

**The Examination of Outcomes of Fatherhood Program Participants in
Rural and Non-Rural Communities**

by

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Abstract

Fatherhood programs focus on enhancing parenting behaviors, couple and co-parenting relationships, and economic security for families and their children. While there is a growing literature on evaluation of fatherhood programs, few consider contextual factors that may influence program effectiveness. This study tested whether changes in outcomes related to parenting, couple relationships, general financial literacy, and child support commitment differed based on rural and non-rural settings. The sample for this study consisted of 274 fatherhood program participants from across Alabama. Of the sample, 78% of the participants either had no high school education or only a high school diploma or equivalent. Findings indicated enhanced benefits for participants and even greater enhancements for those in rural fatherhood programs in three of the four outcomes. Implications for research and practice suggest that the community setting can influence change in targeted outcomes especially for fathers in rural communities. This is important since rural areas have far fewer resources than non-rural areas and program providers can feel confident that providing services to rural fathers will aid in contributing in these communities. However, it appears that all fathers, regardless of setting, experienced significant improvements in their parenting skills. Additionally, these findings add to the finite literature on fatherhood evaluation and suggest more fatherhood programs are needed in rural areas. Continuing to provide fatherhood programs in diverse communities, evaluating their effectiveness, and considering contextual factors in the evaluation of programs significantly adds to the existing literature and may prove to be essential moving forward.

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List of Abbreviations

ADCANP	Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention
CTF	Children's Trust Fund (aka ADCANP)
IRB	Internal Review Board
RMANCOVA	Repeated Measures Analysis of Covariance
RQ	Research Question

Chapter I: Introduction

According to the 2013 U.S. Census Bureau, approximately one in three children live in homes absent of their biological father, (Dion, Zaveri, & Holcomb, 2015). In recent years, there has been a powerful movement for fathers to become more involved in their children's lives since they uniquely contribute to children's development (Fagan, Day, Lamb, & Cabrera, 2014). Yet, poor socio-economic conditions and minimal resources often inhibit fathers from being part of their children's lives (Pruett, Cowan, Cowan, & Pruett, 2009). Due to the importance of fathers in children's lives, hundreds of fatherhood programs are currently active throughout the United States (Dion et al., 2015). The intent of fatherhood programs is to improve parenting behaviors, create healthier romantic partnerships and co-parenting relationships, and increase economic security for their children through child support payments (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

While responsible fatherhood programs are prevalent and relevant, there has been little evaluation of these programs leaving a large gap in the research. Further, the limited research on fatherhood programs also lacks information focused on the differences in program outcomes that may exist based on contextual factors (Osborne, et al., 2014). For example, fatherhood researchers have not investigated the influence of setting (i.e., rural/non-rural) on program outcomes. This may be especially important since rural areas contain distinctive individual and economic challenges compared to non-rural areas. Non-rural areas have various resources available to the community, whereas rural areas are lacking in general resources, especially fatherhood programs.

While responsible fatherhood programs are prevalent, there is not much in the literature and research about a research-based, best practices programmatic outline, or the evaluation of programs. The research specifically lacks information focused on the differences in program outcomes based on the program participants' community context, specifically rural and non-rural. A review of the 2010 Census of the United States was used to determine the "urbanicity" of the community-based programs used in the current study. While the term "urban" is generally used as the opposite of "rural", the term "non-rural" was used in the current study to identify all participants *not* in a rural community.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine participant outcomes of fatherhood programs in rural and non-rural communities. Previous studies have been conducted and have shown general differences between rural and non-rural areas. In the Georgia Fatherhood Program, which included rural and non-rural communities, participant samples were not compared statistically. Program participants in the study showed significant gains in employment, yet the participant outcomes, both rural and non-rural, were not compared (Bloomer & Sipe, 2003).

Research Questions

The following research questions were used in this study:

RQ1: Do responsible fatherhood program participants have different outcomes upon completion of the program based on the geographical location of their program services?

RQ2: Do non-rural fatherhood participants have better outcomes in four domains (*child support compliance, general financial literacy, use of positive parenting behaviors, and commitment to their romantic relationships*) than those participants who participated in program services in a rural setting?

Significance of the Study

The current study and its findings lend important information to the research of fatherhood programs. The significance of this study provides empirical evidence substantiating the presence of fatherhood programs in both rural and non-rural communities, but especially those in rural areas. One may assume participants in non-rural areas may have greater significant enhancements after receiving program services compared to participants in rural areas due to more available resources in non-rural areas than those in rural areas. Therefore, the hypothesis formulated was that non-rural program participants would have greater benefits after program participation when compared to rural participants based on the aforementioned assumption. However, after data collection and analysis, the results of the current study proved otherwise.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I introduces the current study, presents the problem, states the purpose of the study, and asks the research questions. Chapter II includes a review of the literature concerning the role of the father, societal attitudes toward the role of the father, differences in rural and non-rural communities, fatherhood program outcomes, review of the methodology of fatherhood programs, and goals of the present study. Chapter III reports the procedures utilized in the present study, including the population and sample, as well as the measures and data collection procedures. The findings of the study are presented in Chapter IV. Chapter V includes conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further practice and research.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The review of the literature focused on the following main topics: 1) the role of a father in the family dynamic, 2) societal attitudes toward the role of a father and fatherhood programs and 3) differences in rural and non-rural communities and how they impact program outcomes (i.e. *child support compliance, general financial literacy, use of positive parenting behaviors, and commitment to their romantic relationships*).

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Role of the Father in the Family Dynamic

Familial expectations and roles have changed throughout cultural and social groups for the duration of the history of the family. Only fairly recently within the past fifty years have researchers focused on familial roles and expectations, specifically the roles of a father, since the divorce boom in the 1960s and 1970s. That point in American history saw a growing number of fatherless homes, increasing the need for research on the effects of absent fathers on the home, including the children. Society, as a whole, became more interested in the subject, pushing social researchers to understand the effects on concepts regarding fathers and their children, like father involvement. These social scientists began focusing less on masculinity and dominance in the family and focused more on fathers' time spent with their children and the quality of time with the family (Lamb, 2000).

It is also influential to program evaluators and developers to understand why fathers' and mother's parenting dimensions are conceptualized differently. Fagan, Day, Lamb, and Cabrera (2014) discussed whether or not parenting behaviors of fathers and mothers should be conceptualized differently. This is important to fatherhood program developers in order to follow the construct that parenting behaviors of mothers and fathers are different or have differing effects on the lives of children and their families as a whole. The study suggests that parenting behaviors of mothers and fathers, if similar, have no differing effects on their children, and could affect evaluation processes. Most fatherhood program developers would follow the construct that absent or inconsistent fathers would have an effect on the lives of their children, just as an absent or inconsistent mother would have a similar effect, but the focus of the program gives fathers a cohort to vent to, learn from, and grow together while learning positive prosocial behaviors (2014).

Societal Attitudes toward Fatherhood Role

In order to fully grasp the complexity of societal attitudes toward fathers, their roles, and fatherhood programs, as well as the possible outcomes after participating in a fatherhood program, one must look at the various components that impact the specific field of study. More recently, researchers have examined the roles of fathers within subgroups, such as career oriented men, rural families, and non-rural (urban) families (Amatea, Cross, Clark, & Bobby, 1986; Elder & Conger, 2000; Gore, Wilburn, Treadway, & Plaut, 2011; Lemke, Lichtenberg & Arachtingi, 1992). The Life Role Salience Scales have aided researchers and developers of family support programs, including fatherhood programs, to understand participants' expectations of roles within their own families and how to improve familial relationships and role expectations (Amatea et al.). While reviewing research on subgroups of families and understanding the dynamic of particular families, program developers are able to create and improve programs to focus on target-participant specific topics.

For example, The Life Roles Salience Scales were developed to help determine men's and women's assumptions regarding four different aspects of their lives: occupation, marriage, parental, and homecare roles through researching what life roles seemed to be more or less important to families with career driven parents. According to Amatea, Cross, Clark, and Bobby (1986), two facets of personal expectations were weighed on the following two scales: "the personal importance or value attributed to participation in a particular role, and the intended level of commitment of personal time and energy resources to enactment of a role" (p. 835). This particular study focused on career-driven families, helps one understand what and how each participant expects the life-roles in his or her home and relationship, but the Life Role Salience Scale can be applied to other subgroups of cultures.

Fatherhood program developers and reviewers gain information and guidance from all aspects of familial research, including research focused on children and adolescents. Several programs have an aspect of prevention or understanding of certain parental behaviors due to the research regarding children and adolescents. Relationship education for adolescents has been seen as a protective factor to avoid detrimental behaviors in the future, especially with regard to fatherhood behavior. According to Adler-Baeder, Kerpelman, Schramm, Higginbotham, and Paulk (2007), relationship education during adolescence predicts positive relationships later in life, increasing the possibility of positive parental behavior and decreasing the possibility of negative relationships in the future, including those with spouses, co-parents, and children.

The Child-Parent Relationship Scale is often used throughout fatherhood programs in non-rural and rural areas and can be an important tool in evaluating individual participants' success in fatherhood programs regarding child-parent relationships, along with other program goals (Pianta, 1992). This can be used with regard to adult education, especially fatherhood programs, to determine success in the program and the positive influences the program has on relationships for participants and their children.

Furthermore, understanding learning strategies and motivation processes gained throughout education, beginning in childhood, allows fatherhood programs to model their programs on what strategies work best for the particular target audience. Adult education can also learn from these strategies and motivation processes to ensure the effectiveness of the program at hand. Fatherhood program developers understanding positive learning strategies and motivational processes increase the probability of effective the specific program, as well as all education aspects from early education through adult education (Ames & Archer, 1988).

Fatherhood programs have also benefitted from adolescent research through the understanding of interpersonal competence, especially in peer relationships as competence in peer relationships in adolescents is often carried over into adulthood. Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenburg, and Reis (1988) determined five specific domains of interpersonal competence in peer relationships through investigating three studies on college students. Fatherhood program developers and reviewers are able to use this research to understand the five domains determined within the particular investigation—initiating relationships, self-disclosure, asserting displeasure with others' actions, providing emotional support, and managing interpersonal conflicts—and use them within their own programs. These five domains do not only apply to peers, but also to all relationships throughout adulthood, including spousal and parent-child relationships.

As discussed earlier, social support is an important aspect of family, and parental influence on adolescent involvement in community activities is a major predictor of social support and positive familial relationships. Research has shown that youth involvement in extracurricular activities reflects both family socialization influences and civic development. As Fletcher, Elder, and Mekos (2000) discuss, behavioral models from parents, as well as personal reinforcement of children's actions, have significant effects on students' extracurricular activities. Parents who do not engage in community activities are consequential to children's extracurricular activities and community engagement; therefore, fatherhood programs can focus on community involvement and social support by increasing encouragement and involvement in children's extracurricular activities in order to improve relationships with parents and children, their families, and their community, increasing social and community support, predicting positive relationships in participants' own relationships and their children's future relationships.

Differences in Rural and Non-Rural communities

As seen in Elder and Conger's (2000) *Children of the Land*, families and children in rural areas, specifically in rural Iowa, hold certain values as more important than non-rural families. For example, families in rural areas may hold physical labor, family and community involvement, and working as a team for the family to be more important aspects of family life, while non-rural families may hold punctuality, the importance of income, and cultural values to be important. As program developers and researchers understand the differences that lie between rural communities and non-rural communities (urban and suburban), fatherhood programs can be developed that target specific family values important to those within the target communities. Adult education, specifically fatherhood programs, relies heavily on the past and current research regarding target communities, especially within the state of Alabama, as there are several non-rural (urban, suburban) and rural communities in a small geographical area or state. Understanding the family values of the geographical areas in the state of Alabama will guide research and development teams to create and improve programs that will provide participants with positive and usable information that participants take home and use in their own relationships with their children and spouses.

Lemke and And's (2000) *Differences in Social Support between Rural and Urban Communities*, provides a clear example of a major difference in one family value, social support, from two different communities (rural and non-rural). Social support is structured differently in urban communities than it is in rural communities, as rural communities may have a community made up of only a few families who have known one another for long periods of time and have relied on each other at one point or another so social support is high; while non-rural (urban) communities are filled with families and people from various regions and other parts of the

world. Therefore, social support might come from friends, coworkers, or neighbors, rather than immediate family or long-time friends with history. Fatherhood program developers and reviewers must understand the different types of needs from families in rural areas and non-rural (urban) areas to create more diverse, targeted, and stronger programs that provide program participants with the ability to use knowledge that has been catered to their way of life through understanding, rather than a textbook or standard program that would not give accurate or usable information in their homes. Establishing a programming rubric, or guide would greatly contribute to the research literature surrounding fatherhood programs, as well as aid fellow fatherhood program developers.

Another example of a contextual study, specifically a rural community, is the study of collectivism and academic attitudes throughout Appalachia. Appalachia has been a sociological and anthropological topic for years, and through Gore, Wilburn, Treadway, and Plaut's (2011) *Regional Collectivism in Appalachia and Academic Attitudes*, researchers and developers are able to understand how regional collectivism plays in daily life. While the study focused specifically on academic attitudes, the commentary around it gives developers of family support programs an insight into how important regional collectivism is to not just in and around Appalachia, but other strong regional areas and how that influences familial roles and values including fatherhood programs.

Fatherhood Program Outcomes

Fatherhood programs also have a history of focusing on employability, increasing positive influences in all aspects of life. Longitudinal research regarding childhood behavior and later employability in adulthood has been beneficial to fatherhood program developers, including Kokko and Pulkkinen's (2000) *Aggression in Childhood and Long-Term Unemployment in*

Adulthood. Employment skills and understanding the relationship between aggression in childhood and future unemployment can increase the positive effects fatherhood programs have on participants. As this study finds, child-centered parenting and prosocial tendencies in an aggressive child lowered his or her probability of long-term unemployment later in life. Fatherhood programs are aimed to provide participants with positive parenting skills and other protective factors, like employability, in order to prevent a cycle of childhood aggression and future long-term unemployment (Kokko & Pulkkinen, 2000). In a similar study, participants who enrolled and completed the Georgia Fatherhood Program benefitted more from the program services if they were unemployed when first entering the program. The study and its effect on participants' employment and wages earned is significant to use as a base point of evaluating other fatherhood programs that include employment as a key focus area (Bloomer & Sipe, 2003). Additionally, research has shown the issues fathers face in the job markets in both rural and urban areas. Mushinski, Bernasek, and Weller (2015) found that non-rural (urban) areas and rural areas both face problems regarding employment opportunities, but the magnitude of effects on employment opportunities is harsher in rural areas than non-rural (urban), rather than the presence or absence of employment opportunities. Their study focused on the effects of employer-provided health insurance: as new employment opportunities arise, people living in rural areas are less likely to take a job without employer-provided health insurance, creating a job lock more than twice as large than in non-rural (urban) areas (Mushinski, Bernasek, & Weller, 2015).

Other more recent research has discussed theory and outcome measures for fatherhood programs, which is important for fatherhood program developers to understand the effectiveness of specific theoretic frameworks. Fagan and Kaufman (2015) provide three theoretical

frameworks for fatherhood programs to focus on in order to increase the effectiveness of the program and improve participants' relationship with their children. Responsible fatherhood programs exist throughout the United States, but Fagan and Kaufman suggest current evaluation processes are inadequate to provide proper feedback. If proposed theoretical frameworks are integrated into current fatherhood programs, program efficacy could increase, as long as frameworks correspond with target participants' goals. To further the research and literature specific to fatherhood programs, Fagan established the Fatherhood Research and Practice Network (FRPN), which released a request for proposal earlier this year. The proposal specifically attracted state and local fatherhood programs with the hope of better understanding how various programs implemented services across the nation.

Fatherhood programs focus on several aspects of life to improve familial relations and parent-child relations, including mental health, employability (as mentioned above), masculinity, and child support, among other topics. Research has focused on many of these topics; especially in regards to the role these aspects of life play in fatherhood and familial life.

Mental health is an uncomfortable topic in many communities, but as mental health becomes an easier topic to discuss within families, communities, and social circles, mental health has become a focus point in many adult education programs, including fatherhood programs. Anderson, Kohler, and Letiecq (2005) studied predictors of depression in low-income fathers, as depression can influence and even harm familial relationships, especially between nonresidential fathers and their children. The study found that 56% of 127 predominantly African American participants in non-rural and rural fatherhood programs reported depressive symptoms (Anderson, Kohler, & Letiecq, 2005). The study also found that other resource challenges that these fathers faced, including the inability to pay child support, unemployment, limited access to

transportation, or criminal conviction history, as well as rural or urban residency, and level of social support all played a significant role in predicting a father's depression. These findings can be used to address the predictive factors of depression that also play a role in parent-child relationships (Anderson, Kohler, & Letiecq, 2005).

Masculinity is defined differently in non-rural and rural communities, as well as within the African-American and white communities. Black masculinity is a prevalent topic in research as it provides social scientists the ability to understand why and how differing definitions came to be. Researchers have come to understand that life experiences and social constructs have created the differing definitions of masculinity within black and white communities and can affect the positive outcomes that can come from fatherhood programs (Roy & Dyson, 2010, Staples, 1982).

Child support payments is also a focus in fatherhood programs, as many participants are non-residential fathers. Child support can be a difficult topic to discuss within programs because many factors come into play regarding the ability or inability to pay full child support ordered. In Threlfall and Kohl's (2015) *Addressing Child Support in Fatherhood Programs*, the authors discuss ways to address child support. Job status, relationship with the custodial parent, and other factors in fathers' lives can affect a nonresidential father's life in many ways and understanding how these factors affect a father's ability or inability to pay child support can aid fatherhood program developers with information to discuss the subject of child support within their programs while understanding participants' points of view. Many nonresidential fathers not paying child support are often referred to local fatherhood programs to assist them in gaining employment. Historically, local judges preferred to place the non-compliant fathers in jail for not paying court-ordered child support. However, if a father is placed in jail for nonpayment, the

child support is not paid, thus creating a damaging cycle not only to the father but to the child. Fatherhood programs that offer economic stability resources, job searches, job application and resume preparation services and job readiness skills significantly decrease the noncompliance of nonresidential fathers. Fathers are empowered to seek employment, thus providing them financial resources to stay in compliance with child support orders. A substantial portion of participants in Alabama's fatherhood programs is court-mandated for child support arrears. In truth, these fathers are enrolled in the programs as an alternative to contempt. Better understanding these efforts is of critical importance to the research literature on fatherhood programs. Documenting program effectiveness for this population and identifying the contextual and process variables that contribute to program effects will inform recommendations on the treatment of non-payers in the child support system.

Review of Methodology of Fatherhood Programs

Researching the methodology used to review or evaluate fatherhood programs was very important in the present study. Despite the prevalence of responsible fatherhood programs, evaluation of these programs is only in the early stages. Evaluative research of these programs will help to create more effective and successful program designs in the future. In addition to limited evidence of efficacy of programs, process evaluations that examine factors related to successful program design are scarce.

There are several ways to evaluate and review the success and effectiveness of adult education programs and the present study looked at the literature to better understand which ways work best for which programs. According to McCleod, qualitative research and analyses are beneficial since the data is reported in the language of the informant, which in this case are fatherhood program participants. In 2007, Roy and Young reported in their qualitative study

information that came directly from fatherhood participants and their personal perspectives. Conceptually, qualitative data is concerned with understanding human behavior from the participants' perspective. Data is collected through participant observations and interviews. Quantitative research and analyses focus on discovering issues about social phenomena and assume a fixed and measurable reality (McLeod, 2008). However, qualitative research was found not to be useful in the present study due to the limited access of the program participants once they completed the program.

Program evaluations are essential to understanding which tactics of the program are successful and effective in order to improve overall program effectiveness. In order to understand why a program is considered scientifically effective or ineffective, developers and evaluators must understand the several types of evaluation techniques. The type of evaluation method used in the present study was a retrospective pre-post questionnaire. In a review of using retrospective pre-post questionnaires to determine program effectiveness, Davis (2003) determined that pre-post questionnaires can be effective when used for the right programs. Many adult education programs have successfully used a retrospective pre/post survey to measure program outcomes. A retrospective pre/post survey simultaneously assesses retrospective pre-reports (participants reflect back on and provide a score for their pre-program level) and post-program reports (participants provide their current level) (Pratt, McGuigan, & Katzev, 2000). Fatherhood program developers and evaluators can use pre-post questionnaires to improve fatherhood program content. Furthermore, other researchers have studied using retrospective pretest methodology, stating that retrospective pretests provide more accurate feedback than traditional pretest-posttest methods. Before participants have had formal instruction in a particular content area, they generally overestimate their skill levels if given a true pre-test.

Therefore, a retrospective pre/post questionnaire may reflect a more accurate assessment of learning throughout the duration of a class cycle (Davis, 2003, Rockwell & Kohn, 1989). This is important for current fatherhood program developers to understand what specific evaluations and methods work for their target participants, which can vary from non-rural to rural areas based on the theoretical framework of the program.

Summary

In summary, it is evident that research specific to fatherhood programs in rural and non-rural communities, as well as outcomes of these programs, is minimal. Fatherhood program developers, facilitators, adult educators, and researchers would greatly benefit from advancements in this particular field of study. Much more research is needed regarding fatherhood programming and their outcomes.

Based on the literature outlined above, the following questions were examined:

- 1) Do fatherhood program participants have different outcomes upon completion of the program based on the geographical location (rural/non-rural) of their program services?
- 2) Do non-rural fatherhood program participants have better outcomes than those participants who participated in services in a rural setting?

Chapter III: Methods

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine participant outcomes of fatherhood programs in rural and non-rural communities. Previous studies have been conducted and have shown general differences between rural and non-rural areas. In the Georgia Fatherhood Program, which included rural and non-rural communities, participant samples were not compared statistically. Program participants in the study showed significant gains in employment, yet the participant outcomes, both rural and non-rural, were not compared (Bloomer & Sipe, 2003).

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Methods

This study examined participant outcomes of fatherhood programs in rural and non-rural communities. Two research questions were used: **RQ1:** Do responsible fatherhood program participants have different outcomes upon completion of the program based on the geographical location of their program services? **RQ2:** Do non-rural fatherhood participants have better

outcomes in four domains (*child support compliance, general financial literacy, use of positive parenting behaviors, and commitment to their romantic relationships*) than those participants who participated in program services in a rural setting?

The data used in the present study was derived from the CTF/ADCANP Evaluation Project housed at Auburn University. The Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention (ADCANP) is a state agency whose primary focus is to prevent child abuse and neglect in Alabama. Auburn University is the independent evaluator for the grant-funded programs of ADCANP. Various types of community-based programs are awarded through a competitive grant process. Once awarded, programs used the funds to implement programming to prevent child abuse and neglect across the state. ADCANP program participants were given the option to complete a demographic intake prior to programming, and a retrospective pre-post survey at the conclusion of program services.

The surveys (both the intake and the retrospective pre/post) were approved by Auburn University's Internal Review Board (IRB) and adhered to ethical data collection procedures and guidelines. An informed consent letter, required by IRB, was signed by each participant and documented their agreement to participate in the study. The participants were given the option to complete both the intake (which asked demographic and socioeconomic questions) and retrospective-pre/then-post evaluation questionnaire specific to program content. Trained facilitators at each of the 10 community-based resources centers administered the intake and retrospective pre/post and assigned each participant a seven digit participant code. Facilitators administered paper surveys to program participants, and read aloud the questions on the surveys for participants who were not capable of reading the survey and completing it on their own. The intake was administered to each participant upon entry into the class after participant ID codes

were assigned and recorded. The retrospective pre/post was administered at the conclusion of the program. At the conclusion of each agency's class cycle, facilitators prepared the data packets in accordance with Auburn University's IRB protocol. Two separate envelopes were used to mail each class cycle's data: the first envelope contained informed consents and participant record forms, and the second envelope contained intakes and retrospective pre/posts only designated by participant ID codes. Envelopes were labeled accordingly to reflect contents of each envelope. Each agency was assigned a 3 digit program code unique to them and the code was included in each envelope. All data packets were mailed to the CTF/ADCANP evaluation lab at Auburn University. Auburn University's IRB protocol for research on human subjects was strictly followed.

Sample

The sample for the present study consisted of 274 fatherhood program participants from across Alabama. The mean age of the sample was 35.4 years old ($SD = 9.20$). Of the sample, 21% never finished high school, only 57% had a high school diploma/GED, 11% had a trade school/technical certificate or associate's degree, and 10% had a bachelor's degree or higher. Approximately 55% were currently unemployed, and 78% reported an annual household income of less than \$10,000. The sample is racially diverse: 46% were African American, 44% were European-American, and 10% reported other races/ethnicities (e.g., Asian, American Indian, and other). Most of the sample was single and never married (33%), 23% were in a committed relationship and not married, 18% were married, 17% were divorced, 8% were separated, and 1% was widowed.

Program participants received fatherhood curricula focused on self-awareness, caring for self, fathering skills, parenting skills, relationship skills and educational resources (e.g., 24/7

Dads) and employment services (i.e., job skills training and job search assistance) from skilled educators at 10 community-based family centers across the state funded by ADCANP. Program participants were largely recruited through word of mouth, client referrals, and through broad recruitment strategies (e.g., social media exposure, brochure and flyer distribution, and website exposure). Participation in program services averaged 8-12 weeks and at the conclusion of services, participants received surveys, which assessed their perceptions of change from pre- to post-program in parenting behaviors, commitment to romantic relationship, financial strain, and economic stability (specifically their commitment to making child support payments).

Measures

All measures were presented in the form of a retrospective pre/post survey in which simultaneously assesses retrospective pre- reports (respondents reflect back on and provide a score for their pre-program level) and post-program reports (respondents provide their current level) (Pratt, McGuigan, & Katzev, 2000). *Child support compliance intent* was measured using a global item (“I am committed to making full child support payments each month”) rated on a 7-point scale from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). *General financial literacy* was also measured using a global item (“I rarely worry about being able to meet monthly living expenses”) rated on a 7-point scale from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). Use of *positive parenting behaviors* was measured using three items assessing the frequency of the behaviors ($\alpha = .73$; e.g., “How often do you explain the consequences of your child(ren)’s behavior?”), with responses ranging from 1 (almost never) to 7 (very often). Finally, participants’ *commitment to their romantic relationship* was assessed using a two-item scale (Lund, 1985; $\alpha = .91$; e.g., “How obligated do you feel to continue this relationship?”).

Once data were received in the lab, the data were processed and responses from the intakes and retrospective pre/post surveys were entered into a database using TeleForm. TeleForm is a scanning software and significantly reduces the amount of time needed to hand enter data, and has been shown to be as accurate as a manual entry (Jørgensen & Karlslose, 1998). Standard SPSS data operations, explained in detail in Chapter IV, were run to measure the mixed, between-within covariance between the two groups in the present study- rural and non-rural.

Chapter IV: Results

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine participant outcomes of fatherhood programs in rural and non-rural communities. Previous studies have been conducted and have shown general differences between rural and non-rural areas. In the Georgia Fatherhood Program, which included rural and non-rural communities, participant samples were not compared statistically. Program participants in the study showed significant gains in employment, yet the participant outcomes, both rural and non-rural, were not compared (Bloomer & Sipe, 2003).

Research Questions

The following research questions were used in this study:

RQ1: Do responsible fatherhood program participants have different outcomes upon completion of the program based on the geographical location of their program services?

RQ2: Do non-rural fatherhood participants have better outcomes in four domains (*child support compliance, general financial literacy, use of positive parenting behaviors, and commitment to their romantic relationships*) than those participants who participated in program services in a rural setting?

Results

A series of repeated-measures mixed between-within analysis of covariance (RMANCOVAs) were conducted to test time X group interaction effects for change in child support compliance intent, general financial literacy, positive parenting behaviors, and commitment to their romantic relationship. RMANCOVA descriptive statistics are presented in

Table 1 and Table 2. Results indicate support for the main effects hypothesis related to *positive parenting behaviors* ($F(1, 167) = 53.34, p < .001$); however, there were no significant differences by group, suggesting that people in rural and non-rural contexts benefitted equally in their parenting behaviors. Results indicate a significant interaction of time X community context for *commitment to child support payment* ($F(1, 171) = 6.50, p = .01$), *commitment to romantic relationship* ($F(1, 172) = 8.145, p < .01$), and *general financial literacy* ($F(1, 175) = 6.5, p = .01$), such that those in rural contexts showed greater change after participation in a fatherhood program. Graphs showing the change in both groups are reflected in Figures 1, 2, and 3.

Independent samples *t*-tests reveal that there are no significant differences in participants depending on rural/non-rural contexts at pre-test in all outcomes. However, significant differences between the two groups at post-test were seen in *general financial literacy* ($t(174) = 2.7, p < .01$). No other outcomes were significantly different at post-test. Paired samples *t*-tests reveal that participants in non-rural contexts showed significant improvements in *commitment to child support payment* ($t(143) = 5.11, p < .001$), *commitment to romantic relationship* ($t(148) = 3.24, p = .001$), and *positive parenting behaviors* ($t(144) = 8.21, p < .001$). Participants in rural contexts showed significant improvements in *commitment to child support payment* ($t(28) = 5.03, p < .001$), *commitment to romantic relationship* ($t(24) = 6.00, p < .001$), *positive parenting behaviors* ($t(23) = 3.93, p = .001$), supporting that while significant improvements were seen in these outcomes by both groups, participants in rural contexts showed more enhancements. Participants in non-rural context showed no significant change in *general financial literacy* and *perception of financial hardship* from pre- to post-test, while those in rural contexts did ($t(27) = 6.11, p < .001$).

Chapter V: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations for Future Studies

Conclusions

The primary goal of the present study was to expand upon prior research examining post-program outcomes of fatherhood program participants in differing community contexts (i.e. rural, non-rural). Additionally, the present study aimed to expand the literature by examining the outcomes of fatherhood program participants in four distinct areas significant to fatherhood programs: *child support compliance, financial hardship, use of positive parenting behaviors, and commitment to their romantic relationships*. The current study builds upon the evaluation of fatherhood programs and is the first to consider the influence of rural vs. non-rural settings on changes in program outcomes.

Implications

Results suggest that the community setting can influence change in targeted outcomes especially for fathers in rural communities. This is important since rural areas have far fewer resources than non-rural areas and program providers can feel confident that providing services to rural fathers will aid in contributing in these communities. However, it appears that all fathers, regardless of setting, experienced significant improvements in their parenting skills. Additionally, these findings add to the finite literature on fatherhood evaluation and suggest more fatherhood programs are needed in rural areas. Continuing to provide fatherhood programs in diverse communities, evaluating their effectiveness, and considering contextual factors in the evaluation of programs significantly adds to the existing literature and may prove to be essential moving forward.

Recommendations

The assumption was made before analysis was conducted that non-rural fatherhood program participants would have greater significant enhancements after receiving program services than rural fatherhood program participants. However, analysis of the data indicated rural fatherhood program participants showed greater change than those participants in non-rural areas. Perhaps rural participants are more engaged within their communities which could positively impact enhancements in the fatherhood program; or that there is only one fatherhood resource available to the community in which they can participate. Perhaps non-rural participants have numerous resources from which to choose and could receive help from various resources instead of just the one community resource available to rural participants. What can be gained from the current study is a greater understanding of fatherhood programs in diverse settings. Future research can delve deeper into the differences between the communities, but also compare significant change moderated by gender. While females were not part of the sample or included in the dataset used in the current study, females are often part of fatherhood programs. Future research could explore outcomes of both males and females to see if females change in the desired direction as males, and in which outcomes they changed.

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Table 1.

RMANCOVA Results for post-program outcomes by context

	Child Support Compliance						General Financial Literacy					
	<i>N</i>	<u>Pre</u>		<u>Post</u>		<i>F</i>	<i>N</i>	<u>Pre</u>		<u>Post</u>		<i>F</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Time (Main Effect)	176	2.7727	2.84	3.42	3.18	*45.19 2	179	4.73	1.93	5.36	2.02	*28.65
Time x Context						*6.49						*6.46
Rural	29	3.20	2.27	4.37	2.69		28	4.60	1.49	5.96	1.04	
Non-rural	144	2.69	2.95	3.22	3.25		149	4.76	1.99	5.24	2.15	
Cohen's <i>d</i>			0.51						0.38			

Note: *Bold coefficient indicates significance level of $p < .01$ or higher.

N = Number of participants; *M* = Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation; *F* = Fisher's F ratio

Table 2.

RMANCOVA Results for post-program outcome by context

	Positive Parenting Behaviors						Commitment to Romantic Relationship					
	<u>Pre</u>			<u>Post</u>			<u>Pre</u>			<u>Post</u>		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>
Time (Main Effect)	172	5.06	2.00	5.85	1.95	*53.33	177	3.90	2.52	4.41	2.71	*29.16
Time x Context						1.74						*8.14
Rural	24	5.01	1.09	6.09	.95		25	3.90	2.03	5.10	1.81	
Non-rural	145	5.05	2.13	5.80	2.09		149	3.89	2.62	4.26	2.83	
Cohen's <i>d</i>				0.71						0.38		

Note: *Bold coefficient indicates significance level of $p < .01$ or higher.

N = Number of participants; *M* = Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation; *F* = Fisher's F ratio

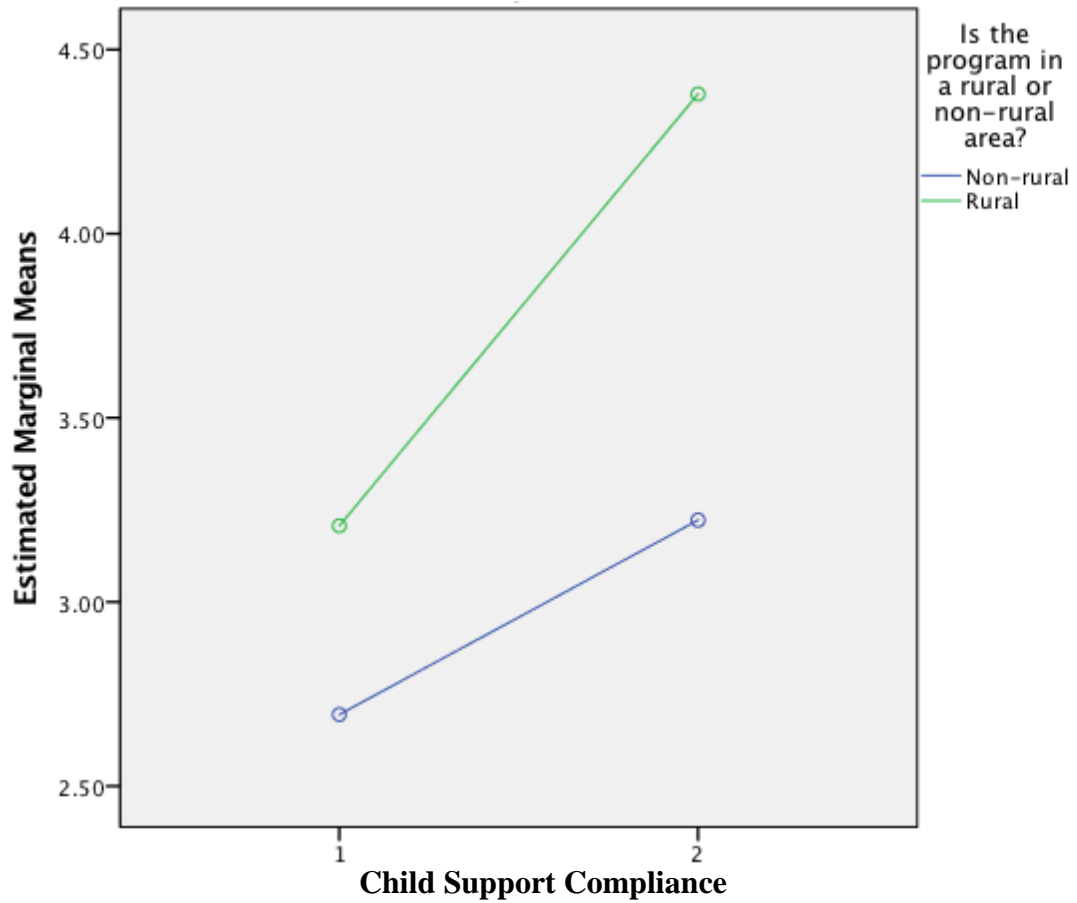


Figure 1. Differences in the amount of change between rural and non-rural program participants in child support compliance after participating in a fatherhood program.

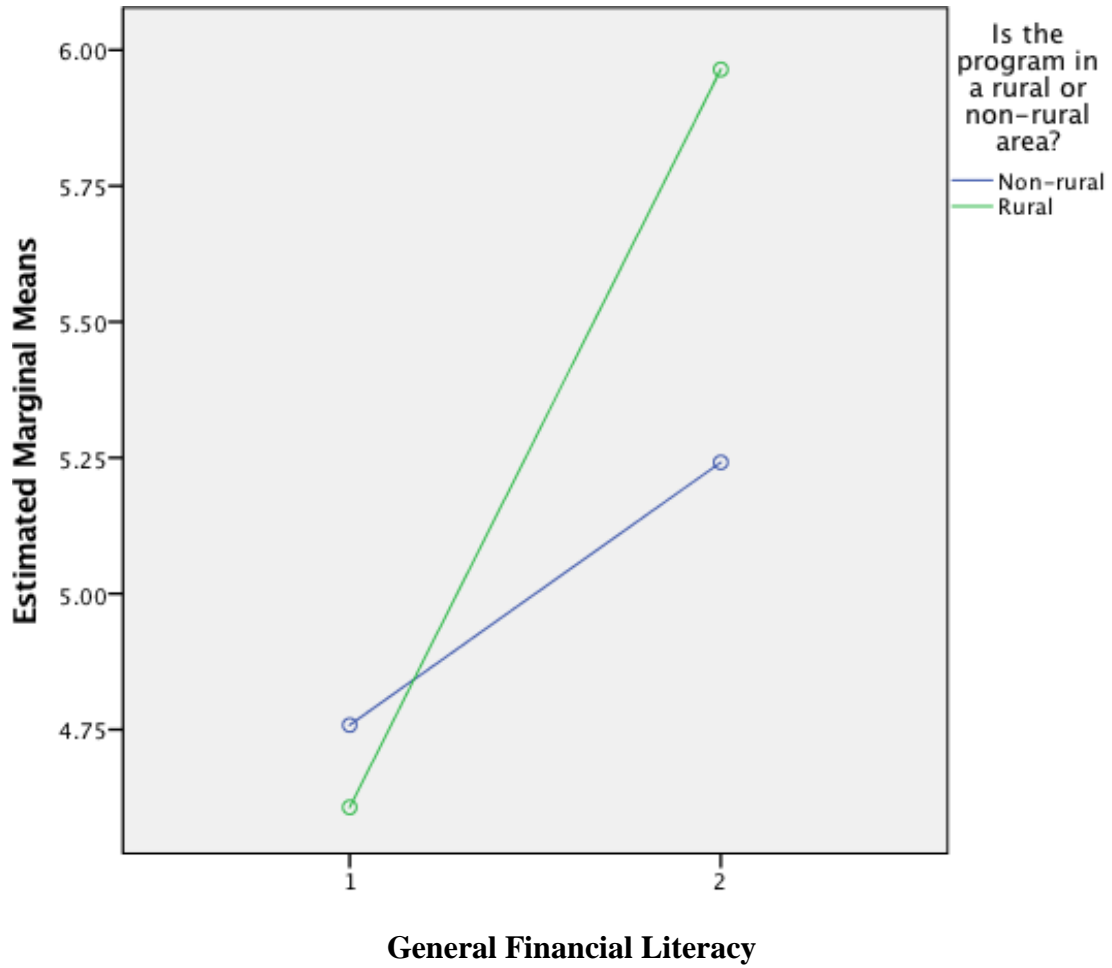


Figure 2. Differences in the amount of change between rural and non-rural program participants in general financial literacy after participating in a fatherhood program.

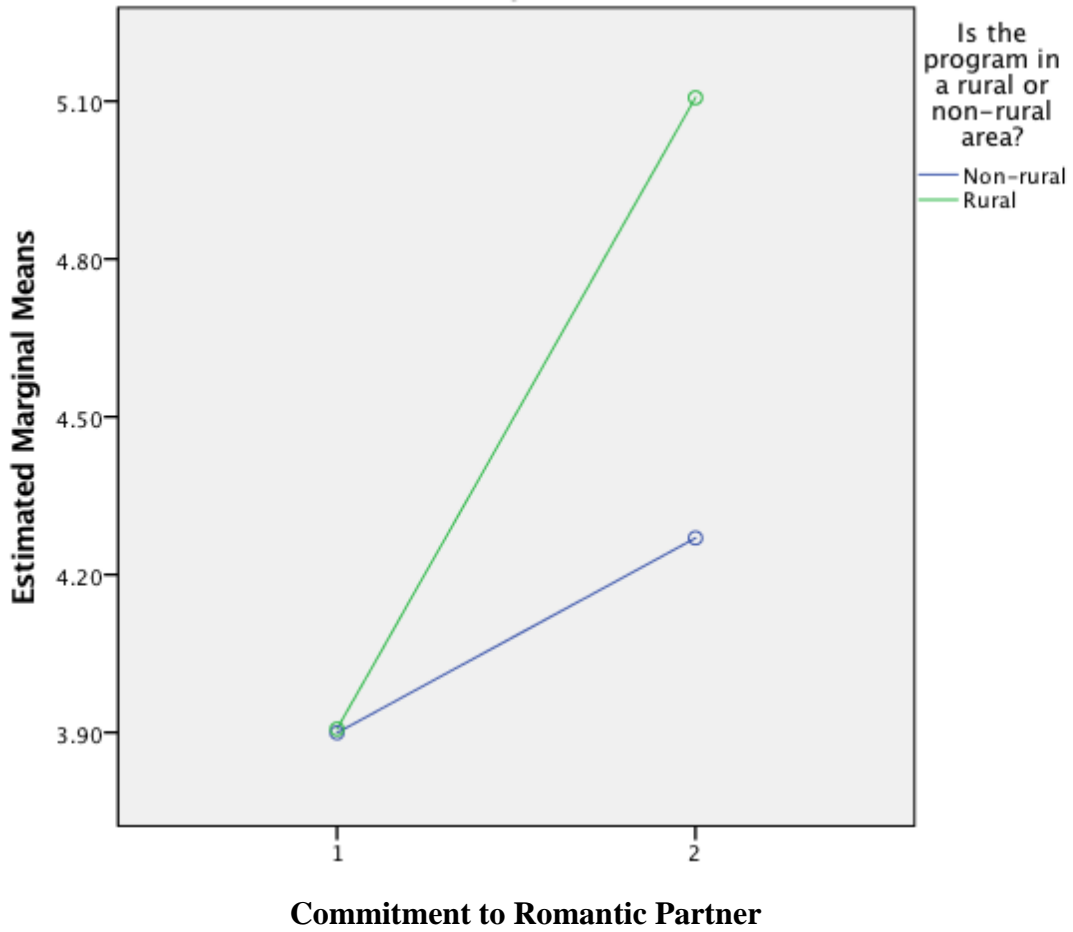


Figure 3. Differences in the amount of change between rural and non-rural program participants in commitment to romantic partner after participating in a fatherhood program.