



To:



United States House of Representatives
Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Human Resources

Testimony of:

AMERICAN FATHERS COALITION

Presented by:

Stuart A. Miller
Senior Legislative Analyst
Washington, DC

Topic:

*“Re-engaging Men... in the
Business of Parenting”*

FOR THE RECORD

2000 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Ste. 148
Washington, D.C. 20006
<http://www.erols.com/afc>
(800) 978-DADS

TESTIMONY OF: Stuart A. Miller, Senior Legislative Analyst, American Fathers Coalition

Madam Chair and Honorable Members:

The American Fathers Coalition applauds Chairwoman Nancy Johnson and the rest of the esteemed members of this Committee for the efforts they are making to find ways to more meaningfully include fathers in children's lives.

This proposal is a step in the right direction and we support this initiative. However, we don't feel that this proposal goes quite far enough. Our primary concern is that this proposal seems to do little to nothing for divorced fathers, whom we proffer face similar, if not greater obstacles, to involvement in their children's lives as do the targets of this initiative.

The detrimental and well documented consequences of father absence are not limited to children from socially or economically disadvantaged families. Children from all walks of life are suffering the consequences of father absence. Those same children, like all children... love, want and need fathers involved in their day-to-day lives. Obviously we are talking about the super-majority of fathers, the 99.9% of fathers that are not a threat to their children... fathers who could be involved in their children's lives, but for one reason or another, are not.

There is no greater crisis facing America today that the degradation of the two-parent, married, intact family. We need to do everything we can to restore and prop-up that most preferred living arrangement for children. However, when that living arrangement breaks down, we need to do everything we can to try to ensure that children are allowed to have the maximum involvement of both parents in their lives. In particular, we need to provide a support structure for all fathers. We need to enable and encourage them to be there for their children. When you have a weak link in a chain, you support the weak link. It makes no sense to put so much strain on that link that you practically ensure that it will break. AFC suggests that this is exactly what have done... encouraged the link to break... and we have allowed it to remain broken.

Congress has taken a very active role in trying to ensure that children's needs are met. But, with regard to parents, those efforts have been primarily focused on the financial needs of children. Until now, the arguably more important needs of children... the physical, emotional and psychological needs have received far less attention than they deserve.

Some detractors to father involvement suggest that this is an area that is best left up to the states. And it may be. However, the same rationale that prompted Congress to get involved in the financial support of children would also clearly justify Congress' involvement in these other areas, too. As a matter of fact, pursuing efforts to maximize father involvement in children's lives may be the most productive and most cost effective means of financial child support collection. Census Bureau Statistics, based on mother-only reporting and a host of reputable studies show a direct correlation between father involvement and financial child support compliance. Where fathers have joint-custody 90.2% pay all of their support on time and in full. Where fathers have visitation, almost 80% (79.1%) pay all of their support on time and in full.

With the vast majority of child support cases being non-TANF cases, Congress should allow divorced dads to participate in Congressional fatherhood initiatives, too.

THANK YOU.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

WOMEN MAY BE INHIBITING GREATER FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN FAMILY WORK

Premier Family Journal Publishes First Study to Define and Document "Maternal Gatekeeping"

PROVO, UT 6 April 1999

With dual-income families now the norm, why are many women still carrying the majority of the responsibility for housework and child-care? Is it because of the "lazy husband" who only wants to watch TV when he returns home, or the "macho man" whose responsibility it is to take out the garbage, not change a diaper? While fingers have pointed at men, new research looks at the other side - how women may inhibit the collaborative efforts they are requesting.

The current issue of the Journal of Marriage and the Family includes the first study to define and empirically document "maternal gatekeeping." The study explores how women's beliefs and behaviors may actually be one of the potential factors inhibiting a collaborative effort between men and women in housework and child-care. The article is based on a sample of 622 dual-earner mothers.

"While many mothers in the work force feel they need more support in family work, most don't even realize their actions may be placing obstacles in the way. They, themselves, may be limiting the amount of their husband's involvement," said Sarah Allen, author of the study and recent Brigham Young University graduate student.

Maternal gatekeeping is defined as having three dimensions including the following:

- 1) Mother's reluctance to relinquish responsibility for family matters by setting rigid standards;
- 2) the need for external validation of one's mothering identity; and
- 3) traditional conceptions of family roles.

Included in these dimensions is the various ways wives manage, exclude or choose their husband's levels and types of paternal participation in family work. According to the study, 20 to 25 percent of dual-earner wives may be classified as "gatekeepers." It is also interesting to note that the conceptualized dimensions of maternal gatekeeping tend to be a "package deal"; mothers higher in one dimension, were generally higher in the other two as well.

Standards and Responsibilities

Some women discourage their husband's involvement by redoing tasks, criticizing, creating unbending standards or demeaning his efforts to protect authority in the home. This is most evident when wives act as household managers by organizing, delegating, planning, scheduling and overseeing the work done by husbands in order to maintain responsibility for the day-to-day aspects of family work. Their husbands, then, act as helpers by doing what is requested. But, this

WOMEN MAY BE INHIBITING GREATER FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN FAMILY WORK (cont.)

pattern may also encourage fathers to wait until they are asked to help and to request explicit directions.

Maternal Identity Confirmation

Rather than issues of control and management, in this dimension of gatekeeping, it is common for a woman's self-identity to be tied to how well she thinks others view her homemaking and nurturing skills. Because of this belief, she is more likely to resist her husband's involvement, as it would diminish her value.

Differentiated Family Roles

Differentiated family roles refer to roles for mothers and fathers that reflect a clear division of labor and distinct spheres of influence. Here, a mother who thinks family work is primarily for women may be hesitant to encourage paternal involvement and increase the likelihood she will monitor her husband's involvement.

As stated in the study, some women both cherish and resent being the primary care-giver, feel both relieved and displaced with paternal involvement, are both intentional and hesitant about negotiations for more collaborative sharing, and feel guilty and liberated with more involvement from men in family work. This ambivalence about increased paternal involvement serves to keep the gate to the domestic garden periodically swinging open and closed with gusts of wind invisible to fathers.

"This is a very complex subject filled with a variety of gender issues," said Alan Hawkins, second author of the study and director of the BYU Family Studies Center. "While the term has been loosely used in the field, no one has previously investigated its many dimensions or adequately defined it. With more attention to these issues, perhaps more mothers will be able to achieve greater collaboration with their partners."

The maternal gatekeeping study was conducted and written by Sarah M. Allen and Alan J. Hawkins, research associates of the BYU Family Studies Center. Alan is one of the few graduate students to have her master's thesis published in the premier journal in the field.

BYU Family Studies Center The Brigham Young University Family Studies Center is dedicated to conducting quality family research and providing valuable information to families that will enhance their lives. The Center has the largest concentration of family research faculty in the nation and is eager to become a valuable resource for family related issues.

Contact Fathers' Loss of School Involvement

Journal of Family Studies, Vol 4, No 2, Oct, 1998, pp201-214.

Ronald J Baker, M Psych & PhD candidate, School of Psychology, Curtin University of Technology, Western Australia. School Psychologist, Non Government Schools Psychology Service, W.A.

Anne M McMurray, PhD, Professor and Dean, Faculty of Nursing and Health, Griffith University, Queensland.

Correspondence and requests for reprints should be addressed to the first author, Ron Baker, School of Psychology, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box 1987, Perth, WA, 6001. Phone (08) 9279 1702.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore contact fathers' involvement in their children's schooling. Twenty fathers were interviewed and data analysis sought to describe and interpret common patterns and themes. Four key findings emerged from the study:

- (a) all fathers who participated expressed a strong desire for school involvement, and believed they had a responsibility to be involved;
- (b) the majority of fathers were not currently involved;
- (c) the majority of fathers reported that they were prevented from or obstructed in their efforts to become involved;
- (d) fathers reported that the loss of their children was the major consequence of separation and divorce and that this sense of loss extended to loss of involvement in their children's schooling.

The findings from this study will be of relevance to practitioners and policy makers in law, education, and mental health in developing policies consistent with changes to Commonwealth Family Law.