

**PERCEPTION OF FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY CHILDCARE BY  
MALE UNDERGRADUATES IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE,  
ABEOKUTA**

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**Abstract**

*Fathers' indifference to early childcare has been a solemn practice in most homes with little understanding of the benefits of their involvement to the development of the child. This research investigated male undergraduates on fathers' involvement in early childcare in FUNAAB, Ogun State. The study utilized descriptive survey design with 400 respondents which were randomly selected from the ten colleges in the University. Structured questionnaire was used to elicit responses from respondents. The questionnaire had Cronbach's reliability Alpha of 0.75. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean and Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The perceived importance of fathers' involvement in early childcare by the respondent is that fathers should make rules for children and ensure compliance (mean = 4.19). The perceived constraints associated with fathers' involvement in early childcare are tediousness and location of fathers' work (mean = 4.11). Findings indicated that the perceived effects of negligence of fathers' involvement in early childcare are emotional insensitivity to other people's feelings (mean = 3.37) and child's unwillingness to learn (mean = 3.33). The result of the test of hypothesis showed that there was positive significant relationship between perceived effect of fathers' negligence ( $r = 0.137$ ) and fathers' involvement. The findings concluded that tediousness and location of fathers' work were major constraints associated with fathers' involvement in early childcare. It is recommended that families should prepare male children for the legal, financial, and emotional responsibilities of fatherhood.*

**Keywords:** Perception of father's involvement, Early childcare, Male undergraduates

## Introduction

The role of parents in early child care cannot be overemphasized. Parents play a key role in child development. It is essential that parents play an integral role in their child's development and that they are encouraged to be full partners in their child's educational and social progress. A child's personal and social development is not only a matter of heredity; it is also influenced by interactions with others, such as parents, caregivers, and peers.

Early childhood is a period from birth to age 6 years; it is a period when children need utmost attention of their parents. It is a time of life during which significant transformations take place. During this period children's vocabulary increases rapidly, and they acquire the ability to remember experiences, sustain attention, count, and recognize letters. Also, they are equipped with basic reflexes, develops into an active, curious child, capable of walking, talking, and pretending (Brooks-Gunn, Fuligni, & Berlin, 2003). Study of the impact of parents on child development such as the effects of attachment, parenting styles, family structure, and parental involvement on a child's personal and social development is essential (Moreno, 2010). Through interactions with adults and peers, young children develop self-concept and self-esteem, improve emotional self-regulation, and form their first friendships (Brooks-Gunn, Fuligni, & Berlin, 2003). In short, the early years are important because they are the period during which children acquire the basic skills that serve as the foundation for later learning.

Rogers, Markel, Midgett, Ryan, and Tannock (2014) examined the factor structure and reliability of a new questionnaire to measure children's perceptions of their parental involvement in learning. They found that exploratory factor analysis supported a four-factor structure representing parental involvement behaviours and emotional tone: parental management of the learning environment; parental participation with homework; controlling parental involvement, and supportive parental involvement. Herrington (2014) studied perceptions of parents regarding their current or recent past experiences with early childhood education programs for their children with and without disabilities. It was shown that parents desire a smaller child-to-adult ratio so that their children with disabilities may be better served in the classroom. Also, the finding contributes additional support to parents agreeing on the representation of quality in an early childhood education programme and that parents desire the same experiences for their children, despite their children's disabilities.

Father plays a crucial role in early child care and child development. Fathers' involvement in early child care is the participation by fathers in a consistent, organized and meaningful way in the consultation, planning, implementation and evaluation of programs and activities that assist their children's development. It goes along with the regular two-way relationship of the home and meaningful communication between fathers and childcare provider and involving parents in decision making (Barnardos' National Children's Resource Centre (BNCRC), 2006). Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (2011) offered a scheme, which consists of three components of fathers' involvement in early child care: (1) *responsibility*, (2) *availability*, and (3) *engagement*.

Responsibility means father making sure that the child is taken care of, distinct from providing the care, as well as arranging for resources for the child (Pleck, 2012). Availability is a related concept concerning the father's potential for interaction, by virtue of being present or being accessible to the child, whether direct interaction is occurring or not. Engagement refers to the father's direct interaction or contact with his child through caregiving and shared activities.

Fathers' nurturing may be less openly expressive than mothers'. In fact, one unique way that fathers nurture their children especially toddlers and teenagers, is by remaining calm when the child is upset or acting out. Studies suggest that fathers who respond calmly when their children misbehave have children who are less aggressive with their friends (Parke, McDowell, Kim, Killian, Dennis, Flyr, & Wild, 2002). Also, fathers play a critical role in providing their children with a mental map of how to respond to difficult situations. This is why they have to learn the art of self-control as they interact with their children. Having a close, positive father-child relationship predicts a reduced risk of engagement in multiple, first time risky behaviours. In addition, when fathers have a positive relationship with their children, the negative effect of having a father with an authoritarian or permissive parenting style with increased risk of engaging in delinquent activity and substance use is reduced (Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, & Carrano, 2006).

The association between father involvement and child development is well established. Positive fathering promotes improved social, emotional, cognitive, and linguistic outcomes in children (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012; Tamis-LeMonda, Kahana, Kalman, & Yoshikawa, 2009). There is general consensus among developmental psychologists that the more extensive a father has an emotional investment, attachment, provision of resources, and involvement with his children, the better off children will be in terms of cognitive competence, school performance, empathy, self-esteem, well-being, life skills, and social competence. In addition, research indicates that the quality of male parenting is more important than legal, biological, or residential ties (Lamb, 2010; Palkovitz, 2002; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002). Stolz, Barber, and Olsen (2005) reported that father involvement is positively correlated with children's overall social competence, social initiative, social maturity, and capacity for relatedness with others. Father involvement protects children from engaging in delinquent behaviour (Harper & Fine, 2006; Gray & Anderson, 2010; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004) and is associated with less substance abuse among adolescent and children who live without their fathers are more likely to experience health related problems (Horn & Sylvester, 2002).

Often, fathers tend to see the responsibility of the early child care as the mothers' duty and only participate occasionally. However, fathers' negligence of early child care has been a solemn practice in most homes with little understanding of the benefits of their involvement in early childcare which has major consequences in the development of the child. Children, who live without their fathers, are, on average, more likely to have problems in school performance (Horn & Sylvester, 2002; Kelly, 2000).

Several studies have been carried out on fathers' involvement in early child care (Parke, McDowell, Kim, Killian, Dennis, Flyr, & Wild, 2002). However, most of these studies are not focused on male undergraduate perception on fathers' involvement in early child care. As potential fathers, most undergraduates tend to develop their mindset towards the method of parenting they will adopt when they become fathers. The way they have been brought up, their environment, lifestyle and family background, contribute to the conscious attitude they show when they become fathers (Lee & McLanahan, 2015). Hence, this research focused on the perception of FUNAAB male undergraduates on the need for fathers' involvement in early childcare. The work sought to provide empirical data on the perceived importance, effects, and constraints associated with fathers' involvement in early childcare.

### Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the respondents' perceived importance of fathers' involvement in early childcare?
2. What are the perceived constraints associated with fathers' involvement in early childcare?
3. What are the perceived effects of negligence of fathers' involvement in early childcare?

### Hypotheses

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between male undergraduates' perception of fathers' negligence and fathers' involvement in early childcare.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between male undergraduates' perception of constraints associated with fathers' involvement and fathers' involvement in early childcare.

### Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The study was conducted at Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB), Ogun State, Nigeria. The population for this study was 9,316 which consisted of the total number of male undergraduate students from the ten colleges in FUNAAB in 2017. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 400 respondents for the study following Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2012). Fathers' Involvement in Early Childcare Questionnaire (FIECQ) was used to elicit responses from the respondents. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections. The first section focused on the respondents' perceived importance of father's involvement in early childcare; the second section had items on perceived constraints associated with fathers' involvement in early child care and the third section focused on the perceived effects of negligence of fathers' involvement in early child care which are measured on five-point Likert type scale format of strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). The instrument was assessed by

experts in the field to ensure lucidity of the items as well as aptness of language expressions and instructions conveyed to the respondents. The content of the instrument was subjected to pilot study using 40 respondents. Reliability test of the instrument using Cronbach's Alpha technique produced a coefficient of 0.75. The total score of the respondents obtainable from each of the scale used was summed up. The average score was then calculated to get the mean score. The mean score for fathers' involvement, effect of fathers' negligence and perceived constraints scales were 23.5, 18.9 and 22.4 respectively. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to analyse the objectives while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to analyse the hypotheses.

### **Results**

RQ1: What is the respondents' perceived importance of fathers' involvement in early childcare?

**Table 1: Perceived importance of fathers' involvement in early childcare**

S/n	Statements	SA F(%)	A F(%)	U F(%)	D F(%)	SD F(%)	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Ran k
1	Fathers should make rules for their children and ensures their children follow the rules.	110 (27.6)	169 (42.3)	43 (10.7)	26 (6.5)	52 (12.9)	4.19	2.729	1 <sup>st</sup>
2	Fathers' care for mothers of their children leads to improved child's health.	170 (42.5)	172 (43.0)	23 (5.8)	20 (5.0)	15 (3.7)	4.16	0.999	2 <sup>nd</sup>
3	Fathers' presence at home instills discipline and compliance with rules and regulations.	178 (44.5)	139 (34.8)	37 (9.2)	35 (8.7)	11 (2.8)	4.14	1.008	3 <sup>rd</sup>
4	Fathers' reading to their children at home aids their speaking ability or skill	124 (31.0)	191 (47.8)	42 (10.5)	37 (9.2)	6 (1.5)	4.00	0.927	4 <sup>th</sup>
5	Children who grew with their fathers might become more daring and confident later in life than others	119 (29.7)	171 (42.8)	60 (15.0)	34 (8.5)	16 (4.0)	3.90	1.037	5 <sup>th</sup>
6	Father's help with homework can aid the child's academic performance	103 (25.8)	184 (46.0)	66 (16.5)	28 (7.0)	19 (4.7)	3.82	1.031	6 <sup>th</sup>
7	Fathers encouraging their children to play leads to development of their muscles	90 (22.5)	178 (44.5)	76 (19.0)	40 (10.0)	16 (4.0)	3.74	1.026	7 <sup>th</sup>
8	Engaging in caring for the child (e.g. bathing, fixing diapers) creates attachment with the child.	59 (14.8)	150 (37.5)	44 (11.0)	90 (22.5)	57 (14.2)	3.18	1.306	8 <sup>th</sup>

Note: SA = Strongly Agreed, A = Agreed, U = Undecided, D = Disagreed, SD = Strongly Disagreed, S.D. = Standard Deviation

Table 1 presents the perceived importance of fathers' involvement in early childcare. Table 1 revealed that, among the perceived importance of fathers' involvement in early childcare, fathers should make rules for children and ensure compliance ranked first

(mean = 4.19), followed by fathers' care for mothers of their children leads to improved child's health (mean = 4.15) while fathers' presence at home instills discipline and compliance with rules and regulations ranked third (mean = 4.14).

RQ2: What are the perceived constraints associated with fathers' involvement in early childcare?

**Table 2: Perceived constraints associated with fathers' involvement in early childcare.**

S/n	Statements	S.A F(%)	A F(%)	U F(%)	D F(%)	SD F(%)	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Rank
1	When father's work is tedious or work location is far from home, it may reduce father's involvement.	153 (38.1)	169 (42.0)	20 (5.0)	30 (7.5)	28 (7.4)	4.11	2.303	1 <sup>st</sup>
2	We live in a male dominated society where mothers have more responsibility over the child.	142 (35.5)	149 (37.3)	33 (8.2)	46 (11.5)	30 (7.5)	4.07	3.483	2 <sup>nd</sup>
3	Lack of money can hinder fathers' involvement in early child care.	116 (29.0)	167 (41.7)	23 (5.8)	56 (14.0)	38 (9.5)	3.80	2.384	3 <sup>rd</sup>
4	Lack of exposure and illiteracy may contribute to low fathers' involvement in early childcare.	101 (25.2)	169 (42.3)	49 (12.2)	57 (14.3)	24 (6.0)	3.68	1.607	4 <sup>th</sup>
5	In-laws interference to the child upbringing can hinder fathers' involvement.	60 (15.0)	144 (36.0)	54 (13.5)	110 (27.5)	32 (8.0)	3.38	2.214	5 <sup>th</sup>
6	Some men fail in their fatherly duties because of what their friends would say.	52 (13.0)	145 (36.2)	78 (19.5)	92 (23.0)	33 (8.3)	3.35	2.353	6 <sup>th</sup>

Table 2 presents respondents' perception of constraints associated with fathers' involvement in early childcare. Result in Table 2 also showed that, among the perceived constraints associated with fathers' involvement in early childcare, tediousness and location of fathers' work ranked first (mean = 4.11), followed by cultural role and responsibility of mothers over the child (mean = 4.07), fathers' lack of financial capacity ranked third (mean = 3.80), while lack of exposure and illiteracy ranked fifth (mean = 3.68).

**RQ3: What are the perceived effects of negligence of fathers' involvement in early childcare?**

**Table 3: Perceived effects of negligence of fathers' involvement in early childcare**

S/ N	Statements	SA F(%)	A F(%)	U F(%)	D F(%)	SD F(%)	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Rank
1	A man can be a good father even if he doesn't live with his child.	63 (15.7)	141 (35.2)	67 (16.8)	87 (21.8)	42 (10.5)	3.43	3.153	1 <sup>st</sup>
2	A child who is deprived of father's care will find it difficult in understanding the emotions of others.	62 (15.5)	152 (38.0)	80 (20.0)	81 (20.2)	25 (6.3)	3.37	7.146	2 <sup>nd</sup>
3	When a child shows an attitude that is less willing to learn from adult, it may be a sign of lack of father's involvement.	46 (11.5)	158 (39.5)	95 (23.8)	93 (23.2)	8 (2.0)	3.33	1.038	3 <sup>rd</sup>
4	A child who is deprived of father's love might demonstrate lack of confidence in social skills.	63 (15.8)	158 (39.5)	54 (13.5)	108 (27.0)	17 (4.2)	3.33	1.163	3 <sup>rd</sup>
5	Alcohol and drug use in older years can be because of father's neglect in childhood.	56 (14.0)	149 (37.2)	46 (11.5)	88 (22.0)	61 (15.3)	3.12	1.334	5 <sup>th</sup>
6	A child who is being deprived of fathers' attention might grow up being quiet and submissive.	43 (10.8)	104 (26.0)	96 (24.0)	119 (29.7)	38 (9.5)	3.09	2.373	6 <sup>th</sup>
7	Feeling of hopelessness in the child is an effect of lack of fathers' involvement.	49 (12.3)	116 (29.0)	79 (19.7)	114 (28.5)	42 (10.5)	3.05	1.217	7 <sup>th</sup>



8	A child who often appears untidy, smelly, with decaying can be a child who lacks fatherly love.	44 (11.0)	65 (16.3)	48 (12.0)	140 (35.0)	103 (25.7)	2.54	1.344	8 <sup>th</sup>
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Table 3 presents perceived effects of negligence of fathers’ involvement in early childcare. Findings presented in Table 3 indicated that, among the perceived effects of negligence of fathers’ involvement in early childcare, emotional insensitivity to other people’s feelings ranked second (mean = 3.37), while child’s unwillingness to learn ranked third (mean = 3.33) alongside child’s lack of confidence in social skills (mean = 3.33).

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between male undergraduates’ perception of effects of fathers’ negligence and fathers’ involvement in early childcare.

**Table 4: Test of relationship between perceived effects of fathers’ negligence and fathers’ involvement in early childcare**

Variables	Mean	S.D.	N	r	p-value	Decision
Perception of effects of fathers’ negligence	18.9	4.347	400	0.137	0.007	Significant
Fathers’ involvement	23.5	4.604				

Decision criteria: reject null hypothesis if  $p < 0.05$ , accept null hypothesis if  $p > 0.05$

Table 4 presents the PPMC analysis of the relationship between perceived effects of fathers’ negligence and fathers’ involvement in early childcare. It shows that there is a significant positive relationship between perceived effects of fathers’ negligence and fathers’ involvement in early childcare ( $r=0.137$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The result implies significant positive relationship between fathers’ involvement in early childcare and perceived effects of fathers’ negligence in early childcare.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between male undergraduates’ perception of constraints associated with fathers’ involvement and fathers’ involvement in early childcare.

**Table 5: Test of significant relationship between perceived constraints associated with fathers' involvement and fathers' involvement in early childcare.**

Variables	Mean	S.D.	N	r	p-value	Decision
Perceived constraints	22.4	4.733	400	-0.157	0.002	Significant
Fathers' involvement	23.5	4.848				

Table 5 presents the PPMC analysis of the relationship between perceived constraints associated with fathers' involvement and fathers' involvement in early childcare. It shows that there is a significant negative relationship between constraints associated with fathers' involvement ( $r = -0.157$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and fathers' involvement in early childcare. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The result implies significant negative relationship between constraints associated with fathers' involvement in early childcare and perceived effects of fathers' negligence in early childcare.

### Discussion of Findings

It is important that fathers play an integral role in their child development. The roles of fathers' involvement in child development cannot be overemphasized. The finding in Table 1 indicated that fathers' care for mothers of their children leads to improved child's health. This finding agrees with Rosenberg and Wilcox (2006) who posited that one of the most important ways that men can be good fathers is by treating the mother of their children with affection, respect, and consideration. Also, finding revealed that fathers' presence at home instill discipline and compliance with rules and regulations which concurs with Pruett (2000) who posited that discipline often is difficult and frustrating; hence, fathers can make raising children easier for all in the family by taking up a substantial share of child discipline. Fathers seem to be uniquely successful in disciplining boys, perhaps in part because boys are often more likely to respond to discipline by a man (Pruett, 2000).

The findings in Table 2 revealed the perceived constraints associated with fathers' involvement in early child care. The result showed that the perceived constraints associated with fathers' involvement in early childcare are tediousness and location of fathers' work, and fathers' lack of financial capacity. The finding is in line with the assertion of Crouter, Bumpas, Head and McHale (2001) that fathers who work long hours are more likely to feel overloaded, be less accepting of their children, and be less effective in perspective taking. The combination of working long hours and feeling overloaded predicted the relationship quality that fathers had with their children (Crouter *et al*, 2001).

Findings in Table 3 revealed that the perceived effects of negligence of fathers' involvement in early childcare are emotional insensitivity to other people's feelings, and child's lack of confidence in social skills. This finding revealed that negligence of fathers' involvement in early childcare may lead to emotional insensitivity and its attendant consequences This was further supported by the study of Cuffe, McKeown,

Addy, and Garrison (2005) which stated that not living with both biological parents quadruples the risk of having an affective disorder.

The result of the hypothesis test in Table 4 showed that there is a significant positive relationship between perceived effects of fathers' negligence and fathers' involvement in early childcare. The result implies significant positive relationship between fathers' involvement in early childcare and perceived effects of fathers' negligence in early childcare. One of the proof to this result according to Horn and Sylvester (2002) is that children in father absent homes are more likely to have problems in emotional and psychosocial adjustment and exhibit a variety of internalizing and externalizing behaviours.

Also, the result of the hypothesis test in Table 5 showed that there is a significant negative relationship between constraints associated with fathers' involvement and fathers' involvement in early childcare. This implies that lack of finances which is a constraint might hinder fathers to make their children explore beyond the surroundings thereby, limiting the child's relational and educational development throughout their lifetime.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

The findings concluded that tediousness and location of fathers' work are major constraints associated with fathers' involvement in early childcare while one of the major perceived effects of negligence of fathers' involvement was lack of emotional sensitivity to other people's feelings and unwillingness to learn. Significant positive relationship exists between perceived effects of fathers' negligence and fathers' involvement in early childcare. There is significant negative relationship between constraints associated with fathers' involvement and fathers' involvement in early childcare. It is recommended that families should prepare male children for the legal, financial, and emotional responsibilities of fatherhood early in life. Government and Non-governmental organizations should create support groups for expectant fathers, fathers with toddlers and childhood educators in schools in order to promote this knowledge and educate them on their required involvement in early childcare.

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