Antecedents of Paternal Involvement: Is It More Than Just Being There?

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Harris, Heidi; Jorgensen, Nathan; Francis, Jessica; and Svedi, Stacia, "Antecedents of Paternal Involvement: Is It More Than Just Being There?" (2010). FHSS Mentored Research Conference. 10. https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/fhssconference_studentpub/10

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Introduction

Our primary research question focuses on what predicts higher levels of father involvement. Previous research has only touched on the variables that influence a father's involvement and very few assess father involvement using a multiple factor definition of involvement and fewer still assess multiple predictors of involvement in one model. Using the Lamb-Pleck model (1987) father involvement was measured (see Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Hawkins et al., 2002) in three aspects: accessibility, engagement, and responsibility). In the current study, items measuring responsibility did not factor together in a way that allowed for further analysis and this element was dropped. Five predictors of involvement were assessed in our model in an effort to ascertain which contributes to each element of paternal involvement. These predictors are: father individual well-being (depression) (Radloff, 1977), partner relationship (commitment/sacrifice) (Stanley & Markman, 1992), father identity (Lee et al., 2002), and level of differentiation (both emotional cutoff and emotional reactivity) (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998).

Methods

The participants for this study were taken from Time 1 of the Flourishing Families Project. The FFP project is an ongoing longitudinal study of inner family life involving families with a child between the ages of 10 and 14 at Time 1 (M age of child = 11.29, SD = 1.01, 51% male). Participants for the FFP were randomly selected from targeted census tracts in a large northwestern city, and were identified using a purchased national telephone survey database (Polk Directories/InfoUSA).

Results

The following results were obtained using a standard least-squares regression analysis. Each of the outcome variables were estimated by entering the predictors in a single block so that the impact of a predictor is estimated while controlling for the other independent measures, income, and education of the father.

The summary table shows that depressive symptoms were not found to have a significant effect on accessibility, but did with engagement net of other independent measures. It is important to note that when father commitment and sacrifice was high, father accessibility and engagement was also higher. Father identity was found to have a strong positive correlation with both accessibility and engagement. The two aspects of differentiation: cutoff, and emotional reactivity were found to have different results. There was a negative correlation in differentiation- cutoff, but differentiation-emotional reactivity was found to have no significant effect on either father’s accessibility or his engagement. Not shown is the impact of the controls. Our model demonstrated that father income significantly and positively predicts father involvement (both accessibility and engagement).

Table 1: Regression Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accessibility T2</th>
<th>Engagement T2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depression At T1</td>
<td>Commit/Sacrifice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✔️</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How you feel is how you’ll deal.

Implications

Overall our findings illustrate how key father attributes predict father involvement. In particular, we show that father commitment/sacrifice to his partner, and his view of his identity as a father figure positively influence accessibility and engagement. We note that when fathers are more depressed they are less likely engage their children—net of other predictors. And, we show here that when emotional cutoff is used by fathers they are significantly less likely to be accessible to their children and less likely to engage them. We also confirmed that income matters as an important control - that is when income is higher men are more accessible and more engaged in children’s lives. These findings help us understand what factors are most important in predicting father involvement, and will help us better understand family dynamics, as well as strengthen father involvement and family relations.

References