



Father Participation in Home Visiting: Lessons from Massachusetts

Tufts Interdisciplinary Evaluation Research (TIER)

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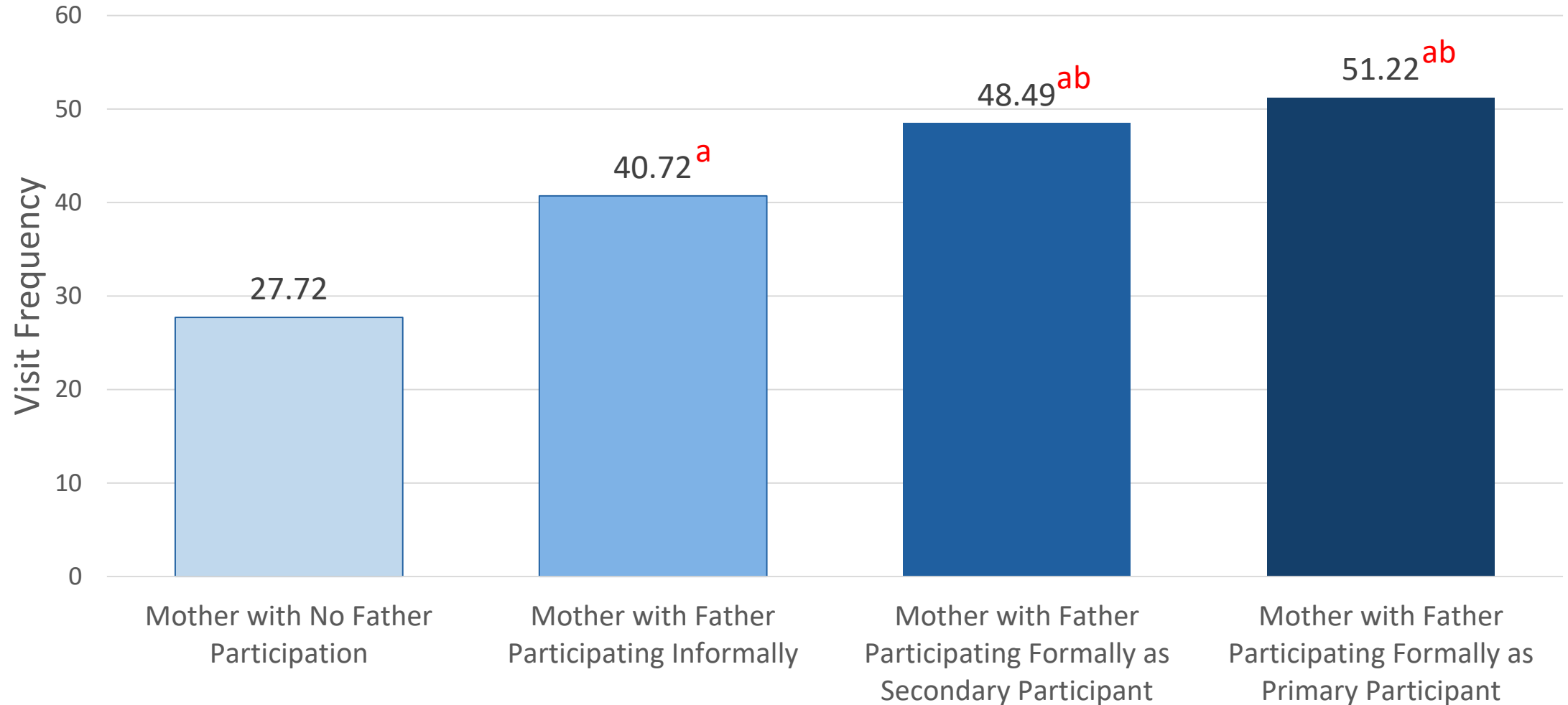
Background

- Retaining participants in home visiting can be a challenge
- Early attrition affects the likelihood and size of intended impacts on families
- Existing studies suggest that father participation in home visiting is favorably associated with mothers' engagement and retention

Initial Study

- Healthy Families Massachusetts (HFM) invests time and resources to promote father participation. In FY18...
 - 18% of all home visits included a co-parent
 - 48% of participants participated in at least one home visit with a co-parent
- Based on anecdotal evidence, HFM suspected that fathers' participation was related to increased maternal retention.
- We used HFM MIS data to examine these associations.

Associations between Father Participation and Mothers' # of Home Visits



What explains the variation in father engagement in home visiting?

What strategies are home visitors using to engage

fathers? What are home visitors' attitudes about father engagement? Are they confident in their ability to work with fathers? Do they feel like they are good at it? How does that affect how well the strategies work?

But lots of remaining questions

What is it about father engagement that leads to maternal retention?

Does home visiting improve the co-parenting relationship? And does that encourage parents to stay in the program?

Are mothers less stressed when there is someone to share the load with? Not just parenting, but also the home visiting piece? Are they more willing to go the distance with the program in that case?

Where does the parents' relationship status come into things?

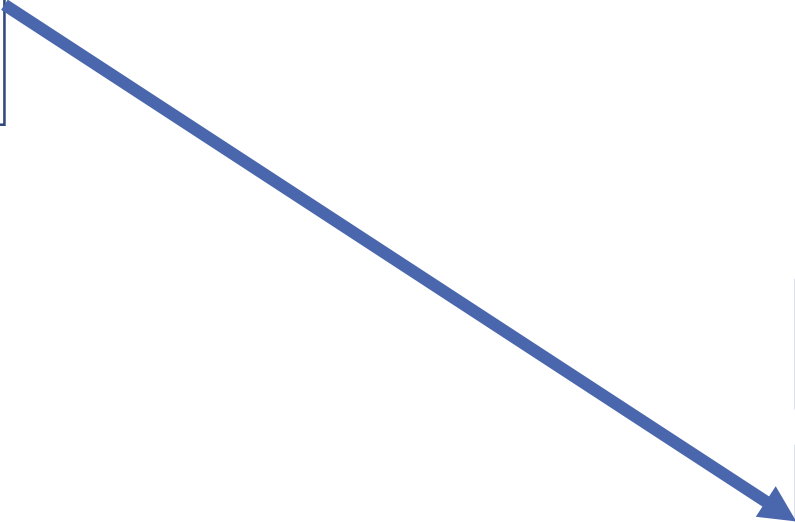
How about their living arrangements?

Active Ingredient

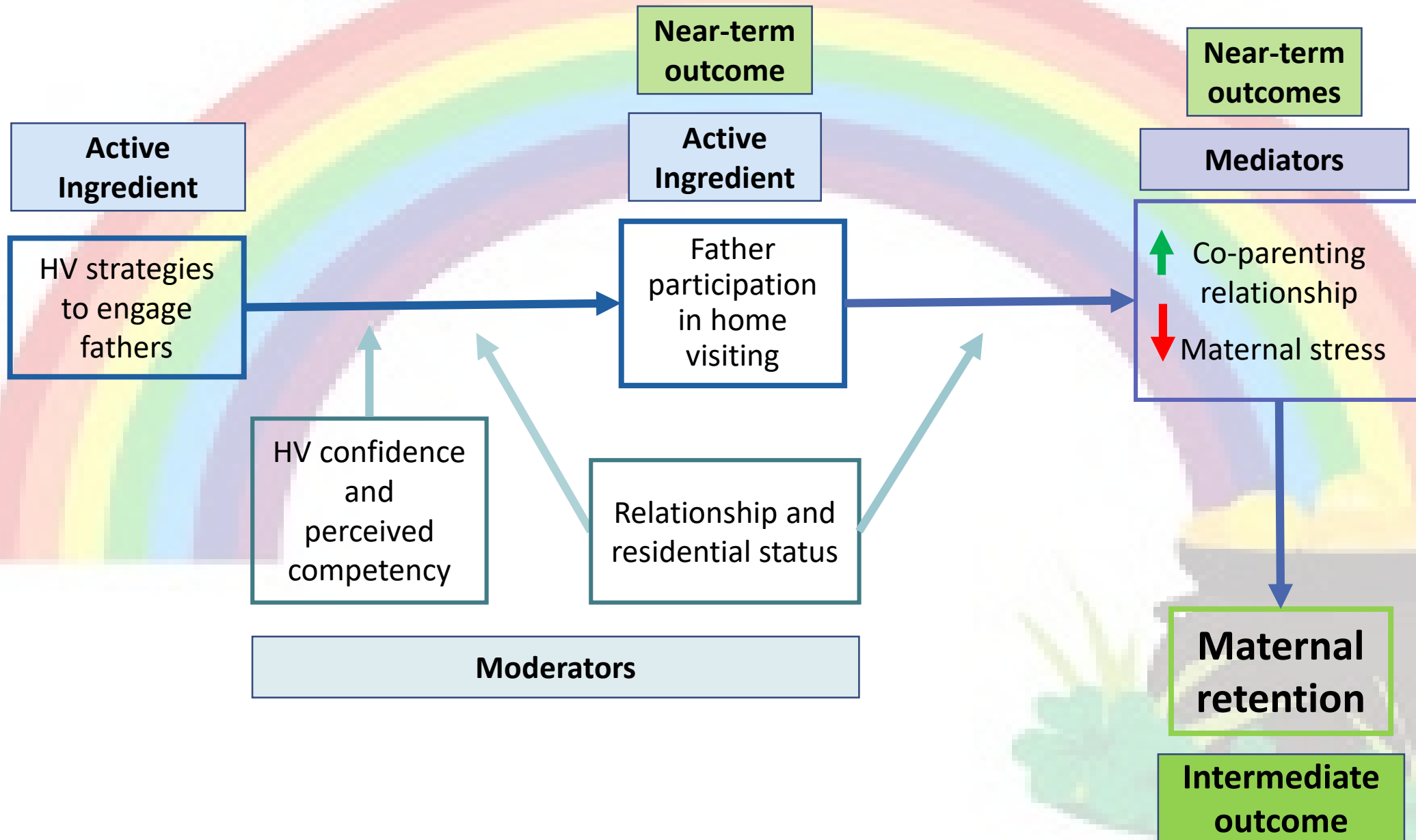
Father participation

Outcome

Maternal retention



Precision Home Visiting Model



Methods

- Interviews with mothers, fathers, co-parents, and home visitors
- Focus groups with home visitors
- Home visit observations
- Examination of MIS data
- Sampling considerations:
 - Programs' level of father engagement
 - Parents' relationship status
 - "Triad" interviews/observations

(*Very*) Preliminary HV Focus Group Findings

- **Home visitor strategies**

- Encourage fathers' participation, even when father isn't present
- Accommodate fathers' schedules
- Bring father-specific curriculum
- Highlight fathers' important role in the family
- Reiterate the message that mothers don't have to do everything by themselves

- **HV confidence/ perceived confidence**

- Importance of home visitor believing that father involvement matters

- **Challenges**

- Fathers think of the program as “mothers only”
- Mothers can be “possessive” of home visiting opportunity/gatekeeping

Findings continued

- **Improve co-parenting relationship**
 - Family activities/team-building
 - Work with parents on conflict resolution, reflective listening, perspective taking
 - Serve as neutral source/provider of information
- **Reduce maternal stress**
 - Build father's parenting confidence
 - Build mothers' confidence that father can play an active role in parenting

Implications for Precision Home Visiting

- Father engagement and participation in early childhood services is an area in which research lags far behind practical interest
- Study will unpack potential predictors and drivers of the link between father participation in home visiting and maternal retention
- Inform program modifications, home visitor training, recruitment strategies, content/curriculum, and structure of home visits to fit families' needs
- Provide groundwork for more formal assessment of the relationship between the ingredients, moderators, and outcomes



Thank You!

Applied Research Collaborative (HARC)