

The Influences of Father Involvement on Children's Development in China

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Abstract. The history of father involvement studies showed the importance of father involvement in children's development. Researchers build theoretical models to explain why father involvement impacts children's development. Compared to the increasing research on father involvement in western academics, there is a comparatively small number of studies relative to father involvement in China. The lack of research on father involvement in China may depend on the traditional Chinese cultural value of fatherhood. However, the Chinese fathers' role evolved during the time change, contributing to scholars' focus on the significance of father involvement in China. Thus, this article reviews past literature to investigate the theoretical mechanism of how father involvement affects children's development, the evolution of Chinese father role, and the effects of father involvement on children's development in China. Moreover, this article will also mention some suggestions for future Chinese father involvement research.

Keywords: Father involvement; Parental involvement; Children's development.

1. Introduction

After industrialization, the increasing demand for labor made females enter the job market. We could find half of the workforce in the U.S.A through the U.S. department of labor data. Gauthier et al. [1] mentioned that the time parents spend with children is necessary because it always produces a positive result. Studies recommend that in the past few decades, the family involvement of both genders in a family is likely to become equal due to the situation that both couples will work to contribute to the financial resource [2, 3]. Through the research on fatherhood, the perspectives and roles of a father are multidimensional [4]. Pleck notifies the benefits of fatherhood in a family from four main theoretical sides: attachment theory, social capital theory, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, and "Essential Father" Theory [5]. Consequently, fatherhood can bring positive interpersonal interaction, material and social bases, and better gender identity [5]. Furthermore, the impacts of fatherhood weigh more than motherhood on a juvenile's mental health, such as depressive disorder [6]. Additionally, research from Cabrera et al. showed that the father's involvement has a positive outcome on an infant's emotional moderation [7].

Although mounting research investigates the impacts of father involvement on children's cognitive and emotional development in western countries, tasks of fatherhood in China rarely occur [8]. According to the discrepancies between cultural environments and national conditions, the conventional role of the Chinese father is invisible during fostering children [9]. A father in expectations should only contribute financial resources to the family, and he should be a dour educator, the demerits while nourishing the children are always reasonable [10]. In modern Chinese society, people are gradually notified that father involvement is avail to the higher test score for juveniles, for example, in Hung's research [11]. Therefore, summarising the research on father involvement in adolescents' cognitive and emotional development in China to emphasize the essence of fatherhood for Chinese children is significant.

Based on the existing and latest research, this article explores the importance, methods, evolution, and current situation of father involvement in children's development in China. Aiming to provide an assistant interpretation of how father involvement has been developed and the related children's development outcome for researchers, educators, and parents.

2. Method

This article looks through past theoretical articles and books that can explain the mechanism of the father's participation in children's development and Chinese father involvement history. Meanwhile, addressing the result of father involvement, this review combines toddlers, pre-schooler, children, and teenagers with the keywords father involvement, fatherhood, cognitive development, and emotional development to have the joint search in Web of Science, Proquest, JSTOR, Science Direct, Springer Link, and other primary databases. There are five criteria for selecting the articles: (1) the literature must be empirical studies; (2) the research must take place in mainland China, Taiwan, Hongkong or Macao; (3) the published year must be in the range of 2000-2022; (4) published language; (5) father involvement must be related to at least one children development.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Definition and Theories

3.1.1 Definition

During the history of father involvement research in western, the father's role has been dynamic [4]. For example, after industrialization, the father was only responsible for the financial resources of a family, which display the father's responsibility to instruct morality to children [4]. The father's role in this phase is similar to the traditional father's duty in Confucian [8]. In modern society, a father's two primary duties are providing finances to the family and the foster children. According to the research by Rollè et al., during cognitive development father can lead to a better outcome for children through stable social and financial bases, interaction with children, healthy mental state, impart culture, and participation in current political events [6]. One variant during the relevant empirical research is the family socioeconomic status (SES), which means paternal and maternal education level, paternal and maternal career, and family income [11]. Studies showed that families that have higher SES pay more attention to children's development. Therefore, the father involvement in the such family will more than that of low SES families [12]. As a result, the high SES children may show more positive outcomes during their development compared to the low SES children.

3.1.2 Four theories explain father involvement

Attachment theory Bretherton defines the attachment theory as the stable interpersonal relationship between parents and infants that will create the individual pattern for children to have positive social behavior in the future base on the fundamental interaction with their parents [13]. The attachment figure is the person who interacts with children in attachment theory [14]. Researchers state that there are four dominant research questions for fatherhood in attachment theory which systematically interpret the relevant research outcome [15]. Firstly, questioned the significance of the father as an attachment figure for infants' development. Consequently, research showed that fatherhood in attachment theory has a similar outcome to motherhood [5]. They correspond to the second investment, the status of paternal attachment outcome. A study by Cox et al. claimed that during responsive parents' communication with infants, they might have a better social or interpersonal reaction when they get along with their father rather than their mother [16]. Also, during the interaction between parent and baby, a gender discrepancy exists. Infants are willing to interact with heterosexual attachment figures [15]. The third question defines the positive attachment relationship. Bretherton mentioned four elements of a positive relationship: inclusive, consistent, responsive, and effective [15]. To explain why these four elements are essential, Bretherton used previous studies to reveal the correlation between the factors and children's sense of stability and reliance on attachment interaction [15]. The last question explores the children's mental development for unique characters in paternal and maternal interaction. According to the father role's evolution, both father and mother provide a thoughtful response to children and can build the children's sense of security which avail to the children's emotional and social development [15]. However, Pleck stated that the limitations

of attachment theory make scholars cannot explain the mechanism of how fatherhood in infants can affect their subsequent social behavior [5].

Social capital theory the social capital theory defines *social capital* as promoting people's material capital through social network resources [17]. Ravanera stated that a standard social capital for an adult is based on the mutually beneficial and adequate personal credit social network [18]. Children can benefit from the adult social capital by inheriting the social capital from their family or using the financial capital promoted by their parents' social capital. Children's social capital is parental interaction that can benefit their social-emotional development [5]. This kind of social capital is the subsequent effect of social capital theory; that is, the social capital determines parents' social status, shaping parents' behavior [19]. These behaviors will affect children's social behaviors. Although it is clear that parental social capital is essential, there is a lack of research relative to the weight of paternal and maternal capital for children's development and the mechanism of how a father's social capital can benefit children [5].

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory Bronfenbrenner developed a framework focusing on human development and the environment and their correlation in investigating human development [20]. The framework contains five ecological systems. Bronfenbrenner interprets their relationship as a Matryoshka doll, meaning they have an inclusion relationship and interplay with each other. To elucidate his model from macroscopic to microcosmic, chronosystem is the longitudinal social environment evolution. Macrosystem are a social environment that includes policies that affect adults' ideology. The affiliation between adults in the macrosystem is exosystem. In the exosystem context, adults connect with others who relate to their children in the mesosystem. Finally, the adult-infant interpersonal interaction is the microsystem. Although all the systems will impact children directly or indirectly, the microsystem on children will lead to the most significant influence on them, which has similarities with the attachment theory [5]. Pleck stated the specific influences of the father-children microsystem according to the personalities that vary from the mother [5]. However, he states that the limitation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory is that the models fail to define the definite difference between paternal and maternal microsystem impacts.

"Essential Father" Theory Essentialist theory in father involvement research has three statements: the physiological discrepancies in gender's nurture style make both fatherhood and motherhood in children's development inalienable and stationary; marriage assures the coherent male contribution; the masculinity from fatherhood is avail to children's development, especially for the gender identity development [21]. Another condition Silverstein and Auerbach interpret about essentialists in fatherhood is that the aforementioned paternal role description is only established in heterosexual marriage. Pleck illustrated that some researchers claim that the essential father theory emphasizes the importance of father involvement in children's development by connecting the social problem in adolescents and adults to fatherhood deficiency [5]. However, the essential father theory has its limitations because the current empirical research shows that the outcome for children who live in homosexual families is similar to those who live in heterosexual families.

3.2 The Role of the Father in China

3.2.1 Confucian and father role

Chinese culture comprises many local and foreign ideologies, which interplay with each other to form the traditional Chinese culture, which uses Confucian and collectivism as foundations and impacts the modern Chinese people [22]. One feature that Chinese traditional culture establishes a hierarchy that treats the emperor, parent, and teacher as the upper authority of the populace [23]. From a gender perspective, Li and Lamb point out that Chinese culture enhances the patriarchy, which treats males as the capital allocator and females as the adjunct capital for males [23]. In the family and social environment, the male patriarch has absolute authority and is the link between the family and social environment. Therefore, Chinese traditional culture supposes the father as the only financial provider and response to the environment exterior to the family. The mother and other female relatives play a role in the inner family, such as fostering children [22]. To maintain authority

in the family, the Chinese family construction is always made of a strict father and a benign mother [9]. However, like the unique father role in western Lamb [4], the traditional Chinese father is responsible for children's values and morality.

Moreover, unlike in western society, Chinese parent contributes all their resources to their children and still have a strong connection with their children (boys especially) when they become adults [24]. This situation still exists in modern Chinese society. Parents live with their male heir even though he can live independently and get married. Corresponding to the previous social capital theory, Chinese children always inherit the social network from their fathers [23].

3.2.2 Father role in modern Chinese society

In 1970th the issue of reform and opening policies changed China's mainland planned economic system to a market economic system. Thus, the frequent cultural communication between Chinese and Western cultures perspectively affects the traditional Chinese value, including the traditional view of father [25]. In 1980th the issue of family planning policy curtails family size. Researchers acknowledge these two factors evolve the father's involvement in the Chinese family [9, 23]. Researchers agreed that the family size dwindles, urbanization development and increasing labor mobility in China divide traditional clans into families with couples as units [26, 27]. Meanwhile, the reduced natality and the market requirement make both father and mother beware that cultivating a child's personality is essential [9]. Therefore, the father needs to involve in fostering, and the image of the father is changing from august to gentle [23]. However, the macroscopic environment transformation does not change the fathers' role as the primary family financial provider due to the labor inequality in China [9]. Although the policies in some specific Chinese districts like Taiwan, Hongkong and Macao are different, the macroscopic environment still promotes the father role movement [9].

3.3 Fatherhood and Academic Achievement in China

Researchers concur that father involvement during the children's education procedure always leads to better children's academic achievement [28]. This consensus is also mainly agreed upon by Chinese researchers in the modern Chinese context. Cheung and Pomerantz investigated 451 Chinese students from two schools in Beijing and 374 American students from two schools in Chicago to compare the impacts of different parenting styles. They found out that after the parenting involvement, students' academic results get promoted, albeit the parenting style: Americans are supposed to foster children's autonomy, and Chinese are more likely to have stronger mental control [29]. Hung's empirical research collected data from 261 year-six students from four primary schools in Taiwan [11]. There are two questionnaires: one asks about SES, family construction (children quantity and birth order), and father involvement; the other questions about students' self-concept about school subjects and studying environment. Students' self-concept is their experience with one school subject. It is a significant factor in students' academic achievement [11]. Verify the effect of father involvement twice in academic tests for students during the research. Hung uses the SES, family construction, parents' expectation, and participation in children's school education. The test result from Hung's analysis elucidated that parents' expectations and involvement have a significant positive impact on students' academic outcomes [11]. To explain the effects of the father's perception of co-parenting, the study by Ren et al. tested 331 preschoolers in Shanghai. Their result shows that the father's view of higher co-parenting quality is related to children's behavioral regulation [12]. Subsequently, the promotion of children's behavioral regulation from fatherhood positively correlates with their academic skills [12]. Moreover, higher SES levels cause better father perception, father authority of co-parenting and better children language acceptance. Another research from Su et al. revealed that family income positively correlates with the father's involvement in their children's development, thus leading to a better academic outcome [8].

However, the research from Hsu and his colleagues illustrated that the father's involvement does not positively correlate with children's academic outcomes [30]. They interviewed 8180 teenagers from Taiwan to investigate the difference between father and mother academic involvement and how

children's perception of involvement affects their academic achievement. They use SES, parental expectation, parental education level, and students' gender as control variables. The result of the study illustrates that according to the remnants of traditional Chinese culture, mothers participate more in children's development and positively correlate with students' academic outcomes. To summarize, a father's involvement can lead to better academic achievement. However, due to the lack of father involvement, the researchers cannot find strong evidence to prove this statement [30].

3.4 Fatherhood and Emotional Development in China

Although the research from Hsu et al. does not support the positive correlation between fatherhood and students' academic achievement, they found that father involvement is essential to children's mental health [30]. Cheung and Pomerantz also stated that parent involvement has a positive influence on children's positive emotional moderation [29]. Such advantages exist as long as parents participate in the children's development despite the different involving methods and cultural contexts [29]. To comprehensively explain why father involvement in parent involvement is significant, Ren et al. declared that the father's higher participation in co-parenting means the couple's support which leads to a cozier family environment that can promote children's self-moderation system development [12]. Su and her colleagues divided the expressions of children's mental issues into two parts: internalizing behavior (e.g. anxiety, mental disorder) and externalizing behavior (e.g., aggressive behaviors) [8]. Through the research, the father's involvement negatively correlated with both externalizing and internalizing behaviors. Additionally, father involvement results in divergently to children due to their gender. To explain this situation may be because different gender reacts various when they encounter pressure. For example, female is prone to internalize their pressure, so the father involvement has a more significant result in reducing the female's internalizing behaviors [12]. Nonetheless, not all father involvement will positively affect children's mental development. Liu et al. explored 609 mother-father dyads, which at least one age 3-7 preschool children from 11 kindergartens in Fuzhou, to find the influence of fatherhood on toddlers' emotional adjustment in rural China [31]. Children's emotional adjustment is essential to children's mental health because it means children's psychological moderation from disorder to health [32]. They mentioned one determining factor during the father-child interaction, that is, fathering practices which can be defined as the father's parenting styles and methods [33]. The negative fathering practices include corporal punishment and fathering consistency (fathers force their children to do tasks that children loathe to do). In the research, they found that only positive fathering practices promote children's emotional adjustment. To illustrate, during fathering parenting, less fathering consistency leads to a better father-children relationship [31]

4. Implications

Through the research above, researchers usually treat the father and mother as an entirety and investigate impacts on children's development in the Chinese academic research field [30]. However, the father and mother always play different roles, and the mother still participates more in fostering the children, which means the mother is the main attacher to the children in modern Chinese society. There is still lack of research on Chinese father involvement in children's development, especially in children's emotional development. Thus, for future empirical research, researchers could separate the impact of paternal and maternal involvement to investigate the clear usage of these two participants in China. Moreover, SES is an important variable affecting the results of children's development related to the father's involvement. The previous study has shown that fathers with low SES are less likely to participate as much as fathers with high SES [34]. There are two factors that explain this situation, one is parents with low SES usually have a low educational level which means they are not aware that parents' participation is important. Another is bad SES deteriorate parents' emotion and family environment [35]. Most of the beforehand research is taken place in Chinese urban hence the studies result may not have universality because the research in Chinese villages is merely noticed

expect the left-behind children. Therefore, researchers can persist in looking at the significance of father involvement in Chinese low-SES rustic families to contribute a solution to promote low-SES rustic fathers to participate more in children's development.

5. Conclusion

Focusing on father involvement in China, this review address three main questions, including the explanatory theory of fatherhood importance, past and current father involvement role in China, and the children's effects of father involvement in China. After reviewing the present literature and empirical studies, we can see the four theories elucidate the mechanisms. Also, the father involvement in China evolved from past rarely existing to gradually being taken seriously and ascending participation recently. Finally, father involvement positively correlates with children's academic achievement and mental health. For future directions, researchers could focus on the Chinese father involvement and low SES rustic Chinese father specifically. Meanwhile, the essay appeals to parents, especially fathers in China, to participate more in their children's development. While they experience the fathering, practices are also essential because only the upbeat parenting style positively correlates with the children's academic and emotional outcomes.

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