

A Case Study on the Social Interaction with the Opposite Sex of Early Adult Women Raised by Single Mothers Since Childhood (Without a Father)

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Abstract

This research uses a case study methodology to examine the social interactions of early adult women raised in single-parent households where the father figure has been absent since childhood. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and field notes. The study reveals that the informants had strong attachments to their fathers and experienced deep grief upon their fathers' deaths, which led to social withdrawal and reluctance to engage with the opposite sex. The absence of a father figure significantly impacted the informants' social development, particularly in forming relationships with the opposite sex. Informants expressed feelings of loss and were reluctant to open up to others, especially men, due to their grief and a sense of abandonment. Despite these challenges, the informants eventually adapted by accepting the reality of their father's death, finding comfort in spiritual growth and learning to accept themselves. This study highlights the long-lasting effects of father absence on social behaviors, particularly in early adulthood, and how these individuals navigate their relationships with others.

Keywords Father absence, social interaction, single-parent upbringing.

INTRODUCTION

The role of fathers in a child's development has long been a subject of psychological research. Studies have shown that both parents contribute essential roles to a child's emotional, social, and cognitive growth. In particular, the absence of a father figure during childhood has been associated with various developmental challenges, especially in terms of emotional well-being and social interactions. Bowlby (2013), a prominent figure in attachment theory, suggested that the absence of a father can have a significant negative impact on the development of children, influencing their ability to form secure attachments and develop healthy relationships later in life.

In the context of a two-parent family, both the father and the mother have complementary roles. While the mother traditionally provides nurturing and emotional support, the father plays a critical role in providing protection, guidance, and a sense of security. The absence of a father figure can disrupt this balance, leaving children, particularly girls, vulnerable to developmental challenges. This research seeks to explore the long-term effects of father absence on the social interactions of early adult women who were raised by single mothers since childhood.

Father absence, whether through death, divorce, or separation, can have profound consequences on a child's emotional and social development. The absence of a father figure in early childhood has been linked to issues such as low self-esteem, depression, and difficulties in forming stable relationships. According to research, girls raised without fathers are more likely to experience insecurity in their relationships, often struggling with issues



such as trust and fear of abandonment. The lack of a male role model may also result in difficulty in engaging with the opposite sex in adulthood, which is a critical aspect of developing romantic relationships and forming a sense of identity.

The early adult phase of life, typically between the ages of 18 and 25, is a crucial period of development characterized by exploration, experimentation, and the transition from adolescence to full adulthood. During this phase, individuals begin to make significant decisions about their careers, relationships, and future families. For early adult women raised in single-parent households, the absence of a father may influence their ability to navigate these important transitions. Social interactions, especially with the opposite sex, become particularly important during this stage, as women form intimate relationships, establish their identities, and plan for their futures.

The significance of father involvement in the development of girls has been widely discussed in the literature. Research has shown that a father's presence in the early years of a child's life promotes healthy emotional development, self-confidence, and secure attachment patterns. Conversely, the absence of a father, especially during critical periods of development, can lead to difficulties in managing emotions and forming healthy interpersonal relationships in adulthood. Santrock (2002) highlights that one of the major challenges for early adult women is navigating intimate relationships, including romantic relationships, partnerships, and family dynamics. The absence of a father may create a sense of emotional instability, making it more difficult to trust and connect with potential partners.

Despite the negative consequences of father absence, many individuals demonstrate resilience and adapt to their circumstances. The ability of individuals to adjust to the loss of a father and find meaning in their lives can lead to personal growth and emotional empowerment. In this study, we examine how early adult women who grew up without a father navigate their relationships with the opposite sex, particularly in terms of their social interactions, emotional responses, and overall development. This research also aims to explore the coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies employed by these women as they adjust to the absence of a father figure.

The focus of this study is on women who were raised in single-parent households, where the father was absent either due to death or other factors. The experiences of these women are explored through interviews and observations, with a particular emphasis on their interactions with the opposite sex and how these interactions have been shaped by their upbringing. This research is significant because it sheds light on the long-term effects of father absence and offers valuable insights into the emotional and social challenges faced by women who grew up without fathers.

In addition, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on the effects of single-parent households on child development. While much has been written about the general impact of single parenting, there is a need for more specific research on how father absence affects women in particular. Understanding the nuances of these experiences can help inform strategies for supporting women who have grown up without fathers, particularly in terms of social and emotional development. Furthermore, this research may contribute to the development of interventions designed to foster healthier

relationships and improve the well-being of individuals who have experienced father absence.

The following sections of this paper will review relevant literature on the topics of social interaction, early adulthood, parenting styles, and single-parent households. The methodology used in this study, including participant selection and data collection methods, will also be outlined. Finally, the results of the study will be presented, followed by a discussion of the findings and their implications for understanding the effects of father absence on social interactions and relationships in early adulthood.

Through this study, we aim to provide a deeper understanding of the lasting impact that father absence can have on women's social and emotional development. By exploring the experiences of early adult women who were raised without fathers, this research contributes to the broader field of developmental psychology and provides valuable insights into how individuals navigate complex social dynamics in the absence of an important parental figure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Interaction and Its Importance

Social interaction refers to the dynamic relationships that occur between individuals, where their actions, behaviors, and responses affect one another. According to Bonner (in Abu Ahmadi, 2002), social interaction is a fundamental aspect of human existence, where the behavior of one person can influence, modify, or even enhance the behavior of another. Social interactions are essential for personal development, as they shape an individual's attitudes, behaviors, and emotional responses.

For individuals raised without a father, particularly daughters, social interactions can be influenced in a significant way. The lack of a father figure, especially during critical developmental years, can result in altered social behaviors. The absence of a male role model might hinder the development of confidence in interacting with the opposite sex and may result in difficulties in forming meaningful and healthy relationships later in life. A significant amount of research has pointed out that the absence of a father figure often leads to difficulties in communication, trust issues, and emotional insecurity, which affect the individual's interactions with peers and romantic partners (Grimm-Wassil, 1994).

Father's Role in Early Childhood Development

The father plays a pivotal role in the development of a child. Bowlby (2013), through his attachment theory, emphasized the importance of both parents in the emotional and psychological development of a child. He noted that the relationship between children and their fathers is central to forming secure attachments, which are vital for emotional stability, self-esteem, and the ability to form future relationships. Fathers typically act as emotional protectors and role models, providing stability and support for their children.

Father absence can therefore be especially detrimental to girls, as they lack the male role model who would guide their emotional and social development. Research by Grimm-Wassil (1994) indicates that girls without fathers often struggle with interpersonal



relationships, particularly with men. The absence can contribute to the development of low self-esteem, insecurity in relationships, and difficulties in forming stable romantic partnerships.

Moreover, Santrock (2002) suggests that the father-daughter relationship can significantly influence the daughter's views on men and relationships. In the absence of a father, girls may experience difficulties in trusting men or in understanding how to navigate romantic relationships. This issue becomes particularly pronounced during the transition into early adulthood, a period in which social and romantic relationships take on greater significance.

Early Adulthood and Its Developmental Challenges

Early adulthood, typically between the ages of 18 and 25, is a period marked by significant psychological, emotional, and social development. This is a time when individuals explore their identities, make major life decisions, and begin to form intimate relationships. According to Santrock (2011), early adulthood is characterized by experimentation, self-discovery, and an increased ability to make life decisions regarding career, relationships, and family. For women who have grown up without a father, this period can present unique challenges as they navigate relationships and try to form a sense of stability in their lives.

The absence of a father figure during childhood can influence the development of social and emotional competencies during this critical life stage. Without the emotional guidance and stability typically provided by a father, early adult women may struggle with issues such as insecurity, trust, and fear of abandonment. These issues can affect their ability to form intimate relationships with the opposite sex, which is a critical developmental task during early adulthood.

Furthermore, studies have shown that the absence of a father can lead to issues with identity formation. Women without fathers may struggle to define themselves and their relationships with others, as they lack a clear model of healthy male-female relationships. The absence of a father figure can create a gap in the individual's sense of self, as they may not have experienced the same level of nurturing and guidance that others with both parents may have had (Keating, in Santrock, 2002).

Parenting Styles and Father Absence

Parenting style plays a significant role in shaping a child's emotional and social development. According to Surya (2003), parenting is a reflection of how parents raise, nurture, and educate their children, directly influencing the child's autonomy, emotional development, and social competencies. In families with both parents present, the mother and father play complementary roles in nurturing and socializing the child. However, in single-parent households, especially those without fathers, the absence of this second role can leave children with fewer resources to navigate emotional and social challenges.

Research has demonstrated that children raised in single-parent households, especially those without fathers, are more likely to experience difficulties in their emotional

and social development. The absence of a father figure can result in feelings of insecurity, lower self-esteem, and an increased likelihood of experiencing anxiety and depression. For early adult women who grew up in single-parent households, the impact of father absence often manifests in their relationships with the opposite sex. They may exhibit distrust or discomfort in romantic relationships, stemming from their childhood experiences of father absence.

Hurlock (2002) explains that single parenting involves the mother assuming both the roles of nurturing and providing, which can often lead to an imbalance in the emotional support and guidance provided to the child. This imbalance can have long-lasting effects on children, particularly when they transition into adulthood. For women who have lost their fathers or never had them, this lack of a male role model can complicate their understanding of male-female relationships and their emotional connections to others.

Psychological and Social Impact of Father Absence on Women

Research by Grimm-Wassil (1994) further supports the notion that father absence has a profound impact on women's psychological and social development. Women raised without fathers often experience greater emotional distress and struggle with forming relationships due to a lack of emotional stability and support. These women may also develop a distorted view of male-female interactions, which can impact their ability to trust and form intimate relationships with men.

According to Grimm-Wassil (1994), women who grew up without fathers are more likely to exhibit behaviors such as social withdrawal, a lack of confidence in romantic pursuits, and fear of abandonment. This often results in an inability to establish stable relationships, which can lead to loneliness and emotional isolation. These women may also harbor feelings of anger, resentment, or disappointment toward men, as a result of the perceived absence of a protective and nurturing male figure during their childhood.

Moreover, women raised without fathers often experience a greater fear of losing loved ones, particularly men. This fear can lead to an avoidance of close relationships altogether, as the individual may fear the pain of losing someone again. According to research by von Hoffmann (1971), children who grow up without fathers tend to struggle with consistency in relationships, and the lack of a father figure can result in negative emotional outcomes, particularly in terms of their ability to form healthy, trusting relationships.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research approach, specifically a case study design, to explore the social interactions of early adult women who were raised in single-parent households without fathers. The case study method is particularly suitable for understanding the complex and multifaceted experiences of individuals in their natural settings (Yin, 2002). The goal is to gather rich, in-depth insights into how father absence has influenced these women's relationships and social behaviors, particularly their interactions with the opposite sex.



The participants for this study were selected using purposive sampling, a non-random technique that allows the researcher to select individuals who are best suited to provide detailed and relevant information regarding the research question (Creswell, 2009). Three early adult women, aged between 18 and 30 years, were chosen as informants. The selection criteria included:

1. Women who grew up in single-parent households without a father, having experienced father absence since childhood (due to death, divorce, or separation).
2. Women who have had social interactions with the opposite sex and are willing to share their experiences related to father absence.
3. Women who had not engaged in any paternal relationship for at least five years prior to the study.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and direct observations. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide flexibility to explore the participant's experiences and perceptions in-depth while following a general set of guiding questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). The interviews were conducted in a conversational style to build rapport and encourage the participants to share their thoughts openly.

In addition to interviews, field notes were taken during the sessions to document non-verbal cues and interactions that could add further context to the verbal responses. Observations were also made in various social settings where participants interacted with others, especially members of the opposite sex, to gain a broader understanding of their social dynamics.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involves identifying and interpreting patterns or themes that emerge from the data. The analysis was iterative, where themes were refined and linked to the research questions. Themes related to the informants' perceptions of father absence, social behavior, and relationships with the opposite sex were identified and analyzed to provide meaningful insights into the impact of father absence.

Through this approach, the study aims to understand the long-term effects of father absence on the social interactions of early adult women, focusing on the emotional and social challenges they face in their relationships with others.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the social interactions of early adult women who were raised in single-parent households without fathers. The findings from the interviews and observations reveal several key themes related to the emotional impact of father absence and its influence on the informants' relationships with the opposite sex.

Impact of Father Absence on Emotional Development

All three informants reported experiencing significant emotional distress due to the absence of their fathers from an early age. The loss of their fathers, whether through death or separation, led to feelings of grief, abandonment, and insecurity. Informant F shared, "When my father passed away, I felt like part of me was lost, and I struggled with

understanding how to deal with my emotions. I felt abandoned, not just by him, but by the whole idea of having a father." This emotional void became a recurring theme in their lives, manifesting in various ways in their adult social interactions, particularly in their relationships with men.

The informants' experiences support findings from previous research (Grimm-Wassil, 1994) that father absence contributes to emotional instability, particularly for women. As noted by Grimm-Wassil, the absence of a father figure can leave a lasting impression, often leading to emotional withdrawal and difficulties in trusting others, especially the opposite sex.

Challenges in Forming Relationships with the Opposite Sex

A major theme that emerged from the interviews was the difficulty the informants had in forming close relationships with men. Each informant expressed hesitancy in initiating romantic relationships, with fears of emotional vulnerability and abandonment as central reasons for their reluctance. Informant D explained, "I've always found it hard to connect with men. Even when I wanted to, I just couldn't open up. I felt like I would lose them, just like I lost my father." This fear of loss and emotional vulnerability was consistently echoed by the other informants.

For example, Informant A stated, "I was never really comfortable with men. After my father died, I felt like I couldn't trust anyone, especially men. I felt that no one could protect me the way my father did." This fear of abandonment, and the unresolved grief from the absence of a father, deeply influenced the informants' approach to relationships. They often found themselves withdrawing from potential partners, even if they were interested in forming connections.

These findings are consistent with Santrock's (2002) assertion that the absence of a father figure can create an emotional barrier to relationship formation, particularly for women. The lack of emotional support and security provided by a father during childhood leads to difficulties in forming and maintaining intimate relationships in adulthood.

Social Withdrawal and Low Self-Esteem

Another notable result was the tendency for the informants to withdraw socially, particularly from men. Their social interactions with male peers were often described as distant, professional, or non-personal. Informant F noted, "I never really had close friends who were men. It's like I kept them at arm's length, not out of dislike, but because I didn't feel I could trust them the way I trusted women." This social withdrawal was particularly prominent in situations where the informants were expected to interact with men in more personal or intimate contexts.

The informants also reported experiencing feelings of low self-esteem, which appeared to be linked to their father's absence. Informant D said, "I felt like I wasn't good enough for anyone. I couldn't live up to the expectations I felt others had of me, and I blamed it on growing up without a father. I felt like I was missing something vital." This low self-



worth often led to feelings of inadequacy and contributed to the difficulty they experienced in forming romantic relationships.

This finding is supported by previous research by Grimm-Wassil (1994) and Santrock (2002), which indicated that the absence of a father can lead to diminished self-esteem, particularly for women, and contribute to social withdrawal. Women without fathers often struggle with feelings of inadequacy and lack the confidence needed to form intimate relationships.

Coping Mechanisms: Spiritual and Emotional Growth

Despite the challenges, all three informants displayed remarkable resilience and adaptation over time. A significant theme that emerged was the informants' use of spiritual and emotional coping mechanisms to deal with their grief and the absence of their fathers. Informant A shared, "I started focusing on my spirituality. I realized that if I didn't accept the loss of my father and the pain, I would never move on. It wasn't easy, but my spirituality helped me find peace and acceptance."

Informant F also found solace in spirituality, stating, "Over time, I learned to accept that my father's absence didn't define who I am. I had to find a way to heal and move forward. My connection to my faith and spirituality helped me do that." These coping strategies allowed the informants to heal from their grief, develop a sense of inner strength, and gradually open up to the idea of forming relationships with others, though it remained challenging.

These coping mechanisms reflect the findings of Hurlock (2002), who suggested that emotional resilience and the development of personal strengths could emerge from adversity, particularly when individuals find meaningful ways to cope. Spiritual growth and self-acceptance are essential for emotional healing and empowerment, helping individuals adapt to their circumstances.

Changing Perceptions of Men Over Time

A shift in the informants' perceptions of men was also noted during the course of the study. Although initially hesitant to trust men and form relationships, over time, the informants developed a more balanced perspective on male-female relationships. Informant D mentioned, "I used to think that all men would leave me, just like my father did. But as I grew older, I realized that not all men are the same. Some can be trustworthy, kind, and supportive, just like the men in my life now."

This change in perspective suggests that as the informants matured and gained more life experience, they began to see men not as potential sources of pain and abandonment but as individuals with whom they could form healthy and trusting relationships. This transformation aligns with the developmental theories of early adulthood proposed by Santrock (2002), which suggest that as individuals transition through early adulthood, they undergo significant changes in their emotional and social understanding.

The results of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects of father absence on the social interactions of early adult women. The emotional and social challenges faced by the informants align with previous research that highlights the negative consequences of father absence, particularly in terms of emotional stability, self-esteem, and relationship formation (Grimm-Wassil, 1994; Santrock, 2002).

The difficulties the informants experienced in forming relationships with the opposite sex are consistent with the literature that suggests father absence can lead to a lack of trust and difficulty in forming secure attachments. The informants' fear of emotional vulnerability and abandonment reflects the insecurity that often accompanies the absence of a father figure during childhood (Bowlby, 2013). This finding emphasizes the crucial role that fathers play in providing emotional stability and teaching children how to engage in healthy, trusting relationships.

Additionally, the informants' social withdrawal and feelings of low self-esteem support the research by Grimm-Wassil (1994), which suggests that women raised without fathers may struggle with confidence and social engagement, particularly in romantic contexts. The lack of paternal influence during childhood may hinder the development of positive self-concept and self-worth, making it challenging to form meaningful connections with others.

However, the informants' ability to cope with these challenges through spiritual and emotional growth highlights the resilience of individuals who have experienced father absence. Their capacity to adapt and find inner strength through coping mechanisms, such as spirituality and self-acceptance, reflects the findings of Hurlock (2002), who emphasized the importance of personal resilience in overcoming adversity. This aspect of the study underscores the potential for healing and growth despite the difficulties posed by father absence.

The findings also indicate that over time, the informants' perceptions of men shifted. This transformation suggests that as the informants matured, they developed a more nuanced understanding of male-female relationships. This change in perspective is crucial for their emotional growth and ability to form healthy, trusting relationships in the future.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the impact of father absence on the social interactions of early adult women raised in single-parent households without fathers. The findings highlight the long-lasting emotional and social effects that father absence has on women, particularly in their relationships with the opposite sex. The informants in this study reported experiencing profound grief, insecurity, and emotional withdrawal, all of which were linked to the absence of their fathers from an early age. These challenges were particularly evident in their difficulty in forming intimate relationships, which was influenced by fear of abandonment, low self-esteem, and a lack of trust in men.

The emotional consequences of father absence were significant and manifested in the informants' social behaviors, especially in their interactions with men. The study found that the absence of a father figure led to feelings of insecurity and emotional instability, which



made it difficult for the informants to trust others or open up emotionally. Informants reported withdrawing from social interactions with men, and in some cases, they found themselves unable to form close relationships despite a desire to do so. This aligns with previous research that suggests that father absence can lead to difficulties in forming secure attachments and emotional barriers to relationship formation (Bowlby, 2013; Grimm-Wassil, 1994).

However, the study also highlighted the resilience of the informants. Despite the emotional challenges they faced, they exhibited significant emotional growth and developed coping mechanisms such as spirituality and self-acceptance to navigate their grief. Over time, the informants learned to accept the absence of their fathers and began to develop healthier perceptions of relationships. This emotional and spiritual growth enabled them to gradually open up to the possibility of forming relationships with men, although this process was slow and required significant effort.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the informants' perceptions of men evolved over time. Initially, they harbored negative feelings and fears regarding men due to their experiences of father loss. However, as they matured, they began to see men in a more positive light and realized that not all men would abandon them. This shift in perspective was crucial for their emotional healing and ability to form meaningful relationships. It also reinforced the idea that, with time, individuals can overcome the emotional scars of father absence and develop healthier emotional responses to future relationships.

In conclusion, the study provides valuable insights into the long-term effects of father absence on early adult women, particularly in the context of their relationships with the opposite sex. While father absence can significantly hinder emotional and social development, the study demonstrates that individuals can show resilience and eventually adapt to their circumstances. The emotional and spiritual growth observed in the informants underscores the importance of coping mechanisms and self-acceptance in overcoming the challenges posed by father absence. These findings suggest that interventions focusing on emotional healing, trust-building, and relationship development could be beneficial for women who have experienced father absence, helping them navigate the complexities of adult relationships and build healthier connections with others in the future.

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