

Father Involvement in Young Children's Lives

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VOLUME 6

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Jyotsna Pattnaik
Editor

Father Involvement in Young Children's Lives

A Global Analysis

 Springer

Editor

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Foreword

I have been involved in fatherhood research and practice for more than 20 years now, and during this time I have watched the field of fathering grow in significant ways. One such change is the explosion of research on fathers. Pick up any family, child development, or psychology journal, and you are likely to find at least one or two articles focusing on fathers. Even papers that focus on mothers' influences on children now include fathers and their contribution to children. As with all fields of study, the findings from these many studies are sometimes confusing, contradictory, and inconclusive. Yet, without a doubt, we know a lot more about fathers and their influences on children than we did 20 years ago. Where early studies only examined fathers' effects on children, more recent research includes both father and mother influences on children. Although researchers quickly realized that the factors which influence father involvement are multidimensional (i.e., include personality, family, workplace influences), recent studies have used more sophisticated analytic strategies such as structural equation modeling to examine the pathways of influence. Fathering research has also made good use of qualitative research designs to explore uncharted areas of fathering (e.g., stay-at-home fathers). The present volume, *Father involvement in young children's lives: A global analysis*, clearly illustrates the knowledge that has been gained from this rich body of research. The chapters in this book help to synthesize these studies, and as such are an important contribution to the field.

The second change is the expanded focus on the many ways in which fathers are involved with their children. The early studies viewed fathers as involved or uninvolved, absent or present, visiting or not visiting their children, responsible or not responsible, and providing or not providing financially for children. This bifurcated way of viewing fathers was lacking because it did not represent the realities of many families. Nonresidential fathers who were struggling to spend more time with their children were often portrayed as absent. Divorced fathers were frequently portrayed as men who were looking to avoid their parenting responsibilities. Fathers were not just involved or uninvolved, they were involved to varying degrees with their children, and the quality of their involvement ranged from high to low, just as it does with mothers. The other drawback of early studies was that they missed some of the important ways in which fathers were engaged with their children. Only recently have researchers paid closer attention to fathering behaviors such as reading to children, stimulating children's cognitive development, getting involved in children's schools

and early childhood programs, attending parent conferences, and teaching children life skills. The present book, *Father involvement in young children's lives: A global analysis*, includes chapters that summarize the varied ways that fathers become involved in their children's lives. Specifically, this book includes important chapters on fathers' contributions to children's learning.

The third change is the recognition of the high degree of diversity in fathering behavior among different ethnic and socioeconomic groups. It is interesting to note that the fathering field has developed rapidly at the same time that the internet and other technologies have provided us with access to far more information about peoples throughout the world. Access to the vast body of information worldwide has enabled us to see that in some communities, individuals are concerned about ways to encourage greater father support of children's development (e.g., reading to children), while in other communities, few individuals are literate and fathers' contributions to children's formal schooling are less critical. The major concern in these communities is how to provide for the basic needs of children such as food, shelter, and safety. The chapters in this volume are important because they synthesize research on fathers from many nations, including the United States, Australia, India, South Africa, Japan, Taiwan, and the Caribbean.

The chapters in this book reveal that nations around the world share many of the same concerns about the role of fathers in families, although the degree to which countries are addressing the needs of fathers and families varies widely. It is interesting to try to grasp the growing worldwide interest in fathers from a global perspective. Significant changes have occurred in the world population in the past several decades. The world population has doubled in the last 50 years. Despite the fact that nearly half of the world population lives in poverty and about 20 % of individuals are severely malnourished, there has been a trend among nations to invest in children. Some of the increased investment has occurred as a consequence of lower fertility rates in many countries. As fertility rates decline, parents are able to concentrate more attention to each child because there are fewer children in each family. One metric used to monitor investment in children is the rate of children attending primary school. Recent estimates show that net enrollment rates in primary school are increasing by 0.14 % per year worldwide (Bayou et al. 2005). Another metric frequently used to measure quality of life among children is the infant or under-five mortality rate. The under-five death rate (i.e., deaths per 1,000 births) went from 90 in 1990 to 65 in 2008 worldwide (World Health Organization 2010). Some would say that these trends reflect minor advancements in the quality of children's lives. Given the multiple factors (including barriers) that contribute to availability of education and health resources, these trends generally reflect slow but steady progress toward investment in children.

It has become abundantly clear that fathers worldwide are an important and often times "untapped" resource (see Pruett 1988) that can continue this trend toward investing in children and improving the quality of children's lives. It is clear that fathers can contribute in innumerable ways to their children. However, it is not clear at this time the extent to which fathers are contributing to this increasing worldwide investment. There is a great need for researchers and scholars to document the efforts

that are being made by individuals and by societies to nurture men's roles in families. The many studies that are being conducted and the wide range of policies and programs being implemented call for a synthesis of this work. This volume makes a considerable contribution by bringing together scholars from around the world to begin this process of synthesis. Although much of the value of this book will be found in the individual chapters, readers will glean considerable value from reading the book as a whole. As a whole, this volume provides a glimpse at the worldwide effort to encourage fathers' investment in children.

Jay Fagan

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I take this opportunity to thank my husband, Mr. Kanak Nath, whose constant involvement in our son’s life has sustained my efforts to continue to learn and conduct my research on the topic of father involvement. My 12-year old son, Kalyan Nath, has served as a constant source of inspiration for my efforts to be involved in activities that relate to young children’s wellbeing. Finally, I would like to thank the series editors and the Springer editorial team assigned to this book whose editorial touches have resulted in this finished product.

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