These biases all contribute to the phenomenon that has been described as **fathers as 'forgotten clients' in the child welfare system**; e.g., fathers are often perceived as irrelevant to the case<sup>19</sup>*

# Societal biases about families



- 1 Western societies largely **embrace a traditional, hierarchical model of attachment theory** that stipulates that mothers are most important for their children's socio-emotional wellbeing<sup>20</sup>
- 2 Researchers have found that there is a widespread belief across Western societies that **the child's mother is the main influence on their wellbeing**<sup>21</sup>
- 3 Ambivalent sexism theory posits that **people view women as more nurturing and men as less competent with child care**, and it may perpetuate a maternal focus in child welfare<sup>22</sup>

## A Changing Society

*Two-parent households are on the decline & cohabitation is on the rise; 40% of babies are born to single mothers or mothers who live with a non-marital partner; less than half of children live in two-parent, married homes<sup>23</sup>*

# Manifestation of societal biases in research

**Focus on sexual abuse:** Studies of sexual abuse represent the bulk of research dedicated to adult males in child welfare-involved families<sup>24</sup>, though these cases represent a fraction of child welfare cases<sup>25</sup>

**Fathers absent from or negatively portrayed in research:** Systematic reviews of child welfare research and texts have found that fathers are often absent or portrayed negatively and that the terms parents or families are used in research when in reality no fathers were included<sup>26</sup>

**Lack of evidence-based programming for fathers:** There is a lack of literature evaluating the effectiveness of preventative programming in men; most programs predominantly serve women in the studies, and outcome findings are rarely broken out by gender<sup>27,28</sup>

**Lack of father-focused family-strengthening research:** In a review of 5 social work journals & 1 family focused interdisciplinary journal found that only 24% of family focused articles included father variables<sup>29</sup>

**Lack of social work educational content about fathers:** A survey of 32 undergraduate social work programs in Canada found that fewer than 5% of courses contained content related to fathers in any way

## Impact

*These frequent negative portrayals of fathers, and/or lack of mention or focus on fathers, could **create and perpetuate biases towards fathers across family-facing agencies**, including the child welfare system*

# Psychological Consideration: Self-Efficacy



- *Only 70% of caseworkers report having had training on engaging fathers<sup>1</sup>*
- *Many caseworkers report not being trained on how to work with men<sup>30</sup>*
- *An additional study found that many home visitors feel incompetent when working with fathers<sup>31</sup>*

- *DV-concerns and/or history of violence, substance use/abuse, criminal histories, mental health concerns; leads to a perceived complicated dynamic<sup>2</sup>*

- *Female caseworkers working with male fathers*

- *Caseworkers may be less likely to engage with fathers out of feelings of discomfort or incompetence<sup>30</sup>*

## Building Self-Efficacy: Evidence-Based Strategies

### Mastery Experiences

*(start small & practice)*

### Social Role Models

*(observe others doing task)*

### Social Persuasion

*(receive positive verbal feedback)*

### Emotional and Physiological State

*(manage anxiety & enhance mood)*

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*Additional Thoughts,  
Questions, Ideas, or  
Concerns?*



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