Fathers of Flourishing Families

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Fathers of Flourishing Families

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have found that father involvement is a critical part of healthy child development (Lamb, 2004; Palkovitz, 2002; Pleck, 2007). Fathers’ perspectives and qualities greatly influence and affect children (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Parke, 2002). Researchers’ findings tell us that father involvement is correlated to positive outcomes in children, including increased cognitive competence, increased empathy, less sex-stereotyped beliefs, a greater internal locus of control, and acting out less often (Sarkadi et al., 2006; Lamb, 2004).

The purpose of this study is to advance the extant literature by showing how father involvement over time impacts child self-esteem, depression, perseverance, hope, and leadership in the lives of 500 teens.

METHOD

Sample

The data are taken from The Flourishing Families Project, now preparing for its fifth consecutive wave collecting longitudinal data from families. Our data suggest that the father figure of the family influences several key attributes in younger teens that have a significant impact on their social and emotional development as they transition into adulthood.

- Mean Age – Child:14.3, Father: 48.3
- Marital Status – 94%. Currently Married/Never Divorced
- Father Ethnicity – 86.6% European American, 5.4% African American, 8.8% Multiracial/Other
- Father Education – 70.9%, Bachelor’s degree or higher
- Family Income Per Annum – 15.8% < $59,000, 33.7% $60,000 – $99,000, 33.3% $100,000 – $149,000, 17.2% > $150,000

Measures

- Hope – Hope/Optimism Scale (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), 5-point Likert scale: 1 (very much like me) to 5 (very much unlike me). Sample items: “Despite challenges, I always remain hopeful about the future”, “I know that I will succeed with the goals I set for myself.”
- Self-esteem – Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), 5-point Likert scale: 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Sample items: “I certainly feel useless at times”, “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.”
- Leadership – Four items adapted from Stricker and Rock (1998), 4-point Likert scale: 1 (very much unlike me) to 4 (very much like me). Sample items: “I like being in charge of things in a group”, “My parents have told me that I am a born leader.”
- Depression – Twenty-item self-report CES-D (Weissman, Orvaschel, & Padian, 1988), 4-point Likert scale: 1 (not at all) to 4 (a lot). Sample items: “I felt lonely, like I didn’t have any friends”, “I was bothered by things that usually don’t bother me.”
- Perseverance – Eight self-report items adapted from Peterson and Seligman (2004), 5-point Likert scale: 1 (very much like me) to 5 (very much like me). Sample questions: “I am a goal oriented person”, “When I get what I want, it is because I have worked hard for it.”

RESULTS

Controlling for education, income and race, each variable was analyzed using multiple regression. These variables were analyzed against the net of other effects using data analysis and statistical software (STATA). Significant findings are marked with an asterisk (*).

Father involvement was significantly correlated with depression, perseverance and hope. These findings suggest that as father involvement increases perseverance and hope in the child will increase. Positive father involvement was negatively correlated with an increase in depression. This suggests that if father involvement increases, negative, depressive thoughts and feelings decrease.

For the leadership variable the results showed that as father involvement increased, the child’s leadership qualities increased as well, yet this was a weak correlation.

Another weak correlation, yet one worth noting, is the effect of father involvement on self-esteem. As father involvement increased, the child’s self-esteem decreased. This correlation was not significant.

TABLE 1

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TABLE 2

Discussion

The findings of this study correlate with previous research indicating that father involvement significantly affects the wellbeing of children. Father involvement plays a critical role in the development of children, specifically as they develop perseverance, and hope. Children’s reported depression is significantly impacted by the involvement of fathers. It was interesting to note, however, that the expected results were not true for the variable of self-esteem.

Day and Padilla Walker (2009) have suggested that while the “fathers’ parenting is more focused on norm compliance” and other similar social, or outward behaviors, “mothers’ parenting may be more centered on relationship-building skills” (Day & Walker, 2009). This assumption coincides with our findings, namely father’s involvement most significantly affected outward attitudes and behavior, while relational variables (self-esteem) showed a negative correlation. Further research is needed to clarify and give more validity to this assumption.

In short, our findings, and the findings of numerous researchers indicate that the role of fathers and their involvement in children’s lives is imperative. Further research of father involvement and father absence will give more validity to this finding and make a more concrete conclusion.

REFERENCES


