

Dissertation

Fathers, Mothers, Marriages, and Children: Toward a Contextual Model of Positive Paternal Influence

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2000

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Emphasis: Family Relations

Abstract

This research explored positive paternal involvement in the lives of children within the broader familial context of marital dynamics and positive maternal involvement. The National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) was used to obtain a longitudinal subsample of 582 first-married couples, as well as the wide range of variables necessary to explore this broader context of paternal influence. Three research questions guided the study: (1) What is the unique contribution of positive paternal involvement-with respect to positive maternal involvement and marital quality-in children's development? (2) How does the influence of positive paternal involvement interact with the influence of positive maternal involvement and marital quality to influence children's development? (3) To what degree do fathers indirectly influence their children via the marital relationship and the mother-child relationship?

Analysis demonstrated little evidence of fathers' unique contribution to children's aggressive/antisocial behavior, school problems, and other outcomes. Similarly, analysis demonstrated no indirect effects for paternal involvement across the 4-5 years span between Wave I and Wave 2 of the NSFH. Specifically, fathers' involvement did not indirectly affect children's outcomes via either the marital relationship or maternal involvement. However, limitations relating to internal reliability rendered findings questionable.

Analysis also demonstrated a limited pattern of interaction effects between paternal involvement measures and marital and maternal variables. Specifically, Wave 2 paternal positive activities demonstrated meaningful interactions with maternal positive activities, marital happiness, and marital conflict, with respect to their influence on children's aggressive/antisocial behavior. Interaction between paternal positive activities and marital variables indicated that paternal involvement is capable of interacting with other aspects of family context in ways which have both positive and negative consequences for children.

Future research efforts addressing these questions should assess parental involvement in greater depth and breadth, incorporating a framework capable of addressing both parental warmth and control. Similarly, future research should consider methods capable of addressing multicollinearity resulting from parallel paternal and maternal variables. Finally, future research should explore the various ways in which paternal involvement interacts with other sources of influence within families to impact the lives of children.