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# The Father Friendly Initiative within Families: Using a logic model to develop program theory for a father support program

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ABSTRACT

The transition to fatherhood, with its numerous challenges, has been well documented. Likewise, fathers' relationships with health and social services have also begun to be explored. Yet despite the problems fathers experience in interactions with healthcare services, few programs have been developed for them. To explain this, some authors point to the difficulty practitioners encounter in developing and structuring the theory of programs they are trying to create to promote and support father involvement (Savaya, R., & Waysman, M. (2005). *Administration in Social Work, 29*(2), 85), even when such theory is key to a program's effectiveness (Chen, H.-T. (2005). *Practical program evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications). The objective of the present paper is to present a tool, the logic model, to bridge this gap and to equip practitioners for structuring program theory. This paper addresses two questions: (1) What would be a useful instrument for structuring the development of program theory in interventions for fathers? (2) How would the concepts of a father involvement program best be organized? The case of the *Father Friendly Initiative within Families (FFIF)* program is used to present and illustrate six simple steps for developing a logic model that are based on program theory and demonstrate its relevance.


## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a growing literature describing men's experience of becoming fathers and the challenges they encounter (Barclay & Lupton, 1999; Goodman, 2005; St John, Cameron, & McVeigh, 2005). Studies have highlighted fathers' often difficult interactions with health and social services and their low satisfaction with those services (Deave & Johnson, 2008; Gervais, de Montigny, & Lacharité, submitted; Premberg, Hellström, Berg, & Premberg, 2008). Now that these experiences and interactions are being documented, it is time to move from description to intervention and build on this evidence to develop programs to support fathers (Bell, 2009; Metz & Bartley, 2012). When using research results to develop intervention programs, we need to look at the theories underlying these results to identify the key structural elements that foster their success (Carrilio, 2001). Developing a program is a complex endeavor that involves focusing on fragmented and even contradictory data drawn from research, practice, and policies, and then applying that data to real-life situations. Our aim in this article is to equip practitioners working with families to develop and structure a program's theory using a logic model. More specifically, we address two questions: (1) What would be a useful instrument to structure the process of developing theory for a program to support father involvement? (2) What is the best way to organize the concepts of a father involvement program and to develop its logic model?

## 2. The importance of program theory

Some authors have attributed problems experienced by existing intervention programs to the fact that their program theory is often weak or non-existent (Best et al., 2003; Brenton et al., 2002; Fear, 2007; James, Fraser, & Talbot, 2007), or that they were developed based on experiences or ideas with no solid theoretical foundation (Best et al., 2003; Conrad, Randolf, Kirby, & Bebout, 1999). Program theory specifies what must be done for a program to achieve its objectives; it describes the program's

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structure, the logical links between problem and goals, actions to be taken, resources to be applied, and desired outcomes (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). The quality and validity of a program's theory largely determine that program's effectiveness (Chen, 2003).

Without program theory, it is more difficult to assess a program's effectiveness, since it is not certain that the proposed interventions are appropriate for solving the problem targeted or achieving the goals desired. Lacking theory, evaluators may focus only on outcomes related to objectives and fail to identify potential negative impacts of the intervention (James et al., 2007). Lastly, the absence of theory may make it difficult to explain a program's results, thereby limiting the potential of formulating recommendations to stakeholders for developing the program further or applying it to another context (D'Agostino, 2001).

According to Savaya and Waysman (2005), the main reasons for the absence of program theory are the time and resources needed for its development and the difficulty, even for highly experienced professionals, of translating concrete actions and tacit knowledge into abstract concepts. The knowledge underlying their actions therefore remains implicit and difficult to transfer to other programs. So, while there is consensus on the importance of program theory for developing, implementing, and evaluating programs, few programs have a clearly defined theory, and even when such theory is articulated, it is generally used in a limited and very specific way, such as when drawing up an assessment plan to evaluate a program (Rogers, Petrosino, Huebner, & Hacsi, 2000).

## 3. The link between program theory and logic models

Many organizations want their interventions, activities, or programs to be evaluated. However, few have detailed descriptions that specify components and objectives, which not only hinders evaluation but also impedes program development, implementation, and management. While authors differ in the terms they use – logic models, program models, action theories – to refer to a program's underlying theory (Rogers et al., 2000; Rossi et al., 2004), they nevertheless agree on the importance of describing precisely a program's components and how they are linked (Ridde & Dagenais, 2009; Rogers et al., 2000; Rossi et al., 2004). Program theory can be a valuable tool for reaching consensus on a program evaluation process, assessing how results can be generalized, identifying unexpected impacts, explaining results, and providing early indicators of effectiveness (Chen, 2005).

For the majority of authors consulted, a logic model is a tool for developing, structuring, or identifying program theory (Ridde & Dagenais, 2009; Rogers et al., 2000; Rossi et al., 2004). In that sense, it is a simplified version of program theory, since the components of a logic model encompass the key categories of program theory (Chen, 2005). Moreover, the process of creating a logic model has been more extensively discussed in the literature and is more accessible to practitioners in terms of time, comprehension, and cost, which is why we propose it here as a tool for structuring the development of program theory.

## 4. Logic models

While definitions differ slightly, it is generally agreed that a logic model is a relatively simple one-page diagram that sequentially presents the changes the program intends to initiate, showing the inputs (resources dedicated to or used by the program), activities (what the program does with the inputs to achieve its objectives), and outputs (the direct products of the program's activities) associated with the benefits it aims to generate (Chen, 2005). Logic models can be applied to all kinds of programs, regardless of their size or objectives (Porteous, 2009).

Creating a logic model enables practitioners and managers to structure a program's underlying concepts and to incorporate an evaluation process based on what the program is supposed to achieve (Newton, Poon, Nunes, & Stone, 2013). The adopted strategies are based on results of similar programs or research, thereby linking the program to existing theories with replicable results (Fear, 2007). The logic model becomes a reference point for everyone involved in the program (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003) and can serve as a foundation for developing an evaluation plan and evaluation instruments (Helitzer et al., 2010).

### 4.1. The program theory logic model

There are different versions of logic models and no unanimity as to their key components (Porteous, 2009; Porteous, Sheldrick, & Stewart, 2002; Renger & Hurley, 2006; Savaya & Waysman, 2005). We have opted here to present and adopt the terminology developed by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (2004), based on the United Way of America's (1996) widely used version of a logic model. We feel it is the clearest and most comprehensive, and offers the advantage of distinguishing between three types of logic models used for different purposes. A logic model that is created to set out the theoretical foundations of a program or to clarify the components of program theory will generally consist of six elements:

(1) Problem and causes: To demonstrate that the proposed strategies will rectify the situation, both the core problem targeted by the program and its causes must be clearly defined. For complex programs addressing several problems, it is helpful to create a logic model for each one.
(2) Community needs and resources/assets: The population needs arising from the problem(s) must be identified, as well as any community-based resources related to these problems.
(3) Desired results: This involves describing the vision of the future that will be created by the program, i.e., short- and long-term changes that will occur when the program is implemented.
(4) Influential factors: It is important to analyze all factors that can have a positive or negative impact on the changes that the program is aimed at introducing.
(5) Strategies: The strategies to be used are determined after surveying all the evidence related to the problem targeted, as well as best practices that have been implemented by similar programs or that were used to achieve results similar to those envisioned by the program.
(6) Assumptions underlying the planned actions: This element explains how the strategies chosen to stimulate the desired changes in the population will operate. It presents the ideas, principles, and convictions that link the problems identified, the strategies chosen, and the intended results.

Fig. 1 illustrates these elements and the relationships among them.

The main drawback of logic models is their cost. Developing or updating a logic model is a long and therefore costly process (Gugiu & Rodriguez-Campos, 2007). Another limitation, noted by Fear (2007), is that logic model flowcharts are based on a linear temporal continuity, whereas programs rarely unfold linearly. Programs may have periods of intensive activity and others that are quieter; they may come to a complete standstill for a time, or some backtracking may be required to correct problems. These and other variations are not readily captured in a flowchart. Furthermore, logic models categorize the elements of a program in closed boxes with no overlapping, whereas in reality things are much less clearly defined. Lastly, by describing the program in the form of a