

STRONG FATHERS EVALUATION FINDINGS
Joan Pennell, RV Rikard, and Ann Scheunemann

March 2014

What are the desired outcomes of Strong Fathers?

The overall goal is enhanced safety and well-being for victims and survivors of domestic violence and their children. The intended outcomes are for the participants to:

- Increase their knowledge and demonstrated competence in parenting;
- Increase their knowledge regarding the deleterious effects of domestic violence on children, including the identification of negative consequences of violence;
- Increase empathy toward their children; and
- Reduce controlling, coercive, and/or abusive behaviors towards the current or former intimate partner (child's parent).

The goal of Strong Fathers is to increase the safety and well-being of children and their children's mothers by helping the men learn positive ways of relating to them.

To measure the outcomes of Strong Fathers, the program needs to be delivered with fidelity to its curriculum. What steps are taken to promote model fidelity?

- Curriculum is detailed in manual;
- Facilitators are trained to deliver curriculum;
- Co-facilitation is usually carried out by one man and one woman;
- Reflecting the group participants, at least one co-facilitator is African American; and
- At the end of each session, the co-facilitators separately prepare notes describing the class and check off whether each curricular module is completed.

The checklist nearly always shows that all curricular modules are completed. And if modules are not covered in one session, they are completed in the next session.

Demonstrating fidelity to the curriculum; nearly always the learning modules for each session are completed.

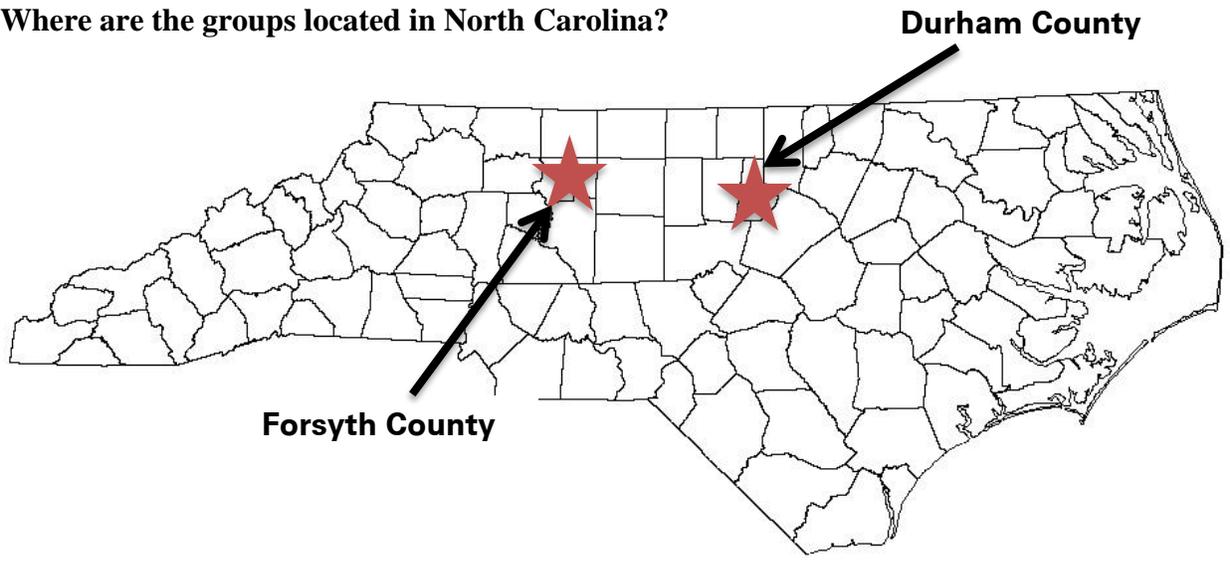
Who is eligible for the group?

- A father or male caretaker whose children are receiving child welfare services and who has been physically or emotionally abusive toward his partner.

Who is NOT eligible for the group?

- A father or male caretaker identified as committing child sexual abuse and/or has a court order stipulating no contact with his children.

Where are the groups located in North Carolina?



In 2008-2009, start-up activities for the project occurred. In fall 2009, the first Strong Fathers group began at Family Services, Inc. (FSI) in Forsyth County. The second location in Durham County began in early 2012.

How many men have enrolled, and how many complete the program?

Table 1 below summarizes the number of participants in the ten groups in Forsyth and six groups in Durham. The 16 groups had a total of 108 men enrolled. For the 93 men from the completed groups, 52 completed the program (defined as 65% of the sessions attended or work made up), 27 partially completed the sessions, and 14 never attended the group. Over the course of the program, the number of enrolled men per group ranged from 3 to 12, and the percentage of men in a group completing the program varied from a low of 29% to a high of 100%. A total of 15 men are currently enrolled in on-going Strong Fathers sessions.

Table 1: Number of Strong Father Participants in Forsyth County and Durham County, 2009-2014

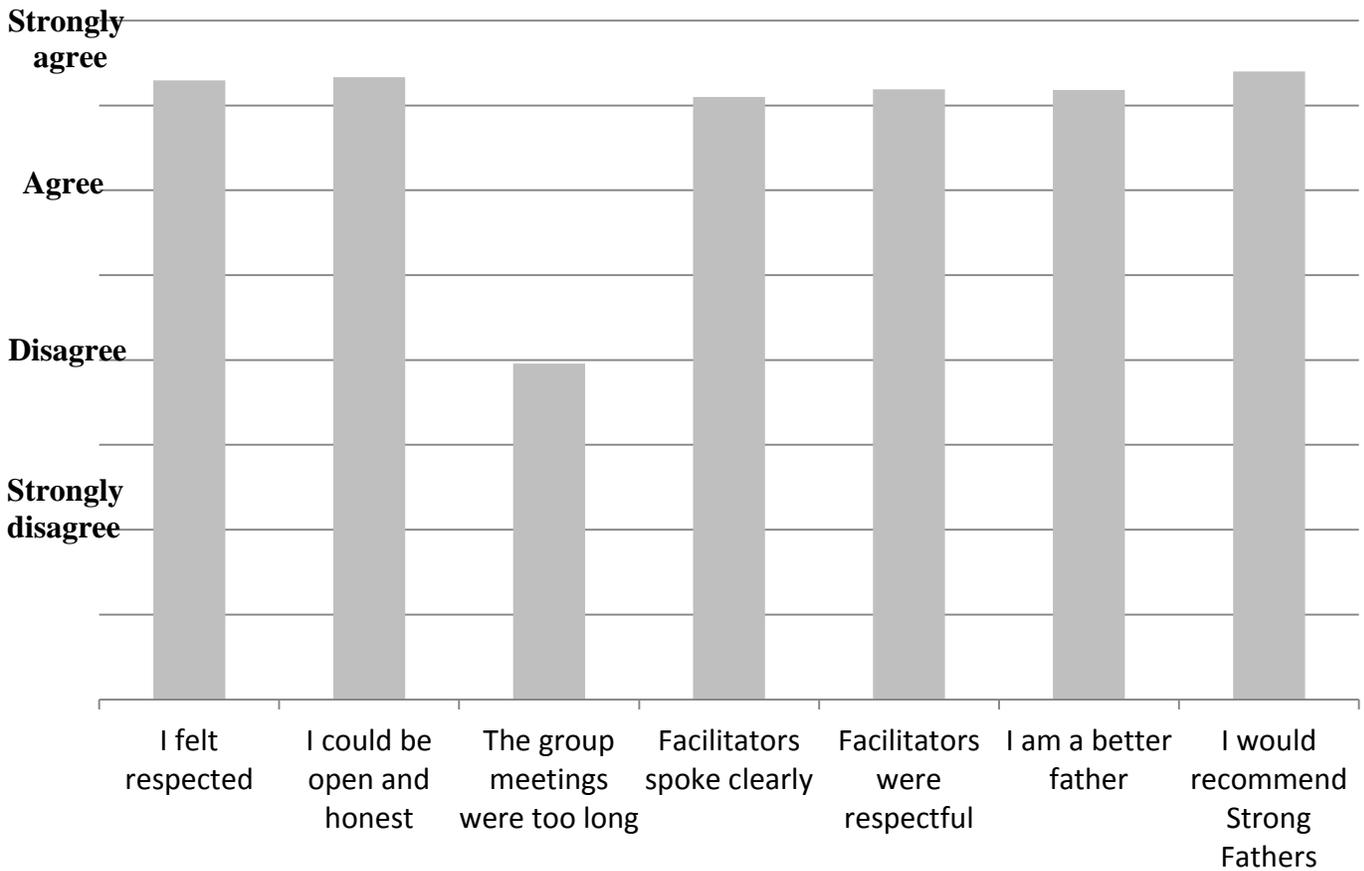
County	Start Date	End Date	Enrollee	Completer	Partial Completer	Non Completer
Forsyth	11/12/2009	4/13/2010	7	2	3	2
Forsyth	4/8/2010	7/29/2010	9	4	3	2
Forsyth	1/6/2011	5/19/2011	5	2	3	0
Forsyth	5/5/2011	10/20/2011	4	4	0	0
Forsyth	9/1/2011	1/26/2012	10	6	2	2
Durham	2/5/2012	6/27/2012	8	5	3	0
Forsyth	4/13/2012	9/6/2012	7	5	2	0
Durham	7/30/2012	12/10/2012	4	2	2	0
Forsyth	10/25/2012	4/25/2013	12	5	3	4
Durham	11/8/2012	3/21/2013	3	3	0	0
Durham	1/21/2013	6/3/2013	11	6	5	0
Forsyth	04/30/2013	9/24/2013	4	3	0	1
Durham	10/14/2013	2/24/2014	9	5	1	3
Forsyth	12/3/2013		6			
Durham	2/18/2014		5			
Forsyth	2/26/2014		4			
Total:			108	52	27	14

Note. One man enrolled twice and partially completed the group both times; only his second (and longer) enrollment is included in these figures.

How satisfied are the men with their group?

A Participant Satisfaction Form was introduced to the program in 2012-2013, to assess what the men liked and did not like about the program, as well as suggestions for improvements. This measure is completed anonymously at the beginning (Session 2 or 3), middle (Session 11 or 15), and end (Session 18 or 19) of the program. To date, 46 forms have been collected across 11 sessions. The first part of the form included 7 items assessed on a 4-point Likert scale. As there are no significant differences in the data between sessions, results are aggregated into Figure 1, below. Most men reported positive responses to the program, as seen by the level of agreement they expressed about their feeling respected, their comfort with the program and the facilitators, and their own growth as fathers. Notably, the men did *not* view the 20-session group as too long.

Figure 1: Participant Satisfaction in Strong Fathers



In addition to the quantitative data, the satisfaction forms also collected qualitative data on why the men had joined the program, what difficulties they faced in attending Strong Fathers, how it has helped them, and what could make the program better. Themes that emerged include:

- A desire to become a better father
- Enhanced parenting skills
- Improved relationships with partners
- A desire for continued support after graduation from the group.

I joined Strong Fathers to:
“be a better Father in every way that I can.”

What are the outcomes of the program?

Outcome 1: Increased knowledge and demonstrated competence in parenting skills

The men made significant gains in their knowledge of child development.

Child Development Test

The Child Development instrument tested the fathers' knowledge of child development. The pre-test on child development was administered in Session 4, the first post-test in Session 7, and the second post-test in Session 18. For the five project years, 42 men completed the 2nd post-test on child development with an average percentage of correct responses of 84.62 ($SD = 12.94$). Table 3 summarizes the results for the 40 men who completed both the pre and 2nd post-test and shows a statistically significant gain of 12 points.

Table 2: Average Percentage of Correct Responses on Child Development for Strong Fathers Participants Completing Pre and 2nd Post-Test, 2009-2013, $N=35$

	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
Child Development Pre-test	72.69	20.24
Child Development 2 nd Post-Test	85.00	13.03

Source: Child Development Test
Paired-Samples T Test, 1-tailed, $t(39)=-4.37, p < .001$

Outcome 2: Increased knowledge regarding the deleterious effects of domestic violence on children, including the identification of negative consequences of violence

Weekly Parenting Log

To assess accomplishment of the second outcome, the primary measure was the men's responses in Session 9 to the Weekly Parenting Log question "The three ways I recognized the impact of domestic violence on my children this past week were:". From 2009 to 2014, 51 (85.0%) out of the 60 attendees gave at least one response. Themes that emerged from their responses included that domestic violence:

- Makes the child violent (e.g., "When someone yells he cry and look at me. He yells at time he get mad. And he swing his hand to hit or push")
- Is normalized for the child (e.g., "Because my child will accept domestic violence as being a good thing")
- Hurts the child' development (e.g., It stunts their emotional growth")
- Leads to the child holding his/herself responsible for the violence (e.g., "It makes them feel like mom and dad are fighting because of them")

Domestic Violence is harmful to my children because "It makes them scared" and "It stunts their emotional growth."

- Causes the child to fear the parent (e.g., “It makes them scared of their parent”)

Outcome 3: Increased empathy toward child(ren)

NCDSS Central Registry Data on Child Protection Findings

The analysis below was conducted using NCDSS data for the first 8 Strong Fathers groups with, a total of 53 enrolled men. Out of these 53 men, 21 men had no matches, meaning that there were no reports regarding their families to child protection services either in the year before enrollment or in the period after enrollment. The data query did not cover years before the one-year pre-enrollment. There were no significant demographic differences between the 34 men whose families were reported to child protection and the 21 whose families were not reported.

The data were analyzed to determine how many of the reported families had a finding, that is, substantiated child maltreatment or family in need of services. Among the 34 men whose families were reported, 14 had no findings before or after enrollment, 16 had only pre-enrollment findings, 2 had only post-enrollment findings, and 2 had pre and post-enrollment findings.

The families saw a dramatic decrease in child protection findings before and after enrollment.

To determine the severity of the findings, the number of findings for a family was multiplied by each family’s average rating on the Family Risk Assessment (1 *low*, 2 *medium*, 3 *high*, 4 *intensive*).

Table 4 below summarizes the severity of findings for the 32 families reported during the pre-enrollment period. The 14 families without a finding were not assessed a risk level. The other 18 families had their number of findings ranging from 1 to 3. The average risk level for 7 families was 2 (*moderate*) while for the other 11 families the risk was assessed as 3 (*high*) or 4 (*intensive*). The severity of findings ranged from a low of 3 for 7 families to a high of 12 for 1 family. For the 18 families with a finding, the average severity of findings was 4.72.

Table 3: Pre-Enrollment Period: Number of Findings and Average Risk Level, N=32

Number of Families	Number of Findings	Average Risk Level	Severity of Total Findings Values
14	0	0	0
7	1	3	3
7	2	2	4
3	2	4	8
1	3	4	12

Source: NCDSS Central Registry

After enrollment, the number of families with a report was four, and the report occurred during the group for three families and after the group for one family. All these four families had at least one finding. Table 5 shows that the 2 families with 1 finding each had an average risk level of 3 (*high*), and the 2 families with 2 findings each had an average risk level of 4 (*intensive*).The

average severity of findings for these 4 families was 4.50. The two families with a severity finding of 6 also had pre-enrollment findings. The primary child protection type found for the two families with only a post-finding was improper discipline with physical injuries and the primary type for the two families with both a pre and post-finding was substantiated neglect.

Table 4: Post-Enrollment Period: Number of Findings and Average Risk Level, N=4

Number of Families	Number of Findings	Average Risk Level	Severity of Total Findings Values
2	1	3	3
2	2	4	6

Source: NCDSS Central Registry

Outcome 4: Reduction in controlling, coercive, and/or abusive behaviors towards the current or former intimate partner (child’s parent)

Household Domestic Violence as a Contributing Factor

In addition to checking on child protection findings, the NCDSS Central Registry query also extracted data on domestic violence in the household as contributing to the finding. Table 6 below relates the pre-enrollment severity of findings to whether household domestic violence was ascertained. The 14 families without a finding would not have contributing factors to a finding. For the other 18 families, all but 2 had household domestic violence identified. The 2 families without household domestic violence had severity findings of 4. The average severity of findings for the remaining 16 families all with household domestic violence was 4.18. The four families with post-enrollment findings all had household domestic violence identified.

After enrollment, 92% of the families did not have a determination of household domestic violence.

Thus, the presence of household domestic violence was strongly associated with the family having a child protection finding. During the pre-enrollment period, 14 of the 16 families with a finding were identified as having domestic violence in the household. For the 4 families with post-findings, all had domestic violence identified. Nevertheless, the drop in post-findings also meant a substantial drop in household domestic violence identified as a contributing factor. During the post-period, 49 (92%) of the 53 families did not have a determination of household domestic violence.

Table 5: Pre-Enrollment Period: Severity of Child Protection Finding by Household Domestic Violence, N=32

Severity of Total Findings	Household Domestic Violence		
	No = 0	Yes = 1	Total
0	14	0	14
3	0	7	7
4	2	5	7
8	0	3	3
12	0	1	1
Total	16	16	32

Source: Central Registry.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that the Strong Fathers program for the most part is successful in achieving its four intended outcomes. Especially noteworthy is that the men's satisfaction with their progress is congruent with the workers' assessments of reduced harm to children and their mothers.

The men's satisfaction with their progress is supported by the workers' assessments of reduced harm to children and their mothers.

For further information, see:

Webpage at http://cface.chass.ncsu.edu/projects/health_wellbeing/strong_fathers/

Pennell, J., Rikard, R. V., & Sanders, T. (in press). Family violence: Fathers assessing and managing their risk to children and women. *Children and Youth Services Review*. doi: 10.1016/j.chilyouth.2013.11.004

Pennell, J., Sanders, T., Rikard, RV, Shepherd, J., & Starsonneck, L. (2013). Family violence, fathers, and restoring personhood. *Restorative Justice*, 1(2), 268-289. doi: 10.5235/2050472.1.1.2.1