

The Influence of Father’s Involvement on the Level of Marriage Satisfaction of Couples in Kenya.

Authors:

Stella Maina¹; Dr Lucy Njiru²; Dr Daniel Kitonga³

^{1,2,3} Tangaza University College, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya.

Main author email: exqmanagement@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this study was to establish the extent to which a father’s involvement affects the level of marriage satisfaction of couples in Westlands Constituency, Nairobi County. The study was based on the Attachment Theory as well as the Theory of Psychoanalysis. This study employed the survey research design among married individuals both male and female from Westlands Constituency in Nairobi County who were above eighteen years of age. The data was collected using questionnaires from 384 participants using simple random sampling. The completed questionnaires were then analysed by the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) whereby the descriptive statistics were analysed using frequencies and percentages while the inferential statistics were analysed by use of the Pearson correlation coefficient. The study concluded that father involvement has a statistically significant negative effect on marriage relationship outcomes of individuals. With a father involvement level that is low, there is a likelihood that the marriage relationship of an individual would be negatively affected. The study recommended that in case of separation, the parents should consider active co-parenting which will ensure that fathers are actively engaged in the lives of their children so that the children do not have feelings of abandonment. The parents can also consider joining parenting support groups.

Key Terms: father involvement, marriage satisfaction, couples, psychoanalysis, attachment.

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INTRODUCTION

The role and responsibilities of a father have changed significantly over time. Father's involvement has been multifaceted from being seen as providers of protection, as breadwinners, as providers of moral guidance, providers of marital support, nurturance, and mentorship as role models (Lamb, 2010). There is often more talk about a mother's role in parenting and it is possible to underestimate the role and value that a father adds to a child's development. The role and presence of a father within families has however been complicated by urbanization. The pressures of work, unstable marriage relationships and the lack of role models on how to parent as a father adds to the chaos fathers find themselves in with regards to how they ought to parent. Cummings and Watson O'Reilly (2013) say that when fathers are absent or are unsupportive and when marital conflict is high, children may end up suffering in the long term.

A father's engagement also influences the social competences of a child whether with their peers or in intimate relationships. Amato and James (2010) have shown that when a father is involved in the life of a child it affects the child positively in education and psychological adjustment. Ramchandani et al. (2013) says that when the interactions of a father are disengaged and remote with their children, as early as the third month of life, it has been found to predict externalizing problems in children longitudinally. A child's well-being is negatively affected by the absence of a father's involvement. Brookes et al. (2014) state that those in pre-school display aggression, depression or emotional dysregulation. Nielsen (2014) explains that daughters who have good relationships with their fathers can adjust better emotionally with other men. Academically they are likely to do well and may not find themselves in casual sexual engagements. They make wiser decisions regarding their relationships with men and they tend to have more stable and fulfilling relationships.

Men's involvement in parenting activities is often influenced by several factors the main ones being employment and the relationship with the mother of the child. In many cultures, the expectation is that the father is the main financial provider in the family but despite the increase in gender equality over the past several years, a survey conducted in 20 countries shows that financial responsibility and provision is still the responsibility of the father (Munoz et al., 2013). With fathers seen as the household providers, the assumption is therefore that fathers spend more time at work and less time with their children (Hook, 2012). Bianchi et al. (2012) have observed that even when mothers have had to work for longer hours, they have still been able to secure time to spend with their children. For fathers, this does not seem to be the case. They spend fewer hours with their children which negatively influences their children (Hook, 2012). Fathers have been found not able to balance their time at work and time with their children.

Several factors have contributed to the change in the structure and management of families, marriages and the role that fathers play in societies. Within the cities especially, the situation seems to deteriorate. Paschall, Ringwalt, and Flewelling (2010) observed that separation and divorce are becoming prevalent leading to more children being raised by single parents and more often without the involvement of their fathers. McLanahan, Tach and Schneider, (2013) studied that divorces that occurred during early childhood and adolescence had worse outcomes than divorces that occurred during middle childhood with boys having more negative outcomes than girls on their social behaviour. Children who are raised outside of a marriage context or within a marriage that breaks are prone to experience divorce or themselves end up raising children outside wedlock (Flouri & Buchanan, 2010).

Though a lot of effort in the last couple of years has been put and continues to be put by pastoral teams to prepare dating couples on the expectations of marriage, the unfortunate scenario seems to be that more couples are finding it difficult to sustain their marriage relationships. The resultant effects of how a father influences their child during the childhood years have been well documented but little attention has been given to how paternal involvement impacts the outcome of children's marriage relationships.

It has been explained that the involvement of a father has an effect on the social behaviour of children but little is known, especially in the Kenyan context, on how the linkages that involvement and interaction with a father during the upbringing of a child affects the outcome of marriage relationships. This research, therefore, sought to fill that gap on informing what impact a father's involvement has on children's marriage outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fatherlessness has an impact that can be seen in schools, homes, hospitals and prisons. Liess (2012) explains that the absence of fathers in the formative years leads to children developing mistrust between themselves and their parents and by extension this leads to the development of mistrust with other people when they grow up. A project done on fatherless daughters by Denna and Karin (2016) shows that out of 2,000 females who responded between the ages of 15 and 80 years and from diverse backgrounds, 50 % said they were fatherless either due to never having met their father, due to separation, emotional absence, death, desertion, addiction, abuse or incarceration. The reports show that there was a missing sense of security, learning of masculine behaviours that are positive, and special social skills.

Krampe and Newton (2012) in a study on the importance of fathers in children's welfare, found out that a father's love

is of great importance in developing the right self-concept and values and it acts as a deterrent to maladaptive behaviour. Paternal involvement is more than just having the existence of a father in the house. It involves his active participation in the physical companionship, emotional involvement and active upbringing of his children. His involvement, in the long run, affects the child's self-esteem, self-confidence, the child's abilities to make sound judgement and having meaningful relationships including marriages.

Tavris (2014) says that when the Harlow's monkey experiment was done to confirm the Bowlby's attachment theory, it showed that the monkeys that were socially deprived of a caregiver ended up being emotionally damaged. When those monkeys became parents, they smashed their infants face on the floor and rubbed them back and forth providing insight into the value of attachment and its impact on social behaviour (Herman, 2012). The kind of attachment and relationships that a child develops in the future is conditioned by how they interacted with their parents in childhood (Tavris, 2014).

Guardia, Nelson, and Lertora (2014) in their study of 342 female undergraduates in the USA found out that girls from fatherless families developed more liberal attitudes regarding sexual activities and that they tended to find it difficult to form and maintain romantic relationships as they further developed. As a result, the researchers posited that these patterns are often passed to their adult life and end up causing unfulfilled relationships with men. A study done in Indonesia among 384 adolescents by Damayanti and Djuwita (2017) showed that the higher a father was participating in a child's life the less the likelihood of dating violence in middle adolescence. It shows that when children grow up with their fathers, they are better able to control their emotions rather than resulting to physical violence to solve their conflicts.

Though divorce is becoming less stigmatized, the result is that more children are being raised by single parents and are mostly fatherless. In cases of separation or divorce where the fathers play a peripheral role and provide financially, Gogineni and Fallon (2013) say that the absence of the direct involvement of a father has been shown to have long term repercussions on their relationships. Hofferth (2016) found that children raised by woman-headed families had more behavioural problems, engage in early sexual activity and have poorer academic achievements and are twice as likely to commit suicide. He also observed that the same child experienced difficulty developing and maintaining intimate relationships as well as maintaining autonomy. Unfortunately, not many people understand the great necessity of the presence of both parents in raising children and neither are the repercussions well known.

The traumatic experience of growing up without a father shapes the worldview of the child. The child grows up not easily trusting people, has low self-esteem, fear abandonment, is easily angered and grows up learning to look out for him or her herself. Early attachments between daughters and fathers have a noteworthy influence on the daughter's capability to trust, be thankful, and relate to other males who come into their lives. Guardia et al. (2014) say that daughters, with absent fathers, also report feelings that their fathers were not able to provide them with the relationship they needed.

A research was done in the USA by Granger (2016) among 24 women aged 18 and 29 years on how father's involvement affected their romantic relationships, most of the participants said that by observing their fathers' behaviour, they learned more about the need for support, loyalty, trust, and closeness in relationships. Fathers have been found to give daughters hope for romantic relationships, especially when fathers are committed in their romantic relationships, and also fathers can influence

daughters' perceptions of relationships. In the absence of a fathers' involvement, the daughters become unsure about what to expect of romantic relationships.

Another study done by Rostad, Silverman and McDonald (2014) found out that females who had supportive and affectionate fathers had a high likelihood of expecting similar qualities from their romantic partners when they become adults which made them to be more careful as they chose their sexual partners. On the contrary, the female who had unaffectionate and unsupportive fathers were less selective when choosing their intimate partners and their encounters with their fathers made them perceive men as cold-hearted, unloving, and non-committing.

In Kenya, three out of every ten girls get pregnant before the age of thirteen. Additionally, out of every 10 Kenyan women, six are likely to be single mothers by the time they reach 45 years of age, one of the highest rates for single-parent families in Africa (Kiberenge, 2013). This means that more than 50% of children in Kenya are being raised without the involvement of their fathers. Kiberenge (2013) also says that on comparing other African countries, in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, only 18 per cent of women give birth before they get married, in Malawi, it is 10 per cent while in Ethiopia, it is five per cent. DelPriore and Hill (2013) have shown that children who come from a divorced family are more prone to divorce themselves because they may not hold interpersonal skills to keep a relationship and they are likely to see divorce or separation as a viable solution to their marital problems Their marriage relationships become difficult to sustain due to the underlying insecurities and poor modelling of a marriage relationship.

The observations above from various studying were indicative that when a child does not have the opportunity to observe meaningful male relations in childhood, it makes

it more difficult for them to develop interpersonal skills that are necessary for making several life adjustments.

RESULTS

Effect of Involvement of Fathers on Marriage Relationship Outcome.

The purpose of this study was to establish the extent to which a father's involvement affects the level of marriage satisfaction of couples in Westlands Constituency, Nairobi County. To determine this, first, the Relationship Assessment Scale which measures the level of satisfaction and had 7 items was scored and the scores ranged from 7-35. The level of satisfaction was then determined by computing the items into a new dummy variable called 'Marriage Relationship'. The level of marriage relationship satisfaction was then computed and recorded in Table 1.

Table 1: Level of Marriage Relationship Satisfaction

Marriage Relationship Satisfaction Level	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Low	222	71.8
Average	67	21.7
High	20	6.5
Total	309	100.0

According to Table 1, 71.8% (n=222) indicated a low level of marriage relationship satisfaction, 21.7% (n=67) indicated an average level of marriage relationship satisfaction, and 6.5% (n=20) indicated a high level of marriage relationship satisfaction. These findings implied that there was a low level of marriage relationship satisfaction among the respondents.

As aforementioned, the variables on fathers' involvement had already been recorded into a variable called actual father involvement. Therefore, the new variables that were called marriage relationship and actual father involvement helped the researcher to

conduct a Pearson Correlation test. The findings are recorded in Table 2.

Table 2: Effect of Involvement of Fathers on Marriage Relationship

		Actual Father Involvement	Marriage Relationship
Actual Father Involvement	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	309	
Marriage Relationship	Pearson Correlation	-.312**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	309	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 2, the Pearson correlation value (r) is -0.312 at a p-value of 0.000. These results imply that there is a negative correlation between actual father involvement and marriage relationships among the respondents. Therefore, the low father involvement negatively affects the marriage relationships of the respondents.

Through a Pearson Correlation test, the study found out that there was a statistically significant negative effect between father involvement and marriage relationships (r=-0.312; p-value= 0.000). The findings are in accord with those of Denna and Karin (2016) who observed that when individuals did not have fathers either due to separation, death, desertion, or emotional absence, they were likely to have negative intimate relationships. There was a lack of sense of security, positive learning of masculine behaviour and social skills among the respondents.

Correspondingly, using the Father Involvement Scale, Damayanti and Djuwita (2017) recognised that there was a significant negative correlation between father involvement and romantic relationships. The study specifically focused on violence while dating and it concluded that the lower the involvement of a father in a child's life, the higher the chances of violence while dating. The children who grew with their fathers involved in their lives were in more control of their emotions and they can solve conflicts better as compared to children with no or little father involvement. Generally, father involvement helped to reduce problem behaviour in children.

In the same breath, Granger (2018) found out that father's involvement especially among women affected the romantic relationships of the women. This was attributed to learning from their fathers in terms of aspects such as behaviour, loyalty, and support. The fathers who were committed in their romantic relationships were deemed to give their daughters hope to also positively build their own relationships. It is from the fathers that the daughters were able to gain healthy perspectives on relationships. Therefore, the study indicated that father involvement positively

affected marriage relationships. However, a caveat is provided only when the involvement is positive.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion: The study concludes that father involvement has a statistically significant negative effect on marriage relationship outcomes of individuals. With a father involvement level that is low, there is a likelihood that the marriage relationship of an individual would be negatively affected. The individual may be unsatisfied in their marriage relationships due to lack of their fathers' guidance and support on how to relate to others.

Recommendation: Additionally, in cases of separation, the parents should consider active co-parenting which will ensure that fathers are actively engaged in the lives of their children so that the children do not have feelings of abandonment. The parents can also consider joining parenting support groups. These groups can help in giving the parents guidance and support on how to increase the extent to which fathers are involved in their children's lives as well as reinforce confidence in the type of involvement to be given.

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