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Measuring Father Involvement with adolescents in Botswana

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Emerging research suggests that father involvement is a multifaceted concept, often driven by cultural mandates. In this study, survey data were collected from 704 adolescents aged 14-16 in Botswana. Fathers who provided both co-residence and financial support were perceived at the highest level of involvement. When considered separately, financial support rather than co-residence was associated with higher levels of perceived father involvement. Maternal gatekeeping was also found to be a significant influence on perceived levels of father involvement. Implications for policy, practice and research are discussed.

Introduction

Botswana has the second highest population living with HIV/AIDS (24%) (UNICEF Children's Fund 1997) and the highest number of female-headed households (46-50%) in the world (United Nations, 1995).

Many men who have heavy responsibilities caring for their own and extended family choose to migrate for work to get better pay (Lamb, 2003). This country is modernizing and some qualitative research (Furstenberg, 1987; Leatjane, 2004; Rikker & Smith, 2006) shows some preliminary results that suggest that father roles have changed dramatically in the last twenty years, and that fathers are now unsure of that role.

There has been almost no empirical research in Sub Sahara Africa to assess the impact of the changing roles of fathers on child well-being in Africa. This presents a problem as HIV/AIDS has taken a great toll in Botswana and is leaving children without father involvement, presence, or support.

The study aims to examine what the impact of co-residence and support are on the adolescent’s perception of father involvement. The hypothesis is that the children who live with their father and are supported by him will report high levels of father involvement.

Methodology

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Table 1. Means, Standard Deviation, and Range for Father Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Involvement</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Availability</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Co-Residence</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>2.20</td>
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</table>

Conclusions

It is uncertain whether or not father absence is the result of being purposely uninvolved, or the result of mother gate keeping and cultural tradition. Rather it is known that fathers can be perceived as being uninvolved without knowing what their attitudes towards fatherhood actually are.

Further research needs to be done regarding the heavy cultural impact of maternal care-taking on expectations and attitudes towards fatherhood in Botswana. Understanding more about these fathers will be crucial in informing future laws and policies in a modernizing Africa.

It could be that because of the emphasis on the role of the father as a provider, there is an important emotional and psychological link to being provided for in a child’s frame of reference. While the disadvantages of not having money are obvious, it seems possible that the children could suffer emotional damage, which may present in behavioral problems or deviance by because of their father’s financial priorities.

A large part of being a father is being in the role of a male provider. While one might argue all well-being comes from the money, this researcher argues that security comes in knowing you are a priority to your father.

References


Coping with divorce, single parenting, and remarriage: A risk and resiliency perspective (pp. 157-172). Cape Town: WRC Press.


