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Father's Presence Improves the Behavior and Mental Skills of the Children

Biological father or father figure?

George Michael knows it. Active father figures are crucial in mitigating behavior issues in young men and psychological ones in young women, as revealed by a Swedish meta-analysis published in the journal "Acta Paediatrica." Regular positive contact decreases criminal behavior in young people coming from low-income families, boosting their cognitive skills such as intelligence, reasoning and language ability. The team analyzed the results of 24 studies published between 1987 and 2007, made on 22,300 subjects, aged 0 to 33, from the US, UK, Sweden and Israel. 18 researches also assessed the familial social economic status. "Our detailed 20-year review shows that overall, children reap positive benefits if they have active and regular engagement with a father figure," said Dr. Anna Sarkadi from the Department of Women's and Children's Health at Uppsala University, Sweden. "For example, we found various studies that showed that children who had positively involved father figures were less likely to smoke and get into trouble with the police, achieved better levels of education and developed good friendships with children of both sexes. Long-term benefits included women who had better relationships with partners and a greater sense of mental and physical well-being at the age of 33 if they had a good relationship with their father at 16. The studies show that (the type of engagement of the father figure) can range from talking and sharing activities to playing an active role in the child's day-to-day care," said Sarkadi. But these researches do not make the difference between the biological father and other father figure. "However, our review backs up the intuitive assumption that engaged biological fathers or father figures are good for children, especially when the children are socially or economically disadvantaged. Children who lived with both a mother and father figure had less behavioral problems than those who lived with just their mother. However, it is not possible to tell whether this is because the father figure is more involved or whether the mother is able to be a better parent if she has more support at home," said Sarkadi. "Public policy has the potential to facilitate or create barriers to fathers spending time with their children during the crucial years of early development. Unfortunately current institutional policies in most countries do not support the increased involvement of fathers in child rearing. Paid parental leave for fathers and employers sympathetic to fathers staying at home with sick children is still a dream in most countries. We hope that this review will add to the body of evidence that shows that enlightened father-friendly policies can make a major contribution to society in the long run, by producing well-adjusted children and reducing major problems like crime and antisocial behavior," she added.