

Fathers Connection

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Research on Fatherhood: Old discoveries seem new again

Fathers' contribution to family and how their presence affects children were reexamined beginning in the early 1990s. The increasing recognition that father absence has led to a variety of crippling social ills led to a renewed appreciation of fathers' contributions to the emotional and developmental well-being of their children. Politically, this was evidenced by President Clinton's Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies directing them to implement policies and procedures maximizing father involvement¹, Vice-President Gore's announcement of a Department of Education finding of fathers' contribution to children's educational achievement², the National Governor's Association resolution regarding Paternal Involvement in Child Rearing³, the establishment of a U.S. Commission on Child and Family Welfare, the development of governors' conferences on fatherhood in several states, the Congressional Fatherhood Initiative legislation introduced in Congress, the creation of the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse in federal government, and the formation of the Congressional Men's Health Caucus in the early 2000s with a focus on fatherhood.

Among researchers, the long-neglected male side of parenting was in vogue, leading to an increasing number of articles and conferences focusing on the short- and long-term effect on children of father absence. This was evidenced by the NIH Conference on Fatherhood held each year, and eye-opening studies by Sanford Braver⁴, Kuhn & Guidubaldi⁵, Horn & Bush⁶, Christine Nord⁷, and numerous others.

Were researchers and policy makers just discovering that children need a father's influence to develop into productive members of society? No. Researchers and politicians⁸ had long known that father absence leads down the path to a dysfunctional society. Child custody determinations and the assumptions made by judges and court personnel about fathers affect the well-being of millions of children. We present the following articles as a sampling of earlier research into the causes and results of children being raised in fatherless families, and of the parenting ability of fathers.

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- 1) *Effects of Father on the Educational Achievement of Urban Black Children* - (*Child Study Journal* - #1, 1975) by Frank J. Sciara, Ball State Univ. (Sampling size = 300)

"... significant differences favoring the academic achievement of both boys and girls from father present homes ..."

"Father absence had a much greater effect on ... boys and girls ... whose ... I.Q. was above 100."

¹ 1995

² *Fathers Involvement in their Children's Schools*. National Center for Education Statistics, October 1997

³ 1995

⁴ Presented to NIH, October 1997

⁵ Presented at a September 1997 press conference in Washington, DC.

⁶ *Fathers, Marriage, and Welfare Reform*. Hudson Institute, 1997

⁷ *Nonresident Fathers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools*. Presented with Nicholas Zill at the Children's Rights Council Conference October 1997

⁸ Senator Moynihan (D-NY) "What I find difficult to understand ... is our sudden rediscovery of a problem (fatherlessness) ... that has been there for 30 years and has steadily gotten worse" U.S. Senate, 1992

- 2) *Fatherhood : Contextural Variations - (American Behavioural Scientist - Sept./Oct. 1985)* by Shirley M. H. Hanson, Ph.D., R.N., Chairperson, Dept. of Family Nursing, Oregon Health Sciences University, Portland, Oregon

"... child development is enhanced by more father involvement ... there is less sexism in the children."

"... househusbands are pioneers for a new society of alternatives for family living."

"... single custodial fathers ... make conscientious efforts to be expressive and physically affectionate with their children.'

"... the quality of father/child interaction ... quite good in these households"

"... are able to meet the emotional and nurturance needs of children."

"... fathers are more often required to pay child support than mothers are in the same situation."

- 3) *Father to Infant Attachment : Effects of Early Contact and Characteristics of the Infant - (Research in Nursing and Health - #4, 1981)* by Colette Jones, Ph.D., Chair., Dept. of Primary Care, School of Nursing, University of Maryland

Study of 51 dyads at 24-72 hours of age and at 1 month. Seems to indicate that fathers and mothers interact with the boys and girls within the context of stereotypes.

"The father plays an active and unique role in part in his child's development."

"Early contact (at birth) between fathers and infants appears to enhance nonverbal communication at 1 month."

"... fathers participate in child care as much as the mother allows."

- 4) *Can Men "Mother"? Life as a Single Father - (Family Relations - Jan. 1986)* by Barbara J. Risman, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology, North Carolina State Univ.

[Sampling of 141 single fathers — those who fought to get custody came out exceptionally well.]

"... 4 out of 5 fathers did not rely on outside housekeeping help"

"... the traditional assumption that children belong with their mothers after divorce needs to be re-examined."

"... social workers and counselors employed in family court should be aware that females do not necessarily make better mothers."

- 5) *Single Father Caretakers : Demographic Characteristics and Adjustment Processes - (American Journal of Orthopsychiatry - April 1982)* by Pi-Nian Chang, Ph.D., and Amos S. Deinard, MD; Dept. of Pediatrics, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

[A study based on 80 fathers with custody. Of 275 contested custody cases, fathers "won" 61 (22%) in that the father was awarded some form of custody (joint, split, sole) but only 41 of these were sole custody (14.9% of the 275).]

"... fathers sought custody because of their love for their children and their confidence in their parenting ability."

"... most of the fathers demonstrated satisfactory adjustment."

"... the presumption that the mother is the better parent ... and thus better fit to be the custodial parent, has dominated most divorce hearings and court decisions for the past 50 years."

"The societal attitude that fathers should be working regardless of the presence of dependent children"

"... Single custodial mothers, on the other hand, have the option of either working or staying home, either of which is condoned by society."

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- 6) *The Impact of Marital Separation/Divorce on Children - Parent and Child Separation and Child Adjustment (Journal of Divorce - Summer 1978)* - by Doris S. Jacobson, Ph.D., Professor of School of Social Welfare, University of California @ LA [30 families - 51 children]

[Part 1 of a 3 part study.]

"Findings indicate a statistically significant association between time lost in the presence of the father and current adjustment. The more time lost, the higher the maladjustment score."

"No significant association between time lost with mother and child adjustment was found."

Of those families in the sample, "... in which custody had been decided by the court, there was one family in which there was joint custody. In all other cases, whether custody had or had not been determined by the court, children lived with their mothers."

"... of a 6 year old boy who, when asked what the most difficult aspect of his family situation was, responded tearfully, 'I miss my daddy.' He had not seen his father for 2 months."

"... an 8 year old boy complained about the interference of the extended family in allowing him to telephone his father. He had learned to put through emergency calls to his father quickly when others were not around."

"... the direct impact on the child's psyche of reduced contact with the father is an important factor to be considered in further research."

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- 7) *Infants of Primary Nurturing Fathers - (The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child - Vol. 38, 1983)* by Kyle D. Pruett, M.D., Professor of Psychiatry, Yale University

Studies of infants reared by fathers. The summary is illuminating:

"One of the more intriguing questions raised by the assessment of the infants is why these babies are developing so well. Most of the babies seemed to have a heightened appetite for novel experience and stimuli."

"... the father's role, even when not primary, has been vastly underestimated."

- 8) *Differences in Children's Behaviour Toward Custodial Mothers and Custodial Fathers* - (*Journal of Marriage and the Family* - Feb. 1982) by Anne-Marie Ambert, Department of Sociology, York University, Toronto

[A study of 20 custodial mothers and 7 custodial fathers. Three main findings: children had a better relationship with the fathers than with the mothers; those in custody of fathers verbalized their appreciation more; and children of low SES mothers were more dysfunctional than those of higher SES mothers. In general, the fathers did better than even the high SES mothers. Write expressed great difficulty in locating custodial fathers anywhere — especially on the lower SES scale. In the cases studied, apparently the father had to demonstrate greater assets in order to gain custody. — MHN]

"All but 1 of the fathers who sought custody had to contest it, while only 3 of the mothers had to contest it. ... 2 women had not wanted custody but had had no choice, 1 father had deserted, and the other was mentally incompetent."

"All fathers had at least 1 son, 3 had no daughters."

"... striking difference ... children's general behaviour"

"Since most children are awarded to their mothers at separation, a mother-headed family is the situation in the majority of cases. Yet these same mothers, mainly those of lower SES, fared less well than the fathers."

"... mothers tend to be more restrictive and authoritarian in the first 2 years after separation."

- 9) *Effects of Divorce on Children : Differential Impact of Custody and Visitation Patterns (Family Relations* - Oct. 1985) by Lowery and Settle, Department of Psychology, U. of Kentucky

[Examines problems with samples used in much of the published material — concludes that joint custody will mitigate many of the problems with child support payments and the child's emotional development. Focus is the cumulative stress on the child rather than looking at divorce as a single event in the child's life. Concludes that relationships among family members do not end when divorce occurs, they are "... merely altered" — MHN]

"... fathers tended to move less after divorce than did mothers ... mothers more often have custody of the children ... this means that the children ... not only lose the relative loss of the father from the home ... but the loss of the home itself, ... neighborhood friends, and other familiar surroundings. (DeFraim and Eirick, 1981)"

"Current patterns of custody, visitation, and child support show low deviations from the traditional mother custody, bimonthly visitation with a father who pays child support. This fact challenges any supposition that arrangements are tailored to meet the specific needs of the particular family. It is more logical to conclude that these decisions are made according to fairly rigid, conventionalized standards that poorly accommodate the variety of circumstances among individual families in minimizing stressful situations." (several sources quoted)

"... duration of contact with the father was directly related to the quality of the father-child relationship and, indirectly, to the child's adjustment."

"... key factors ... insure that the father ... easy access to his children and input into his children's lives, both of which are frequently denied fathers in actual practice."

[Studies show that boys fare better in the custody of the father than the mother — severe problems otherwise.]

"... the mother may vent hostility toward the father on the son." [This could be reflected in the high rate of child abuse in mother-headed single parent families. — MHN]

"Ample confirmation of the ability of custody fathers to function competently in the role of primary caretaker ... "

"However, ... it is still highly infrequent for a father to receive custody except under very unusual circumstances."

"... show better results for joint custody than sole custody."

"... relitigation rate for joint custody was half that for sole custody (16% vs. 32%)."

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- 10) *Games Fathers and Mothers Play With Their Infants* - (*Infant Mental Health Journal* - Winter 1981) by Michael W. Yogman, M.D., Associate Chief of the Child Development Unit, Children's Hospital Medical Center, Boston, Mass. and The Harvard Medical School.

"... fathers as well as mothers can establish a direct social relationship with their infants."

"In contrast to mothers, fathers more often engaged in limb movement games in which their behaviour attempted to arouse the infant."

"Father's play ... more likely to be proximal, social, physical, arousing, and briefer in duration, and fathers reported that they enjoyed it more than mothers. Infants at 8 months responded more positively to play with fathers than mothers and at 2 1/2 yrs. of age not only preferred to play with fathers but were judged to be more involved and excited with them." (This style contrasts to mothers' which seems to be oriented toward care-giving and to playing structured games. The fathers choose to stimulate the infants more, as reported in other studies. — MHN)

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- 11) *Childrearing Fathers in Intact Families, II : Israel and the USA* - (*Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* - Jan. 1982) by Norma Radin, University of Michigan, and Abraham Sagi, University of Haifa

"... in both countries (USA & Israel) the child's internality was positively related with paternal involvement in childcare."

"... that children reared in nontraditional families will manifest more internality than their peers in traditional homes."

"... both social learning theory and reciprocal role theory suggest that youngsters in families where fathers are primary caregivers will adopt non-sextyped perceptions of mothers and fathers."

"... children reared in homes where fathers have a major role in their upbringing, tend to be more internal, more empathetic, and hold less stereotyped views of paternal role."

"... considerable father presence is associated with an internal locus of control of children."

- 12) *Joint Versus Maternal Custody for Families With Latency Age Boys : Parent Characteristics With Child Adjustment* - (*American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* - July 1986) by Virginia M. Shiller, PhD, Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, Yale University (Study involved boys aged 6 - 11, 1 - 6 years after divorce : 20 joint physical custody families and 20 maternal custody)

"According to rating made by parents and teachers, boys in joint custody had fewer behavioral difficulties than their maternal custody counterparts."

"... fewer emotional and behavioral problems"

"... classroom adjustment ... superior"

- 13) *Parent-Child Interaction and the Acquisition of Lexical Information During Play* - (*Developmental Psychology* - Vol. 16, #5 - 1980) by Elise Frank Masur, Department of Psychology, Northern Illinois University, and Jean Berko Gleason, Boston University (supported by a National Science Foundation grant) and several others

"Fathers were also more cognitively and linguistically demanding..."

"Children, in turn, produced more total vocabulary to fathers than to mothers."

"... suggests a strategy of attempting to maximize the language performance of all children, and particularly the younger ones who might require more direct prompting."

"The effectiveness of the fathers' behavior is demonstrated"

- 14) *Single Parent Fathers : A New Study* - (*Children Today* - May/June 1978) by Harry Finklestein Keshet, Ph.D., Research Assoc., Department of Sociology, Brandeis University, Director, Resource and Mediation Center, Cambridge, Mass., and Kristine M. Rosenthal, Ed.D., Professor, Department of Sociology, Brandeis University (sample size of 49 divorced or separated fathers with formal or informal custody)

[Boston area fathers — 1/2 were legally divorced. Majority highly educated. — MHN]

Quotes E. E. Master, "... failure of marriage likely to mean loss of child custody for fathers. Most men do not seek custody and those that do may experience sex role bias on the part of the judiciary."

"Over 90% ... frequently performed the homemaking functions of"

"... fathers in our sample were very active in all the aspects of parenting that we explored."

"... fathers even protected their children from the influence of other adults."

"The bond between parent and child became a new focal point"

"... limited work and social activities to meet the needs of their children"

"... restructuring their daily lives in order to care directly for their dependent children."

- 15) *Father-Infant Relationships : Their Nature and Importance* - (*Youth and Society* - March 1978) by Michael E. Lamb, Department of Human Growth and Development, Department of Psychology, University of Michigan, and Marguerite B. Stevenson, Department of Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Madison

[A critique of the literature dealing with father and mother interaction with infants and toddlers, including Lamb's own work. Draws conclusions from same.— MHN]

"Fathers are more likely to play in physically stimulating and unconventional games."

"... older infants directed more attachment behaviors to their fathers than to their mothers when observed at home."

"The types of play that fathers choose are those that infants enjoy most"

- 16) *Disciplinary Encounters Between Young Boys and Their Mothers and Fathers : Is There a Contingency System?* - (*Developmental Psychology* - Vol. 15, # 3 - 1979) by Hugh Lyton, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Calgary, Alberta

"The mother's tendency to engage in relatively more control actions, and the child's tendency to show rather less compliance to her than to the father"

- 17) *Yours, Mine, or Ours? : Child Custody Decisions* - (*Childhood Education* - Sept./Oct. 1984) by Betty Spillers Beeson, Professor and Coordinator of Early Childhood Education, Ball State University

A 5* rating for joint custody. She quotes several researchers in drawing her conclusion that, "... importance of a continued relationship with both parents."

"Children whose relationship with their fathers were disrupted were more vulnerable to a wide range of problems."

"... children had a better self concept"

"... lack of dire consequences for the children as predicted by judges and some psychologists."

"Judges are more readily acknowledging that their area of legal expertise does not equip them to make such decisions based solely upon points of law."

- 18) *The Deserting, Nonsupporting Father : Scapegoat of Family Nonpolicy* - (*The Family Coordinator* - Oct. 1979) by Lilian M. Snyder, Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Western Illinois University

[Essentially an analysis of needed changes in the welfare laws so that the man does not have to leave the house for the family to receive assistance. The author touches on the child support and the criminal justice systems. — MHN]

"Little effort has been made to see the family dissolution from the man's point of view."

"... there are some overly conscientious men whose support payments are so unreasonable that they lose their business or their jobs under the strain."

"... a substantial number of men who leave home are untrained, unemployed, underemployed, or only periodically employed."

"The deserting nonsupporting father has become the scapegoat of a family nonpolicy."

She studied 55 Maryland men who were arrested for not making support payments and put in prison. "... the exposure to the criminal justice system did not increase job opportunities."

"At the time of their first arrest about 1/3 of the men had regular jobs But only 3 of these men were successful in returning to their old jobs within 3 months after their release from prison."

"The median income at the time of the 1st arrest was \$65 a week, hardly enough to support the man himself."

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- 19) [R] *Joint Custody After Divorce : Major Issues and Goals for Research* - (*Psychological Bulletin* - Vol. 91, # 1 - 1982) by W. Glenn Clingempeel, Department of Psychology, Temple University, and N. Dickon Reppucci, University of Virginia

[A review of literature on joint custody, both for and against. The author is very thorough. Joint custody comes out very well as do fathers who want to remain involved. — MHN]

"... does not mean that physical custody is necessarily divided equally"

"... both parents have equal input in major decisions affecting their children"

"... number of courts have ruled that joint custody is not appropriate for children of 'tender years'."

"... adjustment of children is related to the quality of their relationship with both parents." (author's emphasis)

"... children ... dissatisfaction with the paucity of visits under the 'reasonable visitation' standard (often translated into visiting on alternative weekends)."

"... frequent visits ... positive effect on adjustment" etc.

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- 20) *When Father Gets Custody* - (*Children Today* - Sept./Oct. 1978) by Karen W. Bartz, Ed.D., National Program Director, Camp Fire Girls, Inc., formerly a family specialist, Missouri Cooperative Extension Service, Assistant Director, Family Study Center, University of Missouri @ Kansas City, and Wayne C. Witcher, Coordinator of children's services, N.E. Kansas Mental Health and Guidance Center (sample size = 34)

[These fathers had rather high educational and occupational positions, leading the authors to assume that this might have accounted for them gaining custody. Only three had been involved in contested custody suits. — MHN]

"Only 8 of the fathers received what they termed 'supportive' or 'helpful' advice from their lawyers. ... One father ... '... cost me 22 lbs., \$18,000, and 6 months total effort' "

"Child support is almost always granted in cases when mothers have custody. Only 2 of our fathers were awarded child support by the court; one had received no payments and the other only about half of the payments. ... Several others sought support but were not granted it."

"The most difficult roadblock for these fathers is still the legal arena. Courts remain influenced by the 'tender years presumption' and the belief that all things being equal, the mother is the best parent. The few fathers in our study who contested custody had to prove the mother unfit."

- 21) *Single Custodial Fathers and the Parent-Child Relationship* - (*Nursing Research* - July/Aug. 1981) by Shirley Hanson, Ph.D., R.N., Senior Research Fellow, School of Nursing, University of Washington at Seattle

"... the increasing involvement and importance of the male as a parent"

"Married fathers and single fathers (with or without custody) can and do play an important role in the lives of their children."

- 22) *Parents' Language Interaction with Young Children : A Comparative Study of Mothers' and Fathers'* - (*Child Study Journal* - #3, 1981) by Deborah S. Fash and Charles L. Madison, Washington State University

Found mothers and fathers alike in most areas of communication with the child (differences not considered significant) except in 2 areas : "... fathers scored higher on both self-repetition and reference to past events."

"Fathers produced slightly more interrogative than declarative sentences."

"Fathers ... more reference to past events"

"... may suggest a provision of speech model requiring a higher level of language comprehension or cognitive processing from the child."

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