

# Child Maltreatment and Domestic Violence: Before and After Enrollment in Strong Fathers

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**September 1, 2015**

## **Executive Summary**

The Center for Family and Community Engagement at North Carolina State University completed a pre/post analysis of child maltreatment assessments regarding the children of the men enrolled in the Strong Fathers Program. The purpose of this analysis was to determine what changes in the safety of children and their mothers occurred before and after the men's enrollment in the program. To carry out this analysis, the university used data from the North Carolina Division of Social Services' Central Registry of child maltreatment cases. The data sample included the children of 177 men enrolled in the Winston-Salem and Durham programs.

For the families of the men, the pre/post comparisons found statistically significant reductions in:

- Number of families with investigated child protection reporting;
- Median level of highest family risk assessed during investigations;
- Number of families with child protection findings (substantiations, services needed); and
- Number of families with household domestic violence as contributory to child maltreatment.

The lack of a comparison group precludes establishing the impact of the program. Nevertheless, the data indicate that the program benefits the children and their mothers. Strong Fathers is a promising approach for promoting responsible fatherhood in situations of domestic violence.

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## **Introduction**

The Center for Family and Community Engagement at North Carolina State University completed a pre/post analysis of child maltreatment findings regarding the children of the men enrolled in the Strong Fathers Program. The purpose of this analysis was to determine what changes in the safety of children and their mothers occurred before and after enrollment in the program. To carry out this analysis, the university used data from the North Carolina Division of Social Services' (NCDSS) Central Registry of child maltreatment cases. County Departments of Social Services are required to send reports to NCDSS of child protection assessments.

## **Methodology**

The NCDSS Central Registry data query covered the two-year period prior to the men's enrollment in Strong Fathers and all the period after their enrollment. Each implementation site sent a request to NCDSS to pull data on the children of the men enrolled in the program. The sites provided the available information on the names, birthdates, and race of the men and their children. This year the thoroughness of the search was enhanced by additional information being provided on the children than in past years. NCDSS conducted the data queries over June and July 2015, with final data transmission on July 22, 2015. The query included the counties and neighboring counties of the two implementation sites. If the families resided outside of these counties, the data pull would not have captured their child protection assessments. All data were de-identified prior to transmittal to the university. The protocols were approved by the

Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects at North Carolina State University. The data analysis was conducted in SPSS, version 22. Pre/post comparisons were conducted for nominal data with one-sample chi-square tests and for ordinal data with sign tests at the .05 level.

## **Data Sample**

The data query covered all the men enrolled in the Strong Fathers program from when the groups started in ffy 2010 until April 2015. Thus, the data did not cover men enrolled over the summer for whom the post-enrollment period would have been quite minimal. It should further be noted that the research only included men who were 18 years and older. Younger men were not included in the study.

As shown in Table 1, 24 groups are in the sample with 178 men enrolled in the program. The pre period for each man is before the start date of his group; the post period begins on the group's start date and extends to when the NCDSS conducted the summer 2015 data queries. This means that the post-period varied in length for the men. Because the transmitted data for one man does not include the dates for the child protection investigations, his pre and post period could not be determined. Accordingly, the sample for the Central Registry analysis is reduced to 177.

**Table 1: Number of Strong Father Participants in Forsyth County and Durham County Sites, 2009-2015**

<b>Group #</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Start Date</b>	<b>End Date</b>	<b># of Enrollees</b>
1	Forsyth	11/12/2009	4/13/2010	7
2	Forsyth	4/8/2010	7/29/2010	8
3	Forsyth	1/6/2011	5/19/2011	5
4	Forsyth	5/5/2011	10/20/2011	4
5	Forsyth	9/1/2011	1/26/2012	10
6	Forsyth	4/12/2012	9/6/2012	8
7	Durham	2/15/2012	6/27/2012	7
8	Durham	7/30/2012	12/10/2012	8
9	Forsyth	10/25/2012	4/25/2013	12
10	Durham	11/1/2012	3/21/2013	3
11	Durham	1/21/2013	6/3/2013	11
12	Forsyth	4/30/2013	9/24/2013	4
13	Durham	10/14/2013	2/24/2014	9
14	Forsyth	12/3/2013	4/29/2014	6
15	Durham	1/21/2014	6/24/2014	4
16	Forsyth	2/20/2014	7/17/2014	5
17	Durham	4/24/2014	9/04/2014	11
18	Forsyth	7/1/2014	11/10/2014	9
19	Durham	10/21/2014	3/24/2015	14
20	Forsyth	12/02/2014	5/05/2015	6
21	Forsyth	2/19/2015	7/30/2015	8
22	Durham	1/26/2015	5/18/2015	6
23	Durham	3/12/2015	7/30/2015	6
24	Durham	4/14/2015	8/25/2015	7
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>178</b>

Source: Parenting Logs

As noted previously, the data query used one pre-enrollment period of two years, but the post-enrollment time varied in length for the men because of when they entered the program. The post period ranged from .27 to 5.69 years. As a result, the families of the men differed in terms of their period of hazard or opportunity for appearing in the Central Registry. Accordingly the data were first analyzed using all 177 men and then re-analyzed using a uniform pre and post-enrollment period of one year. To apply a one-year post-enrollment period, the child protection

data were recalculated using only the first 18 groups, which had at least one year post-enrollment. This reduced the second data sample to 130 men.

## **Investigated Reports and Risk Level**

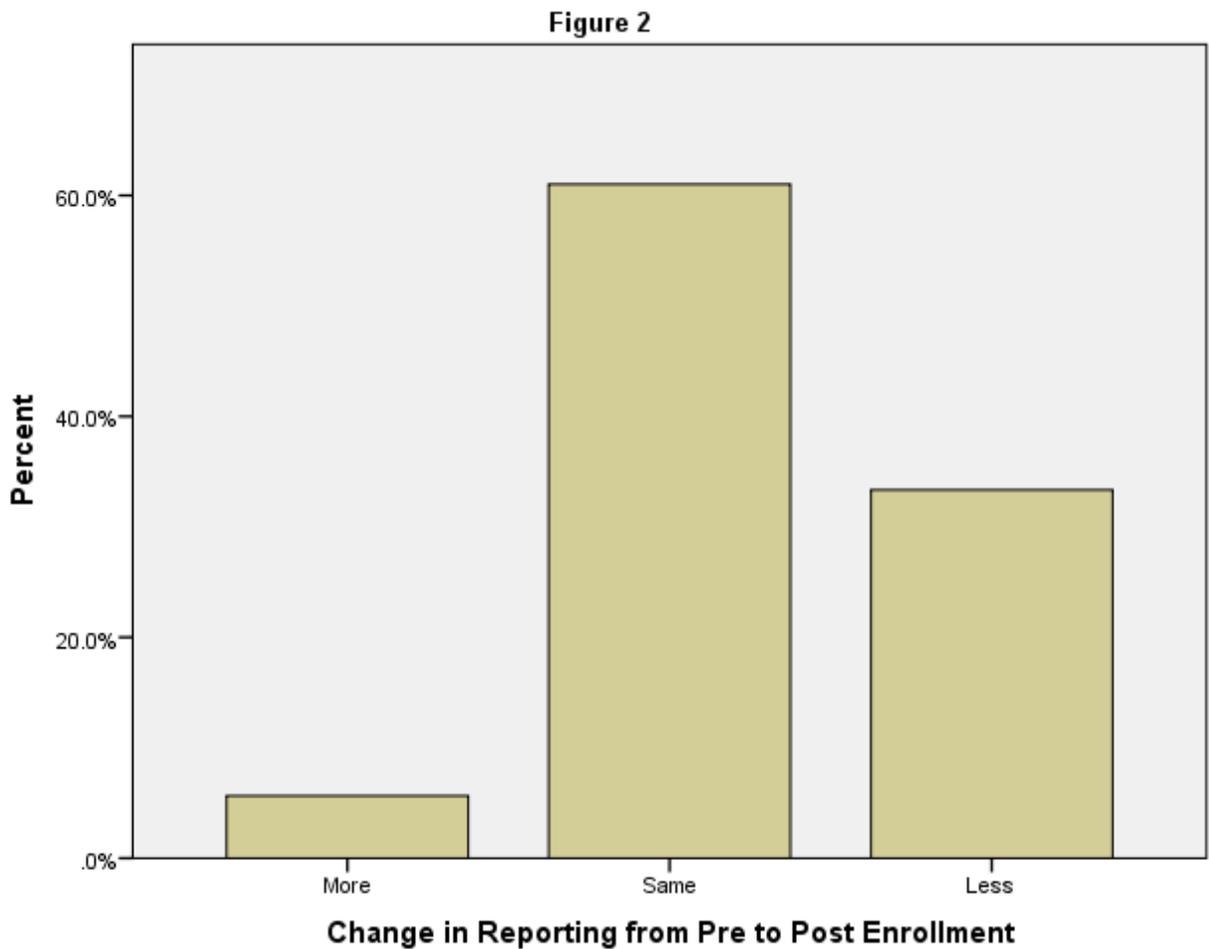
Out of these 177 men, 73 men (41%) had no matches, meaning that there were no reports regarding their families to child protection services either in the two years before enrollment or in the period after enrollment (see Table 1). The other 104 men (59%) had at least one report. Among the men with reporting, 33% had only pre reporting, 6% had only post reporting, and 20% had pre and post reporting. The men with no reporting and those with pre and post reporting had no change in the occurrence of reporting while those with only pre reporting had less reporting and those with only post reporting had more reporting. As shown in Figure 1, this meant that investigated reporting from the pre to post period remained the same for 61%, fell for 33%, and rose for 6%. The proportion of men who had less reporting was significantly greater than the proportion who had more reporting,  $\chi^2(1, N = 69) = 34.80, p = .000$ . For the 45 men with post reports, the first post report occurred on average 11 months after the start of the group ( $M = 10.95, SD = 13.06$ ) and for 17 (38%) of these 45 men, the first post report happened during the group.

For each investigated report, the social workers completed the Family Risk Assessment and provided the level of risk to the children on a scale of low (1), moderate (2), high (3), and intensive (4) as well as not applicable (0). A comparison of the highest pre and post risk assessed found a statistically significant drop in the median risk level ( $z = -4.06, p = .000$ ) with 69 (39%) decreasing, 28 (16%) increasing, and 80 (45%) remaining the same.

**Table 2: Number of Men with Child Protection Reporting, Pre and Post-Enrollment,**  
*N=177*

		Post-Enrollment		
		No	Yes	Total
Pre-Enrollment	No	73 (41.2%)	10 (5.6%)	83
	Yes	59 (33.3%)	35 (19.8%)	94
	Total	132	45	177

Source: NCDSS Central Registry



The second data analysis using only the first 18 groups for a one-year pre-period and a one-year post- period found a similar pattern of reporting. Out of these 130 men, 54 men (42%) had no matches, meaning that there were no reports regarding their families to child protection services either in the one year before enrollment or in the one year after enrollment. The other 76 men (58%) had at least one report. These percentages closely approximate those found for all 177 men. Table 3 shows that among the men with reporting, 35% had only pre reporting, 5% had only post reporting, and 19% had pre and post reporting. These percentages are comparable to those found for all 177 men. The decrease in reporting was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 51) = 29.82, p = .000$ . A comparison of the highest pre and post risk assessed found a statistically significant drop in the median risk level ( $z = -5.458, p = .000$ ) with 51 (39%) decreasing, 8 (6%) increasing, and 71 (55%) remaining the same.

**Table 3: Number of Men with Child Protection Reporting, One Year Pre Enrollment and One Year Post Enrollment, N=130**

		Post-Enrollment		Total
		No	Yes	
Pre-Enrollment	No	54 (41.5%)	6 (4.6%)	60
	Yes	45 (34.6%)	25 (19.2%)	70
	Total	99	31	130

Source: NCDSS Central Registry

### Child Protection Findings

A child protection finding is defined here as investigated report that resulted in a determination of substantiated child maltreatment or family in need of involuntary services. The number of pre-findings per family ranged from 0 to 3, and the number of post-findings ranged from 0 to 2.

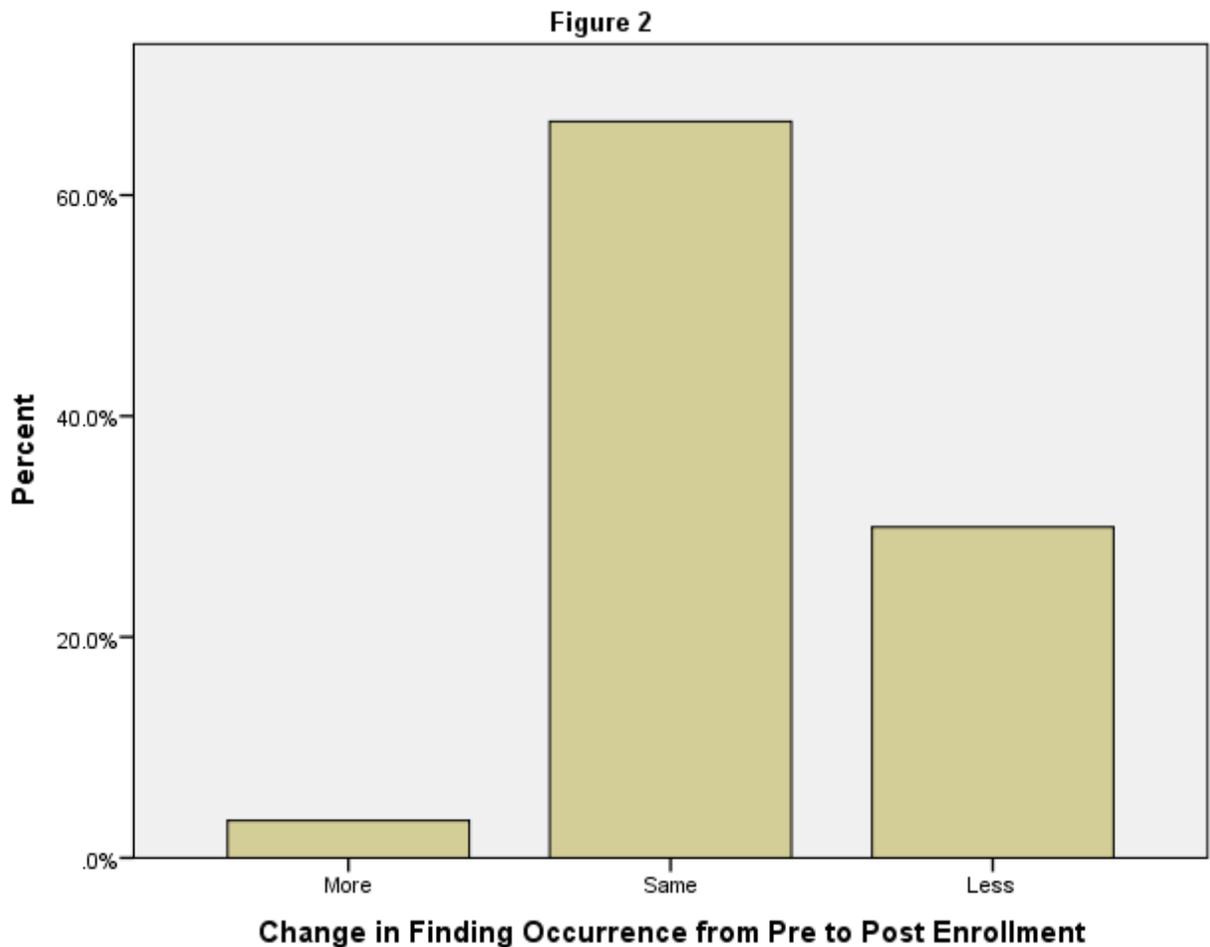
Most families with findings had 1 finding, 83% for pre findings and 88% for post findings. The data were analyzed to determine how many of the reported families had at least one finding. As

shown in Table 4 below, 61% of the men had no findings, 30% had only pre findings, 3% had only post findings, and 6% had pre and post findings. The decrease in findings was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 59) = 37.44, p = .000$ .

**Table 4: Number of Men with Child Protection Findings, Pre and Post-Enrollment, N=177**

		Post-Enrollment		
		No	Yes	Total
Pre-Enrollment	No	108 (61.0%)	6 (3.4%)	114
	Yes	53 (29.9%)	10 (5.6%)	63
	Total	161	16	177

Source: NCDSS Central Registry



Next a comparison was made of the one-year pre and one-year post findings for the 130 men in the first 18 groups. Table 5 shows that 80% of the men had no findings, 14% had only pre findings, 4% had only post findings, and 2% had pre and post findings. This represented a statistically significant decrease in findings,  $\chi^2(1, N = 23) = 7.35, p = .007$ .

**Table 5: Number of Men with Child Protection Findings, One Year Pre Enrollment and One Year Post Enrollment, N=130**

		Post-Enrollment		Total
		No	Yes	
Pre-Enrollment	No	104 (80.0%)	5 (3.8%)	109
	Yes	18 (13.8%)	3 (2.3%)	21
	Total	122	8	130

Source: NCDSS Central Registry

Percentages do not total 100% because of rounding.

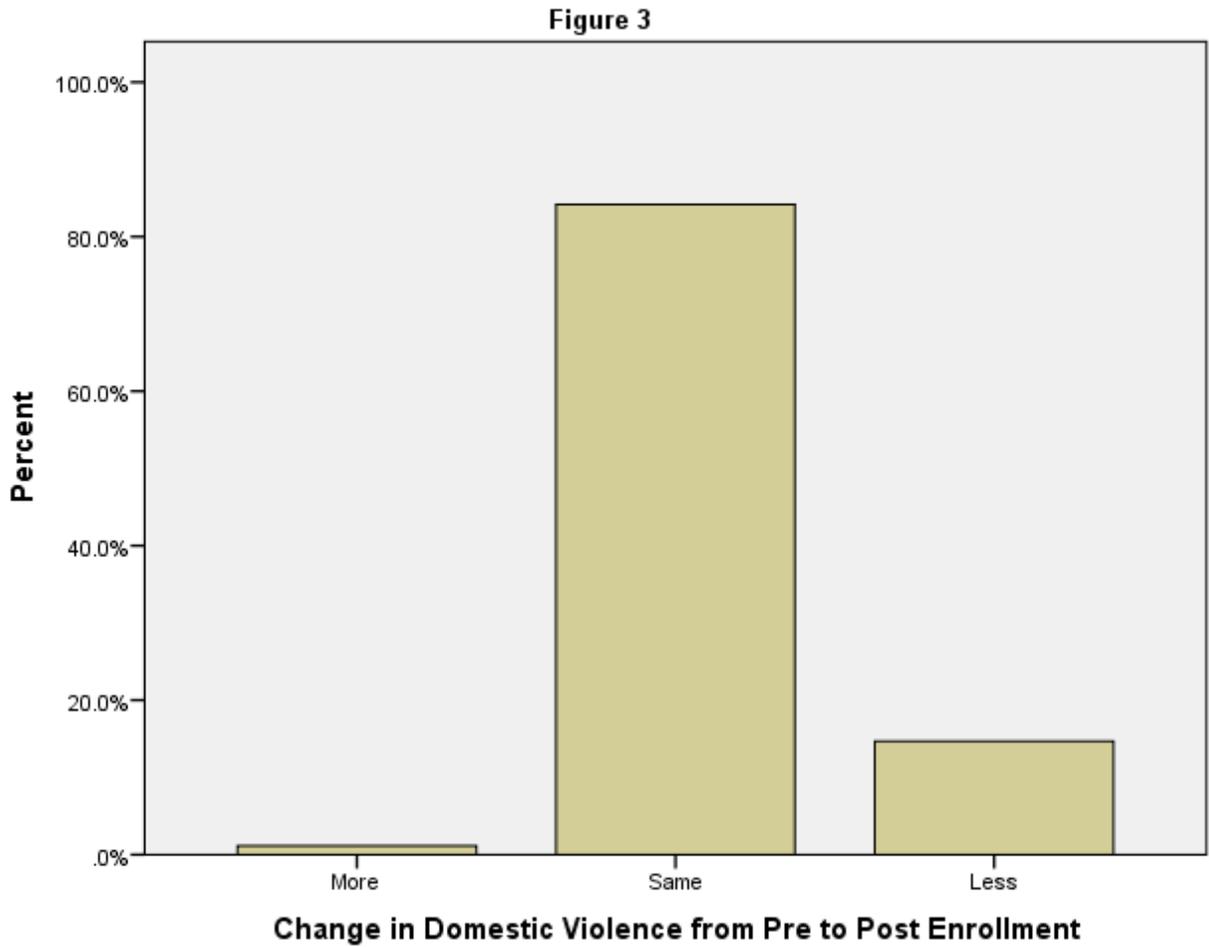
### Household Domestic Violence

The NCDSS Central Registry query extracted data on domestic violence in the household as contributing to children needing protection. It should be noted that contributory factors are expected to be documented when there is a child protection finding and may be documented in other instances. Table 6 below shows that among the 177 men, 83% did not have household domestic violence assessed as contributing to the children needing protection. Contributory domestic violence was assessed for 15% of the men only during the pre-enrollment period, 1% only during post-enrollment, and 2% both pre and post enrollment. As displayed in Figure 3, 84% of the men had no change, 15% had a positive change, and 1% had a negative change. The decrease in assessed domestic violence was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 28) = 20.57, p = .000$ .

**Table 6: Number of Men with Household Domestic Violence, Pre and Post-Enrollment,**  
*N=177*

		Post-Enrollment		
		No	Yes	Total
Pre-Enrollment	No	146 (82.5%)	2 (1.1%)	146
	Yes	26 (14.7%)	3 (1.7%)	31
	Total	172	5	177

Source: NCDSS Central Registry



A second analysis used only the 130 men for whom there was a one-year pre enrollment and one-year post enrollment period. The workers assessed contributory domestic violence for 12% of the men only during the pre-enrollment period, 1% only during post-enrollment, and 1% pre and post enrollment. This represents a statistically significant decrease in assessed domestic violence,  $\chi^2(1, N = 16) = 12.25, p = .000$ .

**Table 7: Number of Men with Household Domestic Violence, One Year Pre Enrollment and One Year Post Enrollment, N=130**

		Post-Enrollment		Total
		No	Yes	
Pre-Enrollment	No	113 (86.9%)	1 (0.8%)	114
	Yes	15 (11.5%)	1 (0.8%)	16
	Total	128	2	130

Source: NCDSS Central Registry

## Conclusions

The pre/post comparisons found statistically significant reductions in indicators of child maltreatment and domestic violence for the families of the men enrolled in Strong Fathers. These reductions were found whether the analyses included all the sample of 177 men for a two-year before enrollment and all the period after enrollment or whether the analyses were limited to a subsample of 130 men for whom data one-year pre enrollment and one-year post enrollment were available. This give greater confidence that the larger sample's varied post-period did not skew the results.

The study design has a number of limitations. First, the data extracted cannot be relied on to identify the perpetrator of the child maltreatment. North Carolina child welfare uses a multiple response system having both an investigatory track that identifies child maltreatment perpetrators

and an assessment track that does not identify perpetrators. Second, the data were pulled for Forsyth and Durham Counties as well as their neighboring counties. If a family lived or moved outside of these areas, the data pull would not have covered them. Third, the study did not include a comparison group and therefore it cannot be determined if the reductions were in all likelihood the result of program enrollment.

Nevertheless, the enrollment of men in the Strong Fathers fathering program does not appear to harm their children or their children's mothers and may benefit them. Separate qualitative analyses support the conclusion that the Strong Fathers participants develop more responsible approaches to parenting and co-parenting (Pennell, Rikard, & Sanders, 2014; Pennell, Sanders, Rikard, Shepherd, & Staroneck, 2013). Fathering programs for men with a history of committing domestic violence are relatively recent innovations. Co-occurring child maltreatment and domestic violence has serious developmental consequences for children (Herrenkohl, Sousa, Tajima, Herrenkohl, & Moylan, 2008) and increase four times the likelihood that they will be removed from their homes (Black, Trocmé, Fallon, & MacLaurin, 2008). Strong Fathers is a promising approach for promoting responsible fatherhood in situations of domestic violence.

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