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**CONFRONTING
THE CRISIS OF
ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE
NONRESIDENT FATHERS**

FAILING OUR FATHERS

The Bottom Line

- If the 1980s were the decade of the Deadbeat Dad and
- The 1990s, the decade of the Deadbroke Dad
- The 2020's should be the decade in which we recognize that there is a broad swath of dads in the middle about which little attention is paid
- These fathers make up to \$40,000 annually, when they are working, which was most of the time before the recession
 - They are much larger and more diverse population than most people think
 - They are major targets of the expansion of health care reform
 - Major part of the expansion of the EITC to nonresident fathers, which many policymakers contemplated before the recession,
 - To provide the same support to working poor and near poor NCPs as the federal EITC provides to single mothers and their children
 - And they need help to if we are slow the growth of

Divergent Trends

- In the 1980s, *Making Fathers Pay* popularized the Deadbeat Dad, which helped to galvanize the nation efforts to make child support enforcement much tougher
- Oddly, our commitment to child support at the Federal level began at the same time that we began a 40 year decline in the earnings of men without graduate degrees.
- In other words, the office of child support was created in 1974 to coordinate child support enforcement, and over the next two decades as we strengthen our ability to collect child support, the ability of men without graduate degrees to support their children has declined.

Policies Towards Nonresident Fathers

- Historically we have focused on collecting child support from nonresident fathers because child support:
 - Reduces the gap between their children and children living in two-parent families.
 - accounts for 25 percent of the income of single parent families
 - Reduces poverty in single-mother families.
 - Improves child development.
 - Is associated with visitation

Vulnerable Nonresident Fathers: Growth...

- However the number of nonresident fathers unable to meet their child support obligations has grown and become much more diverse since that time because of
 - changes in family-related attitudes and behavior
 - long-term declines in male earnings
- Perhaps 9 percent of all adult men between 15 and 44 years old are nonresident fathers who are unable to provide adequate support for their children.
- Prior to the 2007-2009 recession, most of these fathers were among the working poor or near poor.

...and diversity

- Although men of color are overrepresented among vulnerable nonresident fathers, more than half of the men in this population are white and more than two thirds of them worked full-time.
- Most Americans have an ex-husband, brother, cousin, or nephew who is a vulnerable nonresident father
- Yet we know little about this population, or
 - What efforts they make to stay in contact with their children,
 - What barriers they face in making these efforts,
 - How these efforts may contribute to child's health and well-being, and
 - How these contributions might be increased.

More on Diversity

- In the 1980s and 1990s, sociologists, particularly, William Julius Wilson and Elijah Anderson popularized the idea of the marginalization of black and Latino men in urban areas as the US economy restructured
- But virtually all men without college degrees experienced declines in their earnings since the mid-1970s
- Further 40% of US births are to unmarried women and the majority of births to American women over thirty are now non-marital births
- Therefore nonresident fatherhood is widespread among young men who lack postsecondary schooling and high earnings

How Many ..

- There are 7.5 million nonresident fathers in America, about 5.3 million earned no more than \$40,000 (NSFG).
- There are 9.5 million nonresident fathers, but only about 40% have child support orders (TRIM 3).
- Only 40% of nonresident fathers paid all the child support they owed; but only 33% of nonresident fathers making up to \$40,000 paid all the child support they owed.
- We think of this group earning up to \$40,000 as vulnerable because most are poorly educated, fully employed, and they have to choose among poverty, near-poverty or supporting their children.

Annual Income and Expenditures among Non-Custodial Fathers, 2010

Earnings		\$20,000		\$30,000		\$40,000	
Non-resident children		1	2	1	2	1	2
Child Support		(3,400)	(5,000)	(5,100)	(7,500)	(6,800)	(10,000)
Taxes & Credits							
Federal Taxes			49		281		171
State Taxes			(26)		(86)		(130)
Other Taxes			(60)		(79)		(90)
Expenses							
Housing			(10,975)		(11,927)		(13,578)
Transportation			(4,355)		(5,556)		(6,664)
Food			(3,850)		(4,446)		(5,199)
Healthcare			(2,352)		(2,794)		(2,933)
Apparel			(1,023)		(1,196)		(1,317)
Personal Care Products & Services			(364)		(403)		(450)
Net disposable income		(6,354)	(7,954)	(1,304)	(3,704)	3,011	(189)

SOURCE: Consumer Expenditure Survey, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, September, 2010

NOTE: Expenditures for the thresholds shown were calculated as the linear interpolation of the CES reported averages for the income classes just below and above the threshold shown.

Mancession Made Matters Worse

- Because male employment is concentrated in manufacturing and construction, rose more for men than women during the great recession.
- And consequences are far from over because of average unemployment duration has risen to a historic high of more than 30 weeks.
- In July 2011
 - 4 percent of the labor force reported that they had been unemployed for more than six months,
 - 3/4's unemployed for more than a year.

Cascading During the Recession

- 50% of job loses during the great recession found only part-time jobs
- Only a fourth of workers who lost his job found a new job 30 months
- Over half of workers who found new jobs had to take a pay cut

Recession: Harder on Vulnerable Nonresident Fathers

- By the demographic characteristics vulnerable nonresident fathers were more vulnerable to the recession
 - More likely to be men of color
 - Less likely to have post- secondary schooling
- 40 percent less likely to be employed than resident fathers (Fragile Families).

Making ends meet

- Vulnerable nonresident fathers experienced similar hardships during the recession and adjusted in similar ways
 - Unable to meet basic expenses
 - Depleted savings and unemployment insurance
 - Borrowed from friends and family
 - Doubling up

Except, Vulnerable Nonresident Fathers Talked Much More about Irregular Work

- A constant for chronically unemployed fathers (with felonies)
- A temporary adjustment strategy for working-poor fathers
 - Prior qualitative studies associate irregular work with men of color in the inner cities, especially fathers, but
 - Studies based on Fragile Families shows that irregular work (along with regular work) is quite common among vulnerable fathers.

Education Regret

- Vulnerable fathers believed in the achievement ideology: More education would have
 - raised their earnings and
 - insulated them from the recession
- Regretted getting derailed from their educational paths when they were younger.
- Whether high school dropouts or college graduates, most of the vulnerable fathers wanted to return to school, but could not because of their child support obligations
- Fathers learned this lesson the hard way, and overwhelmingly wished to save their children from making the same mistakes.
- They worked hard to stay present in their children's educational lives, by maintaining the emotional
- But were still much less engaged than resident fathers especially in their children's schools.

Barriers to Father Involvement

- Co-parenting Support
- Gatekeeping
- Repartnering and Multiple Partner Fertility
- Domestic Violence: The Deal Breaker
- Distance
- Limited access and visitation
 - Unmarried-no parenting time
 - Divorced-standardized visitation
- Incarceration
- Street Life

Policy Reforms

- Slow and steady progress in muting the adverse effects of automated child support enforcement on vulnerable fathers,
 - Incarceration as voluntary unemployment
 - Lowering fees for medications of child support orders
 - Compromise arrears (mainly for TANF cases, poor fathers, and ex-offenders)
 - Parenting-Time
- But these changes are more likely to provide relief to chronically unemployed than working-poor fathers

To Help Working-Poor Among Vulnerable Fathers We Need:

- An NCP_EITC more generous than programs in NY and Washington, DC
 - Use of a generously interpreted self support reserve to enable them to meet the full compliance criteria.
- Allow temporary modifications while attending community college to help them achieve wage growth overtime.
- Lower fees for modifications and modification conferences with non-TANF, custodial mothers
- Higher means test for participation in Assets for Independence
 - Because they their employment will stabilize, even at lower wages, after the recession, they can take advantage of matched savings
 - Tie participation to child savings accounts and arrears compromise arrangements with non-TANF custodial mothers.
- Expand access and visitation and access to keep them in the game.