

# Factors Affecting Father Involvement in Parenting and Solutions

Yuxuan Han<sup>1, †</sup>, Keyu Liu<sup>2, †</sup>, and Yi Xie<sup>3, \*, †</sup>

<sup>1</sup> College of Foreign Language, Capital Normal University, Beijing, China

<sup>2</sup> College of Marxism, Shenyang Normal University, Shenyang, China

<sup>3</sup>School of education science, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China

\* Corresponding Author Email: 04200451@njnu.edu.cn

†Those authors contributed equally

**Abstract.** This review mainly summarizes the influencing factors of fathers' involvement conducted by predecessors and puts forward relevant feasible countermeasures. Based on previous research, the influencing factors are concluded by many aspects, which can be mainly summarized in the following three levels: father characteristics, children characteristics and family factors. It can be specified into father's socioeconomic status, child's gender differences, maternal gatekeeping in father involvement, distribution of family power, and family type. It is worth noting that the father's efforts, the influence of other family members, marital relationship, social concepts inherent in the social environment, relevant national policies, and school cooperation will affect the final result of father involvement. Therefore, to truly increase father involvement in childcare, all parties need to recognize that this is not the father's personal business but need to work together to improve the situation. In response to this, we have proposed relevant feasible countermeasures for all parties.

**Keywords:** Father involvement; Maternal gatekeeping; Family child-rearing division of labor.

## 1. Introduction

The family environment is one of the important factors affecting the development of children. Father plays an important role in family education, and his influence on children is irreplaceable by the mother. If the father is absent from education, it will affect the children's mental health, their growth, and even their social adaptation ability of children, so it is significant to explore the related situation of fathers' participation in family education.

Since the 1940s, western researchers have generally begun to study father involvement in education. Chinese scholars have conducted research on this situation and comprehensively analyzed the causes, performance, and influence of father involvement in education that is lower than those of mothers. At this stage, based on the research on father involvement in education, more and more attention is paid to the differences between different fatherhood groups, which are embodied in: fathers from different countries, fathers from different classes, fathers from urban and rural areas, fathers of children of different genders, fathers of urban migrant children and fathers of ordinary children.

## 2. Method

The databases of Google Scholar, Web of Science, and China National Knowledge Infrastructure were used in this review. The keywords entered were: "father involvement," "children," "parenting styles," and "parental involvement." And the screening criteria were as follows: (1) at least one factor influencing father involvement is discussed; (2) father involvement is discussed separately; (3) published after 2010; (4) evaluated by peer-view.

### **3. Influencing Factors of Father Involvement**

#### **3.1 Father Characteristics**

##### **3.1.1 Social economic status**

The father's social role significantly affects children's social adaptation ability. Research shows that for children, the father's occupation, income, and other social role factors will indirectly affect children's development.

In the dimension of father's occupation, the influence is mainly reflected in whether the father can provide resources for child care and child development, such as finding a nanny or doctor for the child, formulating the child's education plan, providing social connections, and initiating or directing child care [1].

In the research on the influence of father's income on children's social adaptation ability, Wang concluded that in the dimension of daily care, encouragement, and praise, when father's monthly income is more than 10,000 yuan, his participation in parenting is significantly higher than that of the group below 10,000 yuan [2]. This may be because fathers with low monthly incomes are busy with their livelihood, spend less time with their children, pay less energy, and neglect their children's education in daily life. In addition, fathers with low monthly incomes are usually not highly educated, so they lack the knowledge of child-rearing and the concept of taking care of children daily. Thus, children's social adaptability is decreased.

The father with a low education level, the lower participation in child-rearing, the less impact on children's social adaptability. For example, studies show that the level of education from a junior high school and below to high school or technical secondary school to junior college or full-time father, the level of participation in education is increasing. Although fathers with a bachelor's degree and a master's degree showed a decline in their involvement in parenting, it was still higher than that of fathers with a college or vocational education. This may be due to the fact that fathers with a bachelor's degree, or above are usually engaged in more complex and heavy work, with greater work pressure and less energy and time to devote to child-rearing activities. So, the more educated the father, the more involved he is in raising the child.

Wang et al. also came to a similar conclusion [2]. The more educated the father, the more socially adaptable the children. The father's education level is junior college or above, the upbringing style is better, easy to form a more harmonious family relationship, pay more attention to the cultivation of children's ability to live independently, which has a significant impact on the cultivation of children's adaptive behavior.

##### **3.1.2 Parenting consciousness**

With the development of modern society, the consciousness of fathers to participate in the upbringing of their children is gradually enhanced, and the level of participation in the upbringing is constantly improved. However, there are still problems in their consciousness of parenting.

First, the father's gender role consciousness will affect their participation in child-rearing. Xu et al. found that intersex fathers are more willing to participate in child-rearing in many aspects (such as interactive supervision, discipline and restraint, emotional expression, indirect support, and academic encouragement) [3].

Second, the amount of time fathers spend interacting with their children affects parental involvement. According to Ji's research, fathers have less time to contact their children and lack experience in educating their children, which leads to their lack of confidence in taking care of their children, thus affecting their parenting behavior [4].

Third, fathers often lack a correct understanding of their own family identity and responsibilities. According to the survey results of Zhang, fathers believe that they are responsible for supporting the family and are busy with work and under great pressure, so it is the mother's job to educate the children, which may lead to long-term absence from the children's education, which is very unfavorable to the formation of children's positive personality [5].

At the same time, a father with his own father role identity is also more likely to take the initiative to educate responsibility and effective management and constraints of children and tend to involve more in parenting. The child will have more of a sense of security and self-confidence, and interpersonal relationships will be more harmonious, more open, and more enterprising spirit. As a result, they are more socially adaptable.

## **3.2 Children Characteristics**

### **3.2.1 Gender differences**

Xu suggests that there are significant differences in the social adaptation skills of young children by gender, with boys being less adaptive than girls [6]. On the more difficult and challenging tasks, both boys and girls have a lack of adaptive skills on this dimension, due to little exposure to this aspect of manipulation, and on this dimension, girls score higher than boys, with a more significant gender difference between the two, which is related to the different social expectations of young children of different genders, with girls often being labeled as being dexterous. Fathers also develop some detail in their educational involvement, whereas boys are not deliberately expected to do so, so girls tend to be more flexible than boys. In addition to the homework dimension, there are also significant differences between boys and girls in terms of motor skills, with girls scoring higher than boys, as girls have a higher level of intellectual development than boys in early childhood. They have more control over their behavior. In activities that demonstrate motor skills in young children, girls can participate in an orderly manner as their fathers require. In contrast, boys have difficulty following the game's rules and are more mischievous. Fathers' evaluations of boys and girls in this area may also differ.

### **3.2.2 One-child or Multi-child**

In terms of the impact of fathers' parenting involvement on children, Jenkins and Astington [7] suggest that the quality of educational involvement of fathers of only children is significantly higher than that of non-only children. According to the survey, parents of only children generally have a higher level of knowledge and culture than parents of non-only children and place more emphasis on the education of their children, plus parents of only children can devote limited time and all their energy to raising one child, whereas parents of non-only children find it difficult to allocate time to each child to spend with them even though they have an awareness of the importance of father involvement in their children's Growing up. Parents tend to over-pamper and over-accommodate their children, taking care of everything for them and neglecting the importance of nurturing their children's independence. Parents are more demanding of their children than those who are only children and often consciously cultivate their children's self-reliance and hands-on skills, especially for those with younger siblings, who tend to develop a sense of responsibility and a sense of mission and are more likely to take care of others. This enables them to integrate better into their social environment and to form good interpersonal relationships with others. In addition, having siblings allows children to have peers of similar age and status outside of nursery school so that they can try to put themselves in the shoes of others and understand their ideas when they have different or even opposing ideas. Some studies have found that siblings can contribute to the development of children's psychological theories.

### **3.2.3 Geographical differences**

In terms of household location, fathers are significantly more involved in parenting in urban families than in rural families [3]. In rural families, as most parents work outside the home, 40% of mothers are solely responsible for the home education of their children, and more than 50% of the family's parenting tasks are carried out by grandparents (grandparents), with only 10% of fathers really taking a leading role. Many fathers are indifferent to their children, have a simple and violent attitude, or lack patience. In contrast, in urban families, most fathers place a high value on time and mental support for their children. Both parents play an important role in the formation of their children's personalities during this critical period. With both parents involved in family education and

complementary parental behavior, the child is able to draw strengths from both parents, facilitating the formation of a well-rounded personality.

### **3.3 Family Factors**

According to Bowen's family system theory, family members are interdependent and influence each other [8]. Father involvement, which is part of the family system, is greatly influenced by the family environment. This article will explore the following family factors that have a greater impact on father involvement.

#### **3.3.1 Maternal gatekeeping in father involvement**

Many studies have shown that in traditional families, mothers invest significantly more in education than fathers due to traditional attitudes, working hours, and the division of gender roles. The presence of the mother and their attitude towards the father involvement also invisibly have an expected effect on the father involvement, which in turn affects the father's actual behavior. Some related studies have also confirmed this view. For example, Parke and Beitel, among others, surveyed 300 first-time parents in 1993 whose fathers were involved in parenting and found that the mother's attitude was related to the actual level of involvement of the father [9]. Mothers' interest in their father's parenting skills and involvement activities, as well as their evaluation of their father's level of involvement, have an impact on the level of involvement of fathers. In addition, many studies refer to the "maternal gatekeeper effect," the influence of maternal gatekeeping behavior on the father's parenting input [10]. Mother's gatekeeping is mother's conscious or unconscious attitude and behavior toward father-son interaction, including the "closing effect" that has a negative effect on the father's involvement in parenting and the "door-opening effect" that has a positive effect on the father's involvement. Thus, the concept of motherhood is neutral, not absolutely positive or negative. For example, many early studies have found that the presence or absence of the mother directly affects the father's parenting input. When the father is present-when the mother is present, the father's parenting input level is significantly lower than that of the father alone to take care of the child when the mother is not present, and it is the mother's refusal to share the responsibility of caring for the child with the father, thereby reducing the father's parenting investment level. The study by McBride et al. [11] found that as mothers recognized the value of their father's upbringing increased, the predictive effect of the father's perception of their parenting value on their parenting investment also increased accordingly, which illustrated the mother's role in promoting the father's parenting investment.

Based on the theory of family system, the mother's gatekeeping is in the boundary management of the family subsystem through the exclusion or inclusion of the father and then affects the father's actual parenting involvement. Therefore, the mother's attitude to the father's parenting value has a regulatory effect on the father's perception of his parenting value and his actual parenting investment, which is an important factor affecting the father's actual involvement in parenting behavior and plays a central role in collaborative parental parenting.

#### **3.3.2 Distribution of family power**

Mother's gatekeeping is significantly more pronounced than "father's gatekeeping," and there is no shortage of other family-level traits that regulate them. Studies have shown that mothers tend to have more power in the family. Based on the theory of identity [12], mothers' standards and requirements for their spouses also affect the father's identity, prompting them to fine-tune their own behavioral or role standards. In this context, in the family pattern dominated by maternal power, the influence of mothers on father's parenting behavior is more pronounced. In addition, relevant studies have shown that the distribution of family power is closely related to factors such as the parents' socioeconomic status.

### 3.3.3 Family type

There are differences in the degree of father involvement in the dimensions of family types, such as one-child and non-one-child families, and whether the father is the primary educator. In terms of whether or not to be an only child, the quality of educational involvement of fathers with only children is significantly higher than that of non-only children. For example, a previous study found that there are extremely significant differences in the social adaptability of only children and non-only children [13]. Non-only children not only have significantly higher overall scores in social adaptation but also score higher than non-only children in life independence, athletic ability, homework, communication, and self-management. Young children's social adaptability is an important part of their psychological development, and their development is closely related to environmental factors. The study by Xie also shows that the family environment is a crucial microsystem affecting young children's development. The unique family environment in which only children live will make them experience different growth conditions than non-only children [14]. The reason is that, according to the survey, the parents of the only child generally have a higher level of knowledge and culture than the parents of the non-only child and pay more attention to the education of the child, plus the parents of the only child can put a limited time and all their energy into cultivating them. The parents of the non-only child even if they have an awareness of the importance of the father's involvement in the growth of their children, it is difficult to allocate time to each child to accompany their growth. In addition, some researchers have found that whether the father is the primary educator has a significant effect on the level of parenting involvement by studying families with three generations of simultaneous presence. Studies have shown that in families where the father is the primary educator, the father's level of involvement in parenting is also higher, significantly higher in discipline and restraint, the father's ability to participate in parenting and other than the mother and grandparents, and significantly higher than the mother in the daily care dimension [15].

### 3.3.4 Marriage satisfaction

Marriage satisfaction, parenting behavior, and children's behavior mutually influence and promote relationships, and fathers' marital satisfaction significantly affects their parenting involvement. Studies have shown that fathers' marital satisfaction is positively correlated with their parenting involvement. Belsky and his colleagues found in 1991 that the quality of fatherhood is positively correlated with marital relationships, i.e., the level of paternal involvement may depend on the level of support for family marital relationships [16]. As early as 1983, Feldman and others found that fathers who were satisfied with the state of marriage began to devote themselves to parenting when their wives became pregnant [17]. At the same time, the satisfaction of both parties to the marriage can increase the mother's confidence in the father's ability to play his role appropriately, indirectly promoting the mother's behavior of integrating the father into the family, thereby promoting the involvement of the father, and this model of accommodating and encouraging the father is often referred to as the "marriage gatekeeper." And this model allows for the benign development of both the marriage relationship and the parent-child relationship in the family. Belsky's research found that spousal support is one of the key factors influencing parental functioning [16]. Fulfilling parental duties requires emotional support from their spouses, and fathers who are encouraged by their wives will feel more likely to be good fathers. Bonney et al. [17] research found that fathers who are more involved in homeschooling have good marital relationships, and wives have a more positive attitude towards their husbands' involvement in childcare work, which also increases the level of involvement of fathers. The quality of the relationship between husband and wife affects the interaction between father and child, and the relationship between father and son also affects the quality of marriage. In short, a high level of effective paternal involvement is more conducive to coordinating the relationship between husband and wife than the involvement of mothers. A constantly evolving, positive marital relationship will prompt fathers to become more involved in the family education of their children.

In addition, fathers' marital satisfaction can have a direct impact on the development of children. For example, the research of Yang et al. [18] showed that father's marital satisfaction is significantly and negatively correlated with young children's anxiety withdrawal and anger attack and is significantly positively correlated with the sensitive cooperation of young children and the support response of fathers to children's negative emotions plays a partially mediating role between father's marital satisfaction and children's anxiety withdrawal and sensitive cooperation.

## **4. Solutions**

### **4.1 Family level**

Firstly, we can try to improve the family education structure and the sense of family cooperation. For example, some studies on the mediating role of mother's participation in education and the importance of father's family role in family education to improve father's participation in family parenting. Secondly, improving the action motivation of fathers' participation through an accounting guide or universal education is necessary. Finally, it should also improve the communication ability between father and children and between father and mother in the family, which will help the father better understand the children's characteristics and take better educational strategies.

### **4.2 School level**

Firstly, schools should organize activities such as parent-child education and parent-child sports that involve fathers more in their children's social life, aiming to increase the practical action of fathers' parenting involvement. Secondly, the curriculum can also be designed to raise awareness of fathers' parenting involvement. Schools should organize more talks or teach parents more about the importance of fathers' parenting involvement during parent meetings.

### **4.3 Social level**

First, social organizations and institutions should provide fathers with access to relevant parenting knowledge. Strengthening paternal education and providing childcare knowledge is a must. Second, it is necessary to guide public opinion. On the one hand, society should recognize the diversity of the father group and give the father a certain growth space in the involvement of the child; On the other hand, society should recognize the indispensable and important position of fathers in child-rearing and give them a certain degree of supervision over their responsibilities. In addition, relevant active policies can be introduced to increase the motivation of father involvement.

## **5. Conclusion**

This article aims to obtain relevant suggestions through previous studies on the influencing factors of father's involvement in parenting so as to improve more families' understanding of the importance of father's involvement, effectively improve father's involvement in child care, and thus improve children's ability. This paper summarizes previous studies and, on this basis, summarizes four influencing factors: family, national society, father's personal status and children's basic condition, and discusses the possible mediating effects of these factors at the family, school and national society level, so as to provide reference and theoretical guidance for improving father's involvement in parenting.

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