

# Adolescent Girls' Perspectives on Their Relationships with their Nonresident Fathers

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### ABSTRACT

Eleven adolescent girls participated in this multiple case study exploring fathers' influence on their academic performance, self-efficacy, and personal resilience.

### PROBLEM

Divorce and unwed parenting cause over 83% of children in the United States to live away from one biological parent (Amato, Meyers, and Emory, 2009).

The increase in the number of girls living away from their biological fathers (Amato et al., 2009), has implications for the quality of the father daughter relationship.

Few studies explored the nonresident biological fathers' influence on their daughters' psychosocial development and self-efficacy from the girls' perspective.

### PURPOSE

- To examine the father-daughter relationship from the daughter's perspective
- To assess how fathers' nonresidential status may affect their daughters' psychosocial development and self-efficacy at school.

### RELEVANT LITERATURE

Guiding Theories

- **Attachment theory** : type of emotional connection children feel towards caregivers (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2009).
- **Self-efficacy theory** : self-confidence to tackle challenges (Bandura, 2000).
- **Psychosocial development theory**: psychosocial crises one must face throughout life-span (Erikson, 1953/1963)

**Key Research Studies**

•**When nonresident fathers involved** in their children's lives there was decrease in antisocial and delinquent behaviors in their children (Coley & Medeiros, 2007).

•**Girls who had positive relationships with their fathers** were academically successful, and exhibited high global and academic self-esteem (Cooper, 2009).

•**Mothers are gatekeepers** between girls and their nonresident fathers (Lin & McLanahan, 2007).

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**RQ:** How has growing up without a father in their home influenced the self-efficacy and psychosocial development of adolescent girls?

**Subquestions:**

- How do girls perceive their experiences of growing up without their fathers at home?
- How do girls with nonresident fathers perform academically?
- How do girls with nonresident fathers interact with and relate to peers and adults in the school setting?

### PROCEDURES

- **Each girl was interviewed** in a private room
- **To triangulate the data**, teachers completed an evaluation sheet recording their observations of each girl.
- **Participants' confidentiality was protected** as all data was stored in a locked box accessible only to researcher.

### DATA ANALYSIS

- **Common themes were coded using the Affinity Exercise** (Winchip, 2001), after each statement was put on a spread sheet
- **The data are presented in descriptive form** with both common and unusual findings presented (Sklare, 2006).

### FINDINGS

#### Teachers' Observations All Girls

- Lack academic confidence in Math and Science (specifically)
- Need support for their confidence (generally)

#### Girls with Uninvolved Fathers

- feel angry, abandoned
- yearn for fathers' attention & care
- Emotionally insecure
- Low self esteem
- Poor social relationships
- Express stress and worry

#### Girls with Involved Fathers

- Feel close to their fathers
- More emotionally secure
- Good social relationships
- Express academic confidence even when teachers doubted their abilities
- Yearn for more time with father.

### LIMITATIONS

- Fifteen girls identified reduced to 11 because of the stringent criteria for the case study selection.
- No opportunities for mothers or nonresident fathers to comment on or clarify their daughters' perceptions of their experiences
- Member checking was confined to the interviews and did not include the analysis of data.

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Girls With Nonresident Fathers

**NEED** consistent emotional support for resiliency

**AT RISK** for Low academic & personal self-confidence

**A T RISK** for poor social relations and school dropout

**NEED** interventions from community, school and co-parenting

### SOCIAL CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

**The Findings:**

• **Direct** school counselors, administrators, teachers, and social workers to create programs to foster girls' self-confidence, support girls' resiliency and prevent school dropout.

• **Guide** parents to be mindful of the girls' deep emotions, and encourage coparenting to nurture girls' personal self-confidence, while supporting, and encouraging academic success.