

FATHER ABSENCE AND ITS EFFECTS ON DAUGHTERS

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Abstract

As the divorce rate in the United States climbs to nearly 50 percent, fathers seem to be disappearing from their daughters' lives. Research shows that girls and young women who have an unstable father figure are more liable to unplanned pregnancy, low-self esteem, high school and college drop-out, poverty, divorce and sexually promiscuous behavior. This thesis examines the research linking father absence to daughter problems.

“I still didn't understand what was going on. I didn't know why he hadn't hugged me yet, why he didn't act the way all my other friends' fathers treated them. He was so cold to me. It took 2 nurses to hold me down so they could take the blood from my arm. I was crying hysterically. I was only 9 years old. I didn't know what a blood test for paternity was. I didn't even know this man who so coldly told the nurses to hurry up; he had other things to do. But I know, I'll never forget that moment. Never. When the results came back stating that I was most definitely his daughter, I never saw or heard from him again. Go figure. I'm 21 years old now, and I've yet to meet my father.”

(syri 1).

INTRODUCTION

With nearly half of all marriages ending in divorce, the phenomenon of a father absence in his daughter's life appears to have risen. The ripples of divorce seem to hit the children the hardest, especially the daughters. Girls and young women who have an unstable father figure seem prone to unplanned pregnancy, low-self esteem, dropping out of high school and college. As adults, they are more likely to experience poverty and divorce, and are more likely to engage in promiscuity.

DEFINITION OF FATHER ABSENCE

Many sources agree on what constitutes father absence. The website dictionaryfordads.com has an article entitled, “Absent Fathers.” It explains that “absent fathers usually do not reside with their children or are away for long

periods of time. This includes fathers who are divorced, separated, incarcerated, in the military, travel regularly for business and are absent in the home more than they are present” (Absent Fathers 1). One article titled, “Father’s Absence Increases Daughter’s Risk of Teen Pregnancy” says that, “the researchers [Bruce J. Ellis et al.] defined absence of the biological or adoptive birth father at or before the child reached age 5 as early onset of father absence, while late onset of father absence was defined as occurring when the child was between 6 and 13” (“Father’s Absence”). The “Absent Fathers” article also states that divorce is the most common reason why fathers are absent in America.

DIVORCE AND FATHER ABSENCE

As it is commonly known, divorce separates the children from the parents, mostly from the father. Currently, the divorce rate in the U.S. is 49 percent, according to “Fact Sheet on Father Absence” which was posted on the website, titled, “Reconciled Fathers Ministry” (Ministry 2). This means that most children live with their mother and see their father significantly less. Traveling back and forth between the mother and father’s house can be stressful on the child, as one anonymous woman, known as the anonymous dk-simoneau reports on the forum titled “divorce360.com.” Reared by divorced parents and now divorced herself, she says, “I was still going over to my Dad's as required. But I was miserable. I was miserable because I didn't want to be there. I wanted to be

with my friends or in my room, or anywhere but with my Dad. I was also miserable because I felt guilty. I felt guilty because I knew my Dad was sensing it, and yet I just couldn't bring myself to faking it with him. I knew he was feeling rejected but just couldn't do anything about it. So there we were both having a miserable time” (divorce360.com). Clearly, the woman’s relationship with her father was disturbed. Experts say that if a woman like this had never grown up in a divorced family, she might not have had a more positive view of her father and their relationship. The woman in the forum mentioned she was divorced. In the article titled “Fatherless Homes Now Proven Beyond Doubt Harmful To Children” from the website “fathersunite.org” states that, “Daughters who live in mother-only homes are 92% more likely to divorce” (Fathers Unite 1).

OTHER EXPLANATIONS OF FATHER ABSENCE

Reasons as to why there are more absent fathers than ever are various. Incarceration is a contributing factor to father absence. In 2007, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that there are approximately over 740,000 men in either a U.S. state or federal prison who are the father to over 1.5 million children (Stahl et al 1). Death adds to the number of absent fathers. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about one in 20 children (under 18) experience the death of their fathers (Death of a Parent 1). Also, a large number of fathers are overseas in the Middle East. In addition, many fathers work over 50-70 hours per week or spend

lengths of time on business trips—another factor that deprives girls of irreplaceable father-daughter bonding time. Whatever the reason may be, father absence is obviously detrimental to their daughter’s well-being.

EFFECTS OF FATHER ABSENCE ON DAUGHTERS

TEENAGE PREGNANCY

It is common knowledge that the United States has the highest rate of teen pregnancy. Evidence supporting this trend in teen pregnancy is extensive. According to Rachel Nowak’s article titled, “Absent Fathers Linked to Teenage Pregnancies,” unintended pregnancies seem to be linked to father absence (Nowak 1). Nowak says, “A team led by psychologist Bruce Ellis ... followed more than 700 girls [in New Zealand and the U.S.] from preschool to age 17 or 18, monitoring 10 different aspects of their lives including family income, behavioral problems, exposure to violence and parenting styles. They confirmed that teenage girls raised without fathers are more likely to suffer from depression, drop out of school, and have other behavioral problems” (Nowak 1). These traits suggest that the girl may be prone to sexually promiscuous behavior, which thus spikes the teenage pregnancy rate in the U.S. The study also suggested that the age the father became absent weighed heavily on the way it affected the daughter (Ellis et al).

When it comes to father absence and links to teenage pregnancy, timing is critical. The article, “Father’s Absence Increases Daughter’s Risk of Teenage Pregnancy” noted that the study done by Ellis and his colleagues found that, “... girls whose fathers left the family earlier in their lives had the highest rates of both early sexual activity and adolescent pregnancy, followed by those whose fathers left at a later age, followed by girls whose fathers were present” (“Pregnancy” 1).

One speculation as to why father absence is linked to teenage pregnancy involves girls’ earlier menstruation and ‘mirroring’ their mother’s behavior. Ellis’ study postulated that the significant psychological effects a father’s absence has on a girl may jumpstart her experiences with males. Ellis suggests that, “... girls whose father is absent undergo personality changes at an early age that make them more likely to interact with males. Other studies show that girls raised in the absence in the absence of their fathers tend to sit closer to and interact more readily with men” (Nowak 1). This evidence seems like common knowledge to the one who believes that girls without fathers seek male attention to fill the void in their life. However, it may surprise them to think that the mothers may influence their early sexual behavior, too, thus resulting in the unplanned pregnancies.

The article, “Study Sheds Light on Why Girls With Absent Fathers Tend to Go Through Puberty Earlier Than Girls From Intact Families” points to the fact that father absence may trigger a hormonal change in girls that jumpstarts puberty, which may be the reason why fatherless girls tend to have unintended pregnancies. The article cites, “Early puberty is often cited as a risk factor for young women, linking them to early pregnancy and an array of health problems, such as breast cancer” (“Study” 1). In this study conducted by Ellis and University of Canterbury and Christchurch Jacqueline M. Tither it was observed that the longer the child was without a father figure the earlier she began menstruating (“Study” 1). More notably, Ellis believes that it is the shifting identity of the girls’ fathers that sparks a bodily change that results in early puberty, as it is stated here, “The theory that we’re working from suggests that something about the children’s experiences in their families, and particularly about the presence of different members of the families in the home, actually alters the reproductive axis and timing of puberty” (“Study” 1). In addition, Ellis smartly relates this change to early human traits, where, “In the world in which humans evolved, dangerous or unstable home environments meant a shorter lifespan, and going into puberty earlier in this context increased chances of surviving, reproducing and passing on your genes” (“Study” 1). This appears to bolster the fact that girls being reared in single-mother homes tend to have higher

rates of birthing illegitimate children. Teenage pregnancy is usually indicative to sexual behavior.

PROMISCUITY

The actual study, titled “Does Father Absence Place Daughters at Special Risk for Early Sexual Activity and Teenage Pregnancy?” conducted by Ellis et al., provides a more detailed and comprehensive look at the factors of the timing of father absence in the daughter’s life and it’s link to teenage pregnancy and sexually promiscuous behavior. The study states, “ ... early conduct problems and exposure to familial and ecological stressors consistently predicted early sexual activity and adolescent pregnancy. Thus, girls’ behavioral, familial, and ecological profiles could potentially account for the relations between timing of the father absence and subsequent sexual outcomes” (Ellis et al, 14). From this quote, Ellis postulates that the girls’ personality, environment and lifestyle they are reared in affects her risk of teenage pregnancy. In addition, the study, which was conducted over a period of at least 5 years, Ellis et al. also discovered traits of the types of environments the girls live in when the father leaves before age 13 (Ellis et al).

A man is a crucial ingredient to a strong nuclear family. Mothers who are not with a man may date several men to find a suitable mate for her and her

children. According to Ellis's study, the female child may, "...learn 'dating' behavior earlier by mimicking their mothers" (Nowak 1). Thus, girls' early dating behavior may be the reason why teenage pregnancy is linked to father absence. This suggestion made by Ellis' research team buffers the fact that there seems to be a trend that absent fathers are linked to teenage pregnancy and promiscuous behavior. The promiscuous behavior in fatherless girls also leads one to question their emotional health.

EMOTIONAL EFFECTS

Depending on the age, fathers who leave their daughters may leave them with emotional wounds that can manifest in promiscuous behavior. Franklin B. Krohn and Zoe Bogan examine this behavior trait that is associated with fatherless girls. They note, "Females without father figures often become desperate for male attention ... Females who lose their father figures to divorce or abandonment seek much more attention from men and had more physical contact with boys their age than girls from intact homes ... These females constantly seek refuge for their missing father and as a result there is a constant need to be accepted by men from whom they aggressively seek attention (Bogan and Krohn 1). Further, the authors state that losing a father will alter their perception of men, and they may develop abandonment issues and have trouble forming lasting relationships with men (Bogan and Krohn 2). According to Bogan and Krohn, since fatherless girls are

seeking attention from males, this may explain their promiscuous behavior. This may also explain the increase in teenage pregnancy, which can result in interrupted education.

EDUCATION

It has been cited that a girl's academic performance may plummet due to little or no interaction her father. Krohn and Bogan state that fathers play a significant role in their daughter's math skills and, "Mathematics is typically associated with masculinity therefore females without father figures may have less interest in the subject matter. Female high school seniors were more likely than their male peers to say they did not take mathematics and science courses because they disliked the subject matter ... females are discouraged from pursuing a career in mathematics and father absence contributes to this phenomenon by not providing them with a male role model to stimulate interest" (Krohn and Bogan 2). The authors mention that the lack of encouragement can stem from feeling unprotected by their fathers, and may feel insecure, even when it comes to their future education (Krohn and Bogan 2). Moreover, they state that "Stability is another important aspect affecting the lives of females, which inevitably shape their college careers. Fathers' absence not only hinders their ability to make sound decisions, it also triggers negative reactions as opposed to positive ones ... a confident base enables females to be successful in their

endeavors and accomplish what they attempt” (Krohn and Bogan 2). This stunt in intellectual growth may affect a fatherless girl’s chance at financial success.

Due to an increased chance of lack of education and teenage pregnancy, fatherless females’ financial futures are at risk for poverty. The article, “Why the absence of dads increases the number of children in poverty” by Richette L. Haywood states that, “A principal reason for the increased number of children living at or below the poverty level, according to the recently released report Kids Count, is the rise in absentee fathers” (Haywood 1). One indicator of poverty is that single parent homes do not have as much access to resources (Haywood 1).

POVERTY

Due to an increased chance of lack of education and teenage pregnancy, fatherless females’ financial futures are at risk for poverty. It is obvious that families without a father lack a source of income. It is especially difficult for a single mother to provide ample financial health to her children. The article, “Why the absence of dads increases the number of children in poverty” by Richette L. Haywood states that, “A principal reason for the increased number of children living at or below the poverty level, according to the recently released report Kids Count, is due to the rise in absentee fathers” (Haywood 1). One indicator of poverty is that single parent homes do not have as much access to resources (Haywood 1). According to the article titled, “The Father Factor: Facts of

Fatherhood,” cites the U.S. Census Bureau’s data from March 2002 titled “Children’s Living Arrangements and Characteristics.” The U.S. Census Bureau states, “Children in father-absent homes are five times more likely to be poor. In 2002, 7.8 percent of children in married-couple families were living in poverty, compared to 38.4 percent of children in female-householder families,” (Fatherhood 1).

PAINS OF FATHER ABSENCE

According to one study, girls expressed the effects they experienced from father absence. The study says that, “Findings revealed that growing up without their father present in the family home disrupted the relationship these daughters held with their fathers. Due to the perceived lack of interest these daughters felt from their fathers, they expressed feelings of hurt and diminished respect for their fathers. Furthermore, participants felt that their fathers were unable to provide them with the father-daughter relationship that they sought” (East, Leah; Jackson, Debra; O'Brien, Louise). An anonymous user from an online forum called experienceproject.com named “1pamella” is an example of these feelings. On the forum, she tells her story of father absence. She like, many fatherless girls, became a single mother and was receiving welfare. “1Pamela” says,

“I never see my dad anymore. My parents divorced when I was 11. I always thought I was ‘daddy’s girl.’ I would try to arrange to see him as often as I could as I grew older. My mom let him lower the child support when they got married to help them start their new family and buy a home (she was always golden like that and was always there - she still always is, bless her heart). And then he stopped paying child support to my mom when I was 14 (my sister was 16). Then, after I turned 18, I was a single mother and I NEVER called to ask him for money. I was on welfare and always made a point to make sure I had money to buy both his lunch and my own if I called to ask him to meet me for lunch or something. (He never called me). I never wanted him to think I was calling for money, I just wanted to have a relationship with him. They have two children together now (their son is 1 year younger than my daughter)” (1Pamella 1).

Another example of the painful father absence comes from an anonymous user called O. Spivey who found a letter her anonymous daughter wrote to her absent father and published it on associatedcontent.com. It reads:

Dear Father,

I know you are wondering why I am addressing you this way. Well, I will tell you. When I was younger I thought you were a daddy to me. Now I am older I

look back and see you were not. Yes, you would take me hunting with you and we would do things you wanted to do, but did you ever do anything that I wanted to. No, you did not, you would say you had something else to do, but you had time for the things you wanted to do. Now as I grow older and we are not talking, actually we have not spoken in three years.

I have had time to sit and think about what hurts me the most, about our relationship as "Father and Daughter". The truth is we do not have a relationship, before at least you had a way to contact me but you had to be smart and turn off my cell phone thinking it would hurt me. Now you have no way to contact me unless you call my step-dad and ask him if you can talk to me or maybe call some of moms' family. I know you have my step dads' number because he called you and left you a message with his phone number so that you could call me but you are to "macho" to call another man and ask him to let you speak to your own daughter. That really proves that you do not care about me or that you are not man enough, I really do not know which is it I know you thought you were being a daddy to me the truth is all you did is help with some of the finances it takes to raise a child. Yes, you paid child support, but real child support is being there when your child needs you. When I was sick were you there? When I need to talk to a dad face to face, were you there? When I went on my first real date, were you there? No, but my step dad was.

My step dad has been a daddy to me. He has also taken the responsibility of correcting me when I did wrong and praising me when I was good. When I made straight A's on my report card and when I graduated high school, he is the one that hugged me and told me he was so proud of me, because he was in my life when you were not.

I think of all of these things and I think of more things I want to say to you. If I told you all of my feelings, it would take you hours to read it all. I just want you to know you have hurt me more than any person in this world could ever have hurt me. I know you think that you were good to me and you were as long as all I needed was money and not love. Yes, you said I love you but you never showed it. I have held my feelings inside for so long because I did not want to hurt you, but now it is time for you to have a reality check.

Do you truly think that you have been there as you should have been? Do you realize I am twenty-one years old now? In many cases now is when I would need you most. You do not know if I have a boyfriend, or husband. You also do not know if you are a grandfather. What if I am married who walked me down the aisle and gave me away? Wouldn't you like to do that seeing you are my father and that is who is suppose to walk me down the aisle. If I were pregnant or had, a child would not you like to be there through the birth with me and see your grand child grow up.

These are just a few things to think on.

For your information, No, I am not married and I do not have a child nor am I pregnant. When these things do happen would you like to be there? You do realize the only grandkids you may ever have will come from me, so please think about all of this.

We are all adults now and it is time that we start acting like it. We need to let the things of the past be in the past and move on with our lives. I would like to have a father daughter relationship with you if you would like to have one. If you do not want that responsibility anymore, that is fine. I know my step Dad will be more than glad to walk me down the aisle at my wedding, be there for the birth of my children, and have my children call him grandpa.

I hope that you take all of this to heart and think long and hard before you make a decision.

I Love You.

With love always,

Your daughter (O. Spivey 3).

Here, O. Spivey's daughter has toiled from the sting of her absent father. In her letter, she mostly asks rhetorical questions, as if they were an insult, such as when she asks her absent dad "... When I was sick were you there? When I need to talk to a dad face to face, were you there?" This letter serves as proof of how crucial it is for a daughter to grow up with an intact family. The 21 year old

woman who penned this letter does not seem to have fallen into any statistics for fatherless daughters (i.e. teen pregnancy, divorce, etc.), however, the reader predicts that she will feel the pain of father absence for the remainder of her life. Another woman, in the 19-21 age group, can relate to the user cited above. She, who anonymously calls herself LickingStamps on her posting on the website experienceproject.com was abandoned by her father. She laments about it here:

I was ten or eleven years old. Eleven, I think, and I snapped.

I did the unforgivable; I not only spoke back, but I swore.

*My exactly words were ‘**** off’.*

And he did. He didn’t shout, scream, hit me, like usual...he just took my brother by the arm, walked out of the front door and I never saw him, or my brother, again.

*They sent me to live with my mother. Nobody ever spoke about my father or brother. It was like they had never existed and life went on...like I didn’t exist, until two years later I walked out the door too, when my mother told me to ‘**** off’.*

Do I think he was a bad man? Evil? Cruel?

No. I think he was a lost, tired human being who hadn’t a clue how he’d ended up a single dad, an alcoholic, alone. I think he wanted to be a good father. I don’t think he meant to hurt me or my brother. I think those two words

confirmed to him, said what nobody had, but what was constantly between him and everybody else...that he'd failed, that he wasn't a good dad and that no matter what he could of done by then, that it wouldn't change the past.

There is no excuse for having children and then allowing your own problems to blight their existence or even prevent, taint, destroy a relationship with those children. Of that, I'm sure. But somehow time, instead of making me bitter, has just made me more empathetic. The older I get the more easily I think of him, and the more tenderly I think of the few times I did see that mask slip. That song, 'In The Living Years', he used to sit so silently and listen to, over and over again at night when he thought me and my brother were sleeping.

As they say, I guess absence makes the heart grow fonder.

Even so, I can't say I miss him. I never have, maybe because he made sure I never really knew him in the first place. I'd know. I know I missed my brother for a long time. He was my best friend.

But that's the past. People change. My father, my brother, they're old and older now. So am I. At most, I hope he forgives me for being a child, because I forgive him for being an adult. Beyond that, we're strangers, nothing more and nothing less.

...And that's life (Licking Stamps 1).

Here, 'LickingStamps' communicates her lingering anger she has for her father leaving her and becoming an alcoholic. As Ellis stated in the study, "Does Father Absence Place Daughters at Special Risk for Early Sexual Activity?" the age at which the father leaves can determine how emotionally and psychologically damaged the daughter is. The woman in the post above was eleven when her father left her. It seems as if the father also caused her brother's absence as well. Another young woman posted her story on the same website under the title, "Maybe This Time I'm Ready to Share." Syri says:

I never talk about him. I never mention him. None of my friends have ever heard me speak of him. There is no one in my life that I call Dad. That is easily the word I have used the least since I learned to speak.

The one time I have ever seen him, I was only 9 years old. I remember my mother coming to school to pick me up and saying "we're going home so you can change then you're going to go see your dad." I was so innocent. I got so excited. I pulled my favorite lacy pink dress out of the closet and put it on as quickly as possible. I just couldn't contain my excitement. Finally I was going to see him. Finally he wanted to be a part of my life. Oh God...it still hurts so much....

I remember walking into the courtroom. I remember the cold chair. And most of all, I remember turning at the exact moment he entered the room. "that's him" I muttered. I just knew.

Everything after that I wish I could forget. The judge asking why we were there. Him saying I wasn't his daughter. Calling my mother by every name he could think of. The most vivid memory though, has to be the nurses room.

I still didn't understand what was going on. I didn't know why he hadn't hugged me yet, why he didn't act the way all my other friends' fathers treated them. He was so cold to me. It took 2 nurses to hold me down so they could take the blood from my arm. I was crying hysterically. I was only 9 years old. I didn't know what a blood test for paternity was. I didn't even know this man who so coldly told the nurses to hurry up, he had other things to do. But I know, I'll never forget that moment. Never.

When the results came back stating that I was most definitely his daughter, I never saw or heard from him again. Go figure. I'm 21 years old now, and I've yet to meet my father (Syri 3).

What the anonymous syri posted above is a story about how she took a paternity test to prove whether the man in the story was her father. The test proved that she indeed was his daughter, however, she is clearly scarred from his behavior. It is believed that this woman has suffered permanent damage from her father. The only interaction with him was purely negative, and it is apparent how his actions (being absent for all of her life) pained her. This story proves how crucial it is for a father to be involved in his daughter's life. It is likely that this woman has had

troubled relationships with men, especially after experiencing the extreme negativity and coldness from her father. Based on the consequences of father absence that have been mentioned, the girl's personality may have gone through a change, even though her experience with him was brief (Quigley 2). His absence surely has detrimental effects on her psychological well being. The fact that 'syri' has refused to mention his name speaks volumes. Extreme feelings of hate and hurt are underscored in her tone. This is yet another voice of a fatherless girl.

MissConfused 89, like the other people who anonymously published her painful story of her father's rejection of her here on experienceproject.com, explains,

I guess my mom got pregnant by her boyfriend Derrick (my biological dad). He had plans for school and told my mom to get rid of me. My mom started dating Don (my dad that raised me), they got married and he became my dad raised me as his own. So anyways the parents of Derrick wanted me to be in their lives so my mom said that's fine as long as she doesn't know and that they didn't treat my brother (son of Don) differently. So up until I was about 12 I had a relationship with my biological dad, I just didn't know he was my dad I called him my uncle. Well when I was 13 I always wondered why I didn't look like my mom or dad. My mom told me that Don who I thought was my father really wasn't. That's not even the hard part. After awhile I told Derrick and wrote him a letter asking why he didn't want me. I got no response and since I found out I haven't

really had a relationship with him. Now that I'm 20 I think about it a lot. Why I wasn't good enough? Or why he doesn't love me? It's hard and I know that it has a lot to do with how I am now. I guess though it wasn't all his fault, I guess my mom told him that Don wanted to be my father and basically told him not to step up to the plate cause I was happy with Don. But then again he's in the wrong because when I was 14 and wrote that letter to Derrick he didn't respond, he didn't care or even want to have a relationship. I think that's the part that kills me is that when I asked for him to be a part of my life, he refused (MissConfused 89 1).

It is likely that the author of this experience is scarred for life by her father's rejection. MissConfused89's experience provides a glimpse into the mind of a fatherless daughter; the statistics people often hear about but never actually 'hear.' MissConfused89 tells her audience that the absence of her biological father shaped the way she is today. Again, this story exemplifies how important it is for a father to be involved in his daughter's life.

As it was previously mentioned, statistics show that father absence is detrimental to a girl's success in her relationships, finances, and life success. Some fatherless women have written memoirs about their chaotic lives and cite their irresponsible or absent fathers. Kerry Cohen is the author of her memoir, "Loose Girl: a memoir of promiscuity." In it, she talks of her desperate need of male attention. Her parents divorced in 1980's and her father moved out, "... leaving us in a house with no men" (Cohen 7). Over the memoir, Cohen

describes her father as the ‘cool dad,’ saying, “... he smokes pot in the apartment” (Cohen 35). The reader believes that this behavior suggests that Cohen’s father did not have the disciplinary skills Marcus named as one of the ingredients to being a good father. Cohen recalls that her father smoked marijuana. Clearly, her father’s drug habits are not included in Marcus’s ‘good dad’ checklist, and he is obviously not being a positive role model. Cohen’s father has a very ‘lax’ attitude, as if anything goes. At various points in the novel, Cohen tells the reader that he ‘checks out’ her friends and makes flirtatious comments towards them. At one part in her memoir, Cohen recalls a time when her father crawled into bed with her and embraced her—when she was a teenager. Perhaps Cohen’s father was not completely absent (although she did not live with him; she and her sister, Tyler, resided with their mother, who was often absent as well). However, his flirtatious behavior and drug use suggests that he allows his children to do the same. This may explain why Cohen has slept with approximately 40 males when she realized she had a problem (Cohen 1). She admits it herself, saying, “... I was desperate for attention—any attention—and men’s interest in my body was the easiest avenue to being noticed. Of course, I confused their base interest with love. I needed to believe it meant something ... It [the memoir] is about how desperate I was to feel loved, less alone, and how, misguided by all those cultural mixed messages, I tried to fill my need with male attention and sex” (Cohen 3). Here, Cohen is displaying some symptoms of father absence. It is speculated that

because Cohen had an inconsistent father figure, she longed for male attention to ‘fill the void,’ or to make up for the real attention and love she was missing from her father.

DEFINITION OF A POSITIVE FATHER FIGURE

Julian Marcus, a stress management specialist who writes for askmen.com wrote an article titled, “12 Traits of a Great Father.” In it, Marcus describes the 12 ways a father is a positive influence on his daughters (and children’s) life. This article underscores the importance of having a good father and helps daughters understand and recognize positive traits in their dad that are highly conducive to their mental and psychological well-being. Marcus deems that a good dad is a “good disciplinarian ... he strongly disapproves of his children's misdeeds, using tough love to prove a point” (Marcus 1). Marcus also emphasizes that a good father should realize that mistakes are inevitable, as Marcus says, “However, he makes it clear that repeated irresponsibility won't be tolerated” (Marcus 1).

Marcus also underscores the fact that a good dad understands that times are changing, and that he does not hold his children up to a standard which he lived by in 1960, especially where he says, “A good father understands that times, people and tastes change over the years, and doesn't try to maintain some gold

standard of his own time. For instance, he realizes that body piercings are more commonplace than before, that more couples have premarital sex, and that people talk more candidly about personal issues. In other words, he allows his children to be citizens of their day and age” (Marcus 1).

One of the most important things Marcus points out is the fact that a good father will spend quality time with his children and love them unconditionally. Perhaps these are the two most important traits a father could have that are necessary to foster a loving, positive, and esteemed environment for his daughter(s). Marcus explains, “This is the greatest quality of a good father. Even though he gets upset at his children's faults and may lament that they did not attain what he hoped for them, a father loves his children no less for it ... A dad knows how to have fun with his kids too, taking them out to games, movies, and supporting their sports teams by attending their matches. He takes the time to listen to his kids and have a good, easy chat with them. He also makes time to help them with their homework, every night if necessary” (Marcus 1, 2). It is believed that a father’s love will solidify his daughter’s self-esteem and emotional well-being. It is also believed that a healthy amount of a father’s unconditional love and attention can prevent her from seeking it from other sources (e.g. other boys and men).

Marcus states that a good father “teaches [his children] to deal with conflict with a family member and with others by being firm but reasonable at the

same time” (Marcus 2). This statement may help explain why fatherless girls tend to have unhealthy and unstable relationships with men. The fatherless girl may have trouble communicating and solving problems with her partner and may thus become pregnant or be a victim to abuse. A girl who lacked a father’s lessons on problem solving may also receive less-than-average grades and school which could affect her high school and college attendance.

APPENDICES

The following are graphs that illustrate how fatherless daughters fare in terms of employment and how many children are born into single-parent homes. The graphs were from the work titled, “Father Absence and the Welfare of Children” by Sarah McLanahan.

Figure 1

The visual below shows how father absence due to divorce, unwed mothers, and death affects children. (McLanahan). The reader speculates that the increase is related to the rise in divorces.

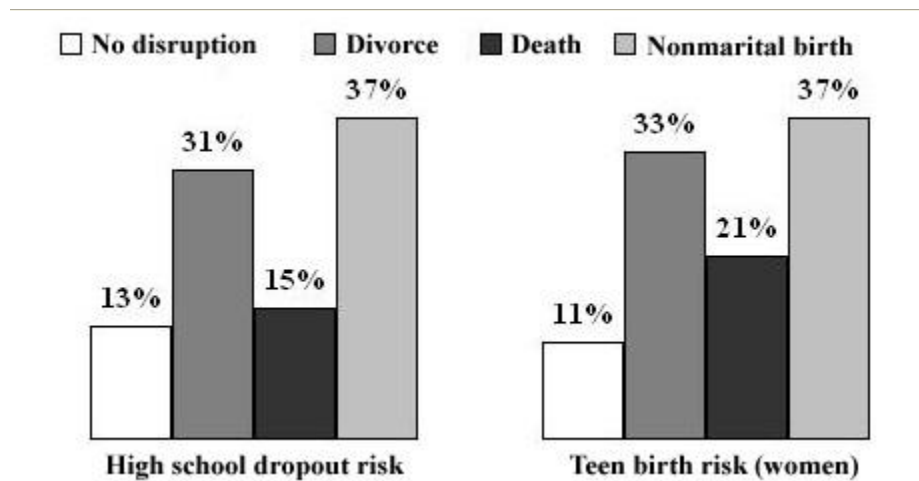


Figure 2

The following bar graph demonstrates the effects of father absence (single-parent homes) on teenage pregnancy and education compared to families that had two

parents/guardians. Note that the children from single parent households had a higher rate of teenage pregnancy and high school drop out (McLanahan).

- Baseline difference between two-parent and one-parent families
- Difference, controlling for school quality
- Difference, controlling for school quality and residential mobility
- Difference, controlling for school quality, residential mobility, and parenting behavior

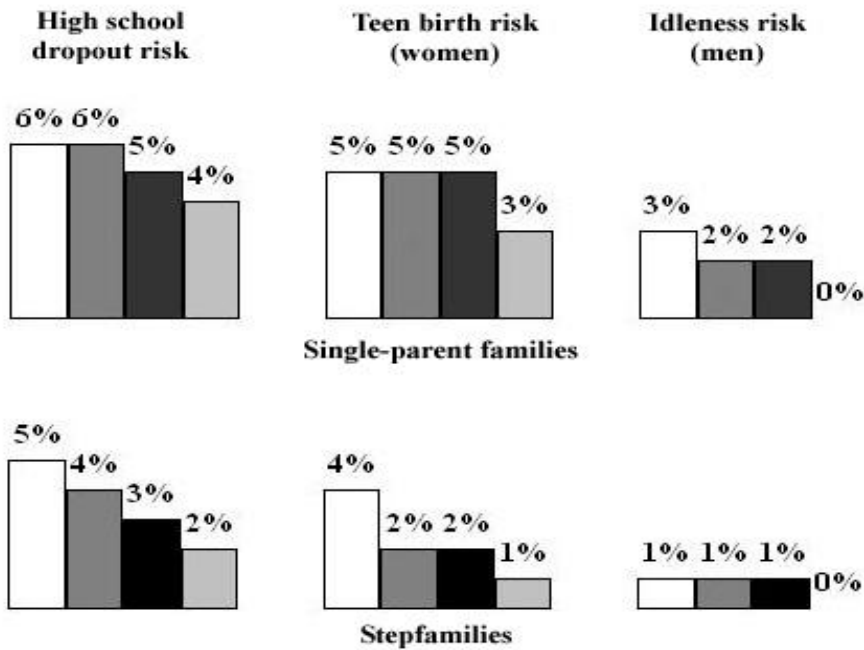


Figure 3

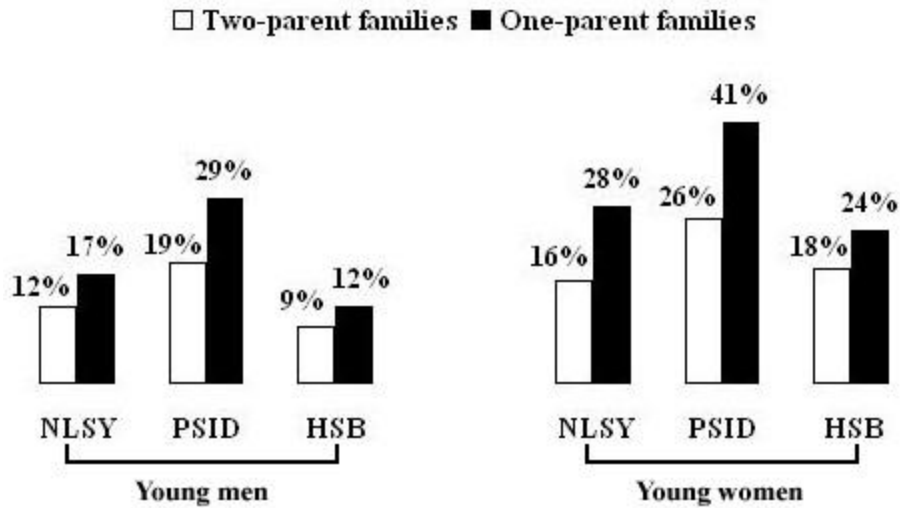
This graph illustrates how many children (including daughters) are born out of wedlock. This table gives the reader an idea at how prevalent father absence is (Kumasi 1).

Year	Total Births United States	Births to Un-Wed Mothers	Percent of Total Births
All	4,059,000	1,347,000	33%
White	2,363,000	522,000	22%
African American	604,000	415,000	69%
Hispanic	816,000	348,000	43%
Asian	201,000	30,000	15%
Native American	42,000	24,000	57%

Source: National Center for Health Statistics

Figure 4

Here, the audience can see that children (this includes daughters) from one-parent homes are more likely to be unemployed (McLanahan).



CONCLUSION

It is critical that fathers remain to be a crucial ingredient to healthy and successful families. Without fathers, daughters are deprived of a significant amount of love, confidence, and self worth. Research has shown that the effects of father absence are highly detrimental to the overall wellbeing of their daughters. It is believed that the catalyst of father absence is divorce. Thus, to rectify this social problem, Americans must prepare for healthy marriages and learn the dynamics of marriage to decrease the amount of fathers lost to divorce. Loss of a father to death, war, and careers is inevitable, however, Americans can learn to ameliorate the number of involved fathers by making wiser choices.

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