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## Fatherhood Education with Latino Fathers: A Mixed-Method Evaluation

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### ABSTRACT

As fatherhood education programs become more common and as the United States becomes increasingly diverse, efforts are needed to ensure that programs reach underrepresented groups. Using a mixed-method evaluation approach, this study examined the programmatic impacts and experiences of Latino fathers ( $n = 156$ ) who participated in fatherhood education programs. Quantitative analyses indicated that participants showed improvements in father-child relations, decreases in partner conflict, and more positive perceptions of employability from pretest to posttest. Qualitative analyses revealed that the programs were largely positively received, with participants reporting greater knowledge of several targeted concepts. Overall, findings suggest that Latino fathers derive perceived benefits from participation in fatherhood education programs. Practical implications are discussed.

### KEYWORDS

Latino fathers; mixed-method evaluation; fatherhood education; phenomenology; father-child relations; partner conflict

Positive father involvement is associated with secure attachment and positive developmental processes in children (Pleck, 2007). The involvement of fathers is also linked to increased marital satisfaction for parents (Coley & Hernandez, 2006) and greater household financial stability (Schindler, 2010). Fatherhood education programs are designed to promote positive involvement, while addressing issues related to the enhancement of social and human capital (Anderson et al., 2002; Frank et al., 2015).

Although family and relationship-centered educational programs have historically drawn the majority of their participation from middle-class European Americans (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002; Skogrand et al., 2009), educators are increasingly targeting fathers from lower income and racially and ethnically diverse populations (Avellar et al., 2018). With this increased reach, however, research is needed to better understand the impact of these programs for fathers from underrepresented groups – and to understand their experiences (Ooms & Wilson, 2004).

Addressing such a topic is timely when considering the increasing diversity of the United States. The Latino population is the country's second fastest growing minority group and the second largest population group overall (Flores, 2017). Projections indicate that Latinos could comprise nearly a quarter of the total U.S. population by 2045 (Frey, 2018). The growing Latino population creates a need to better understand associated trends in family dynamics, fatherhood practices, and whether programs are effective in identifying and addressing the unique concerns of Latino fathers (Concha et al., 2016).

This study takes a mixed-method approach to: (a) quantitatively evaluate the impact of fatherhood education programs in addressing father-child relations, partner conflict, and perceptions of employability among Latino fathers and (b) qualitatively learn more about the experiences of the Latino fathers who participated and the skills they believed they developed as a result of their participation. Mixed-method approaches aim to balance representativeness with subjective meaning in context (Venkatesh et al., 2013). From the point of view of participants, we aim to examine the impact of fatherhood education programs and how programs might be improved in order to accommodate the needs of culturally diverse audiences.

## Literature review

### Fatherhood education

Since the early 2000s, fatherhood education programs have received significant federal support (Tollestrup, 2018). The major goals of these programs include improving father-child and partner and/or coparent relationship quality and connecting fathers with job training services as a way to enhance their social and human capital and economic stability (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2012; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 1999). Several studies have been conducted to determine how well fatherhood education programs meet these goals and to propose best practices (Avellar et al., 2018; Concha et al., 2016; Cowan et al., 2010, 2009; Fagan, 2008; Fagan & Kaufman, 2015; Frank et al., 2015; Gearing et al., 2008).

In general, fatherhood education programs are effective: A decade ago, a meta-analysis of 16 studies yielded effect sizes ranging from  $d = .14$  to  $d = .61$ , with an overall effect size of  $d = .26$ , in terms of higher levels of father involvement, improved attitudes, co-parenting, and child behavior (Holmes et al., 2010). Recent meta-analytic data yielded small, but positive effect sizes for father involvement ( $d = .099$ ), parenting ( $d = .11$ ), and co-parenting ( $d = .167$ ; Holmes et al., 2020). An evaluation of the Supporting Father Involvement (SFI) project (Cowan et al., 2009), targeting low- and middle-income families, showed that program participation was associated with higher relationship quality among couples, as well as improved father-child relationships when compared to control groups. Related evaluations of the SFI project reported that lower income participants showed an increase in earnings upon program follow-up, providing some evidence of the ability of such programs to assist fathers in improving their earning potential (Cowan et al., 2010).

Evaluations of other fatherhood education programs, such as the Minnesota Early Learning Design coparenting and childbirth curricula (MELD) have shown that program completion was associated with improvements in coparenting skills, as well as enhanced interpersonal communication skills between partners (Fagan, 2008). Finally, an evaluation of the Re:Membering Fatherhood Program demonstrated that after program completion, fathers increased involvement with their families and showed a decrease in parenting-related stress, at least in the short-term (Gearing et al., 2008). Although these studies provide examples of fatherhood education programs that have been successfully implemented, experts have noted that the field needs more evaluations of programs and their processes, especially among underrepresented groups (Concha et al., 2016; Cowan et al., 2009; Dion et al., 2015).

### Latino fatherhood

Despite the sustained growth of the Latino population in the U.S., research on Latino fatherhood is limited (Coltrane et al., 2008; Karberg et al., 2017). This is due, in large part, to the general lack of research on fatherhood roles when compared to research on motherhood (Cruz et al., 2011). Parenting research that has been conducted on fathering tends to focus more on the experiences and perspectives of middle-class, European families (Cabrera & Garcia Coll, 2004). Parenting research pertaining to Latino culture have largely followed the trends of the field as a whole, again placing more emphasis on maternal matters (La Hoz, 2012). As a result, research and data focusing on Latino fathers is limited, making it a challenge to understand how Latino fathers respond to pressures related to parenting, marriage, and economic successes and difficulties (Coltrane et al., 2004).

In past research, the concept of *machismo* has been attached to Latino males as a negative stereotype that involves the imposition of rigid gender roles characterized by male superiority over their partners (N. Cabrera et al., 2015) and depictions of Latino fathers as harsh disciplinarians who expect immediate compliance from their children (Concha et al., 2016; Oropesa & Gorman, 2000). Other researchers point out, however that although *machismo* has been historically associated with masculinity, the concept's negative connotations are somewhat outdated and inaccurate (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012). Indeed, the *machismo* concept has also been attributed to positive aspects of fatherhood, depicting the Latino father as a dignified and caring nurturer and a responsible provider who places a high value on family responsibility (Falicov, 2010; Mayo, 1997). This shift in perspective

regarding the *machismo* concept has influenced some experts to place more emphasis on the idea of *caballerismo*, which is more in-line with the benefits attributed to masculinity in terms of positive father involvement (Arciniega et al., 2008; Cruz et al., 2011).

The familial responsibilities that Latino fathers assume are highly associated with the cultural importance Latinos often place on family-centered relationships, a concept referred to as *familismo* (N. Cabrera et al., 2015; Falicov, 2010). Within this context, Latino fathers have displayed high levels of involvement and affection, while acting as positive role models for their children (Falicov, 1998). Further, some research has found that Latino fathers take on greater childrearing responsibilities when compared to fathers from other ethnic or racial groups (Cabrera et al., 2011, 2008). This includes higher levels of involvement in physical play (Karberg & Cabrera, 2016) and a greater willingness to engage in activities such as reading with their children (Coltrane et al., 2004). Research has also noted, that compared to men from other minority groups, Latino fathers are more likely to live with their children and thus are often more accessible to them (Lopez & Velasco, 2011).

### **Latino fathers and fatherhood education**

Relatively few attempts have been made to specifically examine how Latino fathers respond to and what benefits they derive from traditional fatherhood education programs. Some research has profiled the experiences of Latino men and their partners who have participated in stepfamily education (Reck et al., 2012, 2013; Skogrand et al., 2009). Qualitative interviews of Latino stepfathers revealed that, in general, they believed their participation improved their parenting skills and strengthened their relationship with their partner (Reck et al., 2013).

An example of research designed to gain more insight on the effectiveness of fatherhood education programs for Latino fathers can be found in qualitative studies of fatherhood education programs specifically tailored to Latino fathers (N. Cabrera et al., 2015; Concha et al., 2016). Generally, results indicated that participants were highly responsive to the curriculum they were presented, reporting positive changes in their behavior and a greater understanding of their roles as fathers. For instance, participants learned new ways of disciplining children that avoided the use of corporal punishment, improved communication skills with their spouse, showed greater sensitivity to gender issues, and recognized the benefits of coparenting (N. Cabrera et al., 2015; Concha et al., 2016).

These earlier studies provide a basis from which to build on in terms of the evaluation of fatherhood education programs involving Latino fathers. For instance, although these earlier studies extensively addressed issues pertaining to father-child and father-partner relationships, one area that was not thoroughly addressed was the economic and employment situation of participants and the perceptions participants held of their own employability. One of the consistent features of fatherhood education programs, especially under federal initiatives, is the objective of improving economic stability (Avellar et al., 2018; Hayward-Everson et al., 2018). Addressing such issues could be beneficial to Latino fathers when considering that, in general, Latinos in the U.S. tend to be employed in sectors characterized by low earnings with limited possibilities for advancement (Coltrane et al., 2004). Given the lack of research on this topic as it relates to Latino fathers, the current study explores the efforts of fatherhood education programs to teach Latino fathers skills that can instill more positive feelings of employability, while also continuing to reinforce the importance of strengthening father-child and partner relations.

### **Current study**

The goal of this study is two-fold. First, this study seeks to evaluate the impact of fatherhood education programs in terms of father-child relations, partner conflict, and perceptions of employability among Latino fathers. Second, this study adds a qualitative component which seeks to learn more about the experiences of the Latino fathers who participated in these programs. With this mixed-method approach, we hope to determine whether fatherhood education programs can be successful in terms of contributing to improved family relations and perceptions of employability for Latino fathers. Noting the need to

understand processes of education (Concha et al., 2016), we utilize a phenomenological perspective to explore the experiences of Latino fathers in fatherhood education and any skills that were developed. Our research questions include:

- (1) Do father-child relations improve from pretest to posttest? (quantitative)
- (2) Does partner conflict decrease from pretest to posttest? (quantitative)
- (3) Do perceptions of employability improve from pretest to posttest? (quantitative)
- (4) What were participants' experiences in these programs? (qualitative)
- (5) What skills did participants believe were developed as a result of their participation? (qualitative)

## Methodology

### Data

Data for this study were gathered as part of a national evaluation of a federally funded fatherhood initiative, coordinated by Mathematica Policy Research. The survey questions were approved by the New England IRB (#15-369). Researchers were granted access to the data from their respective state.

### Participants

Participants consisted of community-dwelling Latino fathers ( $n = 156$ ), who participated in federally funded fatherhood education courses in a western state between July 2017 and May 2019. Participants were recruited through billboards, flyers, partnerships with state agencies, and word of mouth. Pretest data, along with demographic data, were gathered during the programs' first session. Posttest data were collected during the programs' final sessions.

Detailed demographic data are presented in Table 1. Forty percent of the sample was between the ages of 25 and 34 and 61% were born in the United States. One-quarter of the sample had completed high school and 42% reported a monthly income of 2,000 USD or less. More than 72% of the sample was employed full-time. The majority of the sample (79%) reported being in a relationship. For those in relationships, 87% were married. The majority of the sample (77%) lived with their children.

### Procedure and research design

Fathers in this study participated in one of three funder-approved curricula. These curricula included *Home Run Dads* (Van Epp, 2016), *24/7 Dads* (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2020), and *Love & Logic* (Cline & Fay, 1990). Each program consisted of eight hours of instruction time – spread over four weekly sessions that lasted two hours each. Chi-square tests for independence revealed no significant differences by curriculum type in terms of outcomes related to father-child relations, partner conflict, and employability. Further, the three groups were similar in terms of major demographic characteristics. Subsequently, participant data were merged across curricula.

As part of these programs, all participants were asked to complete the same federally-generated pre- and post-program surveys. Topics included father-child relations, partner conflict, and employability. Participants were given the option of completing surveys in either English or Spanish, with the majority of participants (76%) electing to complete the surveys in English.

In order to gain a more comprehensive perspective on the experiences of participants than a single method design would allow, a mixed-method design was employed (Venkatesh et al., 2013). A series of paired samples *t*-tests gauged programmatic impacts on father-child relations, frequency of partner conflict, and perceptions of employability by comparing scores, pretest to posttest. Per the survey instructions and Human Subjects protocol provided by the funding agency, participants who had not seen their child in the last month were instructed to skip items related to father-child relations. Similarly, if participants were not in

**Table 1.** Participant characteristics (n = 156).

	N	%
<b>Age Group</b>		
18–24	10	6.41
25–34	63	40.38
35–44	55	35.26
45+	28	17.95
<b>Origin</b>		
Born in United States	95	60.90
Born outside of United States	61	39.10
<b>Education</b>		
Less than high school	25	16.06
High school diploma/GED	41	26.28
Some college	35	22.63
Associate's/Technical degree	20	13.14
Bachelor's degree or higher	34	21.90
<b>Monthly Income</b>		
\$2,000 or less	66	42.48
\$2,001–\$3,000	35	22.22
\$3,001–\$4,000	30	18.95
\$4,001–\$5,000	11	7.19
More than \$5,000	14	9.15
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Full-time employment	113	72.44
Part-time employment	14	8.97
Temporary employment	6	3.85
Unemployed	23	14.74
<b>Relationship Status</b>		
In a relationship	124	79.48
Not in a relationship	32	20.52
<b>Residential Status</b>		
Lived with Children	120	76.92
Did not live with children	36	23.08

a romantic relationship, they were instructed to skip items related to partner conflict. For both sets of items, listwise deletion methods were utilized to ensure that only participants with both pretest and posttest scores were included in the quantitative portion of the analysis. Quantitative analyses were supplemented by qualitative analyses of open-ended survey items that focused on participant experiences and the skills participants believed they developed as a result of their participation.

## Quantitative measures

### Father-child relations

Father-child relations were measured with a four-item subscale ( $\alpha = .71$  pretest;  $.70$  posttest). These items, adopted from the Protective Factors Survey (Counts et al., 2010), surveyed participants on how often, in the past month, they had experienced certain feelings toward their child, such as happiness or closeness. Items were rated on a Likert scale from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*often*).

### Partner conflict

To measure partner conflict, a seven-item subscale ( $\alpha = .91$  pretest;  $.92$  posttest) was adopted from the Building Strong Families' destructive conflict subscale (Amato, 2014; Scott et al., 2014). Items in this subscale explored how often, in the past month, certain events such as rudeness during disagreements or placing blame had occurred between partners. Items were rated on a Likert scale from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*often*).

### Employability

To measure perceptions of employability, a four-item subscale ( $\alpha = .86$  pretest;  $.87$  posttest) from other fatherhood education initiatives was used (Avellar et al., 2018; Zaveri et al., 2015). Participants were

asked to rate their level of agreement with statements related to their ability to find gainful employment and the confidence they had in their interviewing skills. Items were rated on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*).

### Qualitative measures and analytical procedures

Participants were also provided opportunities to respond to two open-ended survey items. The first item asked participants to share their general thoughts about the programs. The second item asked participants about skills they developed as a result of their participation. Qualitative data were analyzed using a phenomenological approach, which often utilizes open-ended survey items to gain a greater understanding of participant experience (Creswell, 2013). Characterized by social constructivism, phenomenology is used when common meanings and experiences are of particular interest (Creswell, 2013). It also serves a pedagogical purpose: as one comes to understand new meanings, the understanding can inform educational endeavors.

A crucial element of qualitative analysis is interrater reliability (Gisev et al., 2013). To achieve interrater reliability, coauthors first analyzed all usable data separately to identify statements that provided a description of participant experience, a process referred to as horizontalization (Creswell, 2013). Because options to provide qualitative responses were given near the end of the posttest survey, non-responses were treated as a product of respondent fatigue and were dismissed from the analysis (Porter et al., 2004).

After the initial analyses of usable qualitative data, coauthors applied qualitative analytic techniques to group statements and identified emerging themes within the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Coauthors consulted with one another to come to an agreement on the major themes. Occurrences of overlap between major themes and differences in perceptions of themes were discussed until agreement was reached. Coauthors then proceeded to code data separately. Interrater reliability was calculated by rating the level of agreement between coauthors. The two items under analysis served as the major themes. For the first theme (general thoughts), coauthors reached an interrater reliability level of 88%. This process was repeated for the second theme (skill development), which produced an interrater reliability level of 83%. Discrepancies were discussed until a consensus was reached.

## Quantitative results

### Evaluating programmatic impact

Paired-samples *t*-tests were conducted to evaluate the impact of the fatherhood education programs among participants ( $n = 156$ ), comparing pretest to posttest (see Table 2). First, results indicated improvements in father-child relations from pretest ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = .28$ ) to posttest ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = .21$ ),  $t = -2.98$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $d = .26$ . Next, results revealed a significant decrease in partner conflict from pretest ( $M = 2.22$ ,  $SD = .74$ ) to posttest ( $M = 2.04$ ,  $SD = .72$ ),  $t = 3.27$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $d = .29$ . Finally, statistically significant increases in perceptions of employability were detected from pretest ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = .59$ ) to posttest ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = .58$ ),  $t = -3.16$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $d = .25$ .

**Table 2.** Paired-samples *t*-tests measuring the impact of fatherhood education for community-based latino fathers.

Indices	Pretest		Posttest		Mean difference	Standard error of mean	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>					
Father-Child Relations	3.76	0.28	3.83	0.21	0.07	0.02	118	-2.98**	0.26
Partner Conflict	2.22	0.74	2.04	0.72	-0.18	0.05	105	3.27**	0.29
Employability	3.32	0.59	3.48	0.58	0.16	0.05	136	-3.16**	0.25

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

## Qualitative results

The findings derived from the qualitative analyses were grouped into two major themes: (a) general thoughts and (b) skill development. These themes were then broken down further into sub-themes. Per the phenomenological method, sub-themes mentioned by one or just a few participants were not included in the final analysis (Creswell, 2013). In general, the emerging themes were relatively consistent among the program participants, suggesting that qualitative analysis is an effective method to identify the common experiences of fatherhood education programs for Latino fathers. In this study, there were common themes in terms of what participants found most useful, the effectiveness of facilitators, the suggestions for programmatic improvements, and the skills participants developed as a result of their participation.

### General thoughts

A total of 105 participants offered qualitative responses related to their general thoughts about the fatherhood education programs. From these responses, three major sub-themes emerged: (a) program usefulness, (b) facilitator-related comments, and (c) areas for improvement.

#### Program usefulness

A total of 78 participants (74%) discussed program usefulness. Most mentioned that the programs improved the quality of their relationships with their spouse and children. Several participants offered simple, yet positive short answers that featured adjectives such as “great,” “amazing,” “interesting,” “insightful,” and “informative” in describing the programs. One father elaborated by saying: “It’s very nice to have this information available to dads, it helps in many ways to better understand my family needs.”

Participants mentioned they were pleased that these kinds of programs were offered, because it was important to them to learn how to become a better parent and improve communication with their spouse. One participant said: “Good info and has opened my eyes to different ways to effectively communicate and deal with my child.” Many participants stated that they had increased confidence and learned how to parent and communicate more effectively. One father’s statement is representative:

I believe every parent should educate themselves about how to be effective. I would definitely recommend to all that this is an effective course at helping parents help their children. I am very grateful for the material and experiences shared and taught to me.

#### Facilitator-related comments

Relative to educational processes, sixteen participants discussed how the programs’ facilitators were effective in helping them understand the programmatic content so they could be a better parent in their home, while also using adjectives such as “great,” “helpful,” and “passionate” to describe their particular facilitator. These sentiments were expressed in more detail by one father who said: “Very interesting to get tools that would help you with your children. I appreciate the instructor’s knowledge and the way he taught us.” Several participants commented on how effective the facilitators were at listening to what they had to say, making the content easier to understand, answering questions, and guiding them as they worked on improving their parenting and relationship skills. One participant stated:

Our instructor was an outstanding teacher, person, and great communicator. I think he is great. I loved this class; it improved my life tremendously. Thank you.”

#### Areas for improvement

The majority of participants were positive about the programs. However, several participants offered suggestions on areas of the programs they believed could be improved. For instance, multiple participants felt more could be done to both increase public awareness about such programs and to make programs more available or accessible for interested fathers. As one participant noted: “More ads or info to the public about this wonderful program.”

Other participants believed that families could benefit if other family members also participated in the programs. An example of this sentiment came from one participant who stated: "I think moms need to take the class also. I don't think they should take it together, but maybe the following night or at a later or earlier time." Participants also reported that after their partner had learned about the different topics discussed in class and how much the fathers were benefitting from the programs, they too expressed interest in participating. This was intimated by one father who stated: "Amazing program. My wife asked why there aren't programs like this for couples." Other fathers who were also interested in greater family involvement reinforced this statement by arguing that families and couples should participate in programs simultaneously, with one participant stating:

I want to come again. I want my spouse to come. I want to share this with others. It opens up the mind to understanding.

### ***Skill development***

A total of 57 participants offered qualitative responses that focused on important skills they developed as a result of their participation. From these responses, three sub-themes emerged: (a) empathy and patience, (b) improved father-child relations, and (c) improved communication skills.

#### ***Empathy and patience***

Twenty-one participants stated that a skill they had learned about from their respective program and subsequently practiced in their home, was the ability to empathize with their children. Several participants explained that they learned about how controlling one's reactions and seeing the situation from their child's point of view had helped them become more patient as parents. One participant stated: "Empathy. It's the cornerstone to the other techniques discussed in class." Many participants agreed that increased empathy had improved the relationships in their home, as they made the conscious decision in a situation where they would normally become upset, to first think about the situation, and then patiently and empathically interact with their child. As they did this, fathers reported that they were able to better communicate with their child and resolve their needs. Participants also recognized the importance of using empathy when interacting with their spouse as a way to improve spousal relations and better understand one another. One father expressed the following with regards to learning the value of empathy and patience:

How to be more compassionate when my children make mistakes, by not blaming them but helping to show that I understand it was an accident and not their fault. It helped me gain more patience with the mother of my children by thinking of how her parenting is different from mine and keep that in mind in coparenting.

#### ***Improved father-child relations***

Fifteen participants expressed how the programs helped them improve their relationships with their children. One father stated: "To build a stronger relationship than the existing one. This is a key to a higher quality of life." Several participants noted that, during their participation, they began spending more time with their children after learning that having positive experiences with their children would help improve their father-child relationships. Participants also noted that as they tried to have more positive interactions with their children, it helped their family to be more forgiving of past events. This sentiment can be summarized by one father who stated:

Love my kids, having as many good experiences with them as possible, will overshadow any bad experience, have a good relationship with them.

### **Improved Communication Skills**

Seven fathers expressed that another skill they developed and improved upon dealt with their communication skills. As they learned to communicate more effectively, their relationships with their partners and children improved, and they grew closer to their families. One father stated: “Make sure you know what is going on with your children. Communicate.” Participants noticed a change in the way they communicated with their children and partners and mentioned that they grew to believe that communication is the key to sound family relationships.

Multiple participants also noted that because of the skills learned, they were able to practice better conflict resolution in their families through better communication, with one father stating that he was: “Learning ways to talk to my son when a situation isn’t as delightful.” Others noted that their relationships had improved since they were able to communicate positively with their families in ways they were not able to before their participation, making their existing relationships stronger than before. Another participant noted, that by learning to communicate, his interactions at home and in the workplace changed for the better, stating:

Communication is key. This is not only good for parents, but for supervisors and their employees, etc. coaches. For multiple types of relationships, it’s beneficial.

## **Discussion**

As the U.S. becomes increasingly diverse, effectively serving underrepresented groups will be increasingly important (Flores, 2017). This study applied a mixed-method analysis to: (a) evaluate the impact of fatherhood education programs in addressing father-child relations, partner conflict, and perceptions of employability among Latino fathers and (b) use qualitative data to learn more about the experiences of the Latino fathers who participated and the skills they believed they developed as a result of their participation. A discussion of this study’s major findings is presented below.

### **Evaluation of findings**

#### **Programmatic impact**

The pretest-posttest results of this study’s quantitative analysis (research questions 1–3) suggest that these fatherhood education programs were effective in helping Latino fathers improve father-child relations, decrease partner conflict, and gain more positive perceptions of their employability. Effect sizes were relatively small, ranging from  $d = .20$  (better father-child relations) to  $d = .29$  (lower levels of conflict). However, small effect sizes may be consistent with the relatively low program dosage (i.e., 8 hours total). Moreover, these effect sizes generally exceed the magnitude of those found in previous meta-analytic studies (e.g.,  $d = .26$ , Holmes et al., 2010;  $d = .167$ , 2020). It is perhaps of particular note that from pretest to posttest, fathers’ perceptions of employability improved ( $d = .25$ ) – a variable that is less often examined in fatherhood education. These significant changes in mean scores suggest that the curricula were relevant and applicable to the situations of Latino fathers. Qualitative findings shed further light on the extent to which this was the case.

#### **Participant experiences**

This study’s qualitative analysis (research questions 4 and 5) was organized under two major themes: (a) general thoughts and (b) skill development. Fathers’ qualitative comments focusing on program usefulness and skills learned (i.e., empathy, patience, improved communication skills) point to processes through which quantitative gains may have been achieved (i.e., better father-child relations, less partner conflict).

**General thoughts.** Relative to general thoughts, a strong majority of fathers noted their satisfaction and what they perceived as the overall usefulness of the programs, especially in terms of helping them

improve their relationships with their children and partners. These fathers felt they learned how to become better parents, and how to improve communication with their intimate partners as well.

Fathers were also quick to endorse the programs they participated in, recommending them to others and offering praise for program facilitators. Past research has pointed to the role of facilitator quality and its influence on program outcomes (Bradford et al., 2012; Higginbotham & Myler, 2010; Ketring et al., 2017). Thus, it is likely that a strong rapport with facilitators may have helped fathers be more receptive to the presented material, and in turn increase the likelihood that fathers would apply what they had learned in their homes, which may help to explain the improvements in father-child and father-partner relationships.

When providing feedback related to how the programs could be improved, multiple fathers noted the possible benefits of full-family participation. This is not surprising given the emphasis that Latino groups tend to place on family values and togetherness (Falicov, 2010). Fathers also suggested that more be done in terms of increasing public awareness of fatherhood education programs, possibly indicating the benefits that participating fathers believed their peers could derive from taking part in these programs.

***Skill development.*** In terms of skill development, fathers emphasized the new skills they had developed, such as greater empathy and patience, improved father-child relations, and improved communication skills. In discussing the benefits of improving upon these skills, fathers noted how being more empathetic and patient helped them strengthen their relationships with their children, as well as their partner. This is a promising finding for practitioners hoping to demonstrate the effectiveness of fatherhood education and the ability of these programs to reach some of their main objectives, which center on improving both parent-child and couple relationships (Anderson et al., 2002; Frank et al., 2015).

### ***Limitations and future directions***

The findings of this study should be viewed in the context of its limitations. First, with a small sample size ( $n = 156$ ), it is difficult to generalize this study's findings to the larger U.S. Latino population, which is characterized by its diversity in terms of different nationalities, cultures, and immigrant/non-immigrant statuses (Kumpfer et al., 2002). Further evaluative studies of fatherhood education programs are needed to test the applicability of this and other programs for Latino fathers.

It is also important to emphasize that the programs under evaluation were not specifically tailored to Latino fathers, but rather to fathers in general. Thus, it is not possible to gauge how these same participants might respond to programming tailored to their specific cultural practices and values. Relative to cultural differences, further research is needed regarding common versus unique aspects of program impact and program processes. Even given this limitation, however, this study serves as another example of how family life and parent education programs geared toward a general audience can also help equip participants from underrepresented and minority groups with skills they can use to improve their familial relationships, and in this case learn more about the benefits of responsible fatherhood and positive father involvement (see Reck et al., 2012, 2013; Skogrand et al., 2009, 2014).

### ***Practical implications***

With increasing cultural diversity in the U.S., it will be important that family life and relationship education programs continue to take such diversity under consideration when developing relationship and parenting education programs to ensure that they are relevant and useful to a wider range of audiences (Skogrand et al., 2009). It will also be important that further efforts are made to involve historically underrepresented groups in programs that emphasize positive parent-child relationships, strong spousal relationships, and the achievement of economic stability (Ooms & Wilson, 2004). Our

findings suggest future efforts may benefit from concerted efforts to advertise and raise awareness of fatherhood programs. Additionally, program administrators and educators may need to consider involving family members in some of the educational activities.

The findings from this study suggest that fatherhood education programs can help fathers improve familial relationships and their outlook on employability, but they may also provide educators with a much needed recruitment tool, especially when considering the new relationship skills that Latino fathers believed they developed through their participation. Such findings may serve to display the global applicability of the programs evaluated in this study, encouraging participation of fathers from a wide range of backgrounds who wish to improve their parenting skills and familial relationships.

Further, the positive results related to perceived employability may illustrate the value of these programs to stakeholders, especially to the extent fathers apply what they have learned to improve their employment situation and family relationships. Finally, the findings from this study provide more support for the argument that the quality of program facilitation can outweigh the importance participants may place on facilitator characteristics (Higginbotham & Myler, 2010). Indeed, the fathers in this study emphasized the quality of program facilitation and the skills the facilitators helped them develop, without mention of facilitator demographics. Taken together, the overall positive findings in this study suggest that fatherhood education may be of benefit to Latino fathers and may lend support for the argument that the current study, and similar studies (Concha et al., 2016), may provide a model for program planners hoping to design culturally-relevant and research-based family life, parenting, and relationship education programs and interventions for Latino fathers.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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