

Fathers' Role, Involvement and Cultural Expectations

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Undoubtedly fathers' role and involvement in their children's care and education is not a new field of research. On the contrary, fatherhood has attracted research attention since the 1970's and has gone through several phases, from emphasis on the consequences from fathers' absence to emphasis on fathers' active involvement (Schoppe-Sullivan, McBride & Ringo Ho, 2004). This research indicated that the child-father relationship is not simply an imitation of the child-mother relationship, but develops and evolves differently (Planalp and Braungart-Rieker, 2016, p. 135) and has different expectations from the child's and cultures perspective.

However, despite the fact that fathering and father involvement attracts increasingly more attention in the field of early childhood education and development, it is still surrounded by an assortment of conceptual, methodological and policy issues. For instance, although maternal roles are well established, the roles fathers may assume and the construct of father involvement has long been debated (Pleck, 2007; Schoppe-Sullivan, McBride, & Ringo Ho, 2004). Schoppe-Sullivan, McBride & Ringo Ho (2004) state that there is not "a single way of approaching and thinking about the study of father involvement" (p. 149). In addition, father involvement is typically measured through mothers' reports or through child-or teacher-perceptions (Charles et al. 2016, Bögels & Phares 2008) that raise concern about biased reporting and the validity of using third party

reports (Mikelson 2008). Furthermore, although fathers' role and involvement is changing, "men's involvement in caregiving has too often been missing from public policies, from systematic data collection and research, and from efforts to promote women's empowerment" (Levtov et al., 2015, 16). Today as more women are active in the work force, the role of fathers' in the daily experience of their children is more important than ever. Roles traditionally reserved for mothers are assumed today by fathers, whose role is clearly in transition (O'Brien 2004).

Yet, the differences in roles may also be grounded culturally in that fathers may be expected to play roles different from that of mothers in different cultures, and what constitutes a *good father* may be highly dependent on cultural, historical and familial ideologies (Lamb and Tamis-Lemonda 2004). The present themed issue aims at delineating the importance, roles, and diverse practices of fathers in different cultures. Special attention is given into how existing policies in various countries may affect fathers' role and involvement.

In addition to drawing on research that indicates the amount and type of father investment varies with different developmental stages of the child (Lamb, 2010), this themed issue aspires to shed light into how

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fathers are involved in their preschool children's upbringing, care and education, both at home and at early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings.

Taking into consideration that we do not have a clear picture on fatherhood, as it differs so much culturally, and that changes are needed not only in policies and institutions but also "within data collection and analysis efforts" (Letvov et al. 2015, p. 22), the present themed issue aims to highlight relevant research findings, illuminate areas that are in need of additional research, and examine the implications of these findings on policies and practices.

In *Exploring Paternal Involvement from Greek, Greek-Cypriot and Turkish Fathers' and Mothers' Perspectives: Cross-National Differences and Similarities*, Rentzou, Gol-Guven, Koumariou and Zengin explore if the importance of fathers' role and their actual involvement are culturally constructed and the differences and similarities between maternal and paternal reports on fathering practices and paternal role. The researchers found statistically significant differences in terms of the role of the father and the parental styles adopted at a country level and in the way fathers are involved at a parent level. In addition, the study revealed discrepancies between paternal and maternal rating, with mother's assigning lower ratings on actual involvement but higher ratings on the importance of fathers' role. Overall, the study revealed correlations between perceptions about fathers' role and actual involvement for the total sample as well as for mothers and fathers independently. In addition, the study revealed that father involvement is not only culturally constructed. The parental style adopted by each parent and their social cognitions are correlated with father involvement. The study highlights the need to inform our nomenclature about what fatherhood and father involvement is and the importance of pursuing gender transformative parenting approaches and programs that echo fathers' needs.

In *The Role of Male Caretakers and Pre-school Teachers for Father Involvement in ECEC* Rohrmann addresses the domination of the early childhood development field by women and how this might affect fathers' involvement in their children's ECEC setting. Research and practice from the early childhood development sector indicates that services are dominated by women and are primarily addressed to women and children. This raises several key questions, how do we attract fathers and how do we foster their engagement in their children's care and education outside the house? Male involvement in ECEC is of paramount importance. Male ECEC teachers not only contribute to children's overall and optimal development, but at the same time they serve as an important contact person for fathers in everyday interaction, since many fathers react positively to male staff. As Rohrmann postulates, although fathers do not necessarily need male ECEC staff in order to get involved in their children's care and education in out-of-home settings, and despite the fact that culture may affect such relations, the results do suggest that men can enrich cooperation with fathers in ECEC institutions in many ways. In line with the rest of the articles in this themed issue, Rohrmann concludes that "working with fathers needs a cultural-sensitive approach combined with gender sensitivity, and this is true as well for research on this issue".

Lopez, McWhirter, Rosencrans, Giuliani and McIntyre focus on the role and involvement of fathers with children with developmental delays. *Father Involvement with Children with Developmental Delays* provides a systematic nineteen article literature review centered on father's involvement in the education and care of children with delays as well as the implications that fathers' participation has on children's developmental outcomes. Children with developmental delays have lower quality interactions with parents due to the increased difficulty of parenting this population. However, father participation with their children can have positive developmental outcomes for the child. It

is thus paramount that research on family involvement includes fathers roles and interventions as they have a strong impact on their children's developmental outcomes. By including father's in the research and discussion, we ensure that they have a direct voice in the process rather than getting secondary reports on father involvement from mothers, children and teachers.

In the final paper of this special themed issue, Pambas Tandika Basil takes us to Tanzania, Africa to the village of Kimamba to help us understand the importance of fathers' involvement in young children's learning and development in that region. The paper takes on a cultural journey through the expectations and normative roles fathers have undertaken in Africa and the policy changes that are changing those roles. Fathers understanding of a positive developmental outcome for children was focused on providing food, health needs, clothing and a safe environment. Some fathers in this study stated that their role is equal to that of the mother suggesting that they are beginning to reconceptualize their own responsibilities as a parent and caretaker. The paper is an interesting exploration of the cultural expectations of fathers on their own beliefs about the care, development and learning of their children and the roles they play in this critical life long process.

The articles included in this themed issue demonstrate that father and male caregiver involvement occurs along a continuum and fathers/male caregivers find different ways to get actively involved in their children's lives. Drawing on research results which highlight that "it is estimated that at the current rate of global progress, it will take 75 years to achieve equality in this work" (Heilman et al., 2017, p. 14), the present themed issue seeks to bring to the fore the need for adopting and fostering a gender transformative approach across settings. Traditionally, parenting and parenting support programs have been equated to mothering and mothers' support. The question is where are

fathers and other male caregivers in this picture? What role do they have in the family? Are they in need of support and how do we address this need? Are they welcomed in services addressed to families and to their children? Systematic efforts to address these questions are as urgent as never before.

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