Father Adolescent Relationship Closeness: A Path Analysis of Historical and Current Familial Factors Associated with Father Adolescent Engagement and Relationship Quality.

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Abstract

Father-adolescent child relationship quality has been identified as key to adolescent health outcomes. While factors have previously been identified associated with father-adolescent closeness, a comprehensive model of understanding these factors influence is needed. Using cross-sectional data from the Study of Contemporary Fatherhood (SCF), this analysis of father-adolescent relationship closeness evaluated responses of nine hundred (N = 900) father surveys to investigate historical factors, including own father relationship quality, biological fathering, family transitions, and ACEs along with current factors, including co-parenting, depression, parenting stress, knowledge of adolescent, warmth, and engagement, on father adolescent relationship closeness. Path analysis results indicate that father-adolescent relationship closeness was found to be positively associated with current factors, including co-parenting (p < .055), parenting stress (p = .008), parent depression (p < .004), parent knowledge of adolescent (p < .001), and warmth (p < .001), but not parent engagement. Historical factors, including ACEs, family transitions, family of origin biological father, and own father relationship quality, were not significant predictors of father-adolescent closeness. Implications of this study include the importance of current familial factors on promoting father-adolescent relationship closeness, particularly in family interventions for fathers.

Rationale

Rares are both historical and current factors evaluated and compared for their associations with father-child relationships. Although studies find a relationship between parent-child relationship quality and child outcomes, there are gaps in understanding factors associated with father-child relationship closeness. Research on fathering with adolescents is lacking, despite its significance in the life course. Furthermore, few studies focus on the closeness within the context of the father-adolescent relationship, as most studies attend to involvement and/or engagement. No study to our knowledge compares historical family of origin to current factors such as as it relates to parent adolescent relationship closeness. This study is designed to evaluate pathways between potential fathering factors that influence father-adolescent relationship closeness within the context of comparing both historical and current parenting factors. This study attempts to build a comprehensive model for understanding the associations with closeness by designating factors into two groups: historical, or factors from one’s family of origin related to the parent-child relationship and current, or factors from the present that may be influential in the parent-child relationship. Furthermore, these factors have been identified as potential variables related to both paternal closeness and engagement.

Method

This study is a secondary data analysis from the Survey of Contemporary Fatherhood (SCF) in 2015 (Shaffer, Fielding, & Holmes, 2019). SCF is a national sample of nearly 2,300 biological, stepfathers, and father figures collected by multiple investigators from universities across the United States. Survey eligibility requirements included: 1) at least 18 years of age, 2) a paternal relationship with a child including biological (resident and non-resident), adoptive (resident and non-resident), stepparent (resident only), non-biological related resident father figure (i.e., non-biological and not adopted paternal relationship with a child, living in the home but not married to the child’s biological or adoptive mother), and biological related father figure (resident, related by biology, marriage, or adoption such as grandfather or uncle), 3) English proficiency, and 4) Internet access for survey completion. Respondents were asked to use their youngest child (between 2 and 17 years of age) as a focal relationship to answer questions. Quota sampling techniques were employed for data collection. Due to self-selection bias and survey collection based on quota stratification, quota sampling should be considered exploratory in nature.

Measures

Dependent Variables

Father-adolescent Closeness. NICHD Study of Early Childhood and Youth Development (SECCYD) (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2019).


Historical Factors

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). The Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire

Family transitions. Self-report of number of historical family transitions.

Family of Origin (FOO) Father Quality. RELATE family of origin father-child relationship scale (Busby et al., 2001).

Current Factors

Depression. Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression (CES-D) scale (Comstock & Helsing, 1976).

Knowledge of Adolescent. Parental monitoring or “keeping tabs” scale from Phase IV of the SECCYD study (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2019).

Warmth. Parenting warmth scale from SECCYD, Phase IV (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019).


Control Variables

These included race, residential status of the child, child gender, and father’s employment status, and child age.

Surveyed Participants: The sample (N = 900) consisted of fathers, ages 18 to 72 (n = 449.91, SD = 9.63) including biological fathers (80.9%; n = 728) and non-biological fathers (steinfathers, adoptive fathers, adoptive mother, n = 172) with self-identified racial categories consisting of Caucasian/white (76.9%; n = 692), African American (9.5%; n = 86), Latino/Hispanic (5.6%; n = 51), Multi-racial (3.5%; n = 32), Asian (3.2%, n = 29), Native American (n = 7) and Other (n = 4).

Figure 1

![Figure 1](image)

Discussion

Results indicate that greater paternal warmth, knowledge of adolescent, and co-parenting increase the closeness of the father-adolescent relationship, while stress and depression have a negative effect. While co-parenting positively influenced parent-adolescent relationship closeness, it did not appear to associate with father engagement. As there was not a direct pathway between engagement and closeness, we propose that these are separate dimensions of the father-adolescent relationship experience and should be considered in evaluating outcomes and assessing interventions. We expect that this may be due to a mediator of this relationship that we have not yet analyzed. Based on these findings, father adolescent closeness may be most influenced through current factors such as parent depression, parenting stress, co-parenting, parent knowledge of the adolescent and warmth.

Table 1 | Pearson Correlation Coefficients among Study Variables (N = 900)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Depressive Symptoms</th>
<th>Co-parenting</th>
<th>Parental Engagement</th>
<th>Father Knowledge of Adolescent</th>
<th>Parental Stress</th>
<th>Father Warmth</th>
<th>ACE</th>
<th>Father Relationship Quality</th>
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<td>Father Knowledge of Adolescent</td>
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<td>Parental Stress</td>
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