‘LEFT OUT:’
Father exclusion in addictions services
Sydney Weaver
Doctoral student
University of British Columbia
Canada

Before they were “junkies” they were kids.
Pilot study funded by 

**ACCELERATE BC:**

*BC Mental Health and Addictions Research Network*

and

**Mathematics of Information Technology and Complex Systems**

Doctoral study funding received from

**Canadian Institutes of Health Research**
“Living in a hole as opposed to being near my family which you’d think is important for that first month or two of your sobriety, being together and functioning as a family and letting the government and other people see that.”

- Substance use and parenting research has largely blamed mothers and excluded fathers.
- Very little research has been done with substance-using fathers, yet their absence and drug use affects family health outcomes.
Race, class and violence

- Gender, race and class are identified factors in father exclusion, particularly for Indigenous fathers.
- Domestic violence is frequently linked to illicit drug use and has provided a rationale for excluding fathers from women’s treatment.
“I won’t be the kid rotting in jail, the black kid in jail, I won’t be the criminal ... every time someone holds their purse when I walk by I laugh, sure I might look the role but if you knew I’d rather tell you a joke than take your purse, you know, I’d much rather do that” (Ken).

Yet the dominant view of domestic violence excludes the “social context of colonisation, loss of culture and poverty” (Taylor et al, 2004, p72).
**Mixed methods**

**Quantitative:**
Sample of 40 charts of former patients
Correlation analyses conducted using SPSS

**Qualitative:**
Parents and service providers participated in focus groups; parents were interviewed individually

- This pilot study was conducted in Vancouver, Canada with former patients of a harm reduction maternity ward, and their partners
- The study explored how father exclusion affects pregnant mothers’ engagement in harm reduction services.
## Quantitative findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father and mother engagement</th>
<th>Father engagement and involvement in baby care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Mother engagement was positively correlated with father engagement at .54, with a significance level of .05.</td>
<td>• Father engagement in services was also highly correlated with father involvement in baby care, at .79 at a .01 level of significance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Qualitative findings

FATHERS
“LEFT OUT”
“PUT IN THE EFFORT”

MOTHERS
“WITH HIM”

SERVICE PROVIDERS
“COUNSELLING IF NO VIOLENCE”
“LEFT OUT”

MOTHER: “Are you scared to be a new dad?”
FATHER: “They don’t ever ask me.”

MOTHER: “Are you excited to be a new dad?”
FATHER: “They don’t ever ask me.”

(focus group)

• Fathers described exclusion from parenting and recovery-oriented services:

“I think there was one class out of six classes that I could go to and the rest were for her, so it sort of left me not feeling lonely but feeling left out” (Randy).
“PUT IN THE EFFORT”

“you don’t need someone ... telling you that you’re going to fail when you’re trying to succeed”

- Fathers’ self-respect: accomplishments, independence, providing for mothers, and setting an example

- Childbirth/children motivate fathers to recovery: “first thing was my kid that got me clean”
Mothers describe partners as a familiar, important support at a difficult time in their lives.

Institutional and agency support were of limited value to pregnant mothers.
“A lot of men... have a history of [domestic violence] ... many of them have been really interested in parenting... but we don’t offer what they need”

- Service providers felt a history of violence should not be a barrier for fathers seeking help.

- The source and context of interpersonal violence remains unaddressed.
Parents felt services should include individual counselling. Mothers want fathers included in parenting and recovery services. "Counselling for couples was requested unanimously, to enhance recovery and improve family relationships."
Thank you.

Sydney Weaver, MSW
Doctoral student
University of British Columbia

smweaver@interchange.ubc.ca