



Analysis of the Influence of Father's Role Absence on Single-parent Families

Jiaxun Xie

College of Art and Science, Stonybrook University, StonyBrook, US, 11790

Jiaxun.Xie@stonybrook.edu

Abstract. There are many single-parent families in the United States, 80% of which are single-mother families. The role of the father is often absent in these families. This paper studies the impact of the absence of the father's role on the family using a literature review to study relevant literature in the past three decades and open data on the Internet. This paper finds that the lack of a father's role will have both material and spiritual impacts on children and even make the next generation more likely to become a single-parent family.

Keywords: single-mother family, income, children, education, mental health

1 Introduction

According to the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau, 80 percent of the roughly 11 million single-parent households with children under the age of 18 are headed by single mothers. In these families, the father's role is always missing. And according to the 2007 UNICEF report on the well-being of children in economically advanced nations, fathers' absence has a pervasive and devastating impact on children's lives [1]. Absent fathers lead children to grow up in families that experience more hardship than normal families, such as lower household incomes in general. The median income for families led by a single mother in 2020 was about \$49,214, well below the \$101,517 median for married couples [4]. By means of a literature review, this paper collected a large amount of information about fatherless families (including papers, news reports, and statistical data), hoping to understand the influence of fatherless families in all aspects by investigating their life and development. This paper summarizes the impact of the father's absence on the family, including material and spiritual aspects. Absent fathers cause children to grow up in families that experience more difficulties than normal families. This paper hopes that by showing many problems caused by absent fathers, people can learn more about, care for, and help absent fathers. Hopefully, the growing number of single-parent families without fathers will decline in the future.

2 Material Impact

The absence of fathers has severely impacted household income, with the median income for households headed by single mothers in 2020 being about \$49,214, well below the median income for married couples of \$101,517 [4]. Lack of income leads to serious material shortages, resulting in food insecurity, inadequate education, poor living conditions, and other problems.

2.1 Food insecurity

The most immediate impact of income insecurity caused by the absence of a father is household food insecurity. According to the most recent United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) data, 35.3% of households with incomes below the federal poverty line were food insecure in 2020. Households headed by single mothers had the highest rate of child food insecurity (CFI), at 26% [6]. And the insecure impact of food on the growth of children is huge. Food insecurity is the inability to consistently obtain enough food to maintain an active, healthy life. Research has found that food insecurity is associated with certain birth defects, anemia, reduced nutrient intake, cognitive problems, and an increased risk of aggression and anxiety. It is also associated with higher hospitalization risks, poorer general health, asthma, behavioral problems, depression, suicide ideation, and worse oral health. The odds are 2.0-3.0 times higher [7]. Although persistent hunger in the United States is less of a problem, food insecurity often results in a limited intake of food. For example, families with low incomes can only choose cheap fried foods as a source of protein, which also leads to higher obesity rates. According to the CDC report, in fifth grade, 28% of children from single-mother families were obese, compared with 22% of children from 2-parent families [3]. Whether it's an increased likelihood of obesity or an increased risk of other health problems, the lack of a father's income puts single-mother families at risk of food insecurity, making it difficult for children to grow healthy.

2.2 Education

Another consequence of the lack of a father is the lack of education funding. Although the United States has a free public education system that guarantees young people the right to go to school, more investment in education also means better educational conditions. It is well known that there are many private schools in the American education system. Private schools tend to have better educational conditions, including fewer students, a higher proportion of teachers, a more beautiful teaching environment, and more resources. A higher student-teacher ratio means teachers can devote more energy to each student. According to the model, there is a significant relationship between the teacher-student ratio and grades. The student-to-teacher ratio at private schools was 11.9 students per teacher, lower than the average of 16.2 at public schools [10]. But what is unavoidable is paying higher tuition. Annual tuition at an average private high school is \$16,040. But public high schools do not charge tuition, only require hundreds of dollars in tuition and fees each year. The average annual tuition at a private university

in the US is \$35,801, much higher than the public \$9,212 [11]. A higher income can nurture a child's well-rounded development outside of the normal education system. The current assessment standard is not only academic performance; but the cultivation of various skills is also very important. For example, equestrian, piano, violin, etc. require a lot of money. Parents of higher-level athletes spend an average of \$100-\$499 per month on their child's sports, including travel and team fees. That adds up to \$1,200-\$5,988 per year, depending on the sport. Lessons such as piano, second language, or art run anywhere from \$30-\$60 per hour, costing between \$1,560-\$3,120 per year for each type of lessons [7]. And ordinary families also have more opportunities to participate in cram schools, which allow their children to get high marks in school exams easily. These after-school tutors cost about \$400 per month for 8 hours of tutoring or about \$4,800 per year. The situation that families need to invest a lot of money in education also happens in China. Even though education is compulsory in China, the competition among parents to invest in education is still fierce. For example, Chinese parents will buy a "school district house" at a high price in order to let their children enter a better school. By comparing high school GPAs, high school students living in fully married households had an average combined GPA (2.9) in English and math, while high school students in single-parent households always had an average GPA (2.5). Among students who grew up in fully married families, 28% earned an A, compared with only 9% of single-parent families. At the same time, children in single-parent households are more likely to engage in disruptive behaviors (disobedience to teachers, aggressiveness toward other children) that lead to suspension or expulsion. 20% of students in grades 7-12 who have married biological parents have been suspended or expelled. In contrast, more than half of teens living with unmarried single parents have been suspended or fired. A study shows that children of married mothers are almost twice as likely to complete high school as children of unmarried mothers [5]. The absence of a father greatly affects the family's investment in education, and it is difficult for children from single-mother families to even complete high school education.

2.3 Poor living environment

The immediate impact of missing fathers also includes poor family living conditions. Since The median income for families led by a single mother in 2020 was about \$49,214, well below the \$101,517 median for married couples. This left them with a lot of constraints on their house choices. The first is that the house is in poor condition, and the child cannot have good accommodation when he grows up. Maybe they just shiver without adequate heating in the cold winter or have no air conditioning in the hot summer. The outdated decor carries a lot of noxious odors that affect the children's breath. Dim lights are difficult. Many times they have to choose areas with high crime rates. For example, in New York's Bronx districts, the proportion of single-parent families reaches 57.70093% (Townchart [2]). Such areas are full of gangs and a large number of violent incidents. The Bronx area of New York has 29 crimes per 1,000 residents [12]. Many teenagers join gangs, which means that these teenagers no longer pay attention to school and are involved in gang activities daily. At the same time, areas with

high crime rates often do not have access to good public education resources. For example, the proportion of high school graduates or higher in the Bronx, New York, is only 73%, far below the New York average of 86%. And its dropout rate of 27% is much higher than the rest of New York [2].

The living environment often affects a child's life. The Chinese tradition has the story of Meng's mother moving three times. It tells that the mother of the great Chinese philosopher Mencius moved three times to find a suitable area for him to have a better growth environment. However, it is often difficult for single-parent families with insufficient income to change the status quo and can only choose a poor living environment.

3 Mental health

In addition to the material impact, the father's absence also caused a lack of spiritual guidance. This chapter will demonstrate the influence of lack of a father on children from single-mother families from three results: violent tendency, lack of a role model and teenage pregnancy.

3.1 Violent tendencies

The absence of a father in the family often creates a tendency for children to be violent. From a report by the heritage foundation we know that: over the past 30 years, the increase in violent crime has paralleled the increase in father-abandoned families; high crime communities are characterized by a high concentration of father-abandoned families; A state-by-state analysis by Heritage Scholars shows that a 10 percent increase in the proportion of children in single-parent households typically leads to a 17 percent increase in juvenile delinquency; juvenile violent crime rates correspond to the number of families abandoned by their fathers. The lack of a father affects the unhealthy growth of children in many ways. The first is the lack of companionship before and after childbirth; and the lack of support from single mothers leads to increased emotional stress. Single mothers cannot meet their children's needs as much as possible. These two factors affect the mother's emotional attachment to the child, which in turn reduces the child's ability to be emotionally attached to and empathetic towards others. Empathy often helps curb violent behavior toward others. Second is the lack of a good father-son relationship, with Rolf Loeber saying a close bond between a boy and his father can prevent hostility and inappropriate aggression. Without the authority and discipline of the father, the father's leading role in crime prevention is acknowledged. Lack of a father causes children to become emotional and violent when no one can stop them, leading to violent crimes step by step. The third is that families without fathers are under greater economic pressure, resulting in mothers not having enough time to discipline and supervise their children. When children have violent thoughts, parents cannot stop or correct them in time. At the same time, young single mothers often use angry and violent means to discipline their children. And excessively harsh or violent means will worsen the child's tendency to violence. Almost all West Coast crips and blood gang

members grew up in a dangerous home environment. They fled to avoid violence, and their lack of trust drove them to employ extreme tactics to intimidate and exclude others.

3.2 Teenage pregnancy

Early pregnancy among adolescents occurs mainly in single-parent families, especially single-mother families. Early teenage pregnancy is also a major cause of the new generation of single-parent families, with 16.7 early pregnancies per 1,000 women in 2019. The premise of early teenage pregnancy is to have sex. Children raised in families without biological fathers showed earlier ages of first sexual intercourse and significantly increased teenage pregnancy rates compared to children raised by biological parents [10]. There are multiple explanations for this phenomenon: parents of teens who grew up in single-parent households in the first place are more likely to have sex with unmarried partners, and children are more likely to see illegitimate intercourse as the norm [15]. At the same time, research shows that girls with absent fathers are characterized by severe father dysfunction, need more emotional support, and are more needy and dependent on their boyfriends, making them more receptive to having sex with male partners. Also, single-parent home structures may promote adolescent sexuality due to reduced parental control [9]. Young men and women lack reasonable contraceptive awareness and measures, resulting in early pregnancy in adolescents at an age when they cannot bear the consequences. Early pregnancy has led to the emergence of a large number of unmarried women. According to statistics, in 2020, 40.5% of mothers in the United States gave birth before marriage, and 90.5% of mothers who gave birth at the age of 15-20 were unmarried. Premature pregnancy has many disadvantages. First, it is extremely harmful to the mother's body, such as facing a higher risk of eclampsia, postpartum endometritis, and systemic infection. Second, babies born in early pregnancy are more likely to have low birth weight (LBW), a higher chance of preterm birth, anemia, preeclampsia, and higher infant mortality. For mothers under the age of 20, it is difficult for them to take good care of their babies due to their immaturity in psychological development. Early-pregnancy mothers will encounter various mental stresses, insomnia, postpartum depression, and infant depression symptoms. Other postpartum depression issues include difficulty bonding with the baby, extreme fatigue, feelings of worthlessness, anxiety, panic attacks, and more. Among them, panic attacks can lead to thoughts of harming yourself or your baby, difficulty enjoying activities, etc. And these problems will affect the schooling of teen mothers [14]. Without financial aid, single mother students have little or no means to contribute financially to their educational expenses. One-third graduated with a college degree, while one-sixth had not completed high school [4]. Lower education levels and the distress caused by having a baby mean that young single mothers earn far less than normal married mothers. Even if they spend more time at work, they cannot avoid falling into poverty, with 33.6% of children living with their mothers living in poverty. In two-parent households, only 7.9 percent of children are considered poor. Serious teenage pregnancies caused by the absence of a father in the family have caused the next generation of families to repeat single-parent families.

3.3 Missing role model

The absence of a father deprives the child of the role of a role model, and the child also lacks a sense of responsibility for his future generation. A child's first education is at home, and a responsible father is a good role model in a complete family. Because children always imitate their father's behavior, the father greatly influences the child's character and values. For example, when a child sees his father getting ready to work, he imitates his father's tie and shoes. In the child's subconscious, it will be understood that an adult or a man should work hard to create good conditions for the family. Small difficulties at home are often handed over to the father, such as the need to replace light bulbs and car tires. As males in the family, fathers' influence on children is more inclined to build and maintain intimacy through activities, while women tend to build connections through conversation. At the same time, "the father is the most important model for how the child will be a father in the future." An effective father in the family can teach his child how to deal with future family relationships and how to maintain and protect the family. However, in a single-parent family without a father, adolescents lack role models and cannot receive correct behavioral guidance because there is no father. They tend to make more casual choices due to a lack of accountability education when faced with choices. For example, falling in love in adolescence will be more casual, regardless of the consequences of early pregnancy. The choice to escape and leave after the emergence of early pregnancy has resulted in the emergence of more single-mother families.

4 Conclusion

In this paper, the material and spiritual aspects of the absence of a father in the single mother's family brought about six aspects of the huge impact. The first is food insecurity caused by insufficient family income, which makes it difficult for children from single-parent families to develop and grow healthily. Then there is the lack of education, which results in lower grades for children from fatherless families and a much higher risk of dropping out of school. Poor living conditions affect children's everyday lives, and they are more likely to join gangs when they grow up in areas with high crime rates. In addition to the physical problems, the spiritual ones caused by the absence of a father may be more important. First of all, without the authority and discipline of the father, children's tendency to violence is not stopped, which makes them more inclined to use violence to solve problems. And the lack of role models for fathers as family responsibilities leads to a lack of role models for children to guide. Fatherless families also have more puppy love. Fatherless girls need more emotional support from men, but the lack of sex education for both boys and girls leads to a sharp increase in their chances of early pregnancy. The likelihood of a new generation of fathers deserting the family due to early pregnancy at an unaccountable age is very high, leading to a new generation of fatherless families. The research object of this paper is mainly minority Americans, and minority Americans always appear as the vulnerable groups in American society. It is hoped that more open data can be obtained in the future to study the requirements of different countries and cultures on the role of father, and to understand

the impact of the absence of father role on families of different countries and ethnic groups.

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