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The Effects of Absent Father Figures on the Social Functioning of Teens

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Quantitative Research Question



How does the level of social functioning in teens without father figures compare to teens with father figures?

Problem Statement

In America, children under the age of 18 are being negatively affected by the absence of a father in the home. This is important because fatherlessness is on the rise (Census Bureau, 2016) and can harm a child's future opportunities (Snyder, Et.Al., 2006, p.599). Specifically, depressive symptoms and delinquent behavior have been recognized as two tangible outcomes of growing up without a father. Trending research suggests that delinquency and depressive symptoms are linked to a lack of parental monitoring (Markowitz & Ryan, 2016), yet the aspects of socialization (early father departure) and emotional distress (late father departure) should be further researched.

Literature Findings

Extensive research demonstrates that the findings of negative effects of a father/father figures' absence can be organized into a four main groupings, which will be discussed in the following slides. More research must be done to determine if the absence of a father figure creates the same results.

1. Change in Marriage Trends

- ◉ The number of percentages of single mothers with children were divorced, separated, or widowed have been decreasing since the 1960's (U.S. Census Bureau)
- ◉ The percentage of single mothers with children who have never been married is dramatically increasing (U.S. Census Bureau)
- ◉ Unmarried couples who have children lead to greater risk of single parent homes, which, the majority are female lead (Davidson, 1990)

2. At-Risk Factors For Fatherless Adolescents

- ◉ Adolescence have higher rates of adolescent delinquency such as criminal activity, drug use and gang involvement (Hoffmann, 2002; East, Jackson, & O'Brien, 2006)
- ◉ Adolescence have more violent behaviors and aggressive tendencies (Haynie & Knoester, 2005).
- ◉ These adolescence have lower self-esteem and show in an increase in sexual activity (Hendricks, Cesario, Murdaugh, Gibbons, Servonsky, Bobadilla, Tavakoli, 2005).
- ◉ Adolescence who have been abandoned by their fathers struggle academically and have lower IQ's (Davidson, 1990).

3. Poverty Risk and Low-Income Levels

- ◉ While there is an obvious benefit to remaining in the labor force for low-income families with two parents in the household, there are disadvantages of work over welfare for single-parent households (Bauman, 2000).
- ◉ Households that are lead by single mothers have an increased risk of being impoverished (Davidson, 1990).
- ◉ Research has identified specific communities and neighborhoods where the majority of households do not have fathers and experiencing poverty (Fatherless Homes, 1995)

4. Emotional/Psychological Effects

- ◉ Fathers interact with their children in a unique way, often fostering “exploration, autonomy, and independence” in their lives. When a father is absent, these traits may not develop as quickly or at all. (Wineburgh, 2000)
- ◉ Findings from conducted studies in America as well as other countries show that more than 50% of children admitted into hospitals for psychiatric illnesses did not have fathers (Davidson, 1990).

Defining the Variables

Variables/Measures

- ◉ **Predictor**-presence or absence of a father figure
- ◉ **Criterion**-level of social function
- ◉ **Other variables to account for**-demographics
 - -age
 - -gender
 - -race/ethnicity
 - -socioeconomic status
 - -sexual orientation/preference
 - -location within Miami Valley

Defining Variables

- ***Social Functioning: Internal & External Behaviors (Marowitz & Ryan)***
 - **Internal**-depressive symptoms (Markowitz & Ryan, 2016), mental health (Davidson, 1990), self-esteem/confidence(Davidson, 1990)
 - **External**-education/academic performance (Davidson, 1990), sexual behaviors (Hendricks, Cesario, Murdaugh, Gibbons, Servonsky, Bobadilla, Tavakoli, 2005), juvenile justice system involvement (Hoffmann, 2002; East, Jackson, & O'Brien, 2006), AoD abuse (Hoffmann, 2002; East, Jackson, & O'Brien, 2006)

Defining Variables (Continued)

- ◉ **Father Figure:** An older male who may or may not live in the home who demonstrates the behavior of a father towards a child and would be identified by that child as a father-figure. This could be a coach, older brother, uncle, teacher, stepfather, or a variety of other relations (McDougal, Durnell & Dlamini, 2018).
- ◉ **Biological Father:** Father who through sexual intercourse has conceived a child and shared genetics and DNA with that child
- ◉ **Teen:** From the ages of 13-19
- ◉ **Single Mothers:** Mother who has given birth to her child and has never been married
- ◉ **Youth-related social services:** Child Protective Services & Juvenile Detention Center

Research Proposal Design

Methodology

This study will use a cross-sectional descriptive research design.

-Cross-sectional study: a non-experimental, association only based, design used to gather data from one point in time across from a sample of different population groups (i.e. teens with fathers/father figures and teens without fathers/father figures).

-Descriptive implies: an observational study that describes a certain population or phenomenon being study.

Quantitative Population and Sample

Population Criteria:

- Teens the ages of 13-19 in Miami Valley, Ohio.
- Due to the large sample frame, the study will include that we will survey every 75th candidate.

Sample Selection:

- Sample frame consisting of school rosters, juvenile court documentation, and local social service agencies.

Sample Selection Con't

-Multistage Cluster Random Sampling of teens:

Stage 1a: Random sample of all high schools in Miami Valley.

Stage 1b: Simple random sample of teens within the selected schools.

Stage 2a: Random sample of all juvenile courts in Miami Valley.

Stage 2b: Simple random sample of teens within selected court systems.

Stage 3a: Random sample of all youth-related social service agencies in Miami Valley

Stage 3b: Simple random sample of teens within selected youth-related social service agencies.

Measuring Variables

Measuring the absence or presence of a father figure will be self-identified by teens in order to produce the most test reliability (Test/Retest reliability and Interitem Reliability).

- Self identified by teen participating in study
 - Ex. Do you believe you have a father figure (as defined above) involved in your life in a positive way?
 - Circle Yes or No

Measure Social Functioning With Questionnaire

- Gain approval from the IRB
- Introduce a 'level of functioning' instrument established by researchers (See Appendix A)
- Standardized scale for social functioning
 - Increase content validity by using same scale for all participants

Data Collection Procedures

Survey

- 1-2 pages of questions
- Sending out a mobile-friendly online survey to teachers and homeschool co-ops via email, asking them to distribute this survey to their students in Miami Valley, Ohio.
- Teens (13-19) will gain access to this survey through an email sent by their teacher, administrator, or the surveyor directly.
- The completed survey will be due in a week for students who choose to participate

Data Analysis Procedures

Predictor Variable-presence or absence of a father figure

Criterion Variable-level of social function

Test #1: Demographics

-Run frequency distributions to discover the frequency of each attribute within each variable.

-Preliminary Chi-square analysis (with SPSS software) to assess the similarities of the three grouping of teens:

Presence of biological father

Presence of father figure

Neither biological father or father figure present

Data Analysis Procedures Con't

Test #2: Differences in social functioning

-Run One-Way ANOVA using SPSS software to compare the following variables:

Categorical variables:

- a) Father figure: 1) Biological father or 2) identified father figure.
- b) No identified biological father or father figure.

Continuous variable: Scaled level of social functioning in teens.

-Post Hoc test: Bonferroni- will show where the differences exist within our experimental data (most conservative). It protects against Type 1 Error, yet is vulnerable to Type 2 Error.

Survey

We will be surveying our sample of teens using our questionnaire created by the researchers to identify if the individual has a father, a father figure, or neither of those options as a role model (Appendix A).

We will then use the Self-Rated Emotional Intelligence Scale (Brackett, Rivers, & College, 2006) to determine the teens' social functioning. (Appendix B).

Analysis of the Study

Expected Findings

1. Just as years of research suggests that absent biological fathers have a negative impact on the daily functioning of a child and their family, the absence of a *father figure* will produce similar results.
2. There will be a correlation between demographics such as race and income, and the absence of a father figure. Particularly, low-income families and minority groups are more susceptible to experiencing the absence of a father figure and its following negative effects.

Limitations

1. This study may not provide accurate cause and effect information due to it only examining one point in time (cross-sectional design) versus years of experiences.
2. This study is testing a relatively large amount of teenagers across multiple counties within the Miami Valley, which may contribute to finding an association when one really does not exist.
3. Treatment Misidentification: expectancies of the researchers to find results similar to that of the absence of a biological father.

Implications

1. If the test results show similar social functioning results regarding absent father figures (negative internal and external behavior) to that of an absent biological father, this could imply the impact a father figure has on a teen despite not being their biological father.
- ★ Advocating for mentorship and involvement of caring adult men in the lives of teenagers.

Appendix A

Fatherhood Questionnaire:

- 1) Would you say that your biological father demonstrates the behavior of a father toward you?
- 2) Is there an older male besides your biological father whom you would consider one who demonstrates the behavior of a father toward you (father-figure)?
- 3) Do you find yourself *without* either a biological father or father figure who demonstrates the behavior of a father toward you?
- 4) Does the man whom you identify most closely as a father live with you in the home?
- 5) If applicable, who is it that you consider your father or father-figure?

Appendix B

Self-Rated Emotional Intelligence Scale

The following set of items pertains to your insight into emotions. Please use the rating scale below to describe how accurately each statement describes *you*. Describe yourself as you generally are now, not as you wish to be in the future. Describe yourself as you honestly see yourself, in relation to other people you know of the same sex as you are, and roughly your same age. Please read each statement carefully, and then write the letter that corresponds to how inaccurately or accurately each statement describes you.

Very inaccurate	Moderately inaccurate	Neither nor	Moderately accurate	Very accurate
1	2	3	4	5

Number	Domain	Item wording
1.	P	By looking at people's facial expressions, I recognize the emotions they are experiencing.
2.	U	I am a rational person and I rarely, if ever, consult my feelings to make a decision (r).
3.	R	I have a rich vocabulary to describe my emotions.
4.	M ₁	I have problems dealing with my feelings of anger (r).
5.	M ₂	When someone I know is in a bad mood, I can help the person calm down and feel better quickly.
6.	P	I am aware of the nonverbal messages other people send.
7.	U	When making decisions, I listen to my feelings to see if the decision feels right.
8.	R	I could easily write a lot of synonyms for emotion words like happiness or sadness.
9.	M ₁	I can handle stressful situations without getting too nervous.
10.	M ₂	I know the strategies to make or improve other people's moods.
11.	P	I can tell when a person is lying to me by looking at his or her facial expression.
12.	U	I am a rational person and don't like to rely on my feelings to make decisions.
13.	R	I have the vocabulary to describe how most emotions progress from simple to complex feelings.
14.	M ₁	I am able to handle most upsetting problems.
15.	M ₂	I am not very good at helping others to feel better when they are feeling down or angry (r).
16.	P	My quick impressions of what people are feeling are usually wrong (r).
17.	R	My "feelings" vocabulary is probably better than most other persons' "feelings" vocabularies.
18.	M ₁	I know how to keep calm in difficult or stressful situations.
19.	M ₂	I am the type of person to whom others go when they need help with a difficult situation.

Note. P = Perceiving Emotion; U = Use of Emotion; (r) = reverse scored; R = Understanding Emotion; M₁ = Managing Emotion (self); M₂ = Social Management.

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