

Running Head: PARENTAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

Parental Attitudes and Behaviors of Participants in the Nurturing Fathers Program

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Abstract

The presence of a nurturing father is crucial in fostering healthy child and adolescent development and overall well-being. This study examines the impact of the Nurturing Father's Program on parenting attitudes and behavior of its participants as measured by the Adult and Adolescent Parenting Inventory – 2. Results indicate that participants have significantly positive increases in overall parenting attitudes and behaviors along with significant increases in the five AAPI-2 subscales (expectations, empathy, corporal punishment, role-reversal, and power/independence). Education level is positively related to these gains, while age is negatively correlated. Additionally, married fathers show significantly greater gains in the program than fathers who are single or separated/divorced. The authors discuss the results and offer suggestions for future research.

Parental Attitudes and Behaviors of Participants in the Nurturing Father's Program

The presence of a nurturing father is crucial in fostering healthy child and adolescent development and overall well-being. Bowlby (1969) states that infants construct necessary attachment relationships with many key people in their lives, especially parents. Other researchers highlight the value of father involvement (Black, Dubowitz, & Starr, 1999; Lewis, 1997; Palkovitz, 2002). Research on father involvement continues to gain an increasing amount of attention (Day & Lamb, 2004; Schwartz & Finley, 2005), still, current research reveals that overall, fathers have less involvement with their children than mothers, and this involvement further decreases following divorce (Henley & Pasley, 2005; Pleck, 1997). The Nurturing Father's Program (Perlman, 1998) "was created to cultivate and support attitudes and skills for male nurturance, hoping to benefit men, women, and children in family relationships" (p. xi). This study investigates the impact that the Nurturing Father's Program had on the parental attitudes of its participants.

Many studies demonstrate that the mere presence of fathers does little to influence positive outcomes. Instead it is the quality of the father-child relationship that results in better functioning individuals (Dubowitz, Black, Cox, Kerr, Litrownik, Radhakrishna, English, Scheider & Runyan, 2001). Some of these positive effects include increased self control, self-esteem, and social competence (Amato, 1984); increased cognitive competence, empathy and internal locus of control (Pleck, 1997); decreased psychological effects from bullying (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002); and overall psychological well-being and health (Rohner, 1998).

The negative impact that low or little father involvement has on the development and overall adjustment of children has also been well documented. Poor child rearing and in particular, "poor supervision, harsh discipline, parental disharmony, rejection of the child and

low involvement” relates to antisocial behavior problems in children (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002) and other externalizing child behaviors such as conduct problems or delinquent behavior (DeKlyen, Speltz & Greenberg, 1998; Webster-Stratton, 1996). In fact, Biller & Kimpton (1997) argues that among delinquents, the abusive father is less common than the father who has been “chronically neglectful” (p.155), gives little direction, and shows no interest in nor shares in activities with children.

Lamb (1987) provides three components of paternal involvement that he believes to be crucial in the overall well-being of children: (1) *engagement* (which includes direct contact, care giving and shared interactions with the child); (2) *accessibility* (which involves a father’s presence and availability to the child); and (3) *responsibility* (which includes caring for the child, i.e., making decisions and arranging care) (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000; Dubowitz et al., 2001).

Palkovitz (1997) expands Lamb’s (1987) model arguing that paternal involvement is a multidimensional construct and proposes 15 major categories: *communication* (talking, listening, expression of affection), *teaching* (role modeling, disciplining, fostering interests and hobbies etc), *monitoring* (knowing their friends, helping with assignments etc), *thought processes* (worrying, planning, praying), *errands* (taking their children to various places/activities, picking up needed items), *caregiving* (feeding, caring, bathing), *child-related maintenance* (laundry, cooking, repairs), *shared interests* (e.g. reading together), *availability* (spending time interacting, attending their activities), *planning* (vacation, birthdays and other important events, planning for future), *shared activities* (playing together), *providing* (food, clothing, housing), affection (hugging, cuddling), *protection* (monitoring activities, ensuring a safe environment), and *supporting emotionality* (being supportive and encouraging the child) (Shoppe-Sullivan,

McBride, & Ho, 2004). Despite these important strides in the area of fathering and parental involvement, however, there remains a paucity of empirical research on programs and interventions that teach fathering skills. Our study examines the impact of the Nurturing Father's Program on parenting attitudes and behavior of its participants as measured by the Adult and Adolescent Parenting Inventory–2.

Nurturing Father's Program

The Nurturing Father's Program that has been used across the United States is a group-based 13-week program that aims to improve parental attitudes of fathers, develop parenting skills, and encourage fathers to be nurturing to themselves first and then to their children. Fathers meet for 2 ½ hours weekly in groups of eight to sixteen.

The program defines a nurturing father as “a man who actively provides guidance, love and support to enhance the development and growth of children for whom he cares” (Perlman, 1998, p. ix). Participants engage in planned discussions and activities that include (1) the roots of fathering, (2) Nurturing Ourselves/Our Children, (3) Fathering Sons/Fathering Daughters, (4) Discipline without violence, (5) Playing with children, (6) Managing anger/resolving conflict, (7) Teamwork with spouse/partner, (8) Balancing work and fathering, (9) Communication and problem solving, (10) Cultural Influences, (11) Dealing with feelings and (12) The father I choose to be.

The researchers' question “What is the impact of the Nurturing Father's Program?” generated three hypotheses: (1) There is no statistically significant change in parental attitudes and behaviors following participation in the Nurturing Father's Program; (2) No relationship exists among educational level, age, and changes in parental attitudes and behaviors following participation in the Nurturing Father's Program; and (3) No differences exists in the changes in

parental attitudes and behaviors between single, married, and separated/divorced participants following participation in the Nurturing Father's Program. The researchers used the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory-2 (APPI-2) (Bavolek & Keene, 2001) that measures five areas of child-rearing attitudes and behaviors to evaluate participants before and after their participation in the Nurturing Father's Program.

Methods

Participants

A total of 1,061 participants from five Nurturing Father's Program implementation sites from across the United States contributed data to the analyses conducted in this study. The majority of the participants were from the *Nurturing Dad's Initiative* and the *Fathers Resource and Networking Center*, funded through the Florida Department of Health and implemented through the Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida. There were 476 (44.9%) participants from the *Nurturing Dad's Initiative* in Sarasota, FL and 468 (44.1%) from the *Fathers Resource and Networking Center* in Hillsborough County, Florida.; 36 (3.4%) participants from the *Brownstone Work Release Nurturing Fatherhood Program* in Spokane, Washington; 34 (3.2%) from the *SUMA Fatherhood Project* in Cincinnati, Ohio; 22 (2.1%) from the *Dad's Tool Time* project in Charlotte County, Florida; 16 (1.5%) from the *Newport News Healthy Family Initiative* in Newport News, Virginia; and 9 (.6%) from the Family Nurturing Center of Central New York. All programs used the 13-week Nurturing Father's Program (Perlman, 1998) that included pre- and post-administration of the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory-2 (Bavolek, & Keene, 2001)—Form A (pre-test) on the first day of the program and Form B (post-test) on the final day. The two alternate forms reduce the practice effect that results from the short administration time period.

Instrument

The Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory-2 (AAPI-2) (Bavolek & Keene, 2001) is a 40-item inventory designed to assess the parenting and child rearing attitudes of adult and adolescent parent and pre-parent populations. Presented in a five-point Likert Scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, each inventory takes approximately 20 minutes to administer. Responses to the AAPI-2 provide an index of risk in five specific parenting and child rearing behaviors known to contribute to child abuse and neglect include

1. Inappropriate Expectations of Children: High scores indicate a realistic understanding of the developmental capabilities and limitations of children. Low scores indicate a general lack of understanding of children's developmental capabilities;
2. Inability to be Empathetically Aware of Children's Needs: High scores indicate a sensitivity and high regard to the needs of children. Low scores indicate low empathetic awareness of children's needs and a difficulty in helping children find ways to meet their needs;
3. Belief in the Value of Corporal Punishment: High scores indicate the use of alternative strategies to corporal punishment. Low scores suggest a belief that hitting is the only way children learn to obey rules and stay out of trouble;
4. Parent-Child Role Reversal: High scores often indicate an understanding and acceptance of the needs of self and children. Low scores suggest the participant perceives children as objects for adult gratification;
5. Oppressing Children's Power and Independence: High scores generally mean parents place a strong value on children feeling empowered. Low scores generally mean parents place a strong emphasis on obedience (Bavolek & Keene, 2001, p. 25).

The AAPI-2 (Bavolek & Keene, 2001) has strong validity and reliability scores. Reliability coefficients for the five parenting constructs using the Spearman-Brown formula range from .83 to .93 on Form A, .80 to .93 on Form B, and .87 to .96 on Forms A and B combined. The Cronbach alphas range from .80 to .92 on both Forms A and B and .86 to .96 on Forms A and B combined. Content, construct and criterion-related validity demonstrate that the AAPI-2 discriminates between abusive and non-abusive parents in samples of adults and in sample of adolescents and are effective in assessing parenting attitudes.

Analyses

The researchers use Six Paired Samples T-Tests to examine the first null hypothesis: There was no statistically significant change in parental attitudes and behaviors following participation in the Nurturing Father's Program. Five "pairs" consist of the pre- and post-test scores for each of the five AAPI-2 subscales: expectations, empathy, corporal punishment, role-reversal and power/independence. The sixth "pair" is the overall pre- and post-test scores on the AAPI-2. The researchers use data contributed by all 1,061 participants in these paired sample analyses.

The researchers use the Multiple Regression Analysis to investigate the second null hypothesis: No relationships exist among educational level, age, and changes in parental attitudes and behaviors following participation in the Nurturing Father's Program. The data is from 937 participants who provided data about their educational history.

The researchers use an Analysis of Variance to examine the third null hypothesis: There were no differences in changes in parental attitudes and behaviors among single, married, and separated/divorced participants. The data used in the analysis—344 single, 375 married and 204 separated/divorced participants for a total 923—is from the *Nurturing Fathers Program* in

Florida's Hillsborough and Sarasota Counties, the only programs to contribute data that include marital status information.

Results

The authors discuss the results of the overall impact from participation in the Nurturing Father's Program and the impact by educational level, age and marital status.

Parental Attitudes and Behaviors Following Participation in the Nurturing Father's Program

The researchers use Six Paired Samples T-Tests to investigate any significant changes in the parental attitudes and behaviors for participants in the Nurturing Father's Program. All 1,061 participants contribute data to these analyses. The diversity in the participant pool is mostly within three groups with 637 (60%) white participants, 224 (21.1%) African-American, and 174 (16.5%) Hispanic participants, but does also include 10 (.9%) Asian/Pacific Islander, 7 (.7%) Native American and 3 (.3%) bi-racial participants. The results show somewhat equal representation between single participants (n=344, 32.4%) and married participants (n=375, 35.3%); additionally, there are 204 (19.2%) separated/divorced, 6 widowed (.6%), and 15 do not provide information (1.4%). The majority of participants (n=436, 41.1%) report earning a high school diploma or equivalent (GED) and 218 (20.5%) report not achieving a high school diploma or equivalent. Of those participants who report achieving higher education levels, 138 (13%) report four-year college degree or higher, 65 (6.1%) report some college and 49 (4.6%) report associate college degrees or vocational training certificates; 155 (14.6%) participants do not provide educational information.

Results of the analyses conducted indicate that there are significant increases in all five of the AAPI-2 subscales (expectations, empathy, corporal punishment, role-reversal, power and independence) and in the overall AAPI-2 score (see Table 1). This suggests that participants

improved their understanding of children's developmental capabilities, empathy towards children's needs, their use of alternative strategies to corporal punishment, their understanding and acceptance of their own needs and those of children and the value they place on children's need to feel empowered.

Educational Level, Age, and Changes in Parental Attitudes and Behaviors

The researchers use a multiple regression analysis to investigate if any relationships exist among educational level, age, and changes in parental attitudes and behaviors following participation in the Nurturing Father's Program. The two independent variables are the participants' age and the participants' educational level. The dependent variable is the mean difference between the overall pre-test and post-test scores on the AAPI-2 (DiffTotal). Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the variables of interest. Out of the 1,061 participants in this study, educational level is not available for 155. The data from those 155 was not used and therefore, results in 937 participants contributing data to this analysis. The three primary racial groups that comprise the participants in this analysis are Caucasian (n=545, 60.2%), African-American (n=176, 19.4%), and Hispanic (n=166, 18.3%); other groups include Asian/Pacific Islander (n=8, .9%), Native American (n=6, .7%), Biracial (n=1, .1%) and Other (n=4, .4%). There are almost equal numbers of married individuals (n=358, 39.5%) and single individuals (n=339, 37.45%), and 195 (21.5%) separated/divorced, 6 (.7%) widowed; no data exists for 8 (.9%). Most participants (n=436, 48.1%) report earning a high school diploma or equivalent and 218 (24.1%) report no high school diploma. There are 138 (15.2%) participants that indicate a four-year college degree, 49 (5.4%) report an associates degree or a vocational training certificate, and 65 (7.2%) report some college.

When the results revealed that five apparent outliers identified with studentized residuals of 3.93, 3.55, 3.03, -3.20, and -4.24, the researchers conducted a sensitivity analysis in which the six outliers were temporarily dropped. Results of this analysis indicate that the six outliers did not have undue influence on the model R^2 . Additionally, a visual inspection of a plot of the model residuals versus the predicted outcomes suggests no violations of the regression analysis correct fit assumption, constant variance, or normality.

The model R^2 of .010, reflecting the overall strength of relationship between the difference in the overall pre and post-test scores on the AAPI-2 and participants' age and educational level, is statistically significant at the .05 level ($F=4.77$, $F[.05;2,903]=.097$, $p<.05$). The adjusted R^2 , compensating for the positive bias in R^2 , is .008, reflecting a relatively small overall strength of relationship. Table 3 presents the effects of the education and age on changes in parental attitudes and behaviors (DiffTotal). Although the individual effects of educational level and age are significant, the results indicate that only .6% of the variance is explained by educational level and only 1.0% of the variance is explained by age. Although educational level is positively correlated with increased gains in parental attitudes and behavior, and age is negatively correlated with increased gains, the variance explains suggests that these population effects are not of practical importance.

Differences Among Single, Married, and Separated/Divorced Participants

The researchers conducted an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to investigate the null hypothesis that there were no differences in changes in parental attitudes and behaviors among single, married, and separated/divorced participants. There are a total of 944 participants from the Nurturing Father's Programs from Hillsborough and Sarasota Counties (476 from Sarasota and 468 from Hillsborough). The researchers did not include the eleven participants who did not

provide marital status information in the analysis, leaving 923 participants that did contribute data. Of the 923 participants, 344 are single (37.3%), 375 are married (40.6%), and 204 are separated/divorced (22.1%). There are 558 (60.5%) Caucasian participants, 180 (19.5%) African-American, and 164 (17.8%) Hispanic participants. Smaller groups within the data include 9 (1.0%) Asian/Pacific Islander, 6 (.7%) Native American, 2 (.2%) Biracial and 4 (.4%) that indicate Other. High school graduates or equivalent comprise a large share of the participants with 377 (40.8%) individuals and there are 214 (23.2%) that indicate no high school diploma, 136 (14.7%) with four-year college degrees or higher, 49 (5.3%) with associates degrees or vocational training certificates, 64 (6.9%) with some college, and 31 (3.4%) who do not indicate their educational level.

Results of the Analysis of Variance indicate that a significant difference exists between the groups and the overall mean ($F(2,922)=3.28, p>.05$). A Tukey HSD post-hoc analysis that examines which groups differed indicates that there is a significant mean difference ($p<.05$) between the married ($m=7.14$) and separated/divorced ($m=5.54$), however, the differences between single and married along with single and separated/divorced are not significant. This suggests that married individuals demonstrate greater amounts of positive change in their parental attitudes and behaviors than do separated/divorced participants. See Table 4.

Discussion

Quality fathering programs do have a strong potential to increase the parental attitudes and behaviors of its participants. The Nurturing Father's Programs that the authors evaluate in this study prove successful in increasing the parental attitudes and behaviors of participants in all five constructs and in the overall score of the AAPI-2. The Nurturing Father's Program targets

key parental behaviors and beliefs and its structure and content helps to evoke positive changes and serves as an effective model for other programs.

The results of this study also show a positive improvement in parental attitudes and behaviors that are known to contribute to child abuse and neglect and improve parental attitudes and behaviors that contribute to higher self-esteem and psychological well-being in children (Bavolek & Keene, 2001). Findings indicate that father involvement can also be a proactive solution to many of the issues that affect children and clearly demonstrate that the positive relationship that a father fosters with his children greatly enhances the overall well-being of those children. These results engender other questions about the father's role as nurturer for future study: When is it most effective for a father to participate in a program like the Nurturing Father's Program? What is the overall effectiveness of such programs in fostering long-term healthy relationships between fathers and their children?

The results indicate that the participants in this study also improve their understanding of children's developmental needs; show an increase in empathy, understanding and acceptance of children's needs; and place more value on empowering children. These factors improve the quality of the relationship between a father and his children that Lamb identifies (1987). These factors solidify that it is not the mere presence of a father, but the quality of interaction that makes the difference.

The educational level of the participants in this study correlates positively with gains in parental attitudes and behavior constructs; the more educated fathers show greater gains. Future research could explore the possibility that because these fathers have more experience working through a program, they can be more successful in adopting new skills this program offers than the less-educated fathers. The participants' age, however, shows a negative

correlation to the gains made and married fathers demonstrate greater gains than fathers who are separated or divorced. These findings suggest targeting newly married men or fathers with a newborn child. A six-to-twelve month evaluation with a control group of divorced or separated fathers is another possibility for future research. Counselors could use the information to expand research and assist clients to increase their parenting skills to avoid detrimental issues that arise in custody proceedings.

The authors believe that continued use of the Nurturing Father's Program and continued evaluations of this program will no doubt further interventions and outcomes with fathers, children, and families.

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Table 1: Parental Attitudes and Behaviors Following Participation in the Nurturing Father's Program

VARIABLES	N	Mean Difference	SD	T-Score	Sig.
Expectations	1061	-1.37	2.18	-20.46	.000
Empathy	1061	-1.35	2.21	-19.95	.000
Corporal Punishment	1061	-1.28	1.84	-22.69	.000
Role Reversal	1061	-1.34	2.07	-21.14	.000
Power & Independence	1061	-.87	2.21	-12.89	.000
Overall Score	1061	-6.22	7.36	-27.51	.000

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for 2nd Null Hypothesis (N=937)

		Correlations	
	DiffTotal	Education	Age
DiffTotal	1.00		
Education	.076*	1.00	
Age	-.048	.238**	1.00
Mean	6.37	2.68	33.98
Standard Deviation	7.54	1.65	9.25

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 3: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Education and Age on DiffTotal

Variables	Effect Estimate	Unstandardized Coefficients b	SE	<i>p</i>	R²
Education	7.52	.42	.16	.007	.006
Age	7.51	-.06	.03	.039	.010

Adjusted R² = .008

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics and Multiple Comparisons for 3rd Hypothesis (N=923)

Variable	Comparison Variable	Mean Difference	SE	Sig.
Single				
N=344, M=6.13, SD=8.08	Married	-1.01	.58	.18
	Separated/Divorced	.59	.67	.65
Married				
N=375, M=7.14, SD=7.60	Single	1.01	.57	.18
	Separated/Divorced	1.60*	.66	.042
Separated/Divorced				
N=204, M=5.54, SD=6.74	Single	-.59	.67	.65
	Married	-1.60*	.66	.042

$p < .05$