

# A brief review about parental involvement and children's cognitive behavioral performance

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**Abstract.** Parental involvement is closely related to the development of children's cognitive and behavioral performance. Existing studies have proved the positive role of parental involvement in the growth of children. This study is committed to clarifying the specific aspects and process mechanisms of parental involvement affecting children by systematically sorting out and summarizing existing studies with the theme of parental involvement and children's development. And on this basis, the relationship between the current parental involvement and the traditional family gender division of labor, the intervention research for parental involvement in special families were also further explored.

**Keywords:** Parental involvement; Literature review; Child development.

## 1. Background and Significance of Study

The parent is the first teacher for children, and the family is the first socialization station for children. As a core content of the early education of younger children, parent involvement during their growth has a great significance on the early development of younger children. Active, positive and scientific parent involvement is helpful for enhancing the cognitive ability and emotional ability of younger children. From a macro perspective, it is also good for upgrading family education quality and population quality.

The parenting behavior and parent involvement of young parents are directly related to the basic qualification of the next generation's labor force. Under the background of the disappearing demographic dividend, hindering the implementation of the two-child policy and the population ageing, the government and society do think highly of the marriage development of young parents and the nurturing quality of their offspring. Therefore, the study on the parent involvement and its relationship with the development of younger children based on literature review would not only extend and enrich the study of parent involvement but also provide evidence and reference for the formulation of population policy, social security system and family policy.

## 2. Parent Involvement and the Development of Children's Cognitive Behavior

### 2.1 Basic Concept of Parent Involvement

Parent involvement refers to that parents undertake the role of parents to push the development of their children. Parent involvement includes emotional input in daily parenting and parent-child interaction, such as kissing and chatting and the specific effort made by parents for the healthy growth and physical and mental development of their children, such as buying books and telling stories to their children and playing games with them.

The academic circle has reached a primary consensus on the concept and range of parent involvement, but researchers have different operational definitions of parent involvement. Partial scholars, such as Xu Anqi, Ruth Gaunt, Zvara, and Walker. H, Thompson, Liu Jiankun and others tend to study the internal performance of parent involvement in families. They deem the parents' involvement in providing basic material, safety and health guarantees for children's growth and development, nurturing and raising children to maturity and independence, and creating good family conditions for children's learning activities. While Nermee, Comer, J.P and McCormick emphasize the parent involvement in the aspect of school-family communication. They define it that parents being involved with all kinds of activities in schools, including the parents' meetings, the

management decision-making in school, and the exchange with teachers on the learning issues of their children. Some scholars would divide parent involvement into the communication between family and school and the internal participation in family, and they include these into the concept of parent involvement for discussion.

## **2.2 Parent Involvement and the Development of Children's Cognitive Behavior**

Since the second demographic transition in western countries in the second half of the 20th century, western scholars have been highly concerned with the topic of family upbringing. By far, there have been completed studies on parent involvement in foreign countries. Relevant experience studies are filled with all counties in the western countries, which mainly covered with the leading factors to affect parent involvement and the impact of the involvement on children.

The attention on the influencing factors of the parent involvement. Some studies have drawn a consistent conclusion through the relevant analysis of parent involvement and the basic demographic information of parents: the social status of parents could effectively predict the level of parent involvement. It is specifically shown that the higher the family's economic income level (Hickman, 1995), parents' professional status (Zick et.al. 2001) and education level (Dornbusch, 1987), the higher the parent involvement level. Based on it, many researchers have a further emphasis on the highlighted status of parents' education level on the prediction of parent involvement. The researchers think that, compared with the family type, economic income, parents' occupation and other factors, the education level of parents is the most leading factor to affect the academic achievement of children. At the same time, parent involvement also shows regional differences and cultural differences. Some researchers find that Chinese parents have higher involvement in the learning activity of children, and they have a stricter attitude and higher expectations than others in other countries; and they would help children review the knowledge that they have learned at school more frequently (Lee, 2008). In the influence of parent involvement on their children, most studies consistently find that parent involvement has a significant positive impact on their children's academic performance (Cooper, 2010), cognitive emotion (Grolnick, 1994), behavior customs (Gonzalez, 2005), and it is very helpful and beneficial for the growth of their children.

Although there have been achievements in the studies of parent involvement; such kinds of studies still have shortcomings in the study contents, study objects and study methods. Firstly, most studies mainly focused on the parent involvement in the interaction of family and school, and they cast less attention on the parent involvement in the internal family; most of the study objects were school-age children and teenagers, so there was less for younger children. Secondly, most studies made the parents and their children in partial areas (such as one school and one community) as study objects, so there was no randomness in the study sample extraction and it was insufficient to show the general situation in our country. Therefore, it is necessary to have a further study on the situation of young parent involvement and its impact on the development of younger children with stricter and more weighted data with timeliness. It should be specially noted that the weakness and insufficiency of single-father families are hard to get the same attention as that of the single-mother families due to the traditional social concept and social cognition deviation, so it could not raise extensive attention from the academic circle. It could be found from the process of sorting relevant literature that, compared with that of the studies whose study object is single-mother families, there is obviously insufficiently quantity and quality in the exploration of the micro situation and nurturing quality of single-father families in the foreign and domestic studies.

## **2.3 Practical Study of Single-parent Families**

The practical studies for single-parent families at home and abroad covered the emotional adjustment of single parent and their children [1], social integration [2] and so on; and most scholars have broken through the limitation in the issue of single parents and children in single-parent families: to treat the issue independently and incompletely, and they try to understand the parent-children interaction in single-parent families from a more systemic and comprehensive perspective [3], so as

to prevent from the generation of the family issue by improving the nurturing quality of parents and help children get good development. Bratton et.al. transformed the traditional filial therapy to build up supporting groups and guided parents to learn education experience and skills in the children-centered games[4]. By providing supportive feedback, parents would be encouraged to deliver acceptance, sympathy and encouragement to children so as to enhance the development of benign parent-child relationships [5]. Pinkston integrated multiple scientific interventions based on the theory of human behavior to develop a single-parent group (SPG) with the core of children management strategies, so as to correct the aggressive tendencies and problematic behaviors of children under 12 years old through adjusting the parent-child interaction [6]. Since the occurrence of SPG, it has been widely applied for the enhancement of parents' function and the management of negative behavior of children. The implementation effect has been proved ceaselessly [7]. According to the overview based on 7 studies of SPG invention, SPG could enhance the sense of support and comfort of parents when they encounter difficulties in raising children so as to effectively promote positive parent-child interaction and improve children's compliance [8]. In addition, with the foundation of a series of theories, including cognitive behavior, psychodynamics and social learning, video display, role play, interactive tutoring, discussion with teaching groups and other training forms in the group-based parenting programs would be used for single-parent families to cultivate parents with the skills to develop a parent-child relationship and to provide an environment to practice these new skills, so as to inspire their potential to solve the parent-child problems [9]. Furthermore, along with the carryout of women's affirmative action movement, more and more researchers starts to focus on the gender difference in parent involvement and emphasize the necessary and active role of the father's involvement in the development of children; and they develop multiple training projects for the father to enhance their willingness and participation level of father's involvement.

### **3. Single-father Families' Nurturing: Current Situation and Challenge**

In the traditional family mode, caring for the daily life and psychological status of children and having close interaction and communication with them has been a strength of the mother, so the absence of the mother in divorced families raises a bigger challenge for the roleplay of father since it requires single fathers to "do the job as a mother". The fathers need to struggle to make much more money for the family and devote certain energy and time to take care of the life of the children and focusing on their growth and physical and mental health. Many studies point out that, compared with the father of a completed family, single fathers would show the father involvement with less frequency and lower level [10,11].

The high requirement for the father's involvement raised by the special family environment and the conflicts caused by the insufficient father involvement imposes a negative impact on the growth of children. The children in single-father families would have worse academic performance and much more difficulties in their studies [12], and they also have many problems during the process of socialization [13], such as being incapable to obey and maintain social order, hard to form the correct values and healthy behavioral methods [14].

For a long time, the nurturing behavior of parents in single-parent families has been a focus of the study of such families. In most core families, mothers would shoulder much more nurturing responsibility. The traditional opinions also think that the mother would have much more nurturing strength than the father. Thus, it triggers the interest of a batch of researchers to have a comparative study on the nurturing of single fathers and single mothers; and they also form different explanatory theories based on the strengths and weaknesses of single fathers nurturing children.

The gender perspective emphasizes that the gender role that is performed from personality or physiology and is acquired from biology or early socialization would create a stable and unchanged parenting attribute. Therefore, there is a higher possibility for a mother to take part in the daily nurturing tasks (the physiological nursing and emotional comfort for children), and they would do it better certainly; while the father would spend much time in the entertaining activities and economic

arrangement for the family [15], so they would have less interaction and communication with children. Thus, fathers have obvious weaknesses in the aspect of nurturing experience.

The empirical study under the explanatory aspect of gender role mainly demonstrates and proves the negative impact of single-father families on children by comparing the gap of a series of child development indicators in different family types. For example, Levin and Kirby find that there is a higher prevalence of IBC in single-father families in Scotland [16]; David proposes that the only evidence of the relationship between parental sex and deviant behavior is to take hemp, living with fathers adding the risk of Hispanic teenagers to take hemp; living with fathers increasing the risk of children to have drinking, and the female children living with fathers would be apt to have illegal behavior [17]. Through these findings prove that living with single fathers would increase the risk of the children being involved with misconduct (under certain conditions) through a series of data, these studies could not provide empirical evidence for the specific reasons for the generation of such negative impact due to the limitation of correlation research method; and they could not probe into the micro perspective of the families to explore the causal path and mechanism.

It is thought in a microstructural approach that divergent behaviors of father and mother should not be owed to the lasting or fixed gender characteristics but to the different social conditions faced by them. The social status of single parents would produce similarities in the nurturing behaviors of single mothers or single fathers [18]. The expectation, requirement and provision of the single parent's environment (and others in the environment, i.e. children) would give a chance for the role of single fathers to offset or surpass the traditional gender difference [19]. Some studies show that single fathers would have higher time devotion to the nurturing behavior and housework than the mothers in the completed families, and they would take more participation in the campus activities of children [20], which definitely provides some proof for the perspective of the microstructural approach.

The identity theory and maternal gatekeeping theory also support the opinions of the microstructural approaches from different aspects. The former thinks that there would be an important impact on cognition of self's main role and the degree of self-identity to the role on the time devoted to the role and the situation of playing the role during the process when the individual plays different identities and roles [21]. In another word, the weakness in the father's involvement and nurturing behavior would not be caused by the gender difference or the insufficient nurturing ability and passion of the father but by the identity of most fathers in families, the main supplier (breadwinner) of economic income, so they are too busy to play as a nurturer. The latter emphasizes that the attitude of a mother towards the father's nurturing behavior would impose a great impact on the continuous involvement of the father. When mothers play as the main nurturer in the family and take up the leading positions in nurturing children, they would further hinder the involvement performance of the father by denying and stopping the father's involvement due to the inconsistent nurturing concepts [22].

The studies supported with microstructural approach and other theories provide much more evidence of the strength and potential of single fathers: single mothers and single fathers would have lots of similarities in the self-disclosure of children and the close relationship between parent and children [23,24]. Though single fathers would have much more insufficiencies than single mothers in their participation in family activities, single fathers could gain much more positive comments from their children among all kinds of family types [25].

#### **4. Discussion**

Some literatures point out that fathers are willing to spend much time on children, but wives with the traditional opinion of gender role would stop or restrain their husbands' nurturing behaviors for doubting their nurturing ability so there would be a negative impact on the involvement degree of parents. However, much more studies show that father involvement would not be worse than the mother's involvement when working as the main nurturer of children, even having much more strengths. Such studies powerfully support the opinion that fathers and mothers have no difference in

the instinct and ability to raise children, and it is also helpful to destroy the social stereotypes about fathers not being good at nurturing and guide the wives to realize that the nurturing ability of males is not worse than females, so the role of “gatekeeper” is transformed into the “door opener” to encourage and push husbands to get involved in the nurturing and education of children. Secondly, the impact of the social and economic social status of nurturers on parent-children involvement also warns us to focus on inequality in society and the intergenerational transmission of social status mediated by education. The parent involvement in families with a lower education degree in poor regions by popularizing the nurturing knowledge of scientific families and building a social atmosphere that focuses on family education and parent-children interaction. In addition, the paper’s study on parent involvement and children’s cognitive behavior and learning quality is also helpful to guide the latecomers to focus on much more specific factors of parent involvement when observing family parenting and children’s development, which would provide certain enlightenment and reference for the relevant studies in the future. There has been less attention on single-father families for a long time. However, the parent-children interaction of single-parent families and the quality of family education is closely related to the improvement of population quality and the development of children. The growth and development of children from single-parent families have been a crucial highlight for social work for a long time. Designing and developing group services for single fathers who trap in dilemma in family parenting that is suitable for their special situation and unique needs is helpful to upgrade the nurturing efficacy of single fathers, so as to help them realize the psychological needs of children, adjust the way of education and improve the level of education. Consequently, it would reduce the negative impact of single-parent families on the growth of children and boost the healthy development of children; and it could also provide certain enlightenment for the practice of social work in single father families.

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