



Considering Community: Examining Fatherhood Program Participants' Outcomes

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Introduction

- There has been an increased effort to provide programming for noncustodial fathers that emphasizes their involvement in their children's lives since they uniquely contribute to children's development (Fagan et al., 2014.)
- The intent of fatherhood programs is to promote positive parenting behaviors, create healthy adult relationships in the family (e.g., coparenting and couple), and promote economic security for children through child support payments (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015).
- The limited research on fatherhood programs lacks information focused on the differences in program outcomes that may exist based on contextual factors (Osborne et al., 2014). For example, fatherhood researchers have not investigated the influence of setting (i.e., rural/non-rural) on program outcomes. This may be especially important since rural areas contain distinctive individual and economic challenges compared to non-rural areas.
- The goal of the present study was to explore change in positive parenting behaviors, child support compliance intent, commitment to their romantic relationship, and perception of financial hardship, and test whether there were differences in outcomes for rural and non-rural participants.

Methods

Sample

- $N = 274$ fatherhood program participants
- 75% male, 15% female, 10% no response
- Mean age = 35.4 years ($SD = 9.20$)
- 46% African American, 44% European American, 10% other
- 21% never completed high school, 57% hold a high school diploma/GED, 11% have a trade school/technical certificate or an associate's degree, 10% has a bachelor's degree or higher

Procedure

- Programs took place across 10 community-based family resource centers across Alabama. Participants were recruited through client referrals, word of mouth, and broad recruitment strategies such as social media exposure, brochure and flyer distribution, and websites.
- Participants received various fatherhood curricula focused on self-awareness, caring for self, parenting skills, and relationship skills as well as educational and employment resources and services.
- A retrospective pre/post survey was given at the conclusion of the program.

Measures

- *Positive parenting behaviors* (as used in Adler-Baeder et al., 2016). 3 items. ($\alpha = .73$).
- *Child support compliance intent*. One global item: "I am committed to making full child support payments each month."
- *Commitment to romantic relationship* (Lund, 1985). 2 items. ($\alpha = .91$)
- *Financial Responsibility* (Prawitz et al., 2006). 5 items. ($\alpha = .69$).

Analysis Plan

- Mixed between-within repeated measures analyses of variance were used to determine whether there were significant changes in each outcome (i.e., main effects of time) and if there were differences in change patterns by community context (rural or non-rural).
- Post-hoc paired samples t-tests were then conducted to determine which groups showed significant change from pre-program to post-program.

Figure 1: Interaction of child support compliance intent and community context

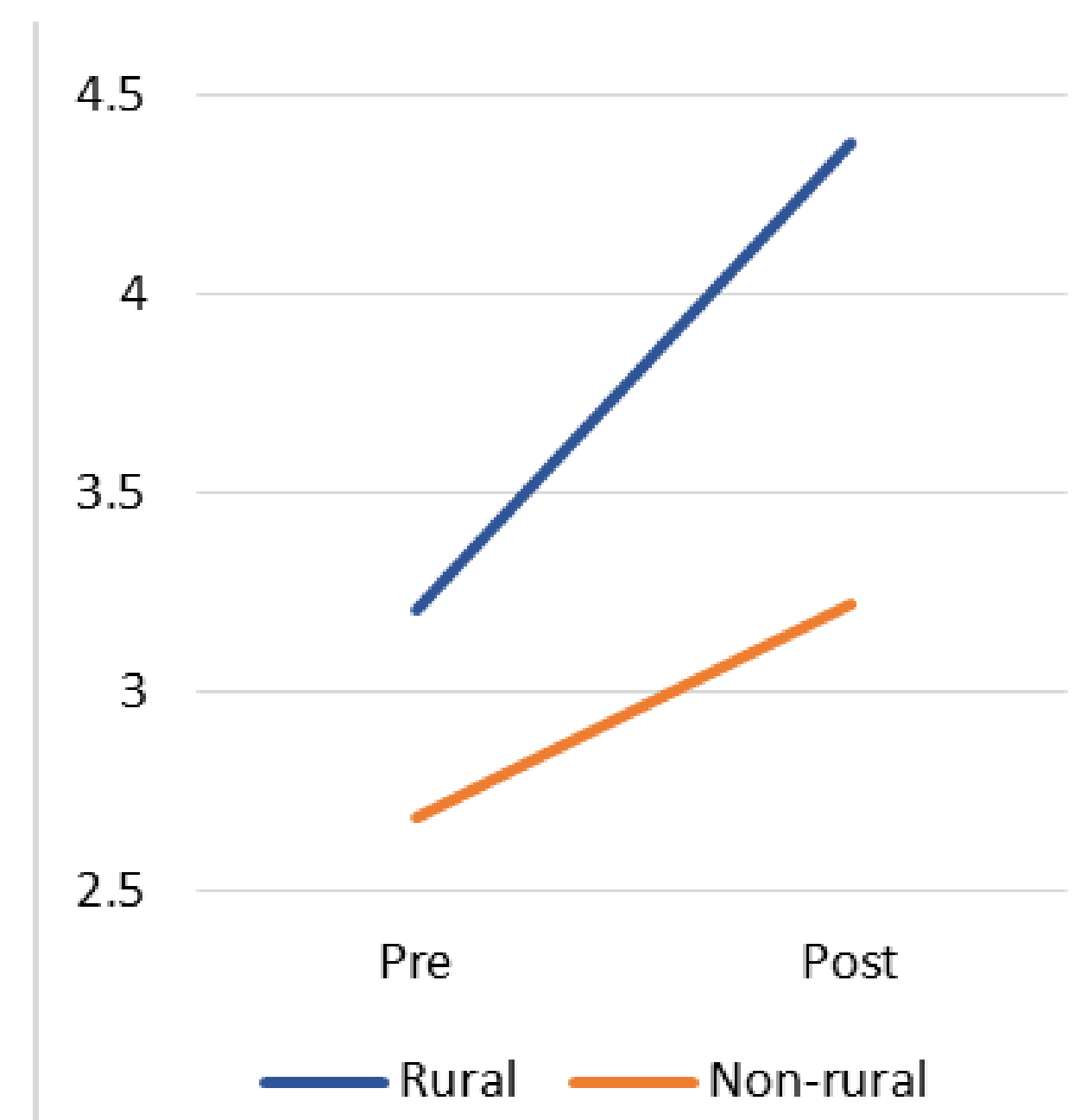


Figure 2: Interaction of commitment to romantic relationship and community context

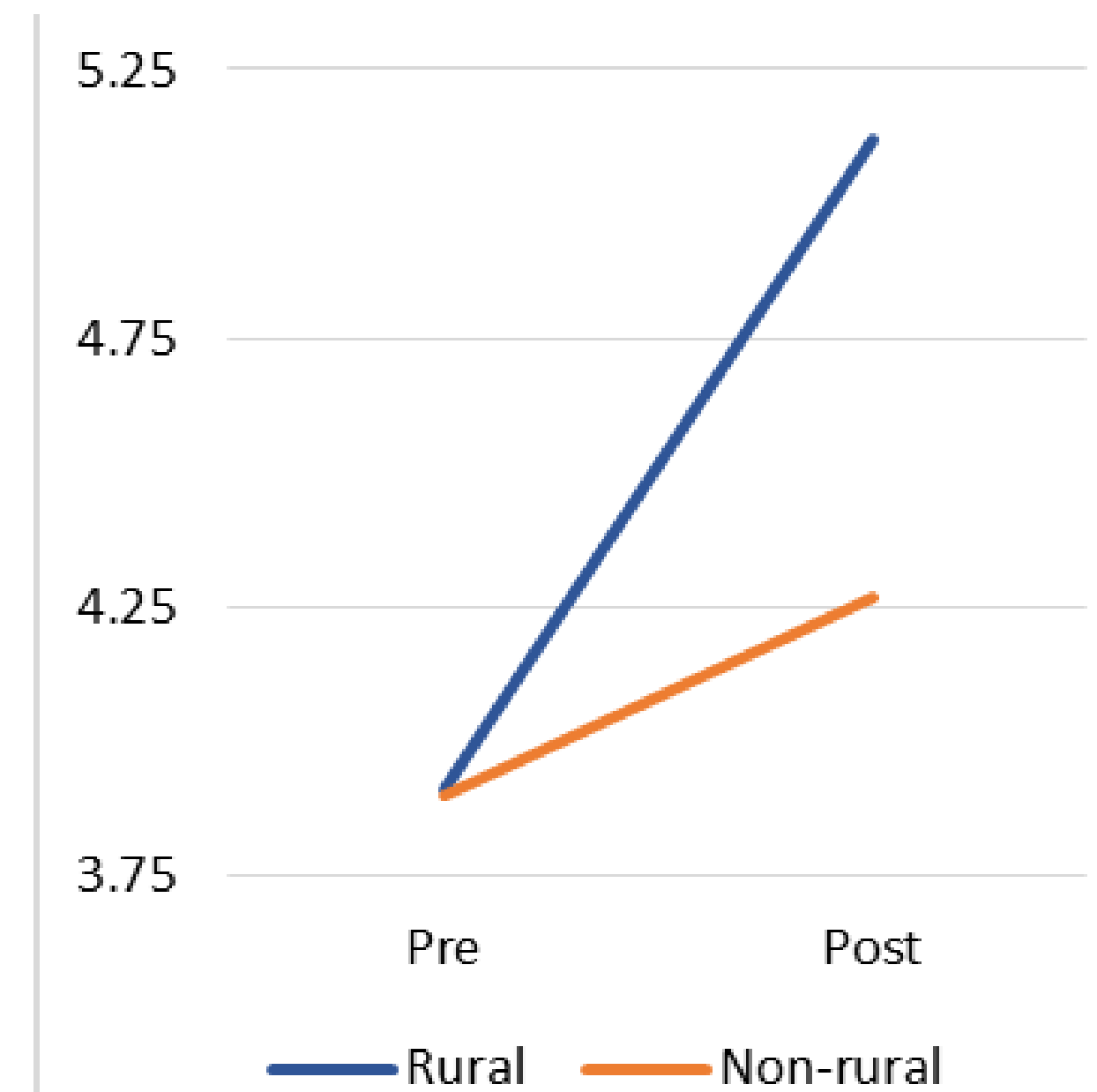
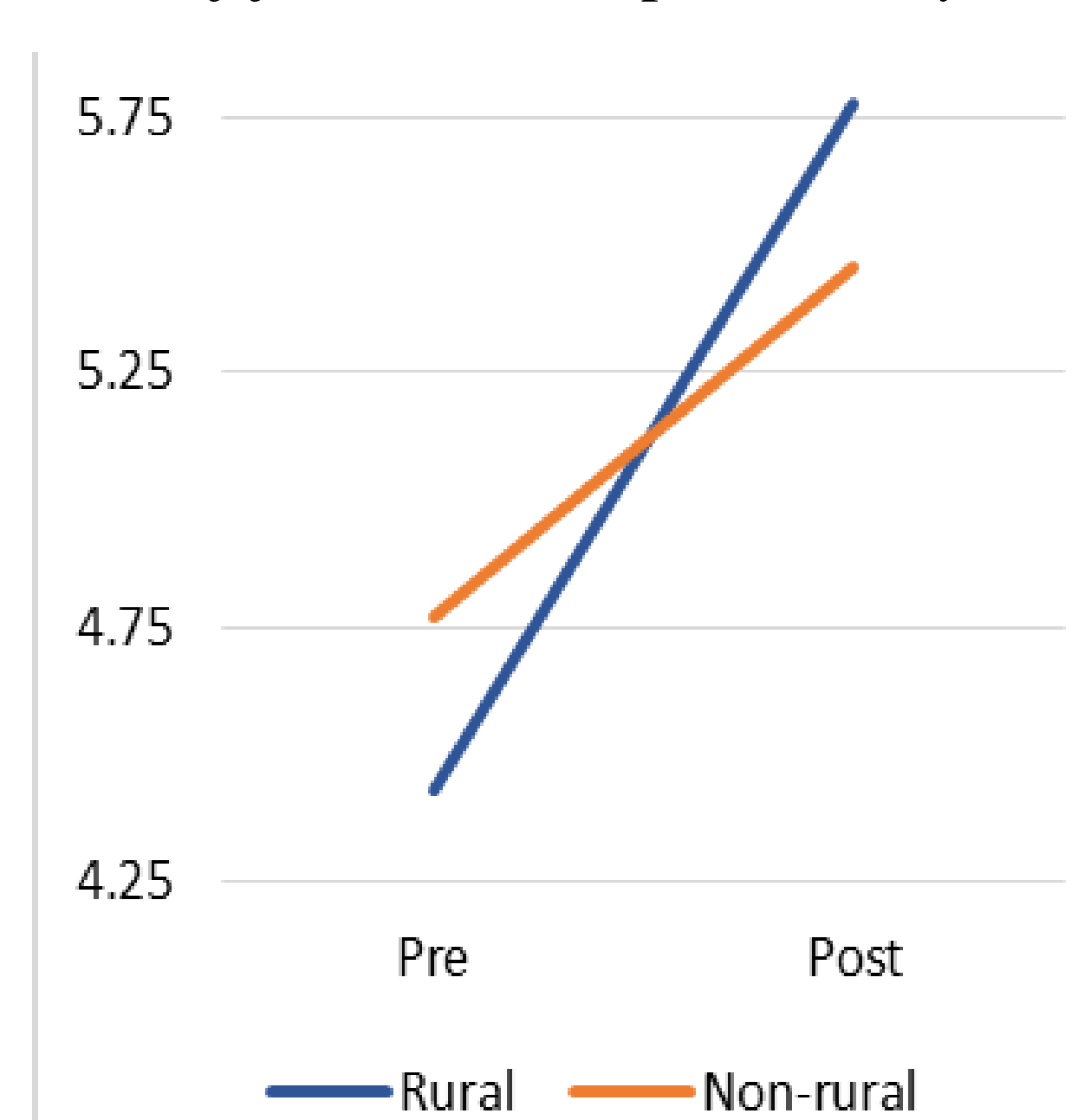


Figure 3: Interaction of financial responsibility and community context



Results

- There was a main effect of time on *positive parenting behaviors* ($F(1, 167) = 53.34, p < .001$), however there were no significant differences by group, indicating both groups changed similarly.
- There was a significant interaction of time X community context for change in *child support compliance intent* ($F(1, 171) = 6.50, p = .01$). Post hoc paired sample t-tests indicate participants in both rural ($t(28) = 5.03, p < .001$) and non-rural ($t(143) = 5.11, p < .001$) contexts improved, however those in rural contexts showed greater change after program participation. See Figure 1.
- There was a significant interaction of time X community context for change in *commitment to romantic relationship* ($F(1, 172) = 8.15, p < .01$). Post hoc paired sample t-tests indicate participants in both rural ($t(24) = 6.00, p < .001$) and non-rural ($t(148) = 3.24, p = .001$) contexts improved, however those in rural contexts showed greater change after program participation. See Figure 2.
- There was a significant interaction of time X community context for change in *financial responsibility* ($F(1, 170) = 7.51, p < .01$). Post hoc paired sample t-tests indicate participants in both rural ($t(24) = 6.80, p < .001$) and non-rural ($t(148) = 7.41, p < .001$) contexts improved, however those in rural contexts showed greater change after program participation. See Figure 3.

Discussion and Implications

- This study contributes to the small body of research evaluating fatherhood programs and is the first to consider the influence of rural vs. non-rural settings on changes in program outcomes.
- It appears that all fathers, regardless of setting, experienced significant improvements in their parenting skills, commitment to their couple relationship, financial responsibility, and intention to pay child support.
- Results support evidence of setting moderating the change in three of the four outcomes assessed, with enhanced benefits for fathers in rural programs.
- The added benefit for rural fathers is interesting and deserves further exploration. We speculate that it may be related to comparatively fewer resources in rural areas compared to non-rural areas and fathers may therefore be more invested and attentive in the program.
- Program providers can feel confident that providing services to fathers in both rural and urban settings is beneficial. These findings suggest the value of fatherhood programs in diverse communities and we encourage continued efforts to evaluate their effectiveness and to consider contextual factors in studies of impact.

References

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