



The Influence of Father Presence and Father-Child Attachment on the Psychological Security of Young Children

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Abstract. The psychological security of children is a crucial issue when it comes to the mental health of young children. As an essential condition for young children to gradually grow up and blend into society, this sense of security always is fostered in children's families. Most of the previous studies and essays combined this security with the mother, while the father has become the popular theme relating to the psychological security of young children in recent years. As a result, this article is based on the father's perspective, trying hard to find how the father's presence and father-child attachment influence the psychological security of young children. This article comprises five parts: introduction, definition, the relationship between father presence, father-child attachment and psychological security of young children, another factor, and conclusion. According to many documents, this research concludes that father presence has an optimistic predict the psychological security of young children. In contrast, the father-child attachment partially mediates the father's presence and the psychological security of young children.

Keywords: father presence · father-child attachment · psychological security of young children

1 Introduction

As an internal psychological resource, psychological security is good at helping individuals process information, regulate stimulus-response, mobilize social support and improve their sense of happiness. As for the children who are too young to go to school, parents play significant roles in cultivating this security of young children. Many cases focus on mother and mother-child attachment, but this article will study the effects of father and father-child attachment.

In the past 100 years, scholars and specialists at home and abroad have conducted many discussions and researches on father presence, absence, involvement, and so on. Since World War II, the relationships between father and child have been favoured by experts in various fields. Early empiricism focused more on studying the father's absence than the father's presence. In 1990, Frank Mott put forward a meaningful question,

“When is a father gone?” [1]. After that, the topic of the father’s presence came to the fore. Based on prior studies, fathers play a vital part in their offspring’s mental health and interpersonal communication. Also, father-child attachment is one of the essential branches of attachment theory. No matter which topics about fathers have been studied, the essential impact is to identify that father plays a critical role in the process of children’s growth. Meanwhile, the final aim is to call for fathers to participate in the education and accompanying of children. This article aims at studying how father presence and father-child attachment affect the psychological security of young children.

2 Definition

2.1 Definition of Father Presence

During World War II, early empiricism studies paid more attention to the paternal absence than the father’s presence [2]. The Father’s absence showed the situation that lacked the father’s education due to separation, divorce, and death, while the reverse was faithful to the father’s presence. Since 1980, many studies about father involvement have been conducted, which means that father involvement has become a popular topic [3]. It was not until 21 century that father presence showed up and increasingly applied in the research on the connection between father and their offspring.

Based on the previous research on the father-child relationship, Krampe and Newton put forward the theory of father presence, depending on the correlation theory of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and theology, with children’s perspective. They define it as the presence of a psychological father, which means that children can feel their father’s psychological nearness and accessibility [4].

2.2 Definition of Father-Child Attachment

Extensive contact and interaction between children and parents form the parent-child attachment relationship. So, the father-child attachment is the lasting, intimate connection that young children develop with their father.

Relying on the attachment theory, young children are born with a trait that builds up an internal working mode to deal with the exterior environment by asking for approach and contact. The essential basis of parent-child attachment is a series of interactions between young children and the person who brought them up, such as kissing, hugs, and hugs. When the two establish the attachment relationship, the young children will regard the attachment figures as a safe base they can depend on. Whenever they feel threatened and fearful and need some comfort and protection, they tend to get close to the attachment figures. In most cases, they like following the attachment figures, showing soaring spirits, and simultaneously having a sense of psychological security. Instead of hereditary, attachment is a relationship constructed during the prolonged interaction between children and parents. It also has a tight relationship and vital influence on children’s social emotional growth development [5]. On most occasions, father and mother are the two figures who preschool children get close to. That’s why not only the father-child attachment but also the highly valued mother-child attachment is the

early social and interpersonal relationship of this kind of young children. Many people believe that they are consistent. For example, Fox, Kimmerly, and Schafer studied the old research and found that they were correlated [6]. However, more and more people support that it is false. Bowlby said mother-child attachment was the most necessary attachment that influenced children's social development. At the same time, Pan believed that father-child attachment played the most significant role in the depressive symptom of teenagers [7].

2.3 Definition of the Psychological Security of Young Children

Sigmund Freud, the founder of the psychoanalytic school, noticed early on that individual weakness, castration anxiety, and inferiority complex in boys had essential effects on a person's growth and the development of mental health and neurosis in adulthood. He believed that psychological security was built up in childhood, and some specific desires and needs in the process of individual growth that could be satisfied would significantly affect the development of psychological security. However, he did not define its essential concept specifically but only analyzed a lack of psychological security that would cause the situation of insecurity and the consequence of surety. Fromm, a humanistic psychologist, believed that individuals had insufficient abilities in childhood and needed to rely mostly on their parents [8]. There was a close relationship between themselves and their parents, and children would experience a strong and stable sense of psychological security when their parents take care of them, with a sense of belonging.

Moreover, numerous types of research have shown the importance of the parent-child relationship to children's sense of psychological security [9]. Domestic academics have recently shown vital interest in this subject. Most scholars, such as Xiao Xiaojuan, believed that psychological security was an individual's subjective feeling and experience and a judgment of their environment and state. To sum up, young children's psychological security is the foundation of children's mental health development and the satisfaction of their internal needs.

3 The Influence of Father Presence and Father-Child Attachment on the Psychological Security of Young Children

3.1 Relationship Between Father Presence and Father-Child Attachment

While father-child attachment is the ability of the child to experience psychological security from the presence of the father, father presence refers to the existence of a child's psychological father. Generally, a high level of father presence can strengthen the father-child bond, whereas a low level of father presence might harm the bond or even bring it to a standstill.

Over fifty years, there has been a lot of intensive research on this topic. Lamb investigated family relationships in 1987, arranging for a father to be the primary caregiver for infants and young children. It was established that even though fathers spared no effort to take care of their children for at least one month, it was proven that father presence and involvement had nothing to do with father-child attachment. However, some individuals' experiments produced the opposite results and outcomes. For instance, Waters

and Caldera used the AQS classification measurement to test young children's attachment patterns, and they concluded that the two are related and connected. The higher the degree of the former, the more secure the attachment patterns displayed by the young children [10]. Chinese researchers Li Zhihua, Yin Xiayun, Cai Taisheng, and Su Linyan also obtained consistent conclusions through the questionnaire method. There was a positive correlation between the two, which means that if the degree of father presence and involvement were higher, it would be easier to build up high-quality and more excellent father-child attachment [11].

3.2 The Influence of Father-Child Attachment on the Psychological Security of Young Children

Research and studies on the relationship and connection between parent-child attachment and the psychological security of young children have shown that parent-child attachment impacts this type of security, a crucial component of psychological security for young children. Although it is claimed that young children are exposed to less unfamiliar and dangerous situations than adults, frequently accompanied by parents and other family members, it is tough to rule out the panic and anxiety of young children. As the critical attachment target, the father is indispensable in this period. Thanks to the long-term positive contact, father-child attachment gradually increase. As a result, in this situation, the father will give the young children a sense of psychological security and let them calm down. Young children unconsciously turn to their father to seek protection and comfort when confronted by negative feelings like panic, fear, hopelessness, sadness, and anxiety to feeling psychologically secure. According to other studies, specialists also have found that father-child attachment considerably impacts children's sense of psychological security. Wood found that early secure attachment significantly reduced children's anxiety levels and boosted children's sense of psychological security. Children with insecure attachments were more likely to struggle with anxiety and depression. The result of the Parrigon study found that, in contrast to mother-child attachment which could only influence children's anxiety temporarily, the father-child attachment could not only relieve and lessen children's anxiety at that time but also reduce children's anxiety level one year later. This had a positive effect on children's anxiety and long-term psychological security.

However, in China, some children have a sense of psychological insecurity and are referred to as stay-at-home children who live in the home by themselves or with their grandparents. Data provided by the Ministry of Civil Affairs proved that more than 6.97 million children nationwide were left behind in 2018. To improve the quality of life for their children, parents living in impoverished and underdeveloped towns and villages have to leave their young children ruthlessly and move to big cities to earn money, which needs to be discussed and raise the critical issue of parent-child separation. Based on the research of Cao Zhongping and Yang Yuanhua, the younger the separation from the parents, the longer the separation time, the less time spent together within a year, and the greater the possibility of children's insecurity tendencies [12]. It can be seen from this that most left-behind children cannot receive a consistent and stable upbringing and care from their parents, lacking the parent-child attachment with their parents and thus generally lacking a sense of psychological security. Even if the number of left-behind

children is declining yearly, this problem should not be overlooked and ignored in the future.

3.3 The Mediating Role of Father-Child Attachment

The degree of father presence often affects the level of the bonding between father and children, known as the father-child attachment relationship. A healthy father-child attachment can positively predict the psychological security young children feel. Due to this, depending on average conditions, the influence of the father's presence on the young children's sense of psychological security is based on the father-child attachment. To explore whether father-child attachment has a mediating effect or not, Li Mengting tested its mediating effect through Bootstrap in the statistical program called AMOS24.0 and concluded that it did have some mediating effects. Both the direct and indirect benefits of father presence and father involvement on toddlers sense of psychological security were significant, and the father-child attachment served as a partial mediator between the father presence and the kid's feeling of psychological security. The Father presence will first affect the father-child attachment and then affect children's sense of psychological security through the intermediary, father-child attachment.

4 The Influence of Other Factors (Mother) on Young Children's Sense of Psychological Security Through Father Presence and Father-Child Attachment

The family is the cradle and provides the foundation for the generation and development of psychological security. The involvement and presence of both parents have an indispensable bearing on young children's psychological security. Most studies have tied the child's sense of psychological security to the mother. For example, the mother's emotions and the mother's parenting style all have a profound impact on the child's sense of psychological security. However, in addition to the young children themselves, mothers also have a specific crucial influence on young children's sense of psychological security through the father's presence and father-child attachment. Due to the traditional Chinese belief that males are outside the home, females are inside, which means the father makes a living. At the same time, the mother always looks after the kids at home, and fathers are permanently absent from their children's growth, resulting in young children tending to have a solid attachment to their mothers instead of fathers. However, more fathers are now willing to support their children's growth and lessen some of the duties placed on mothers due to the updating of educational principles in recent years. The mother also contributes in a similar way to this process. Parke et al. have argued that the role of the mother was uniquely significant in understanding the influence of fathers on children's adaptive capacity, so it is essential to consider the influence of mothers [13]. According to domestic researcher Xu Ying's research, different mothers' attitudes have separate impacts on father presence and father-child attachment, affecting kids' feelings of psychological security. If the mother has a supportive attitude, it will encourage the father to participate in the parenting of father presence and father involvement and improve the time and quality of the father to accompany the young children, leading to

a healthy and positive parent-child attachment relationship and enhancing the children's sense of psychological security. If the mother has a negative attitude, it will reduce the father's enthusiasm to participate and present; it is more likely to destroy the father-child attachment and lessen the psychological security that young children can get from their fathers.

5 Conclusion

The primary purpose of this article is to discuss and study the father's influence on young children's psychological security. Also, father presence and father-child attachment are specially considered in this paper. Due to the progress of the times and the renewal of the concept, many parents gradually spread their attention to their young children from the physical to the psychological. The young children's psychological security is one of the most vital and well-known subject valued by researchers and parents. Many studies are about the mother's influence, but this article decides to find out what role the father plays in this process. As an essential topic in the father study, more attention has been paid to the new item of father presence, which means children can feel the psychological presence of their fathers. Also, father-child attachment plays a significant part in recent research about father-child relationships. That's why this article starts from these two parts, discussing the relationships between these three, and trying to find out how the father affects young children's sense of psychological security.

Through constant searching for relevant literature and classifying, this article draws three conclusions based on the documents: (1) father presence has an optimistic prediction on father-child attachment, (2) father-child attachment has an impact on the psychological security of young children, (3) father-child attachment plays some partial mediating role between father presence and psychological security of young children.

There are some revelations for fathers based on the conclusions of this article. In reality, fathers attach importance to indirect participation, especially in providing financial support for young children. In contrast, the degree of father presence and actual participation in parenting young children are low. However, the father's presence in the parenting process is fundamental to establishing the attachment relationship, which is a core of the growth and development of the children's psychological security in the future. Therefore, it is time for fathers to learn how to balance work and family time, use the available time to present in children's upbringing, and establish an excellent father-child relationship which can help young children's sense of psychological security to build and shape.

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