

Strong Fathers Evaluation Findings
Dr. Joan Pennell
Center for Family and Community Engagement
North Carolina State University
June 2013

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.

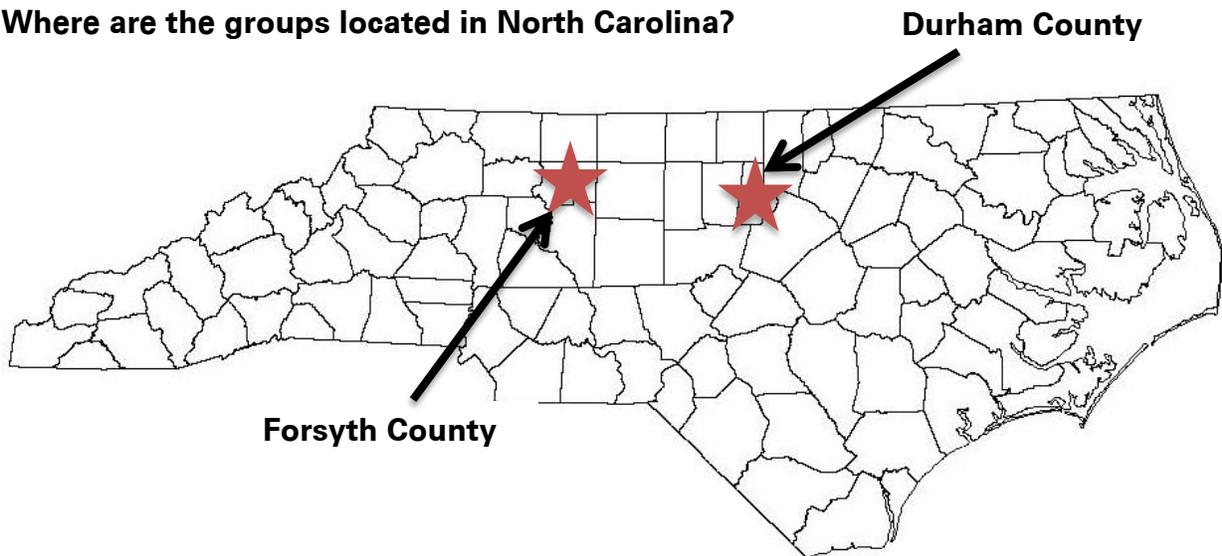
Who is eligible for the group?

- 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?



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

Completing the group is defined as attending or making up the work for 65% of the sessions. The number of participants by group is listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Strong Father Program Participants by Group

Group	County	Start Date	End Date	Enrolled	Completer	Partial Completer	Non Completer
1	Forsyth	11/12/2009	4/13/2010	7	3	2	2
2	Forsyth	4/8/2010	7/29/2010	9	4	3	2
3	Forsyth	1/6/2011	5/19/2011	4	2	2	0
4	Forsyth	5/5/2011	10/20/2011	5	5	0	0
5	Forsyth	9/1/2011	1/26/2012	9	5	2	2
6	Durham	2/5/2012	6/27/2012	7	5	2	0
7	Forsyth	4/13/2012	9/6/2012	8	5	3	0
8	Durham	7/30/2012	12/10/2012	4	2	2	0
9	Forsyth	10/25/2012	4/25/2013	12			
10	Durham	11/8/2012	3/21/2013	3	3	0	0
11	Durham	1/21/2013	6/3/2013	11			
12	Forsyth	4/30/2013	Ongoing	5			
Running Total:				84	34	16	6

What strategies are used to encourage the men to complete the program?

- Referral is made by involved protective authorities (e.g., child welfare, courts);
- During intake, the men learn about the program and choose whether to enroll;
- Men requiring a battering rather than fathering intervention are referred to a different program;
- No fee is charged for participation;
- Family incentives (e.g., zoo pass), transportation support, refreshments; and
- Facilitators inform referring workers of the men's attendance while respecting the men's privacy about what is discussed in the group.

Why do the men choose to complete the program?

- The men set their own goals for themselves and for their relationship with their children and the mothers of their children;
- They rate their effectiveness in meeting their own goals; and
- Fundamentally, the men are pulled by the yearning to be close to their children and pushed by their determination to be strong fathers.

The men complete the group because they are pulled by the desire to be close to their children and pushed by their determination to be strong fathers.

Pennell, J., Sanders, T., Rikard, R.V., Shepherd, J., & Staroneck, L. (in press). Family violence, fathers, and restoring personhood. *Restorative Justice*, 1(2).

What goals do the men set for themselves?

The men aspire to be:

- Caregivers of their children;
- Role models of how to relate respectfully with women;
- Providers meeting their family's economic needs; and
- Persons who reclaim their selves and affirm others' personhood.

These are positive goals that can help the men achieve the program's four intended outcomes.

Pennell, J., Rikard, R. V., & Sanders, T. (under review). Family violence: Fathers assessing and managing their risk to children and women.

The men set positive goals of caring for their children, serving as role models on how to relate to women, providing for their family's economic needs, and reclaiming their personhood and affirming others' personhood.

To what extent do the men achieve the four intended outcomes?

Outcome 1: Increased knowledge and demonstrated competence in parenting skills

The Child Development instrument tested the fathers' knowledge of child development at three points. The first child development instrument was administered in week 4, the second in week 7, and the third in week 18. For the four project years, 32 men completed the third child development instrument with an average percentage of correct responses of 86.30 (std dev = 11.52).

Table 2 summarizes the results for the 32 men who completed both time one and three instruments and shows a statistically significant gain of 14 points. The men's knowledge of child development was reflected in their sense of self-confidence in parenting. When asked at the last class (Session 20) to rate their parenting over the prior week, the 32 men gave a median self-rating of 4 on the 5-point Likert scale (mean=3.86, standard deviation=1.03).

The men in the twelve groups overall show a statistically significant increase in their knowledge of child development. These gains are reflected in the men's sense of competence in parenting.

Table 2: Average Percentage of Correct Responses on Child Development for Strong Fathers Participants Completing Time 1 & Time 3, 2009-2013, N=32

	Mean	Std Dev
Child Development Pre-test	72.36%	20.57
Child Development 2 nd Post-Test	86.30%	11.152

Paired-Sample T Test: $t = -4.048, p < .0001$

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

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 2009-2013, 40 (48%) out of the 84 men who enrolled 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”)
- Causes the child to fear the parent (e.g., “It makes them scared of their parent”)

The men identify concrete ways in which domestic violence harms their children. Nearly all the men (48%) specify at least one negative consequence of the children’s exposure to domestic violence

Outcome 3: Increased empathy toward child(ren)

The primary measure of this outcome is the North Carolina Division of Social Services’ (NCDSS) Central Registry data on child protection findings (substantiated child maltreatment and family in need of services). The NCDSS Central Registry data query covered the one year prior to the men’s enrollment in Strong Fathers and the period after their enrollment. An advantage of using this measure is that it covers children of all the enrolled men. The main limitation is that the measure only indirectly taps into empathy. Nevertheless, the finding that children are *not* in need of protection indicates empathy for their safety and well-being. The data have three other limitations.

First, as the case with administrative data in general, the data cover only what was known to child protection services. Second, the data only concern the children and do not identify the perpetrator of child maltreatment, making it unclear whether the men were involved. This will be corrected in the next cycle of requesting the Central Registry data. Third, the length of the post-enrollment period varies depending on the date of the men’s entering the program, making for differences in the period of hazard for when the families could be reported to child protection.

The data request to NCDSS was for the first 8 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.

To determine the severity of the findings, the number of findings for a family is multiplied by each family's average rating on the Family Risk Assessment (1 *low*, 2 *medium*, 3 *high*, 4 *intensive*). Table 3 below summarizes the severity of findings for the 32 families reported during the pre-enrollment period. The 14 families without a finding are not assessed a risk level. The other 18 families have their number of findings ranging from 1 to 3. The average risk level for 7 families is 2 (*moderate*) while for the other 11 families the risk is assessed as 3 (*high*) or 4 (*intensive*). The severity of findings ranges 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 is 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 is four, and the report occurred during the group for three families and after the group for one family. All these four families have at least one finding.

Table 4 shows that the 2 families with 1 finding each have an average risk level of 3 (*high*), and the 2 families with 2 findings each have an average risk level of 4 (*intensive*). The average severity of findings for these 4 families is 4.50. The two families with a severity finding of 6 also have pre-enrollment findings. The primary child protection type found for the two families with only a post-finding is improper discipline with physical injuries and the primary type for the two families with both a pre and post-finding is substantiated neglect.

The families of the 53 men saw a dramatic decrease in child protection findings from the pre to post-enrollment periods. In the year prior to enrollment, 18 families had at least one finding; after enrollment, only 4 families had at least one finding. Thus, 49 (92%) of the 53 families did not have a post-enrollment finding.

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	8

Source: NCDSS Central Registry

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

The main measure of the fourth outcome is the North Carolina Division of Social Services’ (NCDSS) Central Registry data regarding domestic violence as a contributing factor to the child protection finding. The NCDSS Central Registry data cover the first 8 groups.

Table 5 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.

The presence of household domestic violence is 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		Total
	No = 0	Yes = 1	
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 goals on how to relate to their children and the children's mothers are congruent with the workers' assessments of reduced harm to children and their mothers.

Note. Thanks to Tia Sanders-Rice and Mary Guerrant for their assistance with the evaluation.