

Father Involvement in Child-Rearing in Chinese Families: Current State, Influencing Factors, and Impact on Children's Development

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Abstract:

Children's intelligence but also bolster their confidence and self-esteem. If father has a good relationship with his child, the child will be more confident and have higher self-esteem. Conversely, if father and child have a bad relationship, it will negatively affect child's mental health and the unconscious relational choices, struggle with healthy relationships when they grow up. In modern society, Chinese father's child rearing undertakes significant changing today. The big change of social culture in the early 20th century challenges Chinese traditional value. Nowadays, father's identity cannot simply be explained by tradition. Gender equality legislation enhances Chinese women's social status. If female wants to expand their role from family to outside family, male also need to change their role in the family. It possibly can increase father's involvement in raising children. This paper aims to look deep into father involvement and explore the factors influencing paternal involvement. By doing so, we can provide evidence-based insights specific to China's national conditions.

Keywords: Chinese fathers; child rearing; cultural change; father involvement

1. Introduction

Some social scientists and authorities on mental health are interested in fatherhood since the turn of the century. Considerable research, theory, and speculation have been focussing on fatherhood over the last three decades. As a result, many articles and advances are made in order to understand father-child relationships, paternal influences on child develop-

ment, and the particular impact of father involvement on children and families (Maselko et al., 2019; Wilson & Prior, 2011).

"Fatherhood" has many different concepts. Father can be a financial contributor, a supportive partner, a loving parent, and so on. When the time passes, father's role has shifted from moral guidance to supporting a family, gender-role's example, and nurturance. People now pay more attention to quantifica-

tion of concepts, such as masculinity and dominance, than quantifiable dimensions (the amount of time that father stay with children) (Pleck, 2007).

In a family, father is the first role model that children will encounter. Children are usually sensitive, and they are good at observe things. The early interaction between father and child will influence father-son relationships or father-daughter relationships. If father and child have a bad relationship, it will negatively affect child's mental health and the unconscious relational choices, struggle with healthy relationships, when they grow up. Also, the child will experience psychological distress. On the contrary, if father has a good relationship with his child, the child will be more confident and have higher self-esteem. Therefore, father plays an important role in children's development--father has a positive influence on children, and father has influence on shaping children's characteristic (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003).

Because of sex stereotype, father usually is deemed as the person who provides money to family, and mother usually is deemed as the person who needs to take care of children and does chore. Consequently, in the past, researchers focus more on the role of mother in nurturing children when the topic is about parental involvement in children's development. By contrast, the articles about father's role in children are far less than and far simple than the articles about mother's role in children (Wilson & Prior, 2011; McWayne et al., 2013).

In modern society, the frequency of female's involvement in labor after the Industrial Revolution, with the western feminism develop, quickly increases. Now father and mother cooperate to nurture children equally. More and more fathers are actively engaged in their role of father. Father's involvement and the quality are important for the children's growth, and it helps the equality in family's environment (McWayne et al., 2013; Yogman & Garfield, 2016).

However, because of the long-term absence in family, many fathers have role confusion, role conflict, role failure, and so on during the process of being fathers. Inappropriate engagement will have negative effect on children's mental health. Additionally, many domains in society continue the idea of "Man runs the outside and woman runs the inside". So many family education focus on mother, providing educational guidance and supporting with resources. Not much of the family education gives and plans specifically to father's need in supporting their children (Yogman & Garfield, 2016; Zhong, 2023).

If people look deep into father involvement and its impact, they can know important details about how different kinds of father involvement have different effects on children's development. It can not only let public domains

know the importance of father involvement, but also let fathers engage in children's development more. Also, it offers evidence-based insights for father support programs such as group counseling and workshops, helping improve practical fatherhood support (Zhong, 2023).

2. Literature review

Some researchers discovered that fathers have more role in children's social cognition than mothers. For example, research up to 12 years in Yale University shows that the children who were raised by fathers have higher intelligence and more agile than the children who were raised by moms (Cabrera et al., 2007). Another example is Michael and Crouter's research. Contrast with other girls, the girls who interact more with their fathers have better scores on math and science (Rollé et al., 2019). Caughy found that fathers' level of involvement in education can directly predict children's preschool stage's math and reading scores after the factors of mother are controlled (Baker, 2013). In addition, some researchers discuss the indirect role of father in children's cognitive development. For example, some researches base on family ecosystem theory analyzes father's educational method's effect on children's social development from horizontal point of view and vertical point of view. The result shows that different kinds of father educational method have different predict role on children speech, comprehensive ability, and so on (McWayne et al., 2013).

Infants with a lot of interaction with fathers tend to play more, and they are more cognitive and have a higher score on the Bayley Scales of Infant Development. After one year, these infants also have higher cognitive functioning. They are better problem solvers and have higher IQ's at age three (Shannon et al., 2002). Since children need to be more responsible in communication when interacting with their fathers, they have to talk more and use more different vocabulary, and they even will say some longer utterances when interacting with their fathers (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2004). When children are at the age of going to school, the children with father involvement also get higher scores such as A+, and they also have better quantitative and verbal skills. Boys' academic motivation to study hard in school is positively related to fathers' academic support because boys will think that getting a good score is important (Dubowitz et al., 2001).

Children with father involvement are more likely to enjoy school life. They will be more active than the children with single mothers in school. For example, the children with father involvement tend to participate more in activities in school and do not have much behavior problems in school. Zimmerman, Salem, and Notaro found the in-

versely relationship between positive father engagement in 10th grade and problem behaviors in 11th grade (Pougnnet et al., 2011). Luo et al.(2012) found that children without father's love tend to have emotion disorder such as anxiety, self-esteem issues, and aggressive behavior. Even when they become adults, they also have bad living habits (Lestari & Alam, 2020). American experts who used 30 indicators to survey children without father involvement also found that these children often have depression, loneliness, dependent behavior, and capriciousness, which are called "lack of fathers' love syndrome" (Parcel & Bixby, 2016).

3. Result

Chinese traditional proverb says: "Raise but not teach, father's fault." From cultural perspective, it means that educate children is Chinese father's responsibility. However, because of gender role, traditional Chinese father seldom involve in daily child rearing, and child rearing is seemed as the responsibility of mother (Li & Lamb, 2013; Shek, 2006).

Although Chinese traditional culture influences Chinese father, the big change of social culture in the early 20th century challenge Chinese traditional value (Li & Lamb, 2013). As a result, nowadays, father's identity cannot simply be explained by tradition. For example, Gender equality legislation enhance Chinese women's social status (Xu, 2016). If female wants to expand their role from family to outside family, male also need to change their role in the family (Chuang et al., 2013). It possibly can increase father's involvement in raising children. Additionally, the west's idea of emphasis the value of father involvement is introduced into Chinese society (Ji et al., 2011). It can also have positive effect on father's involvement. Therefore, Chinese father nowadays take care of their children more than their predecessor (Li, 2020; Li & Lamb, 2013). To sum up, Chinese father's child rearing undertakes significant changing today. It helps father having positive influence on their children. Although Chinese family has similarity with the western family, Chinese family has its own advantage. First of all, China is a nation which deeply influence by patriarchy. The idea of "The man runs the outside and the woman runs the inside" is widely spread in society and has large influence. It causes father involves in child rearing be more difficult in China than in western nation. Furthermore, China is a nation with tradition of large family, so it is pervasive that grandfather and grandmother take care of grandson and granddaughter. Consequently, mother is the first choice to undertake the duty of raising children, then is grandparent, and finally is father. As a result, whether grandparent involves in child rearing

has large impact on whether father involves in child rearing. Lastly, large migration of population also has deep influence in father's involvement in children development, especially in rural family. Father works outside will cause children spend a lot of time only with mother. Although it is not the same as the children lacking father because of divorce, it causes children and father separate and do not have contact.

Most studies on paternal involvement in child-rearing are based on Western contexts, with limited research using Chinese data to investigate paternal involvement in children. For instance, Anqi Xu and Liang Zhang used 2006 Shanghai family data to explore levels, factors, and impacts of paternal involvement on child development (Xu & Zhang, 2008, 2009; Zhang & Xu, 2009). However, these studies focus solely on Shanghai and are outdated, providing limited insight into China's overall situation. Although these studies apply Western theories in a Chinese context (Family Ecology, Parenting Skills, Gatekeeper Theory, etc.), and produce valuable conclusions, some China-specific explanatory variables, such as grandparents' involvement in parenting and population migration, are not included in the analytical framework. Consequently, most research relies on Western theories without fully incorporating Chinese national conditions, leaving room for improvement.

3.1 The Current State of Fathers' Involvement in Child-Rearing in Chinese Families

Some researches show that the enrollment rate of infants from age 0 to 3 in all kinds of kindergartens in China is only 4%, much lower than the 50% proportion in developed countries, highlighting significant differences in early childhood enrollment (Su et al., 2020; Long, 2012). The infants from age 0 to 3 are largely dependent on family care due to traditional fertility culture, employment pressures, and childcare responsibilities often undertaken by grandparents and mothers. This results in a low rate of father involvement in early childhood education, with notable gaps in participation time, awareness of scientific parenting, parenting skills, and public acceptance of father involvement (Gu, 2020; Gao et al., 2020).

State Statistics Bureau of "2018 Global Time Use Survey Bulletin" shows that the average time of participants spend in employment activity per day is about 7 hours and 41 minutes. Male spend about 7 hours 52 minutes and female spend 7 hours and 24 minutes. The average time of Resident's discretionary activity per day is about 3 hours and 56 minutes (Wang & Bianchi, 2009; Russell, 1982). Male spend about 4 hours and 13 minutes and female spend about 3 hours and 40 minutes. As a result,

men's daily work time is 28 minutes more than women, and men's daily discretionary activity is 33 minutes more than women. In terms of childcare, the average time of residents spend on taking care of children per day is 36 minutes. Male spend about 17 minutes and female spend about 53 minutes. The average time of residents escort and educate children per day is about 9 minutes. Male spend about 6 minutes and female spend about 12 minutes. These all show that fatherhood involvement's level is apparently lower than motherhood involvement's level (Maurer-Fazio et al., 2011; Brayfield, 1995).

Furthermore, the awareness of fatherhood involvement is insufficient. Some men still have the concept of "man runs the outside and woman runs the inside". They do not fully understand the importance of balanced parent-child companionship to children, and the irreplaceability of father's role.

Thirdly, fatherhood's parenting ability is inadequate. "China Family Development Report 2016" shows that 52.1% of the children from the age of 1 to 5 are cared for by mother or both parents, of which 44.4% are primarily cared for by mother. The participation of fathers in daily care and education of children from age 0 to 5 is very low. Most of the fathers do not know what to do when facing children. They lack scientific parenting knowledge reserve and experience, and other family members' involvement directly or indirectly reduce the opportunity of the interaction between father and children.

Finally, the acceptance of fatherhood involvement in society is not enough. The concept of "the son is not taught well, the father's fault" in Chinese traditional Confucian culture profoundly shows that one of the important functions of father in the family is family education. Male parents are given the function of teaching rather than raising. Usually mothers take care of children, which shows the gendered logic of the traditional Chinese family parenting model.

3.2 Factors Influencing Fathers' Involvement in Child-Rearing in Chinese Families

First of all, children's gender and age have big influence on father's involvement in child rearing. When children are boys, father's involvement in child rearing will significantly increase in three perspectives. Also, when girl children are very young, father's frequency of communication will also significantly increase. This is the same result as foreign.

Secondly, children's registered permanent residence and place of residence also have big impact on paternal involvement. When children are out-bound resident, the variety of paternal involvement in activities will increase,

but the communication with children and relationships with children will be negatively affected. Children are non-agriculture account does not affect parental involvement a lot, but it will significantly reduce affective interaction and intimate degree between father and the children. If children live in cities and towns, the variety of parenting activities when father participates will increase, but the intimate degree between father and children will decrease. Therefore, the children who are out-bound resident and live in cities are more likely to receive daily care from their fathers, but have less communication and affection with their fathers. This maybe is because mobility and urban living experience increase father's involvement in daily affairs, but because of some other reasons such as busy work, fathers may neglect emotional communication with their children, which led to alienation with children. However, the impact of mobility and living in cities on parental involvement cannot be generalized. It needs to be analyzed in concrete questions.

Parents' education, profession, and family economic situation also have significant impacts on father's child rearing level. The analysis shows that when fathers have high education level and high profession level, their involvement in parenting involvement in all three areas will highly increase. This maybe is because higher education and professional status change father's traditional gender roles. It enables these fathers are more willing to participate in parenting activities. The analysis also shows that mothers' education and professional status can enhance father's parenting involvement's level in some extent. This maybe is because mothers with higher socioeconomic status generally have higher family status and bargaining ability. As a result, they may have better ability to persuade fathers to participate in child care. Additionally, the better the family's financial situation is, the less likely the fathers are to participate in transactional parenting activities, but the frequency of communication with their children and the relationship with their children will be greatly improved. This maybe is because the families which have good financial situations outsource transactional parenting activities and focus on emotional interactions with their children.

Lastly, family's population structure and living pattern also affect the level of paternal involvement. Specifically, in single-child families, fathers have higher level of parental involvement. Bases on the resource dilution theory (Blake, 1981), this is because father can use their limited parenting time and energy on one child in single-child families. Also, when old men or women live with the families, fathers' participation in parenting activities will be significantly lower, but communication with their children and intimate relationships will not be affected by old men or women living with the families. It can be seen that the

existence of grandparents does have substitution effect on father's parenting function, but this substitution effect only exist in transactional parenting activities.

Finally, whether parents live in the house also has big influence on fathers' involvement in parenting. Particularly when fathers do not live in the house, their participation in parenting activities, communication with their children, and relationships with their children will be negatively affected. In modern Chinese families, work outside is the main reason of separation between fathers and children. Although father being migrant workers can improve the families' economic situation to some extent, the decreased level of childcare because of separation should be a common concern for all families and the whole society.

4. Conclusion & Discussion

Father plays an important role in children's development—Positive father-child relationships not only enhance

“Fatherhood” has many different concepts. In a family, father is the first role model that children will encounter. Some social scientists and authorities on mental health are interested in fatherhood since the turn of the century. Considerable research, theory, and speculation have been focusing on fatherhood over the last three decades. As a result, many articles and advances are made in order to understand father-child relationships, paternal influences on child development, and the particular impact of father involvement on children and families.

However, because of the long-term absence in family, many fathers have role confusion, role conflict, role failure, and so on during the process of being fathers. Inappropriate engagement will have negative effect on children's mental health. Additionally, many domains in society continue the idea of “Man runs the outside and woman runs the inside”. So many family education focus on mother, providing educational guidance and supporting with resources. Not much of the family education gives and plans specifically to father's need in supporting their children

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