New Study Sheds Light on Impoverished and/or Incarcerated African American Fathers' Involvement in Their Children's Lives

Alliance for Strong Families and Communities publishes study in Families in Society

(PRWEB) June 16, 2017 -- A new study suggests widely held perceptions about low-income and African-American fathers as not being involved in the lives of their children can be largely unfounded. Data collected over 15 years in Syracuse, New York, reveal that even in cases of incarceration or living under the federal poverty line, most low-income fathers stay connected to their children.

Robert Keefe, PhD, an associate professor in the University at Buffalo School of Social Work, and his colleagues analyzed data from five different studies between 1996 and 2011 about the mother-child relationship. Also interviewed were fathers, all of whom had been incarcerated or were presently on parole or probation. Both the mothers and the fathers talked independently of each other about how the dads stayed involved with their children.

"Regardless of what these fathers were facing, they tried to stay involved with their children," said Keefe.

Data indicates that 94 percent of mothers interviewed say their children's fathers were somewhat involved or highly involved with their families. Addressed is the contested issue of father absence versus father involvement, and compares individual parents’ characterization of paternal involvement with metrics from population-level datasets.

The study, African American Fathers: Disproportionate Incarceration and the Meaning of Involvement, was published recently in Families in Society, a peer-reviewed journal published by the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities. The Alliance is a national strategic action network of thousands of social sector leaders working toward a vision of a healthy and equitable society.

The public criticism derives from a narrow definition of "involvement." Father involvement in this country is looked at as financial, according to Keefe. All kinds of factors are considered when talking about what makes a good mother, but with fathers, economic support is the major criterion. That factor is especially problematic in areas like Syracuse, which has the highest concentration of poverty among people of color in the United States, and there is significant racial disparity for criminal sentencing of African American men and women.

"This study provides us all with a compelling and clear way we can advocate for policies that support and encourage fathers in their children's lives,” said Susan Dreyfus, president and CEO of the Alliance. “We have to be doing all we can to provide a strong foundation upon which all children can reach their full potential and this is one more way we can do that.”

Putting change into action
The study substantiates the point that African American fathers are more involved in their children’s lives than some policymakers may claim, and concludes with a way to move forward.

According to the study, although solving the problem of massive incarceration is imperative, facilitating fathers’ contact with their families and children and advocating for broader definitions of father involvement will be big steps forward in promoting the meaning of father involvement. It will also help policy makers write
policies that promote smart efforts to reduce the incarcerated population, which in turn may also lead to successful community reintegration.

About the Alliance: The Alliance for Strong Families and Communities is a strategic action network of thousands of committed social sector leaders driving to achieve a healthy and equitable society. We aggregate the very best sector knowledge and serve as an incubator for learning and innovation to generate new solutions to the toughest problems. We accelerate change through dynamic leadership development and collective actions to ensure policies and systems provide equal access and opportunity for health and well-being, educational success, economic opportunity, and safety and security. Go to alliance1.org for more information.

About Families in Society: Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services, a core publication in social work research for nearly 100 years, is the top-ranked independent journal in the field. Published by the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities, it advances a knowledge-into-practice approach to family and community research through innovative scholarship on the issues related to the capabilities of individuals and families, including consideration of the biopsychosocial, economic, and cultural factors that affect well-being.
Contact Information
Nancy Kunkler
Alliance for Strong Families and Communities
(414) 359-6564

Online Web 2.0 Version
You can read the online version of this press release [here].