

Chapter 1

Introduction

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Father Involvement in Young Children's Lives: Common Themes and Diverse Perspectives

Experts identify some important social trends around the world that have altered the sociocultural milieu in which children are raised (Cabrera et al. 2000). These trends include increased labor force participation of mothers and consequent increase in children's participation in formal childcare settings; increased absence of fathers in the lives of their children; increased involvement of fathers in two-parent households; and increased involvement of nonbiological fathers including step fathers, grandfathers, father figures, and adoptive fathers. In the United States, some other emerging trends include the rising number of single fathers raising children as well as stay-home dads. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2011), in the year 2010, there were about 1.8 million lone fathers raising children and there were 154,000 stay-at-home dads caring for 287,000 children, which almost doubled during the period 2003–2010.

As an academic field with immense implications for families, the topic of father involvement has been receiving wide recognition by diverse groups of experts involved in securing the well-being of children and families. Consequently, a growing body of knowledge is gradually emerging on the importance of paternal involvement in children's development (Alio et al. 2010; Sarkadi et al. 2008). Researchers report greater paternal sensitivity and involvement resulting in children's secured attachment with fathers (Brown et al. 2012). Research findings document benefits of secured father-child attachment on child outcomes including fewer behavior problems (Verschuere and Marcoen 1999), higher reciprocated friendships (Veríssimo et al. 2011), and reduced risk for internalizing and externalizing forms of psychopathology (Phares et al. 2010). Other research findings suggest benefits of quality paternal involvement time for children and especially for fathers (Brown et al. 2012) in terms of fathers' job

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skills, parenting skills, and social relationships (Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004); and beneficial roles of nonresident but involved fathers in children's social and academic skills and in fostering a bond that continues until children are in their young adulthood (Peters and Ehrenberg 2008). Lamb (2010) emphasizes multiple roles for fathers (as bread earners, parent, and emotional partners) and the characteristics of the father as a parent rather than as a male.

In addition, effective programs that take account of multicultural differences and use of culturally appropriate curriculum and outreach strategies have been developed to involve fathers in their children's well-being (Fagan and Palm 2003). Research reports positive changes and behaviors for all members in the family unit for programs that involve both parents compared to programs that do not include fathers (Lundahl et al. 2008). It is important to note that important policy recommendations have been forwarded by educational and community organizations, and there have been government directives to schools and community agencies including corporate sectors to institute policies that maximize father involvement in all aspects of children's life. Nongovernmental organizations and universities around the world have been involved in designing and implementing research studies, advocacy activities, and father involvement programs (Long 2008).

Currently, social scientists from a variety of disciplines are exploring questions such as: How do we define father involvement in diverse cultural contexts? How does paternal involvement benefit children and the entire family unit? What factors promote or challenge father involvement in young children's lives? How do cultural contexts shape men's roles in families? How do theoretical and empirical scholarships inform father involvement programs and policies? What programs and strategies will better support father involvement in diverse family, social, and cultural contexts? These questions bear important context-specific significance, especially for a young academic field that has a long journey ahead. Authors of this book have addressed these questions within the unique multicultural contexts in which their chapters are housed.

Purpose of the Book

Father involvement in young children's lives: A global analysis brings together an interdisciplinary group of scholars, within and outside of the United States, to examine the issues of father involvement within particular cultural and national contexts. While international in scope, the book adheres to its global spirit by highlighting issues, challenges, needs, and possibilities that transcend national borders. Therefore, authors featured in this book have made sincere efforts to preserve the uniqueness of their particular contexts while simultaneously reflecting on common themes such as examining historical and contemporary perspectives; analyzing factors that pose challenges to quality of paternal involvement; reviewing related research studies that extend and/or challenge existing scholarships on the topic; evaluating existing and

emerging policies as well as imagining spaces for future policies; and suggesting feasible ideas for teachers, researchers, and policy-makers. It is important to note here that although the field of father involvement is at various stages of development among countries represented in the book, what binds the chapters in this book is the common passion for strengthening the father-child bond in the early years amid a myriad of challenges.

The editor and authors sincerely hope that the book provides readers with updated information on discussions, debates, trends, policies, programs, and research efforts undertaken around the world and invites collective and contextually appropriate action to remove existing barriers to paternal involvement in young children's lives.

Overview of the Book

With a total of 18 chapters, this book is organized under three major sections.

Section 1: Father Involvement: Broad Strokes

Unlike chapters in the other two sections that focus on particular groups of fathers in the United States or father involvement in particular national contexts, the two chapters in Sect. 1 are not limited to particular groups of fathers, rather they examine benefits of paternal involvement for their children in a more general sense.

Section 2: Father Involvement: Perspectives from the United States

There are seven chapters in this section. This section examines father involvement primarily in the context of the United States, although some chapters integrate international contexts wherever appropriate. Fathers represented in this section come from diverse backgrounds: African-American fathers, Mexican-American fathers, gay fathers, incarcerated fathers, homeless fathers, and fathers of children with disabilities. The section also includes a chapter that examines the needs and challenges of single mothers and controversies related to father involvement in such contexts.

Section 3: Father Involvement: Global Perspectives

This section includes a total of nine chapters. Chapters in this section examine father involvement issues in countries outside of the United States. The countries in this section span across four major regions of the world: North America (Caribbean

Islands and Canada), Asia (India, China, Japan, and Taiwan) and Oceania (Australia and New Zealand), and Africa (Southern Africa). A brief introduction to chapters in these three sections follows.

About the Chapters

Father Involvement: Broad Strokes

The first chapter of the book titled, *Fathers and early literacy*, by Glen Palm highlights international scholarship on father involvement in early literacy with specific reference to important studies that focus on the need for father involvement in children's literacy, characteristics of fathers who are involved in early literacy, and successful programs for father involvement in early literacy in the United States and the United Kingdom. The author also points to the dearth of research on father involvement in early literacy and methodological flaws in existing studies. Keeping in view the importance of early literacy and the long-term benefits of early literacy for children's later academic and personal lives, the chapter sets a tone of urgency for paternal involvement that resonates in other chapters as well.

Paternal caring behavior is the central theme of the chapter titled, *Caring fathers: Empowering children to be loving human beings*, by Kevin Swick. With a myriad of examples of paternal caring behaviors and the responsive and reciprocal returns that accrue from such engagements, the author, in a way, rescues the construct "caring" from its feminine cradle and defines "caring" as a general human trait. With empirical findings and conceptual perspectives, the author suggests that paternal caring behavior has numerous potentials to influence the well-being of children, fathers, and the entire family. The chapter provides many specific societal and educational strategies and policies that support father involvement and guide children's understanding of adult roles through father-centered education.

Father Involvement: Perspectives from the United States

In the chapter titled, *Mexican-American father-child literacy interactions*, Olivia Saracho uses the framework "familism" (as a cultural characteristic where choices, interests, activities, and roles of individual members are embedded within the family network) to contextualize Mexican-American fathers' roles and relationships with their children. Saracho challenges misinterpretations and stereotypes of Mexican-American fathers and identifies outdated theoretical and methodological limitations that guided studies on Mexican-American fathers in past. The author also cites contemporary studies that denounce such stereotypes, portray Mexican-American fathers' diverse and complex roles within the family unit, discuss a host of factors that influence their involvement, and document Mexican-American fathers' positive

perceptions regarding their paternal roles. With a cautionary note, the author reminds researchers to understand fully the prevalent norms, expectations, and beliefs regarding Mexican-American fathers' involvement and the culturally sanctioned forms of father-child relationships so that these understandings accurately inform their study designs.

Drawing from the historical accounts of slavery, religious reform movements, the civil rights movement, and contemporary research, policies, societal realities, and educational practices, the chapter, *Father involvement, African Americans and reducing the achievement gap*, by William Jeynes examines factors that contribute to African-American fathers' involvement (or lack of it). The author discusses research studies that document the positive impact of paternal involvement on African-American children's academic achievement, and identifies successful father involvement programs for black fathers within and outside of the United States.

Embedded in conceptual and empirical groundings, the chapter, *Gay fathers' involvement in their young children's lives*, by Dana Berkowitz and Katherine Kavalanka, challenges socially constructed cultural narratives that project stereotypical as well as deficit perspectives about gay parenting. The authors also provide a comprehensive discussion on multiple and varied paths to parenthood among gay parents, the rising number of transracial adoptions and the adoption of children with special needs among gay parents, and national and international laws that prohibit adoption by same-sex couples. Furthermore, the authors discuss specific implications for policymakers, teacher education programs, and school personnel that include: preparing teachers to embrace same-sex families, addressing "homophobia" through children's books that portray same-sex families, and involving gay families in school activities, to name but a few.

With the rising rate of incarceration, especially among men from low-income African-American and Hispanic-American communities, the chapter, *Incarcerated fathers: Implications for father involvement*, by Mike Roettger and Raymond Swisher is timely in highlighting the impact of paternal incarceration on children and families; identifying a host of challenges that prevent fathers' involvement during and after the incarceration period such as physical and institutional barriers; discussing the psychological effects of prisonization, the stigma of incarceration, and spousal rejection; and offering feasible suggestions to policy-makers and early childhood programs. The authors also present distinctions between contexts where father involvement needs to be limited because of possible deleterious impacts on children and contexts where father involvement bears a symbiotic effect on both fathers and their children.

The chapter, *Involvement of homeless fathers: Challenges and possibilities*, by Jyotsna Pattnaik and Christina Medeiros is contextualized within two distinct social trends; current national and global concerns over growing family homelessness as well as increasing awareness and recognition of the impacts of paternal involvement on young children's development. The authors provide an overview of theoretical perspectives, issues, and programs relevant to homeless fathers and offer specific and feasible recommendations for practitioners and researchers. The authors rightfully conclude that homeless fathers are not a homogenous group, and the diversity

of their life experiences and needs necessitate diversity in service delivery, policy frameworks, and research designs.

In the chapter, *Fathers of young children with disabilities: Experiences, involvement, and needs*, authors, Hedda Meadan, Howard Parette, and Sharon Doubet, justify the theoretical and legal imperatives for involving fathers in the lives of children with disabilities. The authors also point to the dearth of research on fathers of children with disabilities, describe empirical findings related to fathers' experiences with a child with disabilities, present benefits of fathers' involvement for their children with disabilities as well as the family unit as a whole, make comparison of fathers' versus mothers' involvement in the life of children with disabilities, and highlight limitations of available research on the topic. The authors justifiably reject the existing stereotypes about fathers' lack of interest in getting involved in their special needs child's development.

While acknowledging the need for sustained and responsible partnerships between mothers and fathers in the care, support, and protection of children, in her chapter, *Honoring women who must raise their children alone*, Beatrice Fennimore highlights the demographic reality and the importance and challenges of single motherhood. She argues that the current academic focus on paternal involvement and the legislative and social policy changes to promote father involvement must not lose sight of the need for long-term women-based solutions, which support single-mother households, such as equal opportunities for women in the workplace, and provision of available, affordable, and high-quality childcare for their children.

Father Involvement: Global Perspectives

Grounded in the Caribbean society's cultural, social, and economic landscape, and informed by international scholarship on father involvement, the chapter, *Father-child involvement in English-speaking Caribbean countries: Links to childhood development*, by Jaipaul Roopnarine highlights the positive impact of family cohesion, adaptability, and stable living arrangements as well as the negative effects of harsh parenting on young Caribbean children's cognitive and social development. The chapter also outlines specific implications for future researchers, policy-makers, and early childhood teachers.

Contextualized within a historical context of colonial policies and practices that robbed indigenous children (currently fathers) of a secured childhood and exposure to positive fathering, and drawing from Canada's first study with indigenous fathers, the chapter, *Indigenous fathers in Canada: Multigenerational challenges*, by Jessica Ball, identifies structural, cultural, and sociopolitical constraints on indigenous fathers' involvement with their children; presents action strategies; and offers recommendations for policy reform. The author also highlights the role of institutions that serve children and families, including childcare programs, schools, health clinics, and hospitals in supporting paternal involvement.

Set primarily in the backdrop of Australian society, Andrew Martin's chapter, *Male involvement in children's lives: Roles and relevance to academic and nonacademic outcomes in the Australian context*, highlights the gap between ideal perceptions of father involvement and the actual practices both at home and in school, and the fallacies of the gender-matching hypothesis (exposing gender-based role models to children). While highlighting the empirical findings on the academic and nonacademic benefits of paternal involvement for children, Martin also refutes, with empirical evidence, the claim of "masculinity" as a determining factor in father involvement. Rather, with research findings on both present and absent fathers, Martin draws readers' attention to associated stressors (resulting from father absence) or supports (such as fathers' warmth and closeness in case of involved fathers) that contribute to either negative or positive child outcomes. The vital element in this equation of paternal involvement and positive child outcomes, Martin argues, is fathers' active involvement in parenting duties, not their mere presence. Martin warns against gender-neutral terms, such as "parent involvement," that mask the patterns of gendered involvement and influences that are important for intervention purposes.

Paul Callister and Lindy Fursman's chapter, *Father involvement: New Zealand*, links waves of migration from various parts of the world to diverse images and practices of paternal roles in New Zealand. The authors also chart a host of challenges to fathers' active involvement that include: longer working hours for men compared to women; the impact of long working hours on paternal stress and punitive parenting styles; workplace cultures that prevent balance of work and family life; issues surrounding the current paid parental leave policy in New Zealand; family laws that support mothers over fathers; overrepresentation of men especially Maori fathers in the prison population; discriminations against fathers residing in prison or involved in the criminal justice system; and contradictions between theoretical and practical usage of New Zealand's flexible work arrangement policy for men. The authors provide recommendations for father-friendly policies that may encourage paternal involvement and gradually shift gender norms both within and outside home contexts.

Embedded within personal, family, community, economy, and cultural contexts of Africa, mainly South Africa, the chapter, *Father involvement in young children's care and education in Southern Africa*, by Jeremiah Chikovore, Tawanda Makusha, and Linda Richter, provides an extensive discussion on a multitude of factors that actually drive South African men further away from familial responsibility and engagement with their children. The chapter also highlights the plight of men from rural poor households who are forced to participate in the rising "migrant labor" economy of the country, leaving their childcare responsibilities to kin in "stretched households" and consequently holding to an image of "shadowy heads of households." The chapter recommends policy measures such as facilitating planned parenting, adopting practical measures to enhance men's ability to care for their children, using media to promote alternative and more positive forms of father involvement, extending the length of the current paid paternity leave days, introducing variations in defining households, and promoting acceptance of social fathering in the media as well as school curriculum.

Drawing from Hindu religious dictates of *karma* (the law of cause and effect) and particularly *Grihasthadharma* that lays down roles and rules for the family life, the authors of the chapter, *Fathering in India*, have made attempts to capture the immense challenges faced by some fathers in India while trying to uphold the emerging gender egalitarian ideals within the needs of their unique family contexts, their own aspirations for their children, the demands of time in a booming as well as developing economy, and above all the existing stereotypical gendered perceptions and practices in the society. The authors, Rajalakshmi Sriram and Prachee Navalkar, also discuss recent efforts by community organizations, the national government, UNICEF, and Indian researchers to highlight and support fathers' involvement in various paternal roles, moving beyond the traditional "provider role."

Based on the findings of their own study and that of other researchers, the authors of the chapter, *Fathers' role in Chinese children's education*, highlight the continuing motherhood culture in Chinese children's lives although there are a few dedicated fathers who are involved in the recent home-school movement. The authors, Zhonghe Wu, Song An, and Shuhua An, identified factors such as the current reform/open-up policy and labor market policies that contributed to higher unemployment and a poor salary structure among women workers and forced mothers to continue their traditional childrearing responsibilities and fathers to work more hours to move the family up in the economic ladder and support their only child's engagement in multiple academic and extracurricular activities. The authors also provide a comprehensive historical account of gendered family practices and recommendations for early childhood practitioners.

In their chapter, *The father image in Japan: Traditional roles and emerging realities in conflict*, the authors, Michelle Morrone and Yumi Matsuyama, provide historical accounts of father/male involvement in childcare and education as well as current trends and social policies related to father involvement in Japan. The authors argue that while the grass-root movements and empirical studies show some progress, disengaging Japanese men from the post-World War company-men model and reconstructing a comprehensive image of modern fatherhood for Japanese men is not an easy task; therefore, support from many sectors including educational organizations is necessary to achieve this goal. The authors provide suggestions for schools, the workplace, and governmental agencies that bear the responsibility of bringing desired changes in paternal roles in Japan.

With a historical analysis of gender roles in the Taiwanese society and current evidence from empirical studies, policy-level initiatives, print and nonprint media such as text books and television programs, the chapter, *Father involvement in Taiwan: A progressive perspective*, by Hsiu-Zu Ho, Chu-Ting Ko, Connie Tran, Jessica Phillips, and Wei-Wen Chen, portrays how larger processes of social change, such as the changing mode of economic production and the labor market dynamics, have potential to influence the private domain of families, both in conceptualizations and practices of parenting roles. Although there is a long road ahead to achieving a truly egalitarian model of parental responsibilities, the authors of the chapter are hopeful that these preliminary efforts have the potential to overcome the existing cultural traditionalism in Taiwanese families.

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