**Positive Fatherhood: Navigating Male Stigma and Using Positive Psychology to Target Paternal Mental Wellness**

Pierre N. Azzam1

1. University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine

azzamp@upmc.edu

Fatherhood plays a central role in the lives of many men and shapes common conceptualizations of masculinity across socioeconomic, cultural, racial, and religious divides. In early fatherhood, many men experience competing pressures to conform to traditional masculine ideals of stoicism, strength, and self-sufficiency while also providing gentle nurturing and care-taking. Perinatal depressive and anxiety disorders, which impact over 10% of fathers, may further exacerbate the psychological strain associated with these gender-role expectations. Traditional mores of masculinity may also diminish the approachability of conventional mental health services to mitigate distressing symptoms, thereby further limiting a man’s capacity to provide positive fathering that contributes to optimal childhood development.

Efforts to promote mental wellness in men at times of important life transition – including fatherhood – underscore the value of coaching models, cognitive and action-oriented therapies, and interventions that foster positive masculinity. Several innovative programs have focused on promoting mental wellness for fathers in the community and clinical settings; these have yielded promising results, including enhanced paternal involvement in child care and improved self-efficacy, mental health outcomes, and quality of the parenting relationship for fathers – and also for mothers.

In this workshop, Dr. Azzam will:

1. Provide an overview of the psychology of men and masculinities as it relates to early fatherhood.
2. Explore findings related to paternal mental health and resilience.
3. Lead a small-group exercise to promote discussion of participants’ personal and professional experiences with paternal mental health.
4. Lead a large-group interactive discussion to design interventions that foster paternal wellness using aspects of positive psychology.