

The Role of Father Involvement and Neighborhood Disadvantage on Children's Developmental Outcomes

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INTRODUCTION

- Father involvement has been shown to correlate with child development outcomes.
- Research suggests that the neighborhood environment also contributes to child outcomes. Disadvantaged neighborhoods have been linked to negative educational and social outcomes.
- Father influence may be larger in disadvantaged environments.
- Research is less clear in showing whether father involvement is predictive over and above mother involvement.

OBJECTIVES

- To examine if father involvement has a significant longitudinal association with adolescent self-concept and depression.
- To study whether effects of father involvement are dependent on mother involvement and neighborhood.

METHOD

Sample

- United States Department of Labor National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1979 (NLSY79), and Children of the NLSY79
- Range of sample sizes for the variables of interest: 608 - 2,119

Measures

- Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression (CES-D) Scale (Radloff, 1977), Ages 14-17, Adolescent self report
- Neighborhood Disadvantage: Ages 10-13, Mother report
- Father/Mother Closeness: Ages 10-13, Adolescent report
- Pearlin Mastery Scale: Ages 14-17, Adolescent self report
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale: Ages 14-17, Adolescent self report
- Covariates: Child biological sex, family income

Analyses

- Pearson correlations, paired-samples t-test, and multiple regression were used.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

- Mother and father closeness were correlated ($r = .18$)
- Mother and father closeness were positively correlated with mastery and self-esteem.
- Girls reported lower levels of closeness to father than boys; no differences for closeness to mother
- Closeness to mother was higher than closeness to father ($t(967) = 16.31, p < .001$)

Primary Analyses

- Mastery as outcome: Girls reported higher levels ($\beta = .12, p < .05$). Neighborhood, mother closeness, and father closeness were not significantly associated.
- Self-esteem as outcome: Income was positively associated ($\beta = .13, p < .001$), mother closeness was negatively associated at low levels of neighborhood disadvantage, but not at high levels.
- Depression as outcome: Girls reported higher levels ($\beta = .11, p < .01$). Father closeness was negatively associated ($\beta = -.08, p < .05$), with larger effects at low levels of neighborhood disadvantage.

DISCUSSION

- Closeness to father was associated with lower levels of depression, suggesting that low levels of closeness increases risk for depression.
- Neighborhood conditions relate to the effects of closeness to father. In neighborhood with low disadvantage, the effect of father closeness is larger.
- Father closeness showed no effects on self-esteem. Mother closeness was associated with higher self-esteem, but only in neighborhoods with low disadvantage.
- Parent closeness not significantly associated with mastery.
- On average, adolescents report higher levels of closeness to their mothers.
- Sons report higher levels of closeness to fathers than daughters. No differences were found for closeness to mothers.
- This study was limited in that it is correlational and did not control for a wide range of possible confounds. Thus, effects could be explained by unobserved child and family factors.