

# Welcome to the Dad Allies Provider Learning Series

## Strong From the Start: Empowering Dads' Mental Health In the Perinatal Journey

March 21, 2025

**Washington  
Fatherhood  
Council**



# Fathers and Parenting

We  
know  
that:

Child and family well-being improve when fathers are positively engaged in their children's lives.

Fathers play a unique and important role in children's development.

Fathers should have support and resources to become the fathers they aspire to be.



Washington  
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Council



# Strong From the Start

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**EMPOWERING DADS' MENTAL HEALTH IN THE  
PERINATAL JOURNEY**

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"Fatherhood begins before birth. Supporting dads in their perinatal journey isn't just about their well-being—it's about strengthening families, fostering connection, and ensuring every parent feels seen, valued, and prepared for the road ahead."



# AGENDA

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- Introduction
- What is perinatal mental health and why focus on dads?
- What we know about paternal mental health
- Risk factors
- How to identify symptoms
- Supporting Fathers
- Screening and identification
- Takeaways and resources



# INTRODUCTION

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- About me
  - Perinatal mental health specialist (PMH-C),
  - LMHC
- Why focus on perinatal mental health?



# WHAT IS PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH?

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- Perinatal mental health refers to emotional and psychological well-being **during pregnancy and the first year postpartum.**
- Often discussed in relation to mothers
- Conditions refer to:
  - Anxiety and anxiety related disorders (OCD, PTSD, etc.)
  - Depression, and
  - Adjustment disorders



# WHO CAN BE IMPACTED?

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- Perinatal mental health symptoms can impact anyone in the family
- Most commonly occurring in support & caregiver roles
  - Mothers
  - Fathers
  - Caregiving grandparents
  - Foster parents
  - Adoptive parents





# P A T E R N A L   A N D   M A T E R N A L   S P E C I F I E R S

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- Paternal mental health or “Paternal Depression”
  - Impacts at least 1 in 10 fathers
  - Often has unique symptoms and a later onset
  - More research needs to be done to explore rates nationally and worldwide.
  - Despite the increasing research on paternal perinatal mental health, risk factors of paternal perinatal mental health remain relatively unclear (Goodman, 2004). (4)
- Maternal mental health
  - Impacts 1 in 5 mothers
  - Symptoms may present in pregnancy, and present anytime during the postpartum period (year after birth)
  - Onset times vary, but often symptoms appear in the first 6 weeks after birth and during significant hormone shifts or life transitions/events (8)



# PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH? - NOT JUST MOMS

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- Paternal mental health or “Paternal Depression”
  - Often discussed in relation to mothers, but fathers also experience significant emotional and mental shifts during this period.
- Fathers are frequently left out of perinatal mental health conversations
  - Percieved as a caretaker
    - Physically
    - Emotionally
    - Financially



# WHY DOES PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH MATTER FOR FATHERS

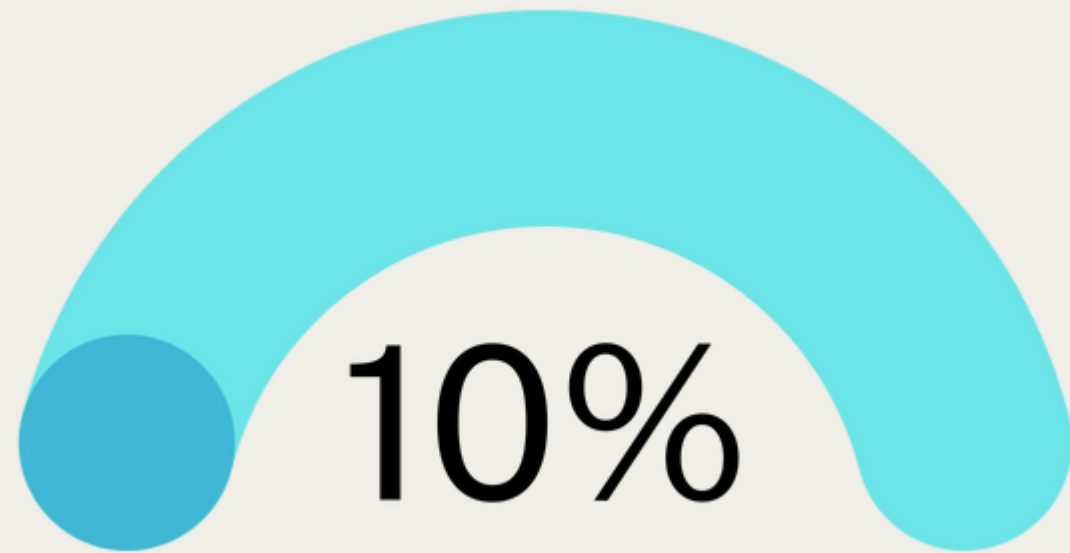
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- Fathers play a crucial role in family dynamics and child development
- Poor paternal mental health can impact:
  - Bonding and attachment with the baby
  - Relationship with the partner, and
  - Overall family well-being
- Recognizing and addressing mental health challenges helps fathers show up as their best selves for their families

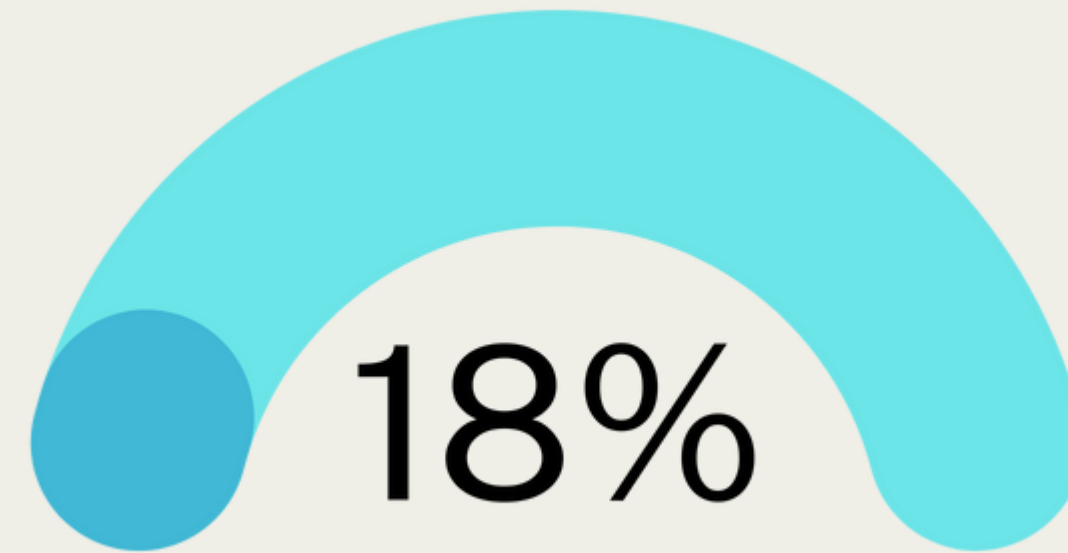


# HOW COMMON ARE PERINATAL STRUGGLES FOR FATHERS

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About 1 in 10 fathers experience postpartum depression.



Nearly 20% of new fathers struggle with anxiety related disorders



# WHAT WE KNOW

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- Unique set of symptoms
- Presentation
  - May present during pregnancy of partner
  - Often can present later and have a later onset after birth
    - typically peaking at 6 months postpartum
- Research
  - More research needs to be done
    - How it impacts fathers
    - How many are actually impacted by paternal depression and anxiety
    - Paternity leave (10)



# WHAT WE KNOW - RISK FACTORS

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- **Life balance- increase in responsibility**
  - Work changes pressure to provide
  - Family dynamics
  - Lifestyle change, financial changes
- **Lack of connection**
  - Reduced sex life
  - Communication stress
- **Hormone changes**
  - Reduced sleep
  - Decrease in testosterone can lead to increase in depression symptoms
- **Perinatal/birth Complications**
  - PTSD- Birth Trauma, Fear of death of partner or baby
  - Perinatal loss, miscarriage or stillbirth
  - Fertility interventions/struggles



# WHAT WE KNOW - RISK FACTORS

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- **Circumstances surrounding pregnancy**
  - Unexpected/Unintended pregnancy
- **First time father**
- **Father age**
- **History of mental health condition**
- **Limited family or social involvement**
- **Involvement in services**
  - Child services
  - Legal circumstances
- **Having a partner with mental health needs** or perinatal mental health symptoms



# WHAT WE KNOW - BARRIERS

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- Fathers are less likely to seek help or talk about their struggles due to
  - Stigma about parenting and fathers
  - Societal expectations
  - Cultural norms
- Professional bias
  - Clinicians and providers often times are looking for symptoms that would be present in internalized depression
  - Miseducation about paternal mental health
  - Expectations about gender roles
- BIPOC fathers may experience unique, race-based stressors during the perinatal period
  - For example, Black fathers are stereotyped as uninvolved parents despite being the most involved fathers across racial categories. 1





# RECOGNIZING SYMPTOMS OF PATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH

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- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed
- Increased substance use or unhealthy coping mechanisms
- Difficulty bonding with the baby
- Withdrawing from partner, family, or social support
- Communication difficulties with partner
- Anger
- Violent outbursts
- Disconnect from partner or other children
- Overly involved in work or tasks to avoid engagement



# RECOGNIZING SYMPTOMS OF PATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH

- Difficulty sleeping or changes in appetite
- Tearfulness, extreme sadness or overwhelm
- Feelings of dread, hopelessness or failure
- Excessive worry, nervousness about health, safety or ‘coulds’
- Worrying about hurting self or the baby
- In severe cases Psychosis
  - Not as common in fathers, however has been noted



# OF NOTE

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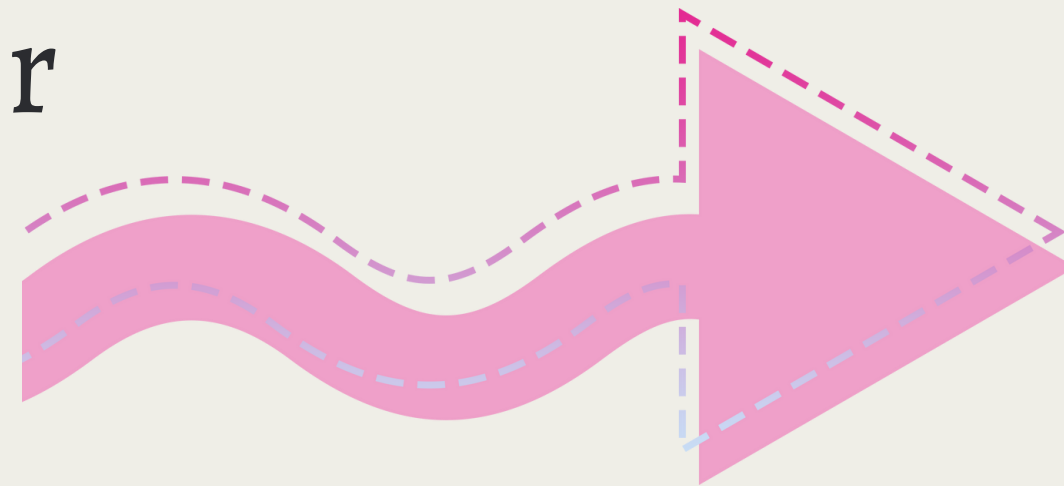
- Masculine Depression
  - Externalized symptoms
  - Masculine culture may prohibit someone from speaking up about depression because it is not accepted
  - "Masculine depression," or a subtype of depression, is characterized by externalizing symptoms like anger, aggression, and substance use, rather than the typical internalizing symptoms like sadness or hopelessness, and is often linked to adherence to traditional masculine norms
  - JAMA Psychiatry Study in 2013
  - There is a Gender Specific depression screening tool available (11)



# OF NOTE

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2:1  
Mother to father  
rates



1:1  
Mother to father  
rates if symptoms of  
externalized  
depression are  
included.



“Men are expected to be big and strong and stoic, to take care of everything, to be a tough guy. It was hard to acknowledge that I needed help.”



# WHAT CAN BE DONE TO SUPPORT FATHERS?

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- Normalize Conversations:
  - Encourage open discussions about mental health in provider settings
  - Educating partners on how to talk about it with each other
  - Including fathers in well child visits, etc.
- Encourage Professional and Peer Resources:
  - Therapy, counseling, or support groups can provide coping strategies.
  - Complementary or alternative therapies, such as exercise, massage, or acupuncture 1
  - Promote and Educate about Self-Care:
    - Sleep, nutrition, exercise, and mindfulness practices.



# WHAT CAN BE DONE TO SUPPORT FATHERS?

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- Strengthen Social Support:
  - Connecting with other dads, friends, and family members.
- Include Fathers in Perinatal Care:
  - Healthcare providers engage dads
  - Utilizing the adaptation for fathers by including partner in the well child visits.
  - Advocating for pediatricians to have dads come in
  - Using well known and utilized perinatal screenings
    - EPDS-Has been validated for fathers with adjusted cutoffs for scoring
- Offer resources regardless of score



# HOW PARTNERS CAN SUPPORT EACH OTHER

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- Communicate
- Ask questions–
  - How are you feeling?
  - How can I support you?
- Reinforce positives and support
- Offer support and encouragement
  - Listen and reflection
- Offer resources
- Remind them they are not alone and that there is help





# SCREENING AND IDENTIFICATION

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- In 2020, the American Academy of Pediatrics [called on pediatricians to assess the mental health of all new parents](#), regardless of gender, and to make appropriate referrals when necessary.<sup>1</sup>
- Why is screening important for fathers?
  - Caregiver mental health screenings help to identify paternal mental health symptoms
  - Fathers are often is under screened or unidentified due to lack of screening
  - Increase fathers experience of inclusion in pediatric appointments



# SCREENING AND IDENTIFICATION

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- How should caregiver screenings be done?
- What screenings are available?
  - EPDS- The Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS)
    - Developed to assist health professionals in detecting mothers suffering from perinatal mental health conditions
    - New cutoff score for fathers
  - PHQ-9 and GAD-7-
    - Offer screening for symptoms of Depression and Anxiety that may be present

*Even if a parent doesn't meet criteria or denies symptoms, resources should be available and presented regardless*



## OF NOTE

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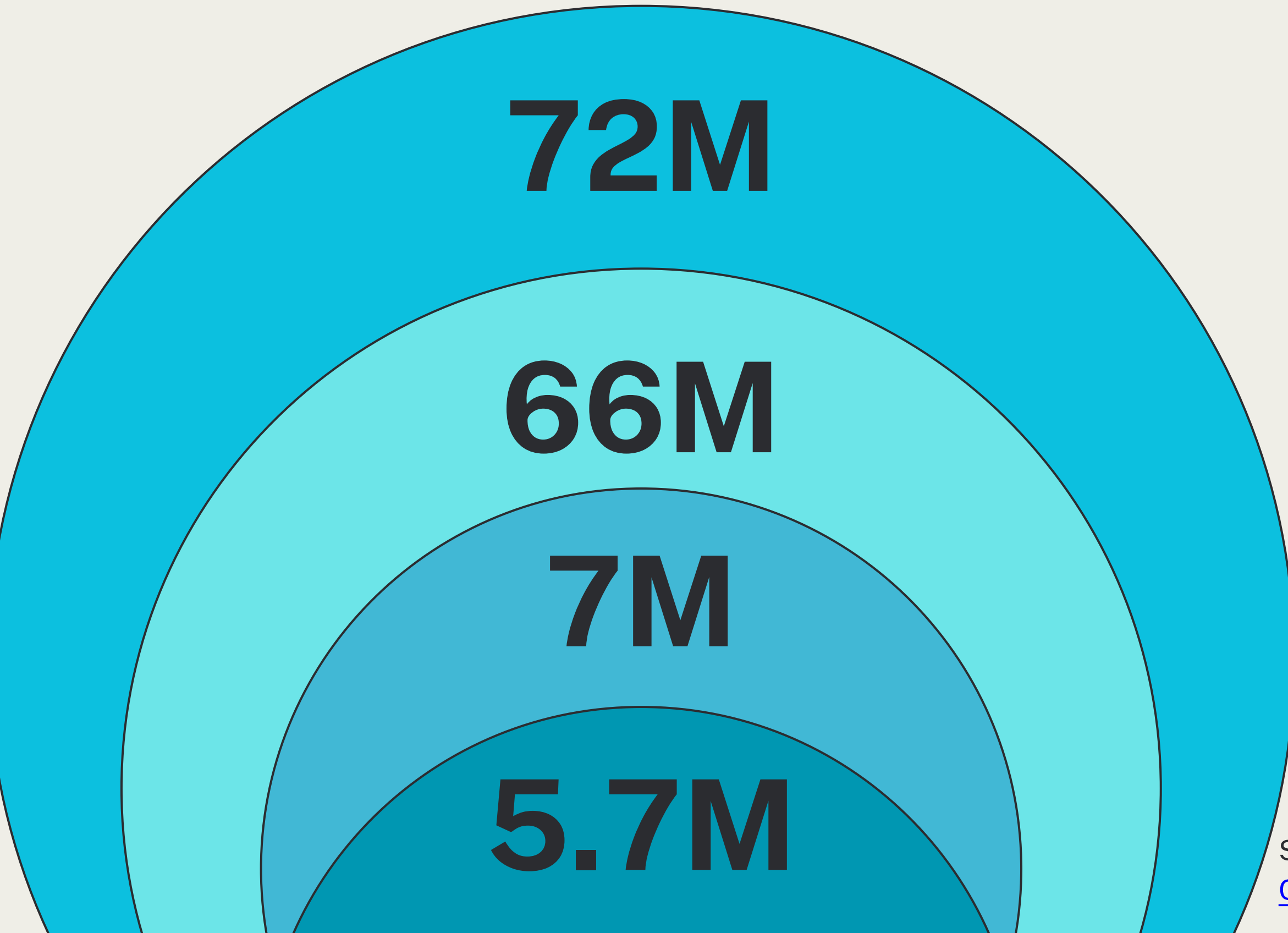
‘Research shows that support provided by partners is a very important protective factor in reducing mental health disorders in both prenatal and postnatal periods in a woman's life.’

[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)



# LETS TALK NUMBERS

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**72M**

Approximately 72 million men identify as fathers

**66M**

Of those 72 Million, 66 Million have been or are currently married

**7M**

Around 7 million dads in the US are the identified primary caregivers and considered 'Stay at home Dads'

**5.7M**

Nearly 6 million children are living in a single father household



Source: United States Census Bureau. (2021). [American Community Survey S0901: Children characteristics \[Data set\]](#).

# THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNER AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

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Children with involved fathers are at lower risk of poor outcomes:

- including infant mortality,
- emotional and behavioral problems,
- poor school performance,
- alcohol and substance abuse, and
- criminal activity.

Source: National Fatherhood Initiative. (2019). [The strengths of father presence \[Infographic\]](#).



# FATHER SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

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- Reminder- if the new father isn't ready to reach out for help yet, offering a list of resources to help him start that process when he is ready may be helpful 3
- [Perinatal Support WA](#)
  - Warm Line Resource
  - Dad Support Group
  - [Resource Guide For Dads](#)
- [Resources for Fathers — Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance: MMHLA](#)
- [Dads Move - Home](#)



# FATHER SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

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- [Help for Dads | Postpartum Support International \(PSI\)](#)
- [International Father's Mental Health Day \(IFMHD\)](#)
- IFMHD – the day after Father's Day – features a social media campaign highlighting key aspects of fathers' mental health.
- 24/7 Maternal Mental Health Hotline 1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262)



# PROVIDER SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

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- [Perinatal Support WA](#)
  - [Warm Line](#)
  - [Educational opportunities](#)
- PSI- [Paternal Perinatal Mental Health Training by Postpartum Support International](#)
  - [An online and in-person training for psychotherapists, medical providers, and allied birth professionals to gain valuable knowledge of the key psychological, interpersonal, and systems-level factors related to fathers as they navigate the transition to parenthood.](#)
- [National Warm line 24/7](#)





# PROVIDER SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

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- [EPDS-EDPS\\_text\\_added.pdf](#)
- [https://med.stanford.edu/content/dam/sm/ppc/documents/DBP/EDPS\\_text\\_added.pdf](https://med.stanford.edu/content/dam/sm/ppc/documents/DBP/EDPS_text_added.pdf)
- [1https://utswmed.org/medblog/paternal-postpartum-depression/](https://utswmed.org/medblog/paternal-postpartum-depression/)
- [2 Supporting New Fathers: An Overview of Paternal Mental Health Statistics, Insights, and Resources — Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance: MMHLA](#)
- [3Male Postpartum Depression](#)
- [4Factors Influencing Paternal Postpartum Depression: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis - ScienceDirect](#)
- [5 Tatemeh Abdollahi, Munn-Sann Lye, Jamshid Yazdani Cherati, Mehran Zarghami, Depressive symptoms in men immediately after birth, Journal of Psychosomatic Research, Volume 151, 2021, 110650, ISSN 0022-3999, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychores.2021.110650. \(Depressive symptoms in men immediately after birth - ScienceDirect\)](#)
- [6 How Fathers Can Help Their Postpartum Partner and Themselves | Wildflower Center for Emotional Health](#)
- [7 For Dads: What to Do, What Not to Do When Your Wife Has PPD | Psychology Today](#)
- [8 Maternal Mental Health | MCHB](#)
- [9Fatherhood Decreases Testosterone | Science | AAAS](#)
- [10Petts RJ, Knoester C, Li Q. Paid paternity leave-taking in the United States. Community Work Fam. 2020;23\(2\):162-183. doi: 10.1080/13668803.2018.1471589. Epub 2018 May 7. PMID: 32076386; PMCID: PMC7030163.](#)
- [11 https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/finding-a-new-home/202406/what-is-masculine-depression-and-how-is-it-treated#:~:text=Indeed%2C%20when%20researchers%20use%20gender,Success](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/finding-a-new-home/202406/what-is-masculine-depression-and-how-is-it-treated#:~:text=Indeed%2C%20when%20researchers%20use%20gender,Success)



# Thank you!

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