

Fatherhood factors influence how dads spend time with children

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A father's resources, relationships, and parenting beliefs affect how he spends time with his children and financially provides for his family, finds a study led by NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.

The findings are published online in the *Journal of Family Issues*.

"We found a range of different characteristics influenced father involvement in unique ways, from caregiving to financial investment. For example, what predicted how often [fathers](#) read to their [children](#) was not only their level of education, but also their beliefs about gender roles in the family," said Tamarie Macon, assistant professor of applied psychology at NYU Steinhardt and the study's lead author.

"The bottom line: Both structural circumstances and fathers' personal beliefs matter."

Researchers tend to focus on two primary ways that parents invest in their children: time and money. What determines how - and how much - a father invests in his children? The current study examined whether and how a father's income and education levels, relationships at home, and views on parenting related to a father's involvement, as measured by time spent with children in a variety of activities as well as financial investment.

Participants for the study were drawn from the Early Head Start Father Involvement with Toddlers Study. A total of 478 ethnically and racially diverse low-income fathers were included.

Researchers visited fathers in their homes when their children were 2 years old and gathered information on fathers' demographic and personal characteristics, including age, race/ethnicity, and resources as measured by income and education levels.

The researchers also asked a series of questions about activities fathers do with their children, the father-mother relationship, and personal parenting beliefs.

Fathers reported how often they spent time with their children in 33 different activities, including play, caregiving activities like preparing

meals, cognitive activities like reading stories to a child, and social activities like visiting friends and family.

With regard to their relationships, fathers were asked if they live at home, what their relationship is like with the child's mother, and whether the couple is often in conflict. Prior research shows that the quality of the father-mother relationship is associated with a father's involvement with his kids, and conflict between parents can result in decreased involvement.

Finally, fathers were asked about their feelings on whether men should be their family's financial provider, the importance of investing in children to positively influence their development, and beliefs about traditional gender norms.

The researchers' analysis found that a father's resources - education and money - were linked to different forms of involvement in different ways. More educated fathers spent more time with their children in caregiving and cognitive activities, but less time in [social activities](#). Fathers with higher incomes were more involved in taking their children to religious services but less involved in infrequent activities like going to the zoo or a museum.

While previous research has found a negative association between income and engagement, this study suggests that rather than overall father involvement decreasing with greater income, income may relate positively to some aspects of involvement and negatively to others.

"For instance, higher-income fathers may have more availability on the weekends versus the workweek and focus their involvement on weekend activities, such as attending religious services," Macon said. "Separating education and income as two aspects of father resources, which are often combined into a single measure of socioeconomic status, revealed

differential associations with father investment of time and finances."

Not surprisingly, the researchers found that fathers who live with their children spent more time with them across several activities, and disagreements between fathers and mothers were negatively associated with fathers financially providing for their families.

Fathers' beliefs about parenting also influenced parenting behaviors. Fathers who believed their role as financial provider to be highly important reported more financial provision, whereas fathers who reported investment in their children's development to be highly important were more involved in caregiving. Finally, fathers who endorsed traditional gender norms participated in less caregiving and [cognitive activities](#).

"Fathers' views of their role related to specific aspects of their involvement beyond resources, relationships, and demographic characteristics," said Macon. "Our results reaffirm the importance of designing parenting interventions that consider fathers' beliefs and values, not solely their parenting knowledge and skills."

Provided by New York University

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