

PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT: A REVIEW OF THE FACTORS INFLUENCING FATHER INVOLVEMENT AND OUTCOMES

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ABSTRACT

This review explores research surrounding the concept of father involvement and its effects on child development. Research to-date has primarily focused on the maternal role in child development and has often discounted or failed to report on the positive effects of fathers' presence on their children. Scholars are primarily in agreement that there are several systemic aspects that influence the quality and quantity of father involvement with their children. Included in this review are maternal attitudes on paternal involvement, paternal beliefs and attitudes and child characteristics. Although each is examined separately in this review, research suggests that any combination of these factors can contribute to the level of paternal involvement. Also investigated in this review are the potential developmental outcomes on children with significant levels of paternal involvement. Studies support the conclusion that an increased level of both the quantity and quality of paternal involvement produces positive affects on children's social, emotional and cognitive development, as well a significant impact on the avoidance of delinquent and/or risky behavior. This review will synthesize research on both the influences pertaining to paternal involvement and the outcomes associated with it.

INTRODUCTION

While the investigation on the role of fathers in family systems is now at the forefront of trends in research studies, there remains a question as to the factors responsible for influencing that very presence (Lewis & Lamb, 2003). There is a growing body of research that suggest the influence of a mother's beliefs and attitudes about a father's parenting abilities has a significant effect on the amount and quality of time a father spends with his child (Lamb, 2002). Added to this suggestion is the belief that a father's own belief system has meaningful correlation to the level of father-child interaction (Holmes & Huston, 2010). Finally, trends in research have also pointed to a child's own characteristics as a determinant in the quality of relationship between father and child (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2000). Aside from the factors originally affecting the level of paternal involvement is the question of the behavioral and developmental effects this interaction elicits in children. Data suggests that a father's involvement produces higher levels of social, emotional and cognitive functioning (Cabrera, et. al, 2007), as well as protecting against the future development of delinquent behaviors (Harris, et. al, 1998). Current studies have investigated these common contextual influences on father involvement and the impact these relationships have on child development outcomes; this review will examine and present these

LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors Influencing Paternal Involvement: Although there has been a significant increase in the amount of research on father involvement in the past decades, there remains a challenge faced by scholars to aptly identify and measure the specific attributes of fathers that are responsible for their level of involvement in their children's lives, which in turn may greatly affect children's development. Nevertheless, the trends in research aim at identifying the key contextual and characteristic factors that influence or enhance father involvement (Cabrera, et. al, 2007).

One highly publicized area of research focuses on the impact of one parent's views, attitudes and beliefs about the other parent on the level of involvement with their children. Past research has highlighted the view that mothers significantly influence a father's level of involvement and his child rearing practices simply by means of beliefs and attitudes (Lamb, 2002). In support of these findings, Shears and Robinson (2005) conducted a series of semi-structured observations of parent involvement using videotaped free play interactions between mothers and fathers, and their children. Their results indicated a positive correlation between the affirmation and appraisal of paternal parenting behaviors by mothers and an increase in the level of involvement by fathers. These results suggest that when a mother encouraged a father's behaviors during child interactions, fathers were inclined to engage more frequently with their children. Similarly, others have discovered that a mother's beliefs about the gender differentiation in parenting roles influence father involvement (Fagan & Barnett, 2003), as well as a mother's appraisal of the father's parenting skills (Beitel & Parke, 1998). In a study that included a series of structured laboratory observations of children and parents at varying ages, Holmes and Huston (2010) reported on videotaped interactions between parents when performing tasks with their children. Observers coded interaction behaviors between parents and evaluated their effects on the frequency of involvement of each parent. Comparisons of these interactions proved that positive dyadic relationships between mother and father were significantly associated with the quality and quantity of father-child interactions, leading to the assumption that a mother's attitude about father interactions directly affects these behaviors. Cabrera, et. al (2007) report support for increased amount of quality of care giving on behalf of fathers when the mother provided repeated responsiveness to such behaviors. Although parent involvement can be investigated and evaluated independently, it is clear through research that some support exists for the assumption that a mother's opinions about a father's interactions with their child impacts father involvement.

Another significant aspect found to have influence on paternal involvement is the attitudes and beliefs of fathers themselves. In a pioneer study on the systemic predictors of paternal parenting, Belsky (1984) affirmed that a parent's prior and present attitudes about childrearing affect his competence in childcare tasks and influence childrearing goals, which in turn ultimately effects direct paternal engagement with his child. Other research has suggested that paternal self-efficacy plays a significant role in paternal involvement (Bonney, Kelley, & Levant, 1999), as well a father's perception of the value and purpose of paternal involvement (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). These findings suggest that fathers' parenting attitudes are meaningful correlates of their future parenting behaviors. Holmes and Huston (2010) expand this finding to suggest that paternal attitudes not only affect parenting behaviors, but that they also play a role in father-child interaction. Using the Parental Modernity Scale of Child-rearing and Educational Beliefs scale, 22 items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale to measure these effects. Results showed significant correlations. Fathers' traditional childrearing beliefs were negatively related to the quality of father-child interactions, meaning men with more adult-centered beliefs were less positively engaged with their children. These findings were in line with previous research supporting the belief that traditional paternal attitudes about childrearing prove to be an obstacle to father involvement (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). To investigate the phenomenon further, Shears and Robinson (2005) conducted a study using the Parental Modernity Scale, asking parents to rate their level of agreement with statements about childrearing beliefs. Their responses were then correlated to those of a separate scale measuring the perceived level of father involvement. The results indicated a positive correlation between parenting attitudes and quality of involvement. Fathers who reported more child-focused parenting attitudes, in comparison to more traditional or authoritarian attitudes, also reported a higher level of perceived involvement with their child. Both dimensions of these results attest to the assumption that paternal attitudes and beliefs are predictive factors in the level of involvement with their children.

There has also been an increase in the research pertaining to a child's influence on father involvement. Research dating back decades has pointed to the argument that child characteristics such as sex, birth order and temperament can be predictors of father involvement (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2000). When investigating this phenomenon, Holmes and Huston (2010) found that child gender and birth order were all non-significant predictors of positive father-child interactions. In contrast, findings have showed that fathers tend to be more engaged with their sons and have less contact with their daughters (Hosley & Montemayor, 1997) and that interactions between father and child are

relatively stable from birth through the first 30 months of life, specifically reported for first-born children (Hwang & Lamb, 1997). Another factor shown to have some significance in relation to father involvement is child social skills. This factor was found to positively predict a father's increased quantity of involvement with his child (McBride, Schoppe, & Rane, 2002). This finding was supported by Holmes and Huston (2010), who found a significant association between a child's social skills and the quality of father-child interactions at varying school ages. Another small factor of note is the small body of research connecting a child's language skills and increased father involvement. Several researchers theorize that an increase in language skills would encourage the involvement of fathers, however, Holmes and Huston (2010) were the only study that reported correlates between observed higher language skills and more positive father-child interactions. Although there is some evidence to support the argument that various child characteristics influence the quality and frequency of father involvement, much more research needs to be done to investigate these factors under varying conditions in order to provide a body of literature with reliable results.

PATERNAL INFLUENCE ON CHILD OUTCOMES

Separate from the factors that influence the level of father involvement are the resulting outcomes from such interactions. Current research is presented dispelling the common myths about fathers' inability to match the maternal bond during infancy. Through play behaviors, fathers have seemingly bridged the gap in these beliefs. Father involvement has also been positively associated with benefits to children's social, emotional and cognitive development, as well as the avoidance of risky or delinquent behaviors.

Common stereotypes in society tend to discount a father's effectiveness as a parent in contrast with a mother's. However, evidence has shown that fathers are attentive, sensitive and skillful in their interactions, starting with infants as they change speech patterns and alter voice pitch to elicit responses (Lamb, 1997). These interactions continue as fathers engage in more physically stimulating and unpredictable play throughout the infancy period (Lewis & Lamb, 2003), which were found to contribute to the important developmental tasks of activation and regulation of arousal (Paquette, 2004). Contrary to popular belief, when investigating the play styles of fathers in comparison to mothers, Notaro & Volling (1999) found no differences in the sensitivity and responsiveness of each parent. In fact, it was discovered through means of coded observations that fathers were more highly attuned to their toddlers' interests during play activities. This is in line with previous research stating that fathers are more likely to engage in vigorous, physically stimulating play or unusual and unpredictable play than mothers (Lamb & Lamb, 1976), are more likely to praise their children during play activities (Clarke-Stewart, 1978), and that this type of paternal play promotes problem-solving in young children (Labrell, Deleau, & Juhel, 2000). Paquette (2004) argued that play behavior is as central to fathering as nurturing is to mothering. Perhaps this is due to the constructs that play behavior as the most common interaction between fathers and children. Regardless, there is substantial research surrounding the developmental benefits of fathers engaging their children through play.

Paternal involvement exhibited through supportiveness has been shown to be important for youth in both social and emotional development, as well as language and cognitive outcomes (Cabrera, et. al, 2007). Similarly found, when fathers provided affection, nurturance, interest, and companionship, it enhanced their children's self-esteem, life satisfaction and social competence (Harris, Furstenberg, & Marmer, 1998). Some speculation into these findings would question these results in comparison to a mother's influence in similar ways. However, in an investigative study into the effects of only parental employment on children's development, Lewis and Lamb (2003) found that fathers' involvement in routine child-care had an influence on the development of peer relationships and social skills, which has been found to ultimately affect overall emotional stability. Also found was a positive link between paternal parenting and IQ performance and later language development. These findings were lacking discussion of whether this child-care environment was based on single parent or two parent homes, leaving one to question the generalizability of the results. During their longitudinal interview study, Shears and Robinson (2005) found evidence that the influence of paternal parenting styles (over a 24-month period) was highly associated with outcomes of prosocial behaviors, competence and self-control. More specifically, when paternal parenting styles allowed for more exploration, provided positive interaction and did not overly dictate children's activities, children had fewer behavioral problems and

showed higher cognitive scores. When combined and in agreement with maternal styles, children had higher levels of emotional and cognitive functioning. Interestingly, in a review of previous literature, Goeke-Morey and Cummings (2007) found that when repeated vulnerability and fragility were exhibited in paternal involvement, it posed negative consequences for children's emotional security and social adjustment. This may be evidence of the larger social stereotype pressuring fathers to remain strong and invulnerable. Although research seems to present support for paternal involvement and overall social and emotional development, there is still limited research on paternal involvement separate from that of maternal.

Behaviorally, paternal involvement is showing a growing amount of research surrounding its effects on children, with specific focus on delinquent and/or risky behaviors. In past literature, it has been found that involved fathers have children who engage in less antisocial behavior (Flour & Buchanan, 2002) and that these close parent-child relationships are proactive against the development of delinquent behaviors (Harris, et. al, 1998). However, it is important to note that father involvement has been conceptualized in many different ways in differing studies. What is clear in several research findings, however, is that greater quantities and qualities of father involvement and father support have been found to reduce the development of problem behaviors in adolescents. This includes polydrug use, delinquency, and other reported violent behaviors (Zimmerman, Salem, & Notaro, 2000). In a similar domain, it was found that children with repeated involvement with their biological fathers seemed to exhibit developmentally advanced symptoms, specifically in relation to behavioral facets. Vogel, et. al (2006) discovered that fathers might be particularly important for helping their children gain control over intense emotions that, if otherwise not addressed, could potentially lead to problem behaviors. This is true of emotional-related behaviors, such as self-regulation and aggressiveness. When father involvement is not present, however, it has been found to lead to similar and other negative behaviors. Jones & Benda (2004) found that without the ability to relate or attach to any kind of father involvement, there was a predicted increase in alcohol use. In another study testing the previous hypotheses, Goncy and van Dulmen (2010) found that both paternal and maternal shared activities with adolescent children were independent protective factors for the future development of alcohol-related problems. Additionally, they found that paternal and maternal emotional closeness were also independent protective factors for future alcohol use, alcohol related problems and co-occurring risky behavior in their adolescent children. In a similar longitudinal study of paternal involvement and adolescents, it was discovered that high involvement and increasing closeness created effective barriers from engaging in delinquent behaviors and therefore from experiencing emotional distress. Overall, in contrast to the other areas of father involvement investigated in this review, the quantity and quality of paternal influence has very substantiated research on the subject of its deterrence of delinquent behavior.

DISCUSSION

The concept of paternal involvement has been a focus of tremendous research in the past few decades, stemming from the idea that maternal affection is not the only factor necessary for advances in child development. Perhaps the greatest area of focus has been on the factors responsible for inhibiting or encouraging paternal involvement with children. Literature supports the assumption that a father's role is increased when a mother provides an encouraging response to such interactions (Cabrera, et. al, 2007), and that her general appraisal of a father's overall parenting skills is a contributing factor for father involvement (Beitel & Parke, 1998). This review also presents evidence that a father's personal and contextual beliefs, as well as the characteristics of a child have been positively correlated with paternal involvement. Aside from the predictors of paternal involvement are the impacts of these interactions on a child. The studies reviewed support the notion that fathers may contribute more, or at least provide meaningful differences, than mothers do to some aspects of child development (Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2007). This includes an impact on positive peer relationships and the construction of social skills, ultimately promoting a healthy rate of emotional stability (Lewis & Lamb, 2003), as well as the avoidance of future delinquent or risky behaviors (Harris, et. al, 1998). Overall, the presented information has sought to explore the factors that contribute to a father's presence in a child's life, and to report on the positive outcomes these interactions exhibit on a child's development.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF COUNSELING

When working with families to investigate and promote the levels of paternal involvement, it is first important as counselors to understand the clients' attitude and belief systems. These values may be culturally based and often vary depending on the background of a family. It is important to educate oneself on the cultural views associated with families from different cultures, and to investigate these values in terms of parenting styles. Cultures rooted in values associated with stereotypically male-dominant characteristics may be more resistant to accepting suggestions that question these roles. Counselors should work with families in adopting activities and methods of including fathers that remain in the parameters of their comfort level. Engaging fathers in early interactions with their children will help build relationships early on and may influence the fathers to participate more in a child's life if they are able to see the positive effects of their presence.

Counselors should also seek to educate parents, specifically fathers, regarding more effective and interactive parenting styles. By utilizing more interactive parenting skills, fathers in particular can form early emotional attachments with their children and by doing so, they can hopefully promote an increase in a child's overall emotional connectedness. These alternate and more prevalent parenting styles can also increase the transmission of proper social and developmental skills within children. Parents and fathers can use these tools to become effective in preparing their children for the future by helping to create well-rounded and sound individuals. By taking a more active role in their child at an early age, fathers can significantly improve a child's future rate of development across several areas. Fathers also often hold the power to transmit powerful messages of acceptable behavior within the family system. By involving themselves early on in a child's life, they can become powerful tools themselves in helping their children avoid risky behaviors. By establishing guidelines of tolerable behavior, fathers can make a powerful difference in a child's value system.

Finally, helping families to adopt cohesive and similar parenting beliefs is a tool that counselors can use to effectively impact the positive outcome of a family. A counselor must first gauge both maternal and paternal belief systems, and then educate each on the importance of developing a collaborative parenting attitude. This action can help promote unity within a parenting structure and help avoid the tendency of one parent to undermine or dismiss another. When both parents exhibit a similar parenting style with their children, trust and respect can develop within their relationship and ultimately foster the same within a child. These consistent parenting beliefs can help engage a father in a child's life, ultimately increasing the child's developmental strides.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNSELOR EDUCATION

Given the previous review, a number of implications can be derived from and applied to the education of graduate students interested in pursuing counseling in a family systems setting. This research should aim to inspire graduate students to explore the existence of marriage and family courses aimed at the education and application of these practices. Even at an introductory level, the family unit is one of the most important influences on a child and can be the deciding factor for many developmental and behavioral difficulties later in life. Seeking education on the family system can significantly alter the methods and skills one uses in counseling settings. When working in school populations, future counselors will be able to draw upon their knowledge of family systems to decide appropriate intervention or outreach procedures when faced with a child experiencing difficulties in any number of areas in their life. Drawing upon the strengths of the father-child interaction might help provide an outlet for children to confide in.

When providing counseling in community agency or private practice settings, it is inevitable that future counselors will encounter clients struggling with a family-related issue. Not surprisingly, father-child relationships will most likely be prevalent among these struggles. It is important for counseling students to educate themselves on the available programs and resources available within the counseling community. Because the issues faced in counseling are typically systemic, there are a wide variety of professionals available to use at any disposal. Many child interaction based programs are currently in existence due to the consistent lack of appropriate father role models in children's lives. In addition,

many family counseling centers provide basic childcare skills to help individuals become more effective parents and should be taken advantage of whenever possible.

For graduate studies, it would be beneficial for courses to include information on lessons within a family systems model framework. In multicultural courses, students should be exposed to the general values and beliefs of cultures as they relate to parenting issues or general family structure. In courses focused on gender studies, it would be beneficial to provide an overview of some concerns faced by parents of individual genders. These differences are significant and could give students some basic insight into the problems influencing effective parenting. Overall, this would help counseling students, including those not specifically interested in pursuing family studies, gain a general background of information from which to draw upon should family systems issues ever arise in future counseling situations.

LIMITATIONS

There are several aspects of the current available studies that provide only a limited view of the various aspects associated with paternal involvement. First, the cross-sectional nature of many studies provides a very divided view of the constructs being measured. It's use in grouping subjects for the purpose of study limits the generalizability of the results. With so many differing aspects of fatherhood being measured simultaneously, it is impractical to group subjects according to similar characteristics. It is the difference in these characteristics that make the research on paternal involvement of such an interest.

Continuing with the limitations of the cross-sectional design, sample groups may not be entirely representative of the father-child groups seeking to be studied. Many studies were solely focused on low-income families, and as a result, there was a significant lack of information pertaining to the other economic classes of families. This deficit also provides limitations in exploring the effects of available resources have on children. These study groups were also limited by the comparison of ethnic families to European American families. Research cannot assume that the results of studies from many cultures and ethnic backgrounds can be ascertained by investigating only a small sample of these varying groups. As previously stated, the reliability of results comes into question.

A number of current studies also only investigate a father's involvement with a child in the context of maternal involvement as well. The results show many correlations between father and child involvement, and only such involvements where the mother is present or has some effect on the interaction. It would be wise to discover how paternal involvement would fair when investigated only in its own context.

One final limitation in the current research is the ability of scholars to effectively conceptualize "paternal involvement" into testable and measurable constructs. Paternal involvement has been classified by the quantity and quality of time spent with their children, however, it remains to be in question as to how these aspects are defined. Deciding what determines the quality and quantity of one relationship over another is very subjective and therefore leaves much to speculate about the reality of findings.

AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research would largely benefit from conducting more longitudinal studies. This framework would allow researchers to explore the constructs over time, therefore receiving a more evidence-based picture of paternal involvement over time. It would be pertinent for more longitudinal studies to be sensitive to the range of possible paternal influences over time, thereby representing greater and more diverse patterns of involvement.

A greater investigation into the ethnic and cultural implications on paternal involvement would also be a relevant area for future study. The vast number of differences in attitudes and beliefs could pose potential discrepancies in the current research. Studies that aim only to investigate the same cultural constructs over a number of cultural divides would give scholars a more accurate framework at which to look at paternal involvement. The cultural aspects of father-child interactions would also seek to explain

why some lack these interactions more than others. Generalizing the lack of father involvement to the greater male population does not currently serve to account for the differences in parent-child relationships across nationalities.

Another area of research related to paternal involvement would be the inclusion of a comparison between biological and non-biological paternal involvement. Much of the research to date is limited to exploring traditional family systems and their effects on children. In the growing pattern of modern families, it is no longer common for married couples to be the only individuals influencing children. Research on positive male role models would serve the educational community well in discovering the impact of non-related male individuals on children. If a correlation were to be found, there would be a growing support for resource programs providing similar mentor-based interactions.

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