

How Fatherhood Affects Men

by National Fatherhood Initiative | October 15, 2015 8:00 am

Editor's note: The following is an excerpt from Father Facts 7, a new reference manual from the National Fatherhood Initiative that is available here[1].

What We Know

Although father involvement causes some strain for men (particularly for new fathers) in terms of finances, employment, and changes in sleep and housing, it also increases men's sense of responsibility, their mental/emotional health, and their confidence.

The Data and Research

Fatherhood increased the responsibility for new fathers to find stable, secure employment. Fatherhood within marriage was also associated with a strengthening of family ties, an increased participation in civic organizations and more involvement in organized religion. Fathers who were involved were found to be healthier than other men and had better longevity because of the reduction in risky behaviors (only for married or residential fathers).

Source: Astone, N., & Peters, E. (2014). Longitudinal influences on men's lives: Research from the transition to fatherhood project and beyond. *Fathering*, 12, 161-173.

Low-income fathers are at higher risk for depression. The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study showed major depressive episodes for married fathers at 13.3 percent, cohabitating fathers at 14.7 percent, and nonresident fathers at 18 percent. Moreover:

- Father involvement decreased depressive symptoms in resident and non-resident fathers during the preschool years (age 3-5 of the child).
- Non-resident fathers with high levels of father involvement actually reported higher levels of depression for children aged 1-3.
- A father's self-esteem was also positively impacted as their frequency of involvement during middle childhood increased.

Source: Kotila, L., & Dush, C. (2013). Involvement with children and low-income fathers' psychological well-being. *Fathering*, 11, 306-326.

Over 200 Canadian fathers reported in a study that multiple changes occur after becoming a father: new priorities, a change in masculinity, reorientation of time, increased responsibility, a shift in values, altered sense of purpose, increased problem solving abilities, and emotional regulation. These fathers also reported becoming more mature, confident, secure and empathic. Furthermore:

- Fathers involved with their children were more likely to show care for others and be more active in their communities.
- Children also had an influence on the father's perception of masculinity. Fatherhood resulted in a greater range of expression, increased authenticity and confidence.
- These new fathers also reported increased work-related stress, financial difficulties, change in social

activities and pressure on the parental relationship after the child's birth.

- A decrease in their sleep, increased importance of proper housing and saving habits for the future as well as a need for more stable employment was also noted among the sample.

Source: Kotila, L., & Dush, C. (2013). Involvement with children and low-income fathers' psychological well-being. *Fathering*, 11, 306-326.

Researchers discovered that the men's testosterone levels dropped by about one third in the first few weeks after their children were born. This change in testosterone level may make men less aggressive and more nurturing.

Source: Anthes, E. (2010, May/June). Family guy. *Scientific American Mind*.

A sample of 2,494 new fathers was drawn from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study and revealed that paternal commitments positively affected men in terms of health and religious participation. However, increasing interaction with their new child negatively affected fathers in terms of changes in paid labor hours.

Source: Knoester, C., Petts, R. J., & Eggebeen, D. J. (2007). Commitments to fathering and well-being and social participation of new, disadvantaged fathers. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70, 1094-1107.

Using data from the first two waves of the National Survey of Families and Households, the researchers found that new children lead to changes in men's well-being and social participation. The findings indicate that the transition to parenthood and the addition of subsequent children have an impact on men's lives, particularly when they become co-resident fathers. Fatherhood encourages men to increase intergenerational and extended family interactions, participation in service-oriented activities, and hours in paid labor.

Source: Knoester, C., & Eggebeen, D.J. (2006). The effects of the transition to parenthood and subsequent children on men's well-being and social participation. *Journal of Family Issues*, 27, 1532-1560.

A national study of 5,089 two-parent families found that 14% of mothers and 10% of fathers exhibited postpartum depression. In both mothers and fathers, depressive symptoms were negatively associated with positive engagement activities with children such as reading and singing.

Source: Paulson, J. F., Dauber, S., & Leiferman, J. A. (2006). Individual and combined effects of postpartum depression in mothers and fathers on parenting behavior. *Pediatrics*, 118, 659-668.

A sample of 18- to 65-year-old adults was taken from the German Health Interview and Examination Survey and its Mental Health Supplement (N= 2,801). Overall, mental disorders were significantly less frequent in parents compared to non-parents (29.7% vs. 34.2%). Depressive and substance use disorders were also less frequent among parents. Moreover:

- 34.3% of parents with one child reported a mental disorder, compared to 28.5% of parents with more than two children, and 25.4% of parents with two children.
- 27.1% of parents with children under six years old reported mental disorders compared to 29.7% of parents with older children.
- 51.6% of parents without partners reported mental disorders compared to 27.9% of parents with partners.

Results also affirmed positive associations between parental status and mental health for men, but not for women.

Source: Helbig, S., Lampert, T., Klose, M., & Jacobi, F. (2006). Is parenthood associated with mental health? Findings from an epidemiological community survey. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 41, 889-896.

Endnotes:

1. here: <http://store.fatherhood.org/just-released-father-facts-7-downloadable/>

Source URL: <http://family-studies.org/how-fatherhood-affects-men-%E2%80%A8/>

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