

Family Interaction And Psychological Well-Being Among Adolescents In Paternal Absence And Involvement

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Abstract

The structure and quality of interactions between family members are fundamental elements of family functioning and a major influence on the well-being of children. The objective of the present study is to investigate family interactions on adolescent wellbeing. This study uses data from adolescents who are leading life in their father absence – whether father living abroad, separated by divorce, and father's death – and father presence to examine family interactions and their links with psychological wellbeing. The sample consisted of 80 adolescent girls and boys where father living abroad (group 1): 10 boys & 10 girls; separated by divorce (group 2): 10 boys & 10 girls; death of father (group 3): 10 boys & 10 girls, and in paternal presence (group 4): 10 boys & 10 girls. Family Interaction Scale and Psychological General Well-being Schedule were used for data collection. Descriptive percentage analyses were used for analysis the data. Result revealed that people with paternal absence due to divorce are having less family interaction but high in psychological well-being. On the variable family interaction, participants from group 2 are low in achievement orientation, intellectual orientation, ethical emphasis and discipline and Group 1 are low on feeling independence, but are high in family cohesion, social orientation, and discipline. On psychological wellbeing, group 2 is low in anxiety but high in negative wellbeing. Group 1 experience high on depressed mood, low self-control, and negative general health concerns.

KEY WORDS: Family Interaction, Psychological Well-being, Paternal Absence, Divorce

Introduction

Families are the foundation of communities and play a critical role in the wellbeing of all family members. Families can only thrive if they are connected to, are valued by and have a sense of belonging in their own communities (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006). Thereby family wellbeing encompasses the experience of a range of human rights and opportunities.

From pregnancy to adolescence, fathers are a major influence on a child's emotional and behavioural health. The relationships a father builds within a family are far more important to a child's mental health than traditionally valued paternal characteristics such as intellect or masculinity (Balcom, 1998). Fathers can create a high quality co-parenting alliance with their partners, including when fathers are not living with their children, and help their children to build positive, trusting relationships (Alen & Daly, 2007). When fathers - whether by divorce, separation or death - give up their responsibility to love, support, teach and nurture their children, mothers have to step up and try to fulfill the roles of both male and female parent and find themselves raising children alone.

The death of a parent is always traumatic (Anuman, 2007). A parent's death typically ends a child's relationship with someone of central emotional importance, with the attendant potential for straining relationships with the remaining parent or caregivers. Studies have revealed many negative outcomes associated with childhood bereavement, e.g. an increased likelihood of substance abuse (Sweeting, West, & Richards, 1998), greater vulnerability to depression (Mack, 2001; Harrison & Harrington, 2001), higher risk of criminal behaviour (Liddle & Solanki, 2002), school underachievement (Abdelnoor, 2004), and lower employment rates.

Divorce is likely to be a stressful experience for children. It is usually preceded and often followed by a period of inter-parental conflict. Divorce is also often associated with other difficult events for children, such as moving houses, changing schools, losing contact with grandparents, and parental remarriage. These stressful events may disrupt children's school attainment, social relationships, and personality development (Borgers, Dronkers & Van Praag, 1996).

Several million children currently live in transnational families. If transnational labor migration is considered a family livelihood strategy that balances economic improvement against family

separation, then one potential “cost” is a negative impact of separation from a parent on the psychological well-being of children left behind. The few studies that have examined emotional responses to parental migration among children left behind suggest that they are prone to anger, feelings of being abandoned or unloved, confusion and worries (Graham & Jordan, 2011).

Although humans are capable of amazing resilience in the face of difficulty, few would argue that single-parenting is ideal. An impressive body of research suggests that fathers and mothers make different though equally important contributions to the healthy development of children, and that neither parent is dispensable.

Literature Analysis

Father absence and early puberty studied by Comings, Muhleman, Johnson and MacMurray (2002) suggested that the link between family and puberty could be due to a particular gene. They found that one version of the gene controlling how our sensitive our bodies are to testosterone was more common in girls whose parents had separated and was also linked with earlier puberty.

Flinnet al.(1996) suggested that father absence should also be related to health. Children in stressful family homes or with separated parents had higher overall levels of the stress hormone cortisol – which we already know is bad for our immune systems – and also showed more sickness.

Statistics consistently point out that children who grow up without their fathers are more likely to suffer from various social problems. Crime, drug abuse, abortion and school dropout rates are often directly related to father absence.

Objective

1. To study family interaction and psychological wellbeing of adolescents in paternal absence and involvement.

Method

Participants

The total sample consisted of 80 adolescent girls and boys. Among them, father living abroad: 10 boys & 10 girls; father separated by divorce: 10 boys & 10 girls; death of father: 10 boys & 10 girls in

paternal absence and 20 were living together with parents: 10 boys & 10 girls. Age of the participants ranges between 15 and 18 years.

Procedure

The needed data were collected from schools and colleges in different districts of Kerala state. The principals of the schools/colleges were contacted by prior appointments and had a brief discussion about the purpose of the study as well as the importance, application and nature of the information required for the study. Then, the principal introduced the investigator to the students who were the participants of the study. A firm assurance was given to each participant that the information gathered from them would be used only for research purposes and that everything, including their identity would be kept confidential.

Result And Discussion

Result of the present study discussing here based on descriptive percentage analysis of the data.

Family Interaction and Wellbeing

As per the Family Interaction tool used in the present study, higher the score on the scale, lesser will be the variable family interaction. That means a high score indicates distressed family and a low score indicates healthy family. Information about family interaction and overall wellbeing of participants of the study were tabulated below.

Table 1: Average score on Family Interaction and Wellbeing of Adolescents with Paternal Absence

Variables	Average Family Interaction	Average Well Being
Death of father	130.9	64
Divorce	269.1	136.4
Father Abroad	127.44	68
Together	124.5	78.125

For better understanding data depicted in bar diagram below:

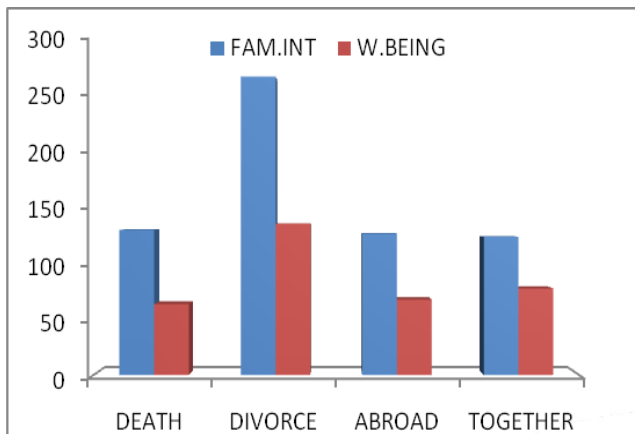


Figure 1: Family Interaction and Wellbeing Score of Adolescents under four categories

According to the results, adolescents from a family of paternal separation by divorce having more distressed family atmosphere and adolescents who are living together with their mother and father shows more family interaction. At the same time, adolescents with paternal absence due to father figure abroad are less distressed than paternal absence due to death.

The Psychological General Wellbeing Schedule was used to measure participant's subjective wellbeing. Considering the Psychological Wellbeing, it can be seen that the group two - adolescents from a family of paternal separation by divorce - having higher scores. As per the indications of the schedule, higher score leads to high in psychological well-being.

Sub variables of Family Interaction

Family interaction have sub variables Independence, cohesion, achievement orientation, intellectual orientation, conflict, social orientation, ethical emphasis and discipline. Family interaction among four types of families are discussing below.

Table 2: Average score on Family Interaction sub variables of Adolescents under four groups

Variables	Independence	Cohesion	Ach. Orientation	Intellectual Orientation	Conflict	Social Orientation	Ethical emphasis	Discipline
Death	19	8	17.6	20.9	16.3	11.5	18.2	19.4
Divorce	17.5	12.5	20.5	23.5	15	16	20.5	22.5
Abroad	14.22	10	15	20	19	14	16	20.22
Together	16	13	14	18	18.4	13	14	20.25

Table shows the average scores on Family Interaction sub variables of Adolescents under four types of families. Results show that adolescents with

paternal absence due to divorce are having less family interaction but high psychological well-being.

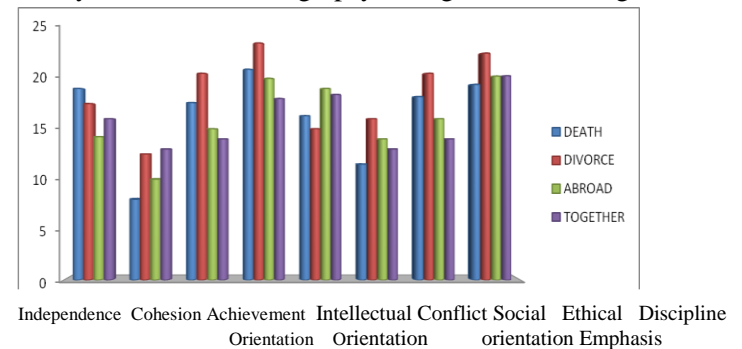


Figure 2: Score of Adolescents with Paternal Absence on sub variables of family interaction

Independence is the extent to which family members are assertive, self – sufficient, and make their own decisions. Analyzing the data, it can be seen that adolescents whose fathers are living abroad experience high independence and adolescents with father absence due to death have low independence in life. Regarding cohesion, the degree of commitment, help, and support family members provide for one another, adolescents of parental death have more cohesion in family than the participants who are living together with their fathers. Moreover, Rodick, Henggeler and Hanson (1986) found that in families with balanced degrees of cohesion and adaptability, the mothers' communication was significantly more supportive, explicit, and possess more positive communication skills.

Achievement orientation is the extent to which activities such as school or work are cast into an achievement – oriented or competitive framework and Intellectual orientation is the degree of interest in political, social, intellectual, and cultural activities. Achievement orientation and Intellectual

orientation is higher for adolescents with paternal presence and less for those having paternal absence due to divorce.

Looking in to conflict, the amount of openly expressed anger, aggression, and conflict among

family members, it can see that family conflict is less in adolescent’s family where father absence due to divorce and high conflict in families where father absence due to living abroad. Taking social orientation, it can see that group one is more socially oriented whose paternal absences due to death and family of father absence because of divorce are low socially oriented. Ethical emphasis is the degree of emphasis on ethical and religious issues and values. Results revealed that ethical emphasis is more concerned in families where experience paternal presence and less where divorce made father absence in that family. Discipline is the extent to which set rules and procedures are used to run family life. Observing the numerals, it can see that there is no much difference on the variable discipline among families. Yet it can say that families of paternal death are more disciplined and families with paternal absence due to divorce are less disciplined.

Sub variables of Wellbeing

Psychological General Well-being have sub variables Anxiety, depressed mood, positive wellbeing, self-control, general health, and vitality. General well-being among four types of families are discussing below.

Table 2: Average score on Psychological well-beingsub variables of Adolescents under four groups

Variab les	Anx iety	Depresse d Mood	Positive Wellbein g	Self Contr ol	General Health	Vita lity
DEAT H	15.4	10	9.9	7.4	8.8	12.5
DIVO RCE	19	11.5	8	11.5	11	14
ABRO AD	14	11	11	9	12	13
TOGE THER	18	12	13.4	10	11.13	14.38

Table shows the average scores on Psychological General Well-being sub variables of Adolescents under four types of families. For better understanding the results were plotted in diagram below:

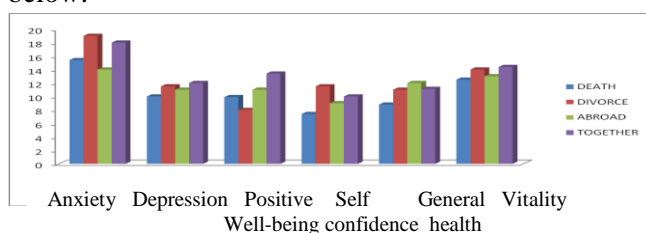


Figure 3: Score of Adolescents with Paternal Absence on sub variables of Wellbeing

From the data, it can be seen that adolescents with paternal absence due to father living abroad are extremely bothered by nervousness and anxiety and adolescents with father absence due to divorce are in low tension, not anxious, little or no stress or strain. Multivariate models from the study of Graham and Jordan (2011) showed that children of migrant fathers are more likely to have poor psychological well-being, compared to children in non-migrant households.

Regarding, depressed mood, self conflict, and general health it can be understood that adolescents with paternal death are more in depression, self conflict and negative general health. They are intensely or often felt depressed, downhearted, feel hopeless, very concerned or disturbed about losing self-control and seldom felt emotionally stable. Also, bothered by illness and bodily disorders, needed help in caring for self and worried or fearful about health. Ellis, Dowrick and Williams (2013) illustrate how discontinuity or continuity that does not meet the child's needs, a lack of appropriate social support for both the child and surviving parent and a failure to provide clear and honest information at appropriate time points relevant to the child's level of understanding was perceived to have a negative impact in adulthood with regards to trust, relationships, self-esteem, feeling of self-worth loneliness and isolation and the ability to express feelings.

At the same time paternal presence made participants low in depressed mood and they never or rarely felt depressed, downhearted and blue or hopeless. Adolescents of father absence due to divorce are in definite control of behaviour, thoughts, emotions and feelings and are emotionally stable than other groups. In the case of general health, participants rarely bothered by illness, healthy enough to do things and not fearful or worried about health, were fathers are abroad.

On the sub variables Positive wellbeing and Vitality, participants with paternal presence are high and that they are in excellent spirits, happy with life, felt cheerfully and their daily life is interesting. They are full of energy, pep, felt active, vigorous and never felt tired or worm-out. Yet participants having father absence due to divorce are low in positive wellbeing and are in low spirits, unhappy, seldom

felt life interesting and cheerfully. Also, result shows that participants from paternal absence background due to death are low in energy, rested, dull, sluggish, tired, worm-out and seldom waking fresh in life. Exploiting the unanticipated nature of parental death resulting from the Indian Ocean Tsunami in combination with measuring well-being of the same children before and after the tsunami, Cas, Frankenberg, Suriastini & Thomas (2014) find that the impact of parental death varies with the age and gender of the child and that shorter-term impacts are not reliable indicators of the effects that emerge in the longer term.

Conclusion And Further Development

The present investigation was conducted to study the family interaction and psychological wellbeing of adolescents in paternal absence and presence. For this, investigators selected adolescents as participants under four categories whose father absent due to death (group 1), father separated in family by divorce (group 2), fathers are living abroad (group 3), and living together with father (group 4). Result revealed that people with paternal absence due to divorce are having less family interaction but high in psychological well-being. On the variable family interaction, participants from group 2 are low in achievement orientation, intellectual orientation, ethical emphasis and discipline and Group 1 are low on feeling independence, but are high in family cohesion, social orientation, and discipline. On psychological wellbeing, group 2 are low in anxiety but high in negative wellbeing. Group 1 experience high on depressed mood, low self-control, and negative general health concerns.

Overall, several limitations exist in present study and it is clearly important to consider to be attentive to direct and indirect effects, to consider the multidimensionality of father absence within the context of other influences and relationships, to explore the impact of structural parameters on father absence and involvement such as employment conditions, new gen trends in family and to find better ways of understanding father presence along with exploring its opposite - father absence. Further research and theory can continue to build the paternal absence and paternal involvement literature by being attentive to these limitations.

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