Research Abstract

A Qualitative Study of the Meaning of Fatherhood Among Young Urban Fathers

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Overview
In the past much of the research on parent-child interactions and parenting focused on mothers. In recent decades, researchers increasingly examine father-child interactions and relationships within families.

Indeed, women serve as an important support system for the development of children but men also can play an important role. Yet, many health care and human services professionals target services toward mothers but not fathers. Recent research shows that some fathers voiced that they believe many institutions are not only lacking support for young fathers but also act as a road block many times. Previous studies have been done on young fathers with low income but most of the studies done were usually on African-American fathers.

The current study conducted interviews with young urban fathers and expectant fathers about their goals, necessities, desires, opinions, struggles, and thought processes. This research builds on Lemay et al.’s earlier research focused on identifying better ways social institutions and programs can be most beneficial for young urban fathers. Furthermore, it is their hope that with a better understanding of young fathers, children born into families with young fathers will be able to live a healthier life style.

Method
Design and Sample. This exploratory study was guided by phenomenology , or focusing on the experiences of participants and the meaning of experiences to them.

The sample consisted of 30 young fathers or young expectant fathers who were less than age 20 at the birth of the child and less than 25 at the time of the study (M age = 18.4; 30% young expectant fathers; 70% young fathers: 30% European American, 10% African American, 50% Hispanic, 3% Native American, 7% multiracial) who were participating in the qualitative study.
Measures. Young fathers and expectant fathers provided information on their idea of what a good father should be, whether or not they would raise their child the way their fathers raised them, reasons supporting their answers, their aspirations as a father, and goals they have for their children. Their feedback was based on eight open-ended interview questions constructed by members of the research team and other scholars. These questions allowed the participants to answer questions that were directly related to their personal experiences.

Results

When young and young expectant fathers were asked to describe the traits of a good father they reported a good father being in their child’s life, a good role model, responsible for their child, and financially and emotionally accessible to their child. The findings also showed participants reporting examples of good fathers being male relatives, their own biological fathers, friends or people within their community, celebrities, and lastly their own fathers.

While the young fathers answered questions about what they knew about good fathers they were also assessed about their own goals and needs as a father. All in all, they agreed that they needed to make improvements in their own lives to become a better father. For instance, they wanted to improve their levels of education and employment. Similarly, the young fathers reported wanting some of the same things for their children but wanted their children to be better than them.

In addition, participants stated that they felt being a father was a reward because it made them happy and they were pleased to have created a human being. However, they did report that they were not always happy with the responsibility regarding finances. Lastly, 77% of the young fathers reported they would not raise their children the way they were raised. Many reported abuse and/or abandonment from their fathers in the past. Overall, this study provides a foundation for further research on young fathers in hopes to provide social institutions insight on young fathers’ strengths and growth areas.