

FATHER ABSENCE EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

Dr. Susan Safe
University of Al-Zahra

Abstract

Families are the smallest and the most important units of each society. Raising children is the main role of every family. Parental warmth is necessary for performance of this duty. If paternal warmth, under any circumstances, be omitted, or in other words, children raised without fathers, there would be some drastical effects on both boys and girls who are living under "FATHER-ABSENT Conditions". This study has tried to explain such conditions and their results on (Father-Absent Children) by reviewing several Dissertations and Studies. The context of the essay is the descriptions of importance ecological effects such as reasons for the separation, age at separation time, family structures, socio-economic status, and mother's reaction to the separation in Father-absent families; and psychological consequences of young children raised without fathers. Father-Absence effects are plausible for most of trends that have affected the numbers of Father-absent children, as: Less masculine sex role by boys-rejecting femininity by girls-difficulties in interacting with opposite sex - and some psychological disorders as: Anxiety, Delinquency - Aggressiveness and so on.

Introduction

Although Freud (1910) referred to the psychological consequences of young children reared without fathers as early as 1910, it wasn't until the wartime conditions of the early 1940's when father absence became widespread, that fatherless children were studied systematically. In the decades that followed, several trends have been observed that have affected the numbers of fatherless children: the marriage failure rate has increased, thus increasing the rate of father absence due to separation and divorce, and there has been an increase in the number of unmarried women bearing and keeping their infants (Santrock, 84).

The net impact of these trends has resulted in more than 7.2 million families in the United States without fathers, a figure representing 13 percent of all families with children. Thus, a large number of children are affected by father absence, and there have been numerous researches done

on this subject during the past two decades. Essentially, father absence has been associated with an increased incidence of inappropriate or undesirable behaviours in children and adolescent as well as with a decreased incidence of appropriate or desirable behaviours in children and adolescents (Lamb, 49), (Felner, 24).

Several studies have focused on the father's role as a model, or identification figure, rather than a socializing agent dispensing rewards and sanctions. With few exceptions (Hartup, 30), (Heilburn, 31), the modeling literature has failed to substantiate its fundamental hypothesis that masculine fathers will have masculine sons. In fact preadolescent boys aren't more similar to their fathers than to their mothers (Hetherington, 35), (Sears, 87) they don't perceive themselves as more similar to their fathers (Middleton, 65), and the sex-role preferences are uncorrelated (Payne, 74) (Mussen, 68). Indeed the only consistent corre-

late of paternal masculinity is the femininity of daughters (Heilburn, 31), (Johnson, 46), (Alpert, 87), and this correlation tends to support the notion of a role-complementation learning process. Modeling theorists would predict that the degree to which the son felt positively about his father would influence the degree to which he identified with his father (Bandura, 3). In addition, warm, masculine fathers should have masculine sons, and indeed, this has been shown in several studies (Biller, 11), (Hetherington, 38). But one important and consistent finding concerns the influence of a father who is warm and nurturant and participates extensively in child-rearing. Such fathers have masculine sons (Anzimi, 2), (Kaplar, 17); (Biller, 9), (Sears, 86), and feminine daughters (Johnson, 46), regardless of their assessed masculinity or punitiveness.

Boys raised without fathers are reported to be either less masculine in their sex-role preferences and behaviour (Biller, 9), (Biller, 10), (Santrock, 83), (Stolz, 89), or else to exhibit compensatory masculinity (Pettigrew, (Tiller, 90), (Bartlett; 6). Such boys have also been reported to have nonanalytic (feminine), cognitive styles (Carlsmith, 15), (Barclay, 4); (Wohlford, 93). Most studies suggest that father absence has its greatest effects on children who were separated from their fathers at a young age (Blanchard, 13); (Hetherington, 34), (Hetherington, 37), (Santrock. In girls, father absence is associated with difficulties in interacting with males (Jacobson, 45).

Nevertheless, perhaps because girls have a role model present (Hetherington, 38); they are spared the harsher effects of father absence suffered by boys. The notion that girls raised without fathers reject their femininity (Jacobson, 45); (Landy, 53); is controversial (Lynn, 58); (Santrock, 83). The presence of an alternative masculine model, for example, an older brother, may inhibit the effects of the father's absence to some degree (Rosenberg, 81).

Though (Biller, 10), argues that the father is a superior role model. Nevertheless this illustrates the point that the effects of father absence cannot reasonably be determined without considering important ecologicals such as age at separation, the reason for the separation (Hetherington, 34) (Santrock, 84), the family composition and structure, socioeconomic status and effects, the mother's behaviour (Biller, 12); (Grain, 19), and the mother's reaction to the separation (Biller, 8); (Peterson, 75).

The establishment of satisfying peer relationships (Liederman (Stolz, 89); (Mitchel, 66); (Lamb, 50), general psychological adjustment, and later success in heterosexual relationships (Barclay, 5), (Palmer, 73); may also be facilitated by the presence of the father and by the warmth of the

father-son relationship when he is present (Cox, 18); (Howells, 44); (Rutherford, 44), Boys from mother-dominated homes have more difficulty in being accepted by peers (Hoffman, 40). Paternal warmth is correlated with a boy's feeling of self-esteem (Coopersmith, 17), (Medinnus, 64); (Sears, 85); and his personality adjustment (Munsen, 67); (Reuter, 80); (Slater, 88), Nurturant fathers may, in addition, contribute greatly to the psychological adjustment of their daughters (Fisher, 27); and facilitate their happiness in subsequent heterosexual relationships (Fisher, 27); (Lozoff, 56). On the other hand, disturbed father-child relationships (Becker, 7); (Peterson, 76); (Warren, 91); and the failure to achieve some sex identification (Lynn, 59); may be pathogenic. Indeed they may be crucial in the etiology of homosexuality (Nash, 69). The findings of some studies suggest that there were attitudinal differences about the acceptability of sexual behaviours in father-absent subjects, with the daughters of widows having stricter views about sexual behaviour than other subjects. This finding is consonant with the general results (Hetherington, 34), found for the daughters of widows. However, these differences didn't extend to reports of actual sexual activity, thus not corroborating other studies which seem to indicate more precocious dating behaviour and knowledge of sex for adolescent girls whose fathers were absent due to divorce than for father-present girls (e.g., Nelsen, 72).

It has been suggested by (Hetherington, 34); that daughters of divorcees have a lower self-concept or sense of self esteem than daughters of widows. The reasoning has been that the divorced mother has more negative attitudes toward herself, her marriage, and life in general than the widowed mother. This is reflected in the divorcees daughters in the number of unfavourable self-descriptive adjectives checked, a measure of self-criticism. The results of the study done by (Parish, 78), are very comparable to the findings reported by (Young, 93). In both studies respondents who had experienced father loss through divorce and whose mothers had not remarried had significantly lower self-concepts than respondents who were from intact families. In addition, both studies revealed that respondents from reconstituted families demonstrated lower self-concepts than those from intact families but the differences weren't significant. Interestingly, the respondents, in the (Young, 93) study were college students, while the respondents in the (Parish, 78), study were grade school and junior high school students. Their findings suggest that throughout the second decade of life the presence of the male figure in the home, as noted in previous discussions,

may, serve to attenuate and/or compensate for at least some of the detrimental effects of divorce and subsequent father absence. Remarriage might not be a panacea, however since in the (Young, 93), study the self concept of respondents from reconstituted families closely approximated the self-concepts of respondents from nonconstituted families than the self concepts of those from intact families.

Concerning child and adolescent delinquency in father-absent families, the literature indicates that delinquents are more likely to come from such families (Gregory, 28), though father absence apparently "has no discernible effect on the conscience development of girls" (Hoffman, 41, Herzog, 32) emphasizes, however, the confounding in such studies of father absence with a host of socio-economic problems that make it difficult to determine father's direct effect. Support for the hypothesis that the father plays a role, in moral development can be drawn from the studies showing that delinquent sons come from homes where the father is antisocial, un-empathic, and hostile (Bandura, 3), (McCord, 61 and 62).

Several researches have found losses in father-absent children's performance, relative to that of control groups, after the father's departure (Deutsch 20); (Douglas, 22); (Ferri, 25); (Rees, 79), (Carlsmith, 16), the effects of father absence on cognitive development are mediated by the child's sex role identification. According to this theory, the "feminine pattern" of high verbal and low quantitative performance shown by male college students from fatherless homes is due to their childhood difficulty in forming a masculine identity without a male role model. However, a review of literature relevant to this underlying assumption (Herzog, 33), concluded that differences in masculinity between father-present and father-absent boys are small and always uniform. (Lamb, 48). Further, the quantitative-verbal differences score phenomenon isn't limited to males or children from fatherless homes. Several studies have found it for father-absent female subjects (Carlsmith, 16), (Gregory, 29), (Lessing, 55), one study that didn't report larger effects for mother-absent than for father-absent males (Nelson, 71).

(Maccoby 60), hypothesized that "anxiety interference" is the cause of quantitative-verbal difference patterns found in middle-class students from fatherless families. They suggested that father-absent children are under a great deal of stress and that stress and tension interfere more with mathematical than verbal activities. (Nelson, 71), were unable to differentiate between a sex-typing and an anxiety-interference hypothesis in their study of Stan-

ford's students' quantitative and verbal performance, however.

The theory that father absence affects children's cognitive development more generally by reducing stability and increasing the general anxiety level in the home is a plausible one. (Weininger, 92) in a review of the emotional and behavioural consequences of parent-child separation, found that both brief and long-term separations (over 6 months) had adverse effects on behaviour. Most studies of long-term separation in this area have been retrospective, showing higher than average incidence of parental absence among various psychiatric samples. (Lessing, 55), also found a high incidence of father absence among children from their guidance clinic. (Maxwell, 63), didn't report the proportions of father-present and father-absent children in his clinic sample, so a similar determination cannot be made for it. The fact that father absence due to divorce was associated with lower cognitive test scores than absence due to other reasons in the studies noted absence supports the emotional-stress hypothesis, as does (Santrock's, 84), finding of negative cognitive effects immediately before divorce. Douglas found that loss of a father to death had detrimental cognitive effects only if it followed a long and presumably stressful illness. Two studies showed that father absence is related to increased aggressiveness in boys (Hillenbrand, 39), (Santrock, 84), although it wasn't clear in either study that aggression was associated with poor cognitive functioning.

The argument that the strained financial circumstances of mother-headed homes is the major cause of father-absence effects is plausible for many studies (Lamb, 50) These effects sometimes disappeared when SES controls were added (Broman, 14), (Edwards, 23), Declines in income levels fail to explain (Hillenbrand's, 39) finding of an association between early separation from the father and low quantitative IQ scores for the daughters of servicemen, since the fathers continued to provide their families with income while on tours of duty. Similarly, the facts that low-availability fathers in (Blanchard, 13), study spent less than 6 hours per week with their sons and that night shift workers sampled by (Landy, 52), saw less of their daughters than did other manual workers presumably didn't affect family income. Children's cognitive test performance did, however, suffer in both cases. Frequent temporary father absence had detrimental affects on children's achievement in two British studies as well (Lambert, 51); (Douglas, 22).

Some studies have shown that father absence was unusually common among exceptionally gifted children (with IQ's over 150) and among college graduates who

received their degree summa cum laude (Albert, 1), (Gregory, 29), suggest that some sort of compensation may occur. Some studies have also reported that father surrogates and, stepfathers had remedial effects on father-absent children's performance on cognitive test (Lessing, 55), (Santrock, 84), but not found that the magnitude of father-absence effects increased with the number of children in the family. This suggest that a mother may be able to compensate for the lack of paternal attention for one child but cannot be both a mother and a father to a large family.

(Hetherington, 36); found that their middle-class mothers exacerbated rather than mitigated the effects of father absence by spending less time with their children than did mothers in intact families. (Longabaugh, 57), in a study of 51 black mother-child dyads, reported that mothers in father-absent families in some cases offer and in others deprive their sons but not their daughters of "interpersonal resources" such as autonomy and support more than do mothers in father-present families. (Natali, 70), found a relative relationship between the amount of time that 11 mothers (mostly from intact families) spent with second grade children and the children's school achievement. Natali interpreted this to mean that mothers spent extra time to help children who weren't doing well at school, since his results weren't replicated with preschool children in a second study (Goldberg, 26), in which parents didn't know how well their children were performing.

Conclusion

The effects of father-absent families on children are so crucial and diverse that it is very hard to differentiate between all factors causing such potential influences. As mentioned earlier, some factors like mother's socioeconomic or other social status may compensate the lack of male figure, and contrary to that other factors like the number of children in family may intensify the problems.

On the other hand, it is very hard to differentiate between the direct (those due to lack of parent figure and male model) and indirect (those due to mother's economic distress) effects of father absence on the child. It would therefore, be incorrect to conclude that paternal behaviour is a "key" determinant of personality adjustment from the finding that children raised without fathers are more poorly adjusted than children raised in intact families.

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