U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Administration for Children and Families

Office of Family Assistance

Brown Bag Webinar Series: *Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the Inner City*

Presenter: *Kathryn Edin, Johns Hopkins University*

Moderator: *Damon Waters, Family Assistance Program Specialist, Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*

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***Webinar Transcription***

**Operator**: Good day and welcome to the OFA Brown Bag Webinar Series, "Fatherhood in the Inner City." Today's webinar is being recorded. There will be a question and answer session at the end of today's call. You may submit your questions online through the Q and A pod located at the top right-hand corner of your screen at any time. If you would like to ask a question over the telephone, please press star one on your telephone key pad. If you are using a speakerphone, please make sure your function is turned off to allow your signal to reach our equipment. At this time I would like to turn the conference over to Damon Waters, Office of Family Assistance. Please go ahead, sir.

**Damon Waters, Family Assistance Program Specialist, OFA**: Good morning and welcome to Fatherhood in the Inner City, the second in a series of informational brown bags sponsored by the Self Sufficiency Branch of the Office of Family Assistance. Today we have with us one of the preeminent scholars in poverty, welfare and families. Dr. Kathy Edin is one of the nation's leading poverty researchers who uses a mixed method approach as she works within the domains of welfare, low-wage work, family life, and neighborhood contexts.

As a national magazine reported, Dr. Edin has spent much of the past several decades studying some of the country's most dangerous impoverished neighborhoods. Dr. Edin has witnessed first-hand the lives of the people she studies. From her insightful look at the lives of children in poverty, and there is a lot of months to her in addition to the early welfare reform era discussion with her looks at how low-income mothers make ends meet in the low-wage workforce and how they navigate a world of limited opportunity.

Dr. Edin has performed much research, caused much fruitful debate and encouraged a closer look at how poverty impacts the lives of those often trapped in its grip. She has taken on key mysteries about the urban poor that have not been fully answered by quantitative work, including how do single mothers possibly survive on welfare, why don't more go to work, where are the fathers, and why do they disengage from their children's lives?

Her most recent books, "Promises I Can Keep" and "Doing the Best I Can" weave together an understanding of the lives of low-income mothers and fathers and seeks to redefine the public discussion about poverty, welfare, fatherhood and families. As stated, Dr. Edin has authored several books and several journal articles. Her book "Making Ends Meet - How a Single Mother Survived Welfare and Low-Wage Work" was one of the highest-selling volumes ever published by the Russell Sage Foundation. Her new book, "Doing the Best I Can - Fathering in the Inner City" just published in May of 2013, talks about unmarried fathers in the inner city of Philadelphia and Camden, New Jersey on how economic and cultural changes have transformed the meaning of fatherhood among the urban poor. In January of 2014, Dr. Edin published a section in the Shriver Report entitled, "What About Fathers?" where she discussed the diverse issues facing low-income men faced with becoming a father and building a life and family.

Formerly professor of public policy and management at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, Dr. Edin currently serves as a professor in the School of Sociology at John Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. Dr. Edin, I turn the conversation over to you.

**Dr. Edin**: Thank you so much, Damon, and I am really happy to talk with you all today. I know that many of you are experts on these subjects in your own right, so I look forward to learning from you during the Q and A that will follow my presentation. Let's go ahead and advance to the [Next slide]

So, the goal of this study was to really examine the problem of father absence among unmarried men. At the time I began the study, the public discourse about these men was really rich. [Next slide]

So, we begin here with a quote from David Blankenhorn, certainly on the right side of the political aisle. “The fathers never signed on to anything. They never agreed to abide by any fatherhood code. They did not have, they have never had an explicit obligation to either their children or to the mothers of their children.” [Next slide]

Also on the right, William Bennett wrote, "It is both the broken heart that is unmarried fathers who are missing in record numbers, who impregnate them and then selfishly leave. And it is these absent men above all who deserve our censure and disesteem.” [Next slide]

Moving to the left of the political aisle, we hear from Bill Cosby: "No longer is a boy considered an embarrassment if he tries to run away from being the father of an unmarried child." And, [Next slide]

Our own president writes before he was elected, made the following statement at the Apostolic Church of God in Chicago in his annual Father's Day sermon: "Fathers are missing, missing from too many lives and too many homes. They have abandoned their responsibilities, acting like boys instead of men. We need fathers to realize that the responsibility does not end at conception. We need them to realize that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child. It is the courage to raise one." [Next slide]

So the common diagnosis that we're hearing across the political spectrum is one of unmarried fathers not caring, for hit and run fatherhood of fathers who impregnate women and selfishly flee, and what we really set out to do here is to figure out whether lack of caring was the crack diagnosis or whether something else, more complex and more profound, was going on. [Next slide]

So, what we learned and what frankly stunned us, and I will tell you a story about this in a minute, from our eight years of conducting ethnographic observations of 110 men in Philadelphia and Camden was that in the broader culture, fathers have become more involved in their children's lives than ever before they really adopted this new father model where they are caregivers and not just breadwinners. What we learned from these interviews we conducted with these men was that they had an incredibly strong father first. They wanted to be different from the generation of men that raised them. They wanted to be there, not just be paychecks. They wanted to be active parents, watching, being there to observe the first steps, the first words. They really wanted to be 100 percent dads. [Next slide]

So, ethnography is a very valuable tool but representation of the general population is always an issue, so I'm going to turn to democracy for a minute to a nationally representative data source, and I kind of moonlighted the demographer when I'm not doing demography, and there is actually a lot of evidence that our men are actually acting in the way that they talk. They talk about when we interviewed them in their communities. We know that the vast majority show up at the hospital now and stayed for the birth of the child or at least showed up in the waiting room to visit their child. We know that the vast majority are voluntarily claiming paternity. They are not being forced to claim paternity, but they voluntarily do so often at the hospital. Surveys tell us that about 80 percent of unmarried fathers claim they're together in a romantic relationship when they're there at the hospital and the mothers agree. About 90 percent of the men and 75 percent of the women say in fact there is at least a 50-50 chance they will marry the child's other parent, and 98 percent of fathers say they plan to be involved in their child's life. So, from both the ethnography and the demography, we hear this story of the desire to really engage in the lives of their children. [Next slide]

So, if you can advance the slides, I want to tell the story from the field work of the first young man we interviewed when we first moved to Camden in the late 1990's to begin this study. We asked Andre Green, who was a teenager when he became a father, to describe the moment that he heard the news that he was going to become a dad, and he tells a story of his Aunt Shirleen meeting him at the door saying, "Hey, you know that girlfriend you used to have?" He would say, "yeah, what about her" and she said, "well, she's pregnant" and oddly relates a story of how he acted all put out in front of his aunt and in fact slamming his fist on the counter of the kitchen and stomping up the stairs to his bedroom, slamming the door as if really upset, and then looking around, you know to make sure none of his cousins were in the room, and then he says he began to dance around the room shouting, "thank you Jesus." Now, when we first heard this story, we were stunned. We thought he was an anomaly. We wondered if he was a little bit crazy. Could he, his reaction, possibly be a common one? And when we began to ask Andre why he responded the way he did, he really talked about the power of the child to ward off the negativity that he felt everywhere in the community. His brother had just lost his life to the streets, in fact, and his mother had returned to a drug addiction to sort of cope with the loss of her oldest son. He also spoke of the desire to redeem the past. He had a painful childhood where his father was absent and to quote him, "had children all over the place." So Andre described this process in which hearing the news that Sonya was pregnant sparked this desire to be better than his own father had done for him. And as we began, next slide, to interview more and more men, not all were as enthusiastic as Andre, but the vast majority were either calmly accepting or downright happy to hear the news. In another study that we conducted, we found that fathers were, in fact, more excited than mothers were to hear the news of a pregnancy. [Next slide]

So, just to give you a flavor of this data, again we say, so, what went through your mind when you first heard she was pregnant? Robert says, "Well I was excited, but then you realize he had me out there to support her. Ozzy simply says, "Well I always wanted one." James said, "When I first found out that she was pregnant, everything changed. I was like, 'I don't care if she's cheating. And at first I was so happy." Wilbur: "I was so happy, even in the back of my mind I wondered, 'is it mine?'" Stephen gave a response that was the most difficult. It was as if we were asking a strange question. "Well of course I was glad. It was no major obstacle." Let's go ahead to the [Next slide]

A few more examples of responses. Devon says, "It was my first son. I really looked forward to having him." George said, "You know I love you. I would love to have a child with you." Amin says, "even though I was not in love, I wanted a son." We are going to hear from Amin a bit later. [Next slide]

So one of the key questions of course was "what was your reaction when you first heard the news?" But another question we were really surprised by the answer to was the question, "what would life be like without your child?" Men would say, "Well, if I didn't have a kid, I wouldn't be having child support dogging me. I would be a, you know, a CPA by now. I would have a chance. I wouldn't be giving all of my income away to someone else. But instead, we heard responses like those that follow. [Next slide]

So Kevin says, "I would probably be in jail." Q thinks he would be dead. Mike also thinks he would be dead, and he says, "it has given me something to fight for, something like a destination. I've got to go somewhere." Apple says, "Kids give you something to live for." John feels more like a man." Seven says, "I couldn't imagine being without them because when I am spending time with my kids, it's like, now that is love. That is unconditional love. It's like the drug that you've got to have." [Next slide]

Again, we see from our white fathers talk of jail, talk of getting high, talking of being dead without one's kids. It's as if kids are life preservers. To quote Bill, "I would still be out there. I would still be on drugs and such. I think about my kids now and there's just this hope of getting a good relationship with them." [Next slide]

And here are some quotes from our Latino fathers that very, very much echo those of our white and fathers. They probably would have been dead. Carlos said, "I probably would have been dead a long time ago. I have friends that have died from overdoses of drugs, AIDS, and so on. I would have ended up like one of them." [Next slide]

So, we asked Elvis. Next slide, "What did you think your future was going to be like before you had him?" He said, "I wasn't going to live past the age of 30." And then once you had him? He said, "I can't even picture my life without Elvis in it." He named his son after him. "I had already made a promise to myself. I had told my friends I do not want to live past the age of 30. If I made it to 30 I am going to take myself out." He came into the picture when I was like 27 and all had changed. My whole life changed." [Next slide]

So similarly, we asked Lacie. [Next slide] "What would your life be like if you hadn't had your children?" "I can't imagine that one. I really can't, because my life without them, it would be empty, it would be empty, because that's what kept me going, knowing had to come out of jail and be there for him." "How did you see your future before you became a father?" "I didn't have a future. I didn't even care. I lived for the moment."

"Did you think you would live to see 42?"

"No, nobody expects me to be there to see 17."

"Did you imagine that you would be doing something career-wise?"

"No career. I would be a big gangster." [Next slide]

Nelson Rios summed it up when he told us, "Having kids, it's like a drug that you've got to have." [Next slide]

So, the good news is that if we believe these men's accounts, children may have a tremendous power to transform young, disadvantaged men's lives to give them a sense of hope, meaning, purpose, to, in one father's words, to give them a sense that they have a destination, something to go to, a reason to stay employed at that low-wage job.

My computer just kicked me out. I'm logging back in.

Okay, but the bad news is that the process of relationship formation, which I would describe to you next, makes the odds very long that the father will remain closely connected to his child throughout the child's life course. And next we will show what men end up doing when they end up accomplishing fatherhood or slaking this father’s thirst is through serial selective fathering. This is a highly uneven pattern of fathering that involves intensive investment with the young children, often with little or no investments in older children. I will talk about implications of that at the end. [Next slide]

So, let's look more carefully at this process of relationship formation. [Next slide]

Let's go to what men say about the courtships with their children's mothers. The courtship is probably not the right term here, but in men's own language there is no real language for describing this period in the couple's relationship. So we turn first to Amin Junketts who we heard from before, and he describes his courtship with Antoinette, his son’s mother in this way: "Well, my youngest son's mother, I met her at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital. She was attracted to me when I first saw her and I made my approach. We began to socialize and then communicate, and from there we began to affiliate. At some point in time we became intimate and my son was born." So there are two notable things about this quote. First of all, what is not mentioned in this quote is any mention of love or commitment, in words bureaucratic language like socialize, communicate and affiliate sort of take the place of those terms. Also the lack of intentionality with regard to the process of becoming a father is also evident and Amin is African American, but let's go ahead and turn the slide to a young man from the Fish Town section of Philadelphia, John Carr, who is Caucasian. He says, "Actually, she was dating a friend of mine and somehow she wanted me, but it was my friend's girl. So I didn't want to have nothing to do with it. But then my friend heard some shit and started talking shit, saying he would kick my ass, so I was like, 'whatever. Somebody will be with your girl.' Eventually I got stuck with her for a little while." So again, John Carr doesn't choose Rayann to be the mother of this child. She is just the woman he happens to be with, he happens to sort of get stuck with at the time a child is conceived. Let's turn now to a young man from the Fish Town Section. Go back to Swanson O'Brien of the Kensington section of Philadelphia, again a Caucasian respondent.

He says, "I was hanging out at a friend of mine's house and her and a couple of her friends were there. And then she used to go out with my friend. My friend was trying to get back with her and I ended up getting with her. We were only together for about two months and she was getting pregnant. I didn't mind at all." What is notable about Tim's response is that although two months is relatively fast even among our sample, the mobile amount of time before the first pregnancy leading to a live birth in this sample and several others is only six to seven months. And so these are very, very tentative relationships at the time a child is conceived. [Next slide]

But what we find is that the news of the pregnancy has tremendous transformative power. We might even think of these as shotgun relationships because it is really the announcement that a baby is going to be born that forges the relationship. The relationship isn't forged beforehand with the child is sort of the outgrowth of the relationship. It is really the news that a child is going to be born that coalesces these tentative liaisons into something more like what men call a relationship. So Will Donnelly in Fairview, he says, "I had just come out of a juvenile institution. I think I had just turned 17 and I started going with her friend, and then she came over and we started talking. Then I went with her and left her friend and me and her got together and started having kids together and then we got closer and closer. So then we started living together." So in Will’s world, getting closer and closer and living together, things that are accomplished after pregnancy or, in his case, even after he and his child's mother start having kids together. But what happens once pregnancy occurs? [Next slide]

So David Williams describes his courtship with Debra prior to pregnancy as follows: "When I was first with Debra I had a girlfriend on the side too, Kathy. She is someone that I met at the NA meeting, got close and we were helping each other with our addictions. One thing led to another and we got intimate. Me and Debra, we would get into an argument, she would tell me to leave. I would go stay with Kathy. So how did you end up with Kathy? Debra got pregnant and I had to do what was right." So again, he isn't really choosing Debra, he is ending up with her, but what happens when the pregnancy is announced? [Next slide]

"Each month of the pregnancy, you know, we got closer and closer. I wanted to be with her more. And then like two or three in the morning she had me running to Passmark buying different foods. So that brought us a lot closer too, and then watching him born brought us even closer. On her last push, he came out spinning like bullets. Nothing was more beautiful than Julian, the way he came out of this mother. That was amazing. And I held him, and I didn't want to let him go." [Next slide]

So, the process of relationship formation we document in “Doing the Best I Can” is one of accidental conception. Most men say when we ask them about the state of the relationship or whether they were planning to have a baby at the time the children were conceived, say, "I just wasn't thinking at the time." And only a tiny portion, less than one in five, say there was intentionality involved. There is more reason to worry about the process of relationship formation because the relationships with a woman who becomes their children's mothers are often highly tenuous, short courtships, little selectivity. "I just got stuck with her for a while" is a fairly stark statement and may be at the end of the spectrum, but still the sense that to end up with a person who becomes the mother of your child is very common. Pregnancy is what prompts the real relationship but in essence, what these men see as primary is the father-child relationship, not the mother-father relationship. So what they're really going for is a way to solidify their connection with the baby and not necessarily the mother of their children.

The third reason to worry is that the situations these men are in are often highly tenuous at the time. Their employment is unstable. They are often still in a pattern of drifting and running the streets and this lands them in prison, in jail, and with parole or probation violations. Many report substance abuse as problems and unstable housing really presents a barrier to visitation as well, so we have a context of sort of extreme risk even though men show this strong desire to father their children, they are doing so in very, very fragile circumstances. [Next slide]

So, the consequences of this pattern of relationship formation is that even though 80 percent come to the hospital and stay there together with the mother and most say that a good or at least there is a 50-50 chance that they are going to get married, half of these relationships end up dissolving in the first year and more than two-thirds by the child's fifth birthday. After these breakups we document a pattern of highly contentious co-parenting. Men and women then go on to re-partner and have subsequent children with their new partners, and these competing obligations lead to obligation overload for some of our men. When moms transferring to new partnerships, they often begin keeping the fathers away. We have both quantitative and qualitative evidence of this, not because they are necessarily mean-spirited, but because they are desperate now to keep the new relationship together. And when the new love of their loves is constantly being confronted by the old, there is a lot of drama in the household and a huge amount of conflict between these two men. So sometimes in order to keep a new relationship intact, women feel they have to really push the dad of another biological child out of the picture. I could talk more about maternal gate keeping in the Q and A. [Next slide]

So rather than the typical family looking like this, and this is kind of I think what we had imagined before we got this rich demographic data that shows the extent of complex families at the bottom end of the income distribution. [Next slide]

Many men are enmeshed in families that look like this, so this just kind of represents the obligation overload they may be facing and the sheer complexity of managing all of these ties. [Next slide]

So to draw from a national representative data source, a national longitudinal survey views, we asked fathers to tell us about the child you are most involved with and we have both fathers that have the children all with one mother and those fathers who have children by more than one mother, and we see in both cases a very high rate of intensive involvement with the child they are most involved with, even among those with multiple partner fertility we see a rate of 85 percent, and it is over 90 percent for men with all of their children with one mother.

So that looks pretty good, but if we turn to the next slide, what we see is that when we asked fathers to describe the child they are least involved with, I think we skipped a slide there, we see that fully half the fathers report that they are involved very little, if at all, with the mother of their biological children, so again, they are being saints to one child's welfare, they could rightfully be called virtual deadbeats to another one of their biological children. [Next slide]

So here is a case in point. This is David Williams, who we quoted earlier. He is very involved with his son Julian, who is now one, and Debra's two children from a prior relationship. Those children's fathers are in jail. But he has no relationship with his two sons aged 12 and 13 from ex number two, and has only sporadic visitation with his 17- and 18-year-old daughter on holidays. So, if you look from Debra's perspective or from the prospective of the household he is actually participating the most in, he is super dad while he is a real failure if you look from the point of view of his other four children. [Next slide]

So, the bottom line is the process of relationship formation puts fathers on a family-go-round and, more importantly, for policy it puts children on a father-go-round, and this often leaves them with no adult male that ends up investing in them throughout their early life course all the way through high school graduation and into college. When their mothers transition to new partners, those partnerships are often always fragile, leaving kids sort of moving from one parent to another, and with little long-term investment and a lot of trauma over the repeated separations they experience. [Next slide]

So what should we do? I think we've maybe underestimated the power of information that we could put into the hands of young men. Sometimes they joke that we need a national campaign for early and unplanned childbearing for men, and people at the national campaign say well, we are gender-neutral here. We want to serve both. But many times I think we have approached the problem of pregnancy intentionality by giving information to women and not to men. I was doing a presentation for the child welfare folks in New York City and a young father was on the panel with men, and I raised the suggestion, someone in the audience as well, he said men's brains aren't yet fully formed, how can they possibly benefit from information. My co-presenter, this young father, Elliot, stood up and said, "You spent six years teaching me about STD's in sex ed. class, why didn't you tell me about child support? And why didn't you tell me it would be so difficult to stay engaged with my child if I didn't have a good relationship with his mother?" So, we might want to think about prevention strategies that, to take a line from the Ian Flood intervention in New York called "Stop, Look and Listen" that has proved so effective for keeping young men from re-engaging in criminal activity. We should find ways to get men to think about the process of family formation in a more intentional way and in a way that could satisfy their father's thirst more fully and perhaps not lead to this pattern of serial selective fathering we see.

Second, we should capitalize on father thirst. We should capitalize on the potential for childbirth and fatherhood to really transform the lives of men and of course we could in all kinds of ways about improving access to children but as fathers say, the worst thing that they experience, and this is not true in all jurisdictions but it is true in most, is that if you're not married to the mother of the child and you get a child support order, there was no automatic process granting you parenting time. They called this taxation without representation and to them, this really makes them feel that the state is treating them merely as a paycheck and not as a parent. They often sometimes frankly feel that the state and the public at large views them as predators, and they feel that they have a real role to play as parents. [Next slide]

So I will end with that. As you will see there is a discount code here for participants if you go to the University of California web site. There is also a web site, "Doing the Best I Can," which shows lots of images of these dads with their kids plus other material. Perhaps some of the folks I'm talking to here, we have links to some of the things that they are doing. But I will end there and open it up for questions, and thank you again for signing in and listening.

**Allen Bediako, ICF International**: As a reminder everyone, you can submit questions online through the Q and A pod on the top right hand corner of your screen, or you can press star one if you are called in to and you would be placed in the queue to ask your questions. So operator, if there is anyone in the queue now, we can start with phone questions first.

**Operator**: We have no one at this time.

**Allen Bediako**: Kathy, while we wait for questions to come in from our audience, we have some here that maybe can spark some additional questions for you. Given the current labor market and some of the challenges that you talked about with regard to getting these individuals, these men, economically stable, what are some additional recommendations to help them get those formal skills, that formal education, and also navigate those social relationships that they have, if they have that multi-partner families and they have all those kids and everything, in dealing with that psychological trauma that they are definitely having to deal with, what are some of the things you, some insights you can offer on how to help programmatically these men address all of that?

**Dr. Edin**: Yeah, so, you know, the failure of these young men to stay involved in their kids' lives in almost over determined. They are facing such tremendous obstacles. And what I didn't mention is trauma from the family of origin. Many of these men had really difficult childhoods, and you know, this is an era in which their own fathers often didn't stay involved, and you know, their mothers might have been struggling with unemployment. They may have been working all the time, leaving the kids to raise themselves and in order to make ends meet, substance abuse also really affected this generation of parents of these men in ways that left real scars on their children, so they bring with them this tremendous fertility.

They do experience tremendous difficulty in the labor market. One thing I would like to point out is that we, we talk a lot about the minimum wage and that's very important. But what's really the fundamental struggle these men face in the labor market is not being able to get full-time work. Low-income employers have decided that they don't want to hire people full-time, and in fact there are incentives for them not to do so. But they really expect 100 percent availability, so the ability to take a job is really limited, so you know we've got dads who are trying to raise families on a 25-hour a week McDonald's job. You know, there is a willingness to work, even men without criminal records really find it hard to find the kind of full-time work that even, you know, even if only at minimum wage or close to minimum wage, could nonetheless help that a lot, so that's a real struggle. But I think what ends up happening is that poor prospects plus traumatic childhoods can limit men's ability to persevere, and that's where children come in. If we could figure out a way to really capitalize on men's desire to be good dads, and really what they want to do is they want to participate in the every-day aspects of parenting. They want to do, put the hair in twists, they want to bring their daughter to church, they want to, you know, take their son to water rides. They want, this is the Philadelphia, treat them to Italian ice, they want to, they really want to be there, you know, they want to read to their kids before bed. They want to do, in many ways what they want to do is what mothers have, the roles mothers have been typically assigned, and as long as we, by really treasuring and honoring their desire to be more involved in practical ways, I think we could really strengthen their resolve to persevere. Many of us wouldn't be able to persevere in the circumstances they end up in. So it's going to take a lot and children seem to be the most meaningful thing in these father's lives, and the point is the transition to fatherhood seems to be a real magic moment we could capitalize on more.

**Allen Bediako**: So we have questions coming in online as well, and the first question we have is for those fathers that may be on public assistance, what is the best way for social workers to reach out to these fathers and get them not only involved in the families, but enrolled in supportive services to get them out of the social service system?

**Dr. Edin**: Okay, so very few men of our men were on public assistance from work, you know, the laws were changing around that time, but this is a hard problem. You know, public assistance pays, as you know, very little money. I'm not sure how to answer that question. Certainly the men we talked to who find themselves on public assistance would like to work more conventional jobs, but these of course are the men with significant barriers. So, you know, it's very hard to imagine, given the limitations of the policy environment we are now in, what we might do about this. Certainly providing public jobs might be one solution.

**Allen Bediako**: And then to follow up on that question, we have a question regarding what available tools or recommendations might you have for those practitioners who are working with fathers on relationship formation?

**Dr. Edin**: Well, you know, basic information, for example, on the impact of multiple-partner fertility and child support would be helpful. And you all know that you are more expert at this than I am, but you know, the percentage of your income you are going to pay for three children across three households is much higher than them which are going to pay for three children in one household is a key piece of information that fathers don't seem to have. They know about child support, but they don't know the intricacies, and when they end up with a child support order of close to 50 percent because they have had three kids across three different households, that becomes unsustainable. Also, if we taught men, and in some states they are actually doing this, right? In high schools, if we taught men about parenting, about you know, their importance in children's lives that perhaps the most important thing you do, frankly, is to convince the women in their lives that they are important. The theme of maternal gatekeeping that I mentioned earlier is really significant. Moms often not only want to keep her new relationship together, but she can be lulled into thinking that this new dad is going to be the father her child really needs and you know, it's kind of okay to push away the biological dad. She often treats up partner quality so it is tempting to think that the part-time electrician she is now with is a little bit better than the unemployed caterer she used to be with, you know, so that's another reason for gate keeping, like, often times it is, you know, I spent my early career studying mothers and, you know they're all for single mothers, but oftentimes they, you know, don't have a strong sense of the importance of the men in their lives and really the only way to keep the father involved is, you know, is to get over sort of this drama in the household when two men are sort of competing for the same child, both the social father and the biological father, is to have the mother in there playing a nurturing and supportive role. Complex families are complex, however, and in the end, if fathers can think and be more intentional about the pregnancies, we may see less multiple-partner fertility if we can use some of the insights of causing this behavioral therapy to get men to engage in what economists call slow thinking rather than fast thinking, and that is what the intervention in Chicago I mentioned, the Stop, Look and Listen intervention, is focusing on. We can not only get men to commit less crime, but, and graduate from high school more often, that perhaps we can get them to be more intentional about their pattern of family formation as well.

**Allen Bediako:** Do we have any questions coming in through the phone?

**Operator**: Not at this time but as a reminder, it is star one.

**Dr. Edin**: I wanted to mention one more thing while we're waiting. That is that, ultimately, this is about hope. I mean, the reason children become so important to men who are in such desperate circumstances is because that's all there is. They're really grabbing on to children to make meaning.

**Allen Bediako**: All right, we have three additional questions, and the first one I'll post to you. Many of these fathers will be hourly workers and have opportunity for hours that are evenings and weekends and cannot be available for their children. We are addressing the concerns about money, but what has the research foundation about scheduling logistics?

**Dr. Edin**: Yes, so this is a big problem, right? This is kind of an interesting he said and she said in the data because in my prior book, "Promises I Could Keep" with Maria J. Kefalas, was about the single mothers in these communities. They are the partners of these men. And what moms really expect from men is, you know, dependability. They want men to visit at a regular time and they want them to show up when they say they will. These are all reasonable things, but the chaos of men's work lives and, you know, what is really interesting is that this is part of a larger study of 440 low-income men in four cities. Even men who appear to be unemployed are working at something, right, because nobody is willing to pay the bills of the man. Men are expected to support themselves, so they are not only, you know, working at hourly jobs, but they have got all of obstacles to get by. They may have a ladder, you know, a paint brush, a drop cloth and a grocery store card. They may work on the weekends doing side jobs as painters. They may buy equipment and do extermination or power washing on the weekends, so they have all kinds of things they are doing, and this really makes their visitation patterns very catch as catch can, which of course infuriates mom, and especially if she is trying to build a firewall between, you know, her child, or between her ex-partner and her current partner. Many of these guys are forced to see their children in the context of the mother's household because they don't have stable housing of their own and, in fact, if there is one thing after doing all this work I would say is just a really crucial problem we have overlooked is the problem of housing for these men, especially the kind of housing that will allow them to have overnight visits and really spend one-on-one time with their children outside of the purview of the mother and the mother's new partner. So, again, if mothers and fathers could be brought together, if co-parenting strategies, you know, oftentimes in fatherhood programs were limited because fathers are the ones coming to the door and we can't really deal with the couple. But really what we need is a couple-level intervention where mothers and fathers can see one another's point of view. A father can understand that mom needs more stability in the pattern of visitation. Mom also needs to understand that fathers are working multiple jobs that are highly contingent and unpredictable. If those points of view can be reconciled and if we can figure out a way to get men more access to stable housing, some of these problems can be eased.

**Allen Bediako**: Thank you. And our next question, in what ways, if any, can we help shift the paradigm in relationships from the clinical, non-emotional, to the relational and intimate with commitment?

**Dr. Edin**: Yeah, so that's a very, very good question. You know, what's interesting is when you talk about the relationships these men have with their children's mothers, you ask them about it, it is rare that the words love and commitment come up. So that's really striking, right? But if you ask men about marriage, not only will they tell you that they want it, but they'll tell you that they are waiting for a soul mate. In fact, one man in his 30's during his screen said that the kind of love he was looking for, you know, was that crazy love, and to roughly quote him he said, "You know, when you stand out in the rain under the window in the dark waiting for her light to come on." So men have very romantic notions of finding a soul mate. And what's plain about these accounts is they really fundamentally don't believe they will find a woman who will love them through thick and thin. They just think their own circumstances are such that they are going to be rejected by the women in their lives. Also, you know, they have these highly romanticized ideas about what they want in a partner, but they tend to have children with whoever happens to be around at the time that a pregnancy occurs. So the plain Jane who is one's child's mother is just not very likely to end up being, you know, the woman of their dreams, and so they often really separate the notions of my soul mate from my children's mother. Many of these men have very few role models as you can imagine of these kind of soul mate relationships, so this is possibly part of why they become so romanticized. One thing the state of Oklahoma has done is it has put married and unmarried low-income couples together in their relationship skills classes, and it's really striking to watch the unmarried couples. I visited the state many times. How these unmarried couples would relate to these young married couples, all of these are Medicaid, these are folks that have a Medicaid birth and they really see that people like them can make it and can have a committed relationship is really inspiring.

**Allen Bediako**: Thank you. And next question? Fixing the taxation without representation fees by entering parenting time orders is one thing that child support programs can do to improve working relationships with young fathers. Given the child support mandate and core purpose, what are things can these particular state-run programs do to flex and meet the needs of men not living with their children so they stay more engaged over the long haul?

**Dr. Edin**: So, one thing I think, you know, child support has a limited budget, but bringing it up to the moment, turning the child support agency into an agency that serves couples and families rather than the agency that serves women and treats men as the enemy is the goal here. And there's a lot of, you know, sort of, history to be overcome. In some ways the child support system we have now was made for the generation of men before this one. There was a generation of men, we have documentation in both surveys data and in ethnographic data from prior generations who really did cut and run, who really didn't maintain contact with their kids or even desire it outside of the context of the relationship they had with the children's mother. And our current child support system still operates on that assumption. You know, it's, what we need to think about is a more nimble system that doesn't try to force parent, men to care, but takes advantage of their desire to care. So one example is in kind child support. Almost all men prefer to giving time than cash, and they often prefer to divide things that are either highly symbolic of their care like Pampers and tennis shoes, Pampers and wipes, that allow them to come over often, like, if you're constantly supplying the Pampers and the formula, right, you get to visit, you get to stop by all the time. Fathers love this. And that's, when the children are older, they like to give things that go directly to the kids so that a pair of tennis shoes becomes, you know, a constant reminder to their son of their care and, you know, and their love for that child, so by sort of making, if child support makes the provision of paternal care invisible, right, it takes it right out of the dad's paycheck and funnels it right to the mom without, sort of, ensuring or facilitating any kind of direct relationship between the father and the child, building on this tons of magic of any kind of child support, is might give it some purchase. Are there ways that fathers could be credited for caring for their children more directly via the child support system? Are there ways that the agreements between moms and dads could be made so that in-kind items could be regularly offered in lieu of some of the cash that fathers owe? Are there ways to build up this fragile family rather than tear it down via, sort of, the blunt, you know, the blunt state? So treating the process of, you know, building up the fragile family rather than, you know, soaking the blood out of the stone to benefit the child I think is where we need to go and a lot of folks in the child support world know this and are eager to try.

**Allen Bediako**: Alright and our final online question we have regards Native American fathers and do you have any statistics on them?

**Dr. Edin**: I don't. It's, yeah, I really apologize, but I don't have any data at all on Native American populations.

**Julia Conte**: Hi, this is actually Julia Conte, Office of Family Assistance, and I was wondering, can you talk a little bit about what these fathers see as the role in the lives of their non-biological children, so when they are visiting in the hospital with some mom who might have a kid from another father, do they also feel very connected to that child, or what does that relationship look like?

**Dr. Edin**: That's an excellent question. So, it depends, and it mainly depends on the child's age and the participation of the child's father. So, it's, a guy like, we looked at David Williams in that six-figure graphic I showed. David came in to Debra's kids’ lives when they were fairly young and they don't have an ongoing relationship with their own dad because he is incarcerated and, in fact, the little daughter asked David if she could call him Dad, and this just broke him up, “you know”, he said, “man, maybe I'm better than I think I am but this child is asking me to be her dad and it's a very, very touching moment in this life, one that he, you know, he, the pride while relating it to us.” But you know, men can be very, very attached to their social children. They get a lot of credit from the moms because this is a relationship in which they are not obligated to give anything so they are sort of given extra credit for what they do for their social children in ways they actually they don't get for their biological children. The problem is when that relationship breaks up, mom seldom views it as legitimate for the dad to stay involved. So we have dads who have really taken on social children as their own and seek to make no distinction between the bio and social children within a household if the relationship breaks up and suddenly mom won't let that man talk to his non-biological child on the phone or have any contact. So this is kind of a heartbreak for the men. You can see the mom's position, you know, he is enough trouble, I'm not going to, you know, the co-parenting relationship is often so poor that these relationships end up going by the wayside and this is why I think the father-go-round is so deleterious to kids. Even if you do bond with a social father, that bond is likely to be ripped away when mom and dad break up. So these highly unstable, highly complex families that have really proliferated at the bottom of the income distribution pose real challenges for fatherhood not only of biological children, but of social children as well.

**Damon Waters**: And just before we wrap up, Kathy, if you could just give some quick insights about where you see the next phase of research and in programming with regard to responsible fatherhood and family formation and relationship skill building, what recommendations you could make on how to increase or improve the economic and the social stability for these very, very fragile families and fathers?

**Dr. Edin**: Well, I have, you know, through my pie-in-the-sky recommendations and some more rubber-meets-the-road recommendations. I do think that we could work very systematically throughout all of our social institutions to send the message that really, there are no single mothers. And if you look at the data, this is true and in the fragile families and child well-being study, which is a nationally representative survey of urban births beginning in 2000, you see only four percent of women staying stabile single throughout the child's first five years of life, so if we change our point of view and realize that these really are fragile families, and not single mothers, and we begin to incorporate the fathers in every way that we can just, you know, maybe, it's a radical sort of change of vision, but it is one that doesn't really require money. It just requires attentiveness. So that is kind of a very simple thing we can do. Pie in the sky, we extend the earned income tax credit to dads or maybe even more generally to singles because everyone deserves to make a living wage if they are willing to play by the rules and go to work and work a significant number of hours. So I think this co-parenting piece is really, really key as well as the prevention piece. So those are two new areas I think we can really push and how do we get guys to plan their pregnancies? Can we get them to stop, look, and listen with pregnancy just like they do, we've gotten them to do for crime? And can we find ways to bring mom in and to create an environment in which mom is dad's friend and facilitator and not his adversary?

**Damon Waters**: Thank you so much, Dr. Edin. You have given us definitely a lot of information, a lot to think about, and we really appreciate you taking the time, we appreciate everyone for calling in for the brown bag. We encourage everyone to join us for the next brown bag which will be scheduled on July 9th at 12:00 p.m. and will feature Dr. David Pate and focus on toxic stress among men and boys of color. Stay tuned for more information on that brown bag, but coming off this presentation by Kathy, we will definitely get a better insight into what's going on in the mind of some of these low-income men, especially the men and boys of color. So again, on behalf of James Butler and the Office of Family Assistance, thank you, Dr. Edin, and thank you everyone. Have a good day.

**Operator**: Thank you and again, this does conclude today's OFA Brown Bag Webinar Series, "Fatherhood in the Inner City." We do appreciate your patience.