

The Effect of Father Absence on their Daughter's Self-Esteem

Taylor Quillin-Morkowski

California State University, Chico

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine whether a father's absence affects his daughter self-esteem and see how these daughters self-esteem adjusts over five years. A pre-experimental design will be used with 120 girls from 6th and 7th grade classes. A follow up study will be given to these subjects five years after the initial study has been implemented. Data collection will be collected through a demographics questionnaire and by completion of the Rosenberg self-esteem scale, which will produce quantitative data. The quasi-experimental group will be analyzed using a paired samples t-test. This study is most beneficial for single mothers raising daughters and counselors to better understand how to help these girls cope.

The Effect of Father Absence on their Daughter's Self-Esteem

An increasing number of children grow up in a single parent household. Although it may be better for the parents to be separated, the separation affects their children greatly (Hetherington, 1972). It is important for parents to understand the effects separation can have in order to help their children cope with the situation more effectively. Many children are raised by their mother after a separation or divorce occurs. This can greatly affect daughters because this causes them to lack connections to important male figure, unless someone else has taken on that role for the child. The purpose of this study is to examine the emotional effects that absentee fathers have on their daughters.

Daughters of absentee fathers are often impacted in numerous ways. Pipher (as cited in Allen, 1999) has found adolescent girls without fathers are more likely to engage in substance abuse, sexual acts, and have a greater likelihood of having children without fathers too. Fatherless girls have a variety of different reactions to their father; some live their lives trying to please their father while others hold a grudge towards him. No matter what their feelings are, these girls often suffer great amounts of insecurities. These insecurities can lead to depression, loneliness, and attempts of suicide, as found by McConville (as cited in Allen, 1999). "Father hunger," termed by Frailberg (as cited in Allen, 1999), is used to describe children who grew up without fathers or with uninvolved ones. Father hunger girls often suffer with body image, self-esteem, and self-identity. All of these are negative effects fatherless girls are prone to experience.

The effects girls are prone to experience when not having a father figure can lead to anxiety and self-esteem problems. Lou, Wang, and Gao (2012) conducted a study that observed children and adolescents' anxiety and self-esteem levels and the time when the father left. Their

study found that anxiety and self-esteem levels of children and adolescents were more affected by the father's influence compared to the mother's influence. Also they found that the age of the child when the father became absent affected the subject's self-esteem. Girls who experienced this absence before the age of 2 years old showed lower self-esteem than those that experienced this later in life.

Self-esteem is related to the support children receive from their parents. According to Bastaits, Ponnet, and Mortelmans (2012), children of highly supportive mothers and educated fathers showed higher self-esteem. Overall girls reported lower self-esteem than boys when the support of mothers and education level of fathers were taken into account. Another finding is that once the event of divorce occurs, the amount of connection a father maintains with his child affects their self-esteem (Bastaits, Ponnet, & Mortelmans, 2012). The more supportive and involved the divorced father is, the better adjusted the child is to the separation. Another researcher found that noncustodial fathers tend to be less supportive and lack control over their child (O'donnell, 1999). The children that O'donnell studied showed lower self-esteem when their father was less involved, supportive, and controlling. Knowing this it is important to urge fathers who don't have custody over their children to be actively involved in their children's lives.

Another effect of separation is higher hyperactivity levels, which can lead to deviant behaviors (Pagani, Boulerice, Tremblay, & Vitaro, 1997). These children often have too high of energy levels in situations that are not always consider socially acceptable. These levels can be reduced if the custodial parent remarries. The most beneficial time for remarriage to occur in order to balance out hyperactivity levels is when the child is in elementary school years (Pagani et. al, 1997). If the separation occurred before the child is 6 years old, the child is more prone to

disobedient behaviors. This could escalate into physical aggression. It is important to be aware as a parent that deviant behaviors can be related to the divorce.

While behaviors such as aggression arise from separation other personality factors can be affected. One is it can lead to a greater need of dependency (Hetherington, 1972). This will be displayed when a girl is dependent on others to satisfy her needs. These needs can be either physical, emotional, or both. The earlier the separation occurs, the greater the effects. Another researcher (Lamb, 1979) based his studies on Hetherington's findings to discuss the father's role he has for his daughter. He found how father absence can result in his daughter having trouble interacting with boys. This can lead them to participate in sexual acts with boys or avoid them altogether. For example, girls may become highly engaged in unprotected sex with multiple partners while others fear having any connection to the opposite sex and avoid interaction with them. Lamb also found that paternal absent affects girls later than boys. Most girls with absentee fathers start showing effects in adolescence.

Adolescence is a time when intimate relationships begin to blossom and girls with absentee fathers often show difficulties maintaining relationships. Daughters without fathers often express greater negative attitudes (Mustonen, Huure, Haukkala, Kiviruusu & Aro, 2011). They seem to have a harder time trusting the other gender, difficulty communicating in relationships, and are generally less satisfied with their relationship. Girls experience greater negative effects because they are often cared for by their mothers. They may adopt similar views as their mothers because they can easily relate to them (Mustonen et al., 2011). Because many daughters grow up with their mother and often witness divorce, they create a negative view towards their father and other men. This can be an explanation for why these girls often are troubled with intimate relationships.

The current study is to examine how self-esteem of daughters with absentee fathers adjusts over time. A pre-experimental design will be used to see whether a father's absence causes a decrease daughter's self-esteem. This study differs from prior studies because a longitudinal study will be conducted over five years to see if self-esteem decreases over time or if it remains stable. Due to past research it is hypothesized that there is a negative relationship between the time a father has been absent and his daughter's self-esteem.

Method

Overview

The purpose of this study is to determine whether a father's absence causes a decrease in his daughter's self-esteem by using a pre-experimental design. The study will be conducted on daughters with absentee fathers. The self-esteem levels of these subjects will be evaluated after five years to see if the levels increase, decrease, or stay the same as the initial observation. The independent variable is the father's absence. The dependent variable is the daughter's self-esteem. Self-esteem will be evaluated by having participants complete the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965), which is an ordinal measurement. Also the length of time the father has been absent, in years, will be taken into account. This is a ratio measurement.

Participants

The study will be conducted in the eastern bay area. A nonprobability sampling method will be used. This is due to the logistic fact that a longitudinal study is difficult to conduct so participants must be willing to commit to this type of study. The study will be conducted on at least 120 girls to ensure that if any child backs out of the study later on a large enough sample size will still be available. Girls given the initial survey will be recruited from 6th and 7th grades classes, (children aged 11 years old to 13 years old). The follow-up study will be conducted on

these same subjects when they are in 11th and 12th grades (ages 16-18). The study ethnicities will consist of 41% White, 23% Latino, 19% Asian, 12% African American, and 5% in the other category (East Bay Indicators, 2009). The predicted annual income levels are 24% in the \$0 to \$25,000 range, 47% in the \$25,001 to \$50,000, 16% in the \$50,001 to \$75,000 range, 7% in the \$75,001 to \$100,000, and 6% in the \$100,000 and higher range. Also marital status of parents will be declared as either single, married, separated, divorced, or remarried. If the subject's parents are not married they will be able to write the length of time (in years) that their parents have been single, separated, divorced or remarried, and indicate who their primary caregiver is (mother, father, grandfather, grandmother, aunt, uncle, other).

Materials/Measures

Children will be given a demographics questionnaire for their guardian to fill out. The questionnaire is both open and fixed formatted responses. This includes questions about their gender identity, ethnicity, age, parents' marital status (single, married, divorced, separated, or remarried), and income level. This will produce qualitative data. After completing this, children will be given the Rosenberg self-esteem scale to answer. This is to evaluate the self-esteem of the subject based off of a fixed response format (Rosenberg, 1965). Examples of items provided in this measure are "on the whole, I am satisfied with myself" and "I take a positive attitude toward myself" (Rosenberg, 1965). This Likert scale consists of ten items scored from zero to three in which 0 =strongly disagree, 1= disagree, 2= agree and 3=strongly agree with the given statement. Items two, five, six, eight, and nine were reversed scored items. The range of scores is zero to thirty. The higher the score signifies a higher self-esteem. The Rosenberg self-esteem scale contains an internal consistency of .77 to .88 and test-retest reliability of .82 to .85. The criterion validity of this scale is .55. Its construct validity is -.43 for anomie, -.54 for depression,

and $-.64$ for anxiety (Rosenberg, 1965). This material will provide the study with quantitative information.

Procedure

Before conducting the study, approval was obtained from the IRB at California State University, Chico. Then approval will be conducted from the school districts, as well as the teachers giving out the survey. An informed consent form is to be sent out to the parents to fill out with their student. If no written consent is provided, those specific students will not be able to participate in the study. Parents will be informed that this is a longitudinal study so subjects will receive the same exact study in 5 years. These results will then be compared. Before participating students and parents must be aware of this and be willing to participate in the study at a distant time.

The study will be conducted on randomly selected 6th and 7th grade classes in the east bay area. Of those selected students, 120 students will be given a survey to complete in class after consent has been granted from both them and their guardian. While in selected core classes, teachers will assist students in completing the questionnaires, if assistance is needed. The students who participate will have their contact information collected so they can be contacted for the second part of the survey.

In order to ensure confidentiality the subjects will be assigned a number. This number will be what is used on the questionnaire. This is necessary because a second test will be conducted so it is important to be able to compare the subject's results without revealing the subjects identities. For the purpose of the study any male subjects information will be disregarded because this study focuses on females only. Therefore males' information will be shredded and the female's information will be locked away where only the researcher has access

to.

A small incentive will be granted to those participants who complete the longitudinal study. This means they complete the questionnaire when in middle school and then again in high school. The incentive granted will be a \$10 gift card to wherever they desire! This is to increase the likelihood of subjects following through with both sessions of the study.

Statistical Analysis Plan

The hypothesis of this study is that a father's absence causes a decrease in his daughter's self-esteem over time. Because the study uses a Lickert scale, quantitative data will be produced. Using a paired samples t -test the critical value for 120 subjects at an alpha level of .05 with a degree of freedom value of 118, is 1.658. If the value of t is greater than 1.658, the null hypothesis can be rejected and this will indicate there is a statistically significant relationship. If this happens it can be concluded from the research that there is a statistically significant relationship that a father's absence will cause his daughter's self-esteem to decrease over time.

Appendix

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1. Demographic Questionnaire
2. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale

Instructions

Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. At times I think I am no good at all.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. I certainly feel useless at times.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

Scoring:

Items 2, 5, 6, 8, 9 are reverse scored. Give “Strongly Disagree” 1 point, “Disagree” 2 points, “Agree” 3 points, and “Strongly Agree” 4 points. Sum scores for all ten items. Keep scores on a continuous scale. Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem.

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