

CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS

# Focus on Fathers: father advocacy in home visiting

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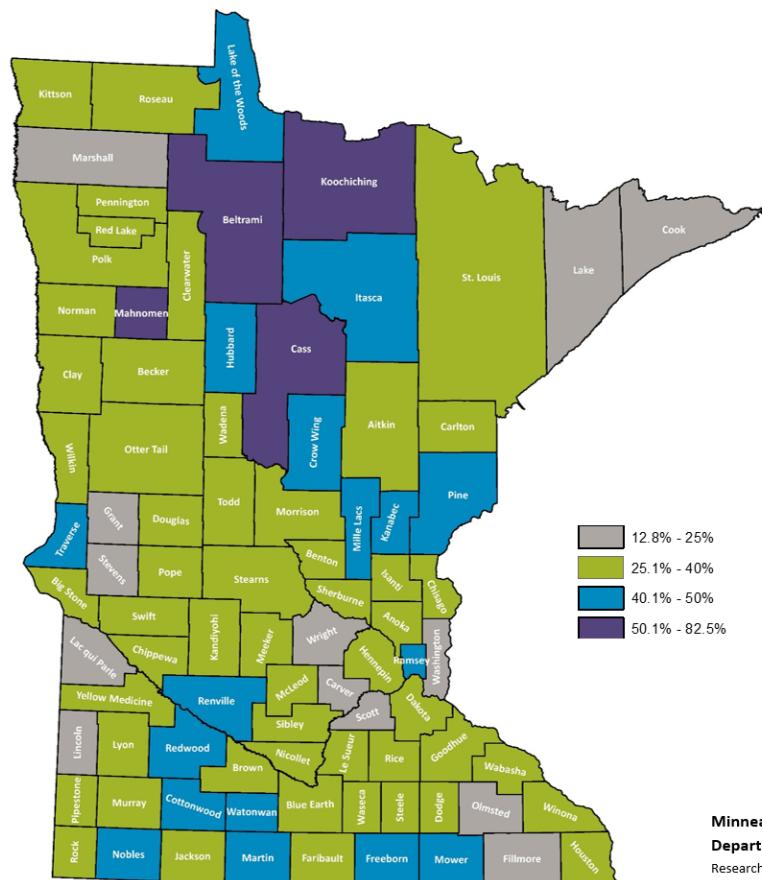


December 7, 2018

# Agenda

1. Background and scope of unmarried parenthood in Minnesota
2. Discussion: reflecting on our own agencies
3. Research project overview
4. Discussion: strategies from the Father Advocate
5. Policy feedback and suggestions from parents and service providers

# Births to unmarried mothers in Minnesota (2016)



*Data Source: MN Vital Statistics 2016  
Analysis completed by Minneapolis Health Department Research and Evaluation*

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DISCUSSION

## Reflecting on our own agencies

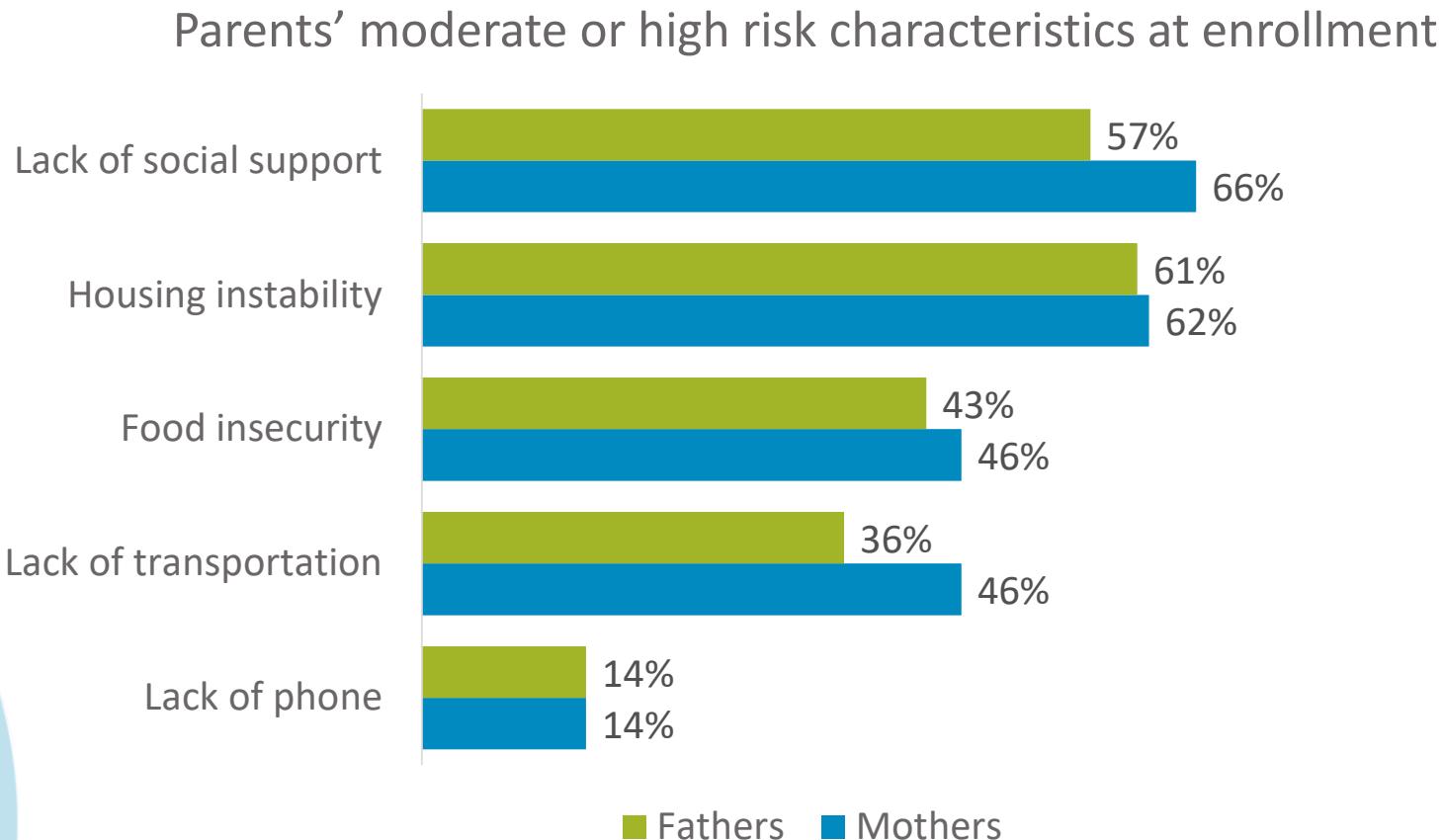
- What would ideal father engagement look like during pregnancy and early infancy at your agency?
- Where is your agency in regards to engaging fathers?



# Research project

- Father advocate study
  - Background and development
  - Study piloted a father advocate in a home visiting program among expectant and new parents
- Father involvement
  - Asked parents and service providers and other stakeholders for input on policy changes to reduce barriers to father involvement in pregnancy and early infancy

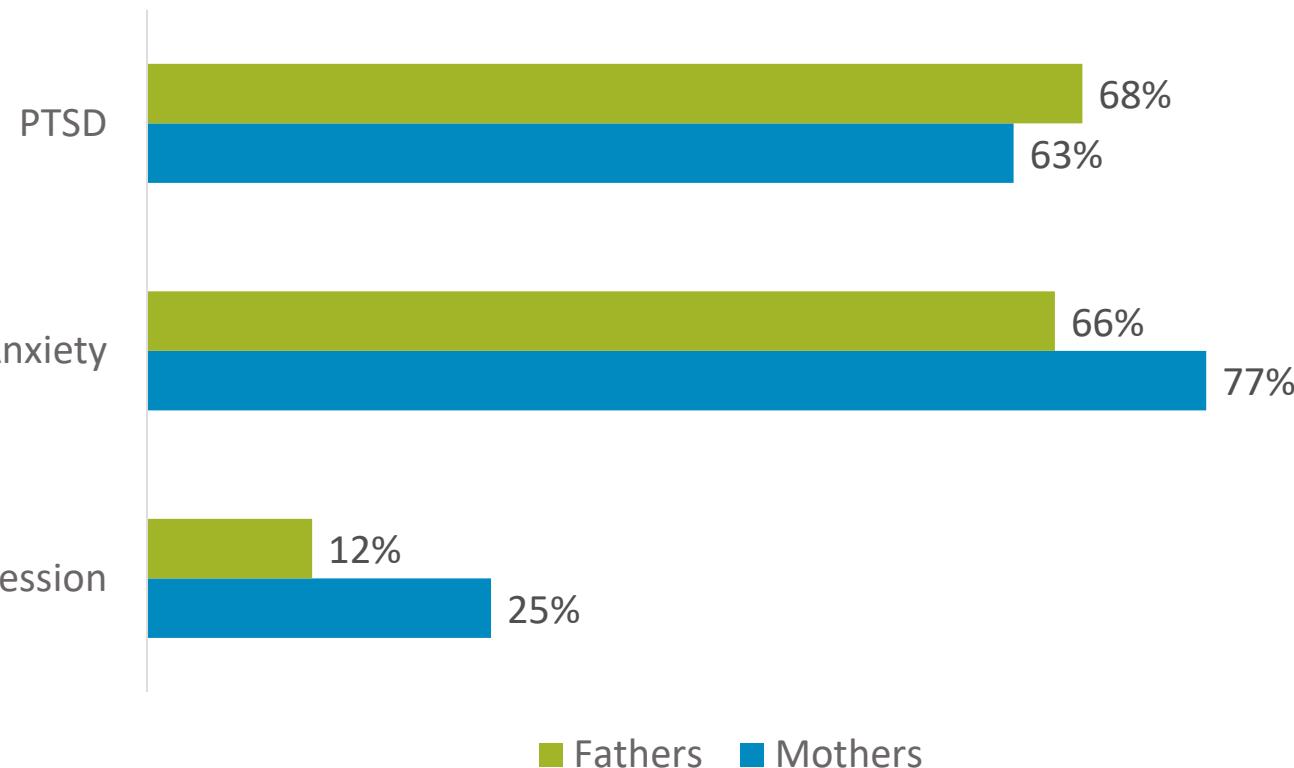
# Basic needs and social support risk



*Focus on Fathers: Father advocate*

# Mental health risk

Parents' moderate or high risk characteristics at enrollment



# Fathers' request of services

We asked fathers if they asked for help with

- Finishing high school/GED
- College or trade school
- Finding a job
- Improving job skills
- Finding a place to live
- Getting health care
- Getting dental care
- Dealing with anger
- Dealing with stress
- Taking care of a baby
- Healthy relationship with their partner

## Fathers' receipt of services

- Dads asked for help about the same number of times between the group that had the advocate and the one that didn't
- Dads usually got most or all of the help they asked for from the advocate
- Dads usually got little very little or none of the help they asked for if they didn't have the advocate

## Helping fathers helps fathers and mothers

When fathers got the help they asked for, fathers and mothers both had lowered basic needs and social support risk

Example: In one couple, father's risk of food insecurity and homelessness was particularly high at the start of the study, and by the end, he was no longer reporting skipping meals or being without a steady place to live.

That pair's mother was eating enough and had a place to stay, but reported that she had no one to turn to if she needed help, and after the intervention, reported that she had several people she could trust.

## Strategies from the father advocate

- Confidentiality was important
- Fathers liked to text and had long and involved text conversations with the advocate
- Preferred settings included the park, taking a walk, playing basketball, fishing, or fast food restaurants – outside of the house
- The advocate let fathers drive the topics covered in group work
- Fathers liked to receive Dad Starter Kits from the advocate, as well as bus tokens



DISCUSSION

## Strategies for engaging fathers

- How do the strategies from the advocate fit with your observations from your work?
- What makes successful father engagement possible?



*Policy suggestions*

## Background on paternity establishment in MN

- At the time of their child's birth, many unmarried parents want to co-parent and share custody of their child
- Most parents do not receive information about establishing paternity and legal custody until after their child is born
- Under state law, the mother has sole custody – to obtain shared custody and parenting time, an unmarried father has to go to court



*Policy suggestions*

## Feedback from local parents, government, and community agency staff

- Timing of the in-hospital Recognition of Parentage (RoP) process
- Legal nuances
- Mothers granted sole custody at birth and even when they agree, fathers have to go to court



*Policy suggestions*

## Recommendations from unmarried parents and service providers

- Allow unmarried parents to sign and submit RoP before the child is born and have it become effective at birth
- Allow shared custody to be the default when both parents state this is what they want. Alternatively, develop and expedited court process for parents who agree on all aspects of their custody/parenting time plan
- Have state Departments of Health and/or Human Services offer training to local government, community, and faith-based agencies to provide assistance to unmarried parents on the RoP and co-parenting plans

DISCUSSION

## Who should do this work?

- Does your agency have a part of this work?
- Who should do the work? How should it move ahead?



# Thank you!

Please don't hesitate to reach out with questions, comments, or ideas about how to move this work ahead!

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