



The influence of father involvement in adolescents' overall development in Taiwan



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ABSTRACT

Western Studies show that father involvement is predictive of adolescent development; however, there are few studies that demonstrate this relationship in Chinese cultures, including Taiwan. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of father involvement on adolescents' development in areas of academic achievement, self-esteem, internalizing, and externalizing behaviors in Taiwan. This study utilized dyadic data of 1043 10th graders from wave 5 of a longitudinal study on adolescent development in Taiwan. The study utilized student reports of father involvement, child academic achievement, externalizing behaviors, internalizing behaviors, and self-esteem. Structural equation modeling results indicate father involvement significantly predicts child academic achievement, externalizing behaviors, internalizing behaviors, and self-esteem. Gender analysis shows that male adolescents exhibited more externalizing behaviors, whereas female adolescents exhibited more internalizing behaviors. The findings of this study provide evidence that father involvement is important for the overall wellbeing of adolescents in Chinese cultures.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the topic of father involvement has been extensively studied in Western societies. These studies show that father involvement positively affects adolescents' overall development in areas such as academic achievement, social, behavioral, psychological, and cognitive outcomes (Michiels, Grietens, Onghena, & Kuppens, 2010; Newland, Chen, & Coyl-Shepherd, 2013; Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2008). Additional research has also found that fathers have greater influence than mothers in the areas of adolescent's happiness level, life satisfaction, and alcohol consumption (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002; 2003; Goncy & van Dulmen, 2010). On the other hand, the absence of fathers is correlated with children's delinquent activities, anxiety and depression, and behavioral problems (Carlson & Corcoran, 2001; Le Roux, 2009).

Although there has been considerable research conducted on the positive consequences of father involvement on adolescent's well-being in Western societies, there is little research on father involvement in Chinese societies, including Taiwan. The role of fathers in traditional Chinese families was that of a strict, authoritarian, and distant parent figure, with their primary responsibility focused on affairs outside of the home, with mothers being responsible for internal family affairs (Ho, 1987). However, the role of fathers in families in contemporary Taiwan has changed significantly. With extensive interaction

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with Western societies and government structure change, Taiwan has moved towards capitalism and rapid modernization (Han, Li, & Hwang, 2005).

With those transformations, Taiwan has experienced substantial social change, including changes in family structure, from intergenerational to primarily nuclear households, as well as changes in gender role ideology (Lin, 2009; Xu & Lai, 2004). With more power and opportunities given to women through increased education and gender-equality laws in marriage and divorce (Huang, 2005a,b), these policy changes have led to an increase of dual-income families and an increase in the divorce rate in recent years in Taiwan. Researchers have found that mothers are still more involved in children's education and development than fathers in dual-income Chinese families (Hsu, Zhang, Kwok, Li, & Ju, 2011). In addition to the social changes, the Taiwanese government has put much effort to shorten the parental gap by implementing parent involvement programs and curriculums at public schools (Ministry of Education, 2009), establishing family education centers across the nation (Ministry of Education, 2004), passing The Gender Equality in Employment Act (Council of Labor Affairs, 2008), and extending paternity leave to five days (Council of Labor Affairs, 2014). With these current movements in increasing father involvement in Taiwan, the goal of this study was to examine the impact of father involvement on adolescents' development in areas of academic achievement, self-esteem, internalizing behaviors, and externalizing behaviors.

1.1. Fatherhood in traditional Chinese culture

Cultural beliefs have heavily influenced the role of fathers in families throughout the world, and this is especially true in traditional Chinese culture. Based on Confucian teachings, families assigned the responsibilities and duties with a distinct gender order and arrangement to each family member, even before birth. The idiom, “男主外、女主内” (“men take care of external affairs; women take care of internal affairs”), illustrates the role of fathers as breadwinners and the role of mothers as caregivers (Walton & Takeuchi, 2010; Yao, 2000). Within the home, the responsibility of fathers was to discipline the children and govern the family, whereas the responsibility of mothers was to nurture and take care of household chores. Mothers assisted in fathers' discipline by mentoring the children's behaviors until they reached the age of reason. Fathers were officially responsible for children's education when the child developed age-appropriate cognitive abilities (Li & Lamb, 2013; Shwalb, Nakazawa, Yamamoto, & Hyun, 2004).

Strict parental discipline was the primary responsibility of fathers in the Confucian classics (Li & Lamb, 2013). Traditional Chinese culture did not encourage intimate connection between father and child in order to maintain the father's authority and discipline. The popular Confucian belief, *a strict father raises a filial son*, encouraged fathers to be strict with the child in order to cultivate the child's development and proper manners. However, this type of parental strictness was generally motivated by kindness and caring, viewed as compatible with strictness in traditional Chinese societies (Chan, 2013; Hwang, 2001). Confucius's student, Yan Zhitui, taught that “*The father should be strict with the son and not improperly close; the love for one's own blood should not be spared*” in order to raise a filial and respectful son. Based on these Confucian teachings, Chinese fathers carried a significant responsibility of the children's behaviors and manners. Child misbehavior was usually viewed as a failure of the father (Hwang, 2001; Li & Lamb, 2013).

1.2. Fatherhood in modern Chinese culture

Social change in Chinese culture has led to gender roles in parenting becoming less distinct, with the father's role in children's day-to-day lives being redefined (Ho, Ko, Tran, Phillips, & Chen, 2013; Tu & Chang, 2000); the father's responsibilities have shifted from an authoritarian to more of an authoritative parenting style (Jian, 2007) in modern Chinese societies. Despite these changes, mothers from Chinese societies are still more involved in children's education and development than fathers, even if they have their own career outside of the home (Hsu et al., 2011).

In addition to these economic and societal changes, the Taiwanese government has actively promoted egalitarian gender roles with the goal of increasing father involvement in the child's life (Ho et al., 2013). For example, the Taiwanese government has implemented mandated parental involvement programs in elementary and junior high schools (Ministry of Education, 2009), included gender equity education in school curriculum, and established family education centers across the country (Ministry of Education, 2004). Another policy change is The Gender Equality in Employment Act, which calls for parental leave for both mothers and fathers in corporations (Council of Labor Affairs, 2008). In 2014, the Taiwanese government further passed an amendment to The Gender Equality in Employment Act to extend paternity leave from three days to five days (Council of Labor Affairs, 2014).

In addition, the modern role of the father has been depicted as a more equal role with the mother in family responsibilities through school curriculum and the media. For example, one lesson from a third-grade Social Studies textbook, *My Family Life: Sharing Responsibilities*, includes a discussion of the importance of family members working together in household chores. The lesson contains images depicting the father, mother, grandparent, and children preparing dinner together (Kang Hsuan Educational Publishing Corporation, 2009). A Taiwanese children's picture book, *Red Rooster*, also illustrates a single father who is happy in his fathering role and capable of caring for a child through a story of a rooster taking care of an unhatched egg that he found (Wang, 1993). Moreover, several commercials have depicted fathers performing household responsibilities that were traditionally assigned to women, particularly cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children (Ho et al., 2013).

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