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EFFECTS OF FATHER ABSENCE ON AGE OF SEXUAL ACTIVITY AND CURRENT STRESS AND ATTACHMENT LEVELS OF YOUNG ADULT WOMEN

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EFFECTS OF FATHER ABSENCE ON AGE OF SEXUAL ACTIVITY AND CURRENT STRESS AND
ATTACHMENT LEVELS OF YOUNG ADULT WOMEN

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in
Family Sciences in the College of Agriculture, Food
and Environment at the University of Kentucky

By

Stephanie Glenn

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Ronald Werner-Wilson, Professor of Family Sciences

Lexington, Kentucky

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Effects of Father Absence on Age of Sexual Activity and Current Stress and Attachment Levels of Young Adult Women

This study bridges the gap in literature about the impact of father absence on female adult attachment and current stress levels. A sample of 666 female college students between the ages of 18 and 22 at the University of Kentucky was recruited to complete an online survey about their experience with their fathers and the effects on their attachment and stress levels, while assessing the age of their first sexual experience. Father absence seems to be a significant predictor of earlier sexual activity among females and anxious attachment styles, along with higher stress levels. When the father is absent from the home, females have sex earlier than when the father is present in the home. Females who experience father absence have higher anxious attachment levels and higher current stress levels. These findings inform therapists about the importance of recognizing attachment injuries when dealing with individuals and supports the need for mother and father involvement in a female's life.

KEYWORDS: Father Absence, Adult Attachment, Stress, Sexual Activity, Young Adult Females

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Chapter One: Introduction

Father absence has been an increasingly prevalent issue within multiple societies, and the impacts that the absence creates are lifelong. Some of these lifelong impacts include early sexual activity, insecure attachment levels, and a stressful environment (Chisholm, Quinlivan, Petersen, & Coall, 2005, p. 234; Mendle, Harden, Turkheimer, Van Hulle, D'Onofrio, Brooks-Gunn, & Lahey, 2009). Researchers find that single mother households have become a rapidly increasing change in American society, which has led to questions as to why and what influence this has on individuals and families (East & O'Brien, 2006). Rohner and Veneziano (2001) suggest that the attention placed on mothers is larger than attention on fathers, due to society's view that the presence of mothers is more important than the presence of fathers. This places pressure on the mother to provide the psychological well-being needed in the child's or adolescent's development, while also dealing with the absence of the father. Because of this stress, researchers find evidence that father absence affects individuals and families over time (McLanahan, Tach, & Schneider, 2013). Not only is there an impact as soon as the father becomes absent, as the family adjusts and experiences new transitions, they will continue to face the burden of not having the father or experiencing a lack of resources.

Father absence has been noted to have impacts on female children in terms of age of first sexual activity and self-esteem. When the father is not there, the female may begin to seek male validation in other areas, and what is often available is sex. When girls have a sexual experience earlier in their lives, they tend to be left with broken hearts and attachment injuries. The gap I am aiming to fill within this area of study is focusing on

young adult female levels of attachment and stress and determining if there is a correlation with age of sexual activity.

One of the biggest challenges when studying father absence is finding an effective way to define absence. The father may have passed away, the parents could be divorced but the father is still involved, the father could be in the home but not active in the child's life, or the father could have left at any given point in the child's life and had no connection or contact with the child or adolescent and the mother. Because of these differences in definition, researchers highlight the significance of identifying how absence has been defined. For the present study, we investigated absence associated with divorce.

Theoretical Perspective

Attachment theory. Attachment theory, based on the joint work of John Bowlby and Mary Salter Ainsworth originally focused on a child's tie to the mother and the impact of separation, deprivation, and bereavement (Bretherton, 1992). Ainsworth believed that the concept of an attachment figure was to provide a secure base for the infant to explore the world. Attachment theory is important when studying the effects of father absence because it aids in understanding the potential for lifelong impact.

Secure attachment involves children who have a safe base to explore and search for their attachment figures in time of distress. These children are easily soothed by their attachment figures by through recognition of their attachment figure's availability. When their mother leaves the room, they began to search for her and are easily soothed when she returns. Ambivalent attachment involves children who appear clingy but will also reject their attachment figure when they interact with them. These children find it

difficult to develop feelings of security. The final level, avoidant, involves children who do not search for affirmation from their attachment figure when they experience distress. These children likely have experienced a caregiver who is insensitive and detached. It is important to understand these levels of attachment when researching absence of fathers and adult attachment levels (Bretherton, 1992). While these seem like concrete levels of attachment, they can change over time and are not permanent.

Many of the attachment studies regarding caregiving roles and children conducted have focused on the mother as the attachment figure, so there has been an increased need to investigate other attachment figures, including fathers, grandparents, and siblings. Investigating father influence seems particularly important because when mothers are present and active but fathers are not, secure levels of attachment could be impacted. There has been a particular lack of literature regarding current attachment levels for young adult females whose fathers have been absent.

Family Stress Theory.

Family stress theory is a theory that explores why some families thrive and grow among adversity while other families tend to fall apart (Patterson, 2002). When looking at how father absence has impacted individuals and families, it is important to understand how the family handled stress and what kind of support they had. It is also important to look at how the absence of the father is going to impact the expectations of the family being successful or not. Lastly, understanding what protective factors the family needs to implement is crucial in determining the resiliency in families whose fathers are absent from the home. Family stress theory is important when studying the impact of father absence on sexual activity and adult attachment because it examines how the lack of the

father in the home can cause stress and economic issues in the family. It can be used to examine how families react to stress in the family when the father leaves, and how they perceive their abilities and their unmet needs. It is essential to recognize that this stress level in the family can influence how the female handles difficult situations as she goes through life, also impacting her beliefs in her abilities.

The theory suggests that one of the most stressful environments can be that of a fatherless home in the first seven years of the girl's life (Comings, Muhleman, Johnson, & MacMurray, 2002). When daughters are not exposed to safety and stability in their home, they are more likely to engage in sexual activity and seek relationships at a younger age because they are not receiving male affection at home. When daughters are exposed to a stable home, they are more likely to have a later onset of puberty due to potential less stress and they take their time when searching for a stable relationship (Comings et al., 2002). There is no urgency in searching for a relationship because they have an appropriate attachment with their father at home.

Literature Review

Previous literature has provided evidence that there are long-lasting effects when the father is absent, and that these long-lasting effects can be detrimental when females seek to form relationships. Father absence has been recognized as a predictor of early sexual activity which can lead to difficulties when the female forms relationships and how she perceives stressful situations (Mendle et al., 2009; Quinlan, 2003). Researchers understand the importance of recognizing these risks and exploring the numerous areas affected the by absence of the father.

Sexual Activity

When females are raised without their biological father present in the home, they may engage in intercourse earlier than females who are raised with their biological father in the home (Mendle et al., 2009). Mendle et al. (2009) suggests that there are multiple explanations for earlier sexual activity among females coming from absent father homes, and one of these is reduced parental control. The female likely has more unsupervised time due to the lack of two, present parents. An additional finding is that there are developmental pathways behind female reproductive behavior and that these have close association with the father's role in the family (Mendle et al., 2009). When the father is present in the daughter's life, she may receive validation and affection from him rather than seeking it somewhere else. On the other hand, when the father is not present the female may begin to seek validation and affection from individuals who are willing to give it to her.

Parents also influence their children's ideas about sex (Mendle et al., 2009; Quinlan, 2003). If the father is absent, there is a potential that the mother is engaging in sexual intercourse with individual with whom she is not married, which has been found to signify sex as a casual experience. Quinlan (2003) found that reproductive development has an association with parental separation and that the association is not confounded by socioeconomic status or the mother's reproductive behavior. If the father becomes absent between birth and the first 5 years of the child's life, early menarche and sexual intercourse could be predicted. The absence of the father is found to bring forth stress, which leads to earlier sexual activity.

Stress

Earlier life stress has proven to provoke earlier puberty and earlier sexual activity (Ellis et al., 2003). Family stress theory would assume that some families are not able to positively adjust and grow through the stressful experiences, which can cause a stressful environment for the female and family. Some of these stress factors that are associated with father absence include poverty, divorce, and conflict which can also impact early sexual activity and pregnancy (Ellis et al., 2003). Ellis et. al. (2003) found that when the father is absent from the home before the daughter turns five, the daughters tend to seek attention and affection from males to cope with the stress they are already experiencing, at higher rates than daughters whose fathers became absent after the age of five.

Stress has been recognizably present when the father leaves the home or when the father has never been present in the child's life. When the father leaves the home, the mother is left to raise the child or children on her own, unless she has some type of support system that can provide assistance. Regardless, a level of pressure has been added to the mother and child or children, who are suffering with the consequences. The child is also unable to appropriately attach to their father and receive the security they need.

When the father is not present, the absence "predisposes both sexes (male and female children) toward early and/or frequent reproduction and exploitative or tenuous pair bonds (relationship through sexual activity) and father presence predisposing both sexes toward later and lower reproduction and more enduring pair bonds" (Chisholm et

al., 2005, p. 234). This suggests that puberty can occur earlier for girls who are exposed to stressful environments.

“Security is important for all humans but for females it is vital for growth” (Krohn & Bogan, 2001, p. 563). While both males and females need security growing up, females desire safety from their fathers because it allows them to freely explore. Krohn and Bogan (2001) found that when the father is present and active in the daughter’s life, it can help her reduce stress. When the father is not around, it can cause the daughter to search for outside influences to find security.

Bowlby (1988) suggested that when individuals feel threatened or are experiencing stress, their attachment system will become activated. The attachment system will vary depending on the security that is or is not present in the caregiver relationship. Stressors can include personal factors (hunger, pain, fatigue, illness), environmental factors (dangerous or challenging events), and relationship factors (relationship conflict, discouragement of proximity by attachment figures, prolonged absence of, separation from, or death of an attachment figure) (Simpson & Rholes, 2015). When examining the effects of a prolonged absence of a father attachment figure, for example, stress is said to be present. This absence causes the child/adolescent to wonder or fear that their needs may not be met (physical and emotional). They may also experience relationship stressors because of the obvious absence of their father and the potentially strained relationship between them and their mothers because of the mother’s additional responsibilities.

Attachment

With most of the research involving attachment focusing on the mother as the attachment figure, there has been little focus on fathers especially when it comes to young adult females. What has been revealed is that fathers influence infant's attachment through their own relationship with the infant and their relationship with the mother (de Wolff & van Ijzendoorn, 1997). If the father, for example, has a negative impact on the mother's well-being it can lead to negative impacts for the child as well. Chisholm et al. (2005) found that when fathers were absent, females were more likely to have insecure attachment styles.

Purpose

For this study, *father absence* is defined as the biological father no longer living in the home due to difficulty in assessing degree of father involvement. *Sexual activity* is defined by the following: intercourse, oral sex, and manual genital stimulation. *Attachment* is divided into three categories- close, depend, and anxious- examining how participants score in each level. *Stress* is measured based on how participants perceive their current stress levels. It is important that there is a definition for father absence since there are several different pathways from which it can occur. For this study, we will be defining father absence as the father no longer living in the home.

Based on past studies, there is scholarly evidence that suggests father absence can lead to an earlier age for sexual activity among females (Mendle et al., 2009; Quinlan, 2003). There is scholarly evidence indicating father absence can impact female attachment levels and create more stress in the female's life.

H1: females who experience father absence will engage in a sexual experience earlier in life than females whose fathers are still present.

H2: there is an association between age of sexual activity and anxious attachment levels.

H3: there is an association between age of sexual activity and current stress levels.

Chapter Two: Methods

Sampling

A sample of female students at the University of Kentucky was recruited to complete an online survey through Qualtrics. Participants were recruited through a modified Dillman approach which emphasizes repeated contact (Dillman, 2007). First, the e-mail addresses of all female students at the University of Kentucky were obtained by sending an open-records request to ukopenrecords@uky.edu. Then, a random probability sample of 10,000 e-mail addresses of female college students was generated. Next, an e-mail introducing the study and providing the Qualtrics survey link was sent to the sample (See Appendix A). A reminder e-mail was sent a week after the initial email for individuals who had not yet completed the survey to have another opportunity.

Participants were made aware that by participating in the study, there would be a drawing for four \$25 checks for every 100 people who completed the survey. Therefore, students were informed that they had a 1 in 25 chance on winning \$25. The reason for using lottery incentives is due to the finding that lottery incentives are successful at increasing college students' response rates on internet surveys. To randomize the selection of the \$25 check recipients, each participant was assigned a number and then Microsoft Excel was used to generate random numbers, which corresponded to the winning participants.

Participants

Inclusion criteria required participants to be female college students between the ages of 18 and 22, to assess for females who are considered young adult. We did not exclude females whose fathers were still present because we were unsure of the amount of participants we would receive. Due to incomplete data, a total of 666 students were

used in the analysis. Participants ranged from 18 to 22 years of age, with 21 year olds being the largest group (21.9%), followed by the 22 year olds (20.5%), the 19 year olds (18.9%), the 20 year olds (17.3%), and 18 year olds (16.1%). Most participants were Caucasian (72.8%), followed by Black or African American (7.7%), Latino or Hispanic (4.2%), Asian or Asian American (3.6%), Middle Eastern or Arab American (.9%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (.5%), and American Indian or Native Alaskan (.4%). When asked if their biological parents still lived together, 60.3% indicated that their parents still live together and 34.2% indicated that their biological parents no longer live together, while missing 5.5% of the data. Of the participants whose father's left the home, the majority of participants marked that it was during infancy (32.2%) and early childhood (31.7%); followed by middle childhood (16.7%), adolescence (14.4%), and young adulthood (5%). Of the participants whose mothers left the home, the majority of participants marked that it was during young adulthood (33.9%), followed by early childhood (20%), adolescence (19.1%), infancy (13.9%), and middle childhood (13.0%).

Procedure

Research procedures followed a protocol approved by the University of Kentucky's Institutional Review Board (See Appendix B). The online survey began with an informed consent page which required the participants to read and agree to its terms (see Appendix C). Participants were asked to complete all parts of the survey, but were informed that they could close out of the survey whenever they wished, as the nature of the survey was purely voluntary.

Measures

Demographics. The first portion of the survey contained demographic questions, including age, biological sex, whether or not their biological parents still lived together, the age they were when their father or mother left, age of their first sexual experience, sexual identity, and racial or ethnic identity (See Appendix D). These were included at the beginning of the survey to prevent participants taking the full survey without their responses being recorded. If someone answered that biologically they were male, they were not qualified to take the survey.

Sexual activity. The survey inquired about the age the participant had their first sexual experience. Sexual experience was considered as oral sex, intercourse, or manual genital stimulation (hand-job). This question was asked to assess for the age of their first sexual experience and to determine any correlations with adult attachment levels and current stress levels. This question was also asked in efforts to provide information for the first hypothesis of the current study.

Adult attachment level. Participants also completed the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS; Collins & Read, 1990), which was based on the original work done by Hazen and Shaver (1987) and Levy and Davis (1988), originally containing three prototypical descriptions. Collins and Read (1990) created an 18-item instrument designed to measure adult attachment level, based on the three prototypical descriptions originally created. (see Appendix E). Examples of items include, “I do not worry about being abandoned” and “I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be there when I need them”. Collins and Read (1990) reported Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of .69 for Close, .75 for

Depend, and .72 for Anxiety. Along with this, test-retest correlations for a 2-month period were .68 for Close, .71 for Depend, and .52 for Anxiety.

The AAS identifies three adult attachment styles named “secure”, “anxious”, and “avoidant”. The subscales of the AAS include “Close”, “Depend”, and “Anxiety”. Close measures extent to which a person is comfortable with closeness and intimacy when forming relationships. Depend measures the extent to which a person feels that he/she can depend on others and can expect them to be available when needed. Anxiety measures the extent to which a person is worried about being abandoned or unloved. Respondents would classify as having secure attachment if they had high scores on close and depend subscales, and low on anxiety subscale. Respondents would classify as having anxious attachment if they had high scores on anxiety subscale and moderate scores on close and depend subscales. Respondents would classify as having avoidant attachment if they had low scores on Close, Depend, and Anxiety subscales. The scores range from 6-30, with 18 being the moderate score.

Stress. Stress was measured in this survey through use of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen, Karmack, & Mermelstein, 1988) (See Appendix F). The questions used in the scale ask respondents to think about their feelings and thoughts over the last month. Examples of the items include, “In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?” and “In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?”. The purpose of using this scale which accounts for more recent levels of stress rather than having respondents recall their stress levels while growing up is to account for more accurate responses. Respondents typically find it difficult to recall too far into the

past, specifically with the nature of this study potentially connecting back to infancy or early childhood.

Chapter Three: Results

The first hypothesis of the study is that females who experience father absence will engage in a sexual experience earlier in life than females whose fathers are still present. The second hypothesis is that there would be an association between age of sexual activity and anxious attachment levels. The third hypothesis is that there would be an association between age of sexual activity and current stress levels.

In order to test the first hypothesis, we completed a T-Test to compare means for those whose biological parents did not divorce to those whose parents divorced, but the father left. We then completed an ANOVA, allowing us to look at three groups to see if there was a difference between mother and father absence as well as non-divorced families. We then ran another T-Test that compared the means for “Do your biological parents still live together”. A final T-Test was run that compared the means from the father leaving and the mother leaving. To test the second and third hypotheses, we completed a bivariate correlational analysis. The bivariate correlational analysis compared levels of attachment, age of sexual activity, and current stress level.

The T-Test comparing means for those whose biological parents did not divorce to those whose parents divorced, but the father left was statistically significant (See Table 3.1). Participants whose parents divorced had sex at an earlier age ($M = 15.745$, $SD = 2.174$) than those whose parents did not divorce ($M = 16.41$, $SD = 1.93$; $t(df=487) = 3.41$, $p < .001$).

The ANOVA (See Table 3.2), allowing us to look at three groups to see if there was a difference between mother and father absence as well as non-divorced families,

was statistically significant ($F = 6.35, p < .01$). This suggests that the issue existing may be due to a parent moving out more than specifically the father moving out.

The final T-Test, comparing the means created through the various tests was not significant (See Table 3.3). Participants whose fathers moved out were similar to participants whose mothers moved out ($M = 15.747, SD = .176; M = 15.943, SD = .201$). This implies that participants whose biological parents are not living together had their first sexual experience at an earlier age than those whose parents are still together, but it is not because fathers have left specifically.

Bivariate correlational analysis revealed that there was a significant correlation between the levels of attachment (close, depend, and anxious), age of sexual activity, and current stress level. In order to determine the relationships between the variables, Pearson correlations were conducted and examined (see Table 3.4). As predicted by the hypotheses, anxious attachment style was negatively correlated with sexual experience, $r = -.093, p < .05$. Also, as predicted by the hypotheses, current level of stress was negatively correlated with sexual experience, $r = -.147, p < .01$.

In addition to testing the hypotheses, we ran a t-Test for levels of attachment, stress, and if the biological parents still lived together (See Table 3.5). There were higher levels of Close and Depend for parents who still lived together ($M = 3.624, SD = .761; M = 3.218, SD = .867$), lower levels of Anxiety ($M = 2.551, SD = .843$), and lower levels of stress ($M = 2.306, SD = .701$). Respondents scored higher in Anxiety if the parents no longer lived together ($M = 2.943, SD = .879$) lower in Close and Depend ($M = 3.321, SD = .794; M = 2.549, SD = .890$), and higher levels of stress ($M = 2.616, SD = 7.222$).

Table 3.1

T-Test for Parent Presence and Age at First Sex

	Parent Presence	Mean	St. Deviation
Age at first sex	Biological Parents Still Together	16.415	1.973
	Divorced/Separated- Father Moved Out	15.745	2.174

Table 3.2
Oneway ANOVA for Parent Presence and Age at First Sex

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	50.473	2	25.236	6.354	.002
Within Groups	2069.199	521	3.972		
Total	2119.672	523			

Table 3.3
Pearson Correlations between All Variables for Total Sample

	Close	Depend	Anxious	Stress	Sex
Close	-				
Depend	.648**	-			
Anxious	-.305**	-.472**	-		
Stress	-.400**	-.509**	.485**	-	
Sex	-.038**	.074	-.093*	-.147**	-

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3.4
Final T-Test for Parent Presence at First Sex

	Parent Presence	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age at first sex	Divorced/Separated Father Moved out	16.415	1.973
	Divorced/Separated Mother Moved Out	15.745	2.174

Table 3.5
T-Test for Attachment and Parents Living Together

	Do your biological parents still live together?	Mean	Std. Deviation
Close	Yes	3.624	.761
	No	3.321	.794
Depend	Yes	3.218	.868
	No	2.549	.890
Anxious	Yes	2.551	.842
	No	2.943	.879
Stress	Yes	2.306	.702
	No	2.616	.722

Chapter Four: Discussion

The purpose of this present study was to examine the impacts of father absence on females in terms of sexual activity, adult attachment, and current stress. Sexual activity was defined as sexual intercourse, oral sex, or manual genital stimulation. Adult attachment was divided into three different categories: Close, Depend, and Anxiety. Stress was measure in terms of the female's current level of perceived stress.

The first hypothesis of the current study is that females who experience father absence will engage in a sexual experience earlier in life than females whose fathers are still present. The hypothesis was partially supported by the data. A T-Test comparing the means for individuals whose biological parents did not divorce and those who did divorce with the father leaving, was statistically significant. An ANOVA revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between mother and father absence, as well as non divorced families. Although it was statistically significant, the mean for first sexual experience was similar if the mothers left or if the father left. This implies that children may be impacted by the fact that a parent has moved out more than specifically if the father moved out. A final T-Test, examining if the father leaving was more important than the mother leaving, was not significant. While females whose biological parents are not living together had their first sexual experience at an earlier age than those whose parents are still together, it is not because of the father leaving specifically. This could have implications that stress could potentially be leading to earlier sexual activity due to a disruption in the home.

The second hypothesis of the current study is that there would be an association between age of sexual activity and anxious attachment styles. This was supported by the

data. As expected, the data revealed that females who had earlier sexual experiences had higher scores on Anxiety subscale and moderate scores on Close and Depend subscales. The third hypothesis of the current study is that females who had an earlier age of sexual activity would have higher levels of current stress. This hypothesis was supported by the data. As expected, those who had an earlier age of sexual activity had higher levels of current stress.

Implications

Using a convenient sample, such as female students from one university, excludes a large portion of individuals. Previous research indicates that the father being absent from the home may cause earlier ages of sexual activity (Mendle et al., 2009). The results of the current study, however, reveal that an earlier age of sexual activity is closely related with biological parents no longer living together rather than specifically the father leaving the home. While this does not support the first hypothesis of the study, it is an important finding for the field of family sciences. This finding suggests that females who experience a disruption in the home are more likely to engage in sexual activity earlier than females who experience an intact home life. Earlier sexual activity, as revealed in the current study, was associated with higher levels of anxious attachment and higher levels of current stress. Although it is not specifically father absence leading to earlier age of sexual activity, this reveals the importance in recognizing that earlier sexual activity is associated with anxious attachment and higher levels of stress.

There are several policy implications based on the results of this current study. The results of this current study suggest that divorce mediation could be recommended. Recent studies suggest that divorce mediation is more effective than divorce litigation

(Shaw, 2010). Divorce mediation could allow parents to recognize the long-term impacts divorce can have on their child(ren). There are implications that the mediator in the process could share with the parents the potential for anxious attachment styles and high levels of stress. The therapist would work with the family while explaining the importance of the mother's and father's role throughout the entire process.

Case Example

I, an intern marriage and family therapist, worked with a family who had gone through the process of divorce. The parents, though they are divorced, agreed that they should bring their children to therapy due to the disruption in the home and new transitions. While I did not see them all together as a family to avoid giving the children false hope that the parents will get back together, I conducted sessions with the father and the children and the mother with the children, along as some sessions with only the parents. Throughout these sessions, I was impressed by the parental support each parent has offered. One session, involving the father and the children, stands out among other sessions. The father mentioned that he worries about them when he is not there and he worries that he has traveled for work too much, and that he misses them. The daughter replied, "It's so nice to know that you're thinking about us. That makes me feel really good." I encouraged the father to continue being open about his feelings toward his children as it is extremely important for them to feel loved and that they are enough for him.

This therapeutic experience mentioned above and the results of the current study, strengthen the support for Bowen's Family Systems Theory. Family systems theory, one of the first theories of family systems functioning, believes that there is an importance in

understanding family of origin and that it is more effective to examine the family as a whole rather than solely focusing on the individual (Brown, 1999). Working with a family, as stated above, would allow the therapist to communicate the importance of involvement with the child(ren) even if the parents are not able to get along. The child must realize that they are loved by both parents and that they can feel secure in that relationship.

Limitations

Although the current study presents important findings for the world of family therapy, readers are advised to use caution while reading the results due to the limitations of the study. The current study was conducted at the University of Kentucky, which means that the results are not generalizable to the entire female population. Future research could benefit from studying females in diverse locations, within and outside of the United States. The sample was also primarily homogenous, with the majority of the respondents being white and heterosexual. A more diverse sample including various ethnicities and sexual orientations could benefit future research and could potentially change the results. The current study also could have included a qualitative approach by asking how the fathers became absent rather than working with the definition of the father simply leaving the home. Future research could account for fathers who have passed away or even accounting for fathers who may have been physically present but emotionally absent. Finally, a longitudinal approach to this research topic would allow researchers to understand other relational influences the females experience as they develop through their lives. A longitudinal approach could also account for changes that may occur over time, specifically regarding attachment and stress.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to strengthen research regarding the impacts of father absence on female development in terms of sexual activity, adult attachment, and stress. Sexual activity, occurring earlier for females whose biological parents no longer live together, was closely associated with anxious attachment levels and higher stress levels. Although it did not specifically lead to earlier sexual activity if the father was absent, it revealed important results involving the impact of divorce or separation.

Appendix A

Participant Recruitment E-mails

Dear student,

Because you are enrolled at the University of Kentucky, we would appreciate it if you will take roughly 15 minutes to complete a survey designed to assess experiences with father absence. If you are a female, currently 18 to 22 years old, then you are eligible to participate in this research study. By completing the survey, you will be offered to enter a drawing for four \$25 checks for every 100 people who complete the survey, up to \$1000. Students, therefore, will be informed that they have a 1 in 40 chance of winning \$25 for completing the survey.

To begin the survey, go to:

If you have any questions regarding this survey, please e-mail Stephanie Glenn at saco236@uky.edu

Respectfully

Stephanie Glenn and Dr. Ronald Werner-Wilson

Appendix B



Office of Research Integrity
IRB, RDRC

Initial Review

Approval Ends
November 28, 2018

IRB Number
17-0756-P4S

TO: Stephanie A Glenn (Combs)

FROM: Non-medical Institutional Review Board (IRB)

SUBJECT: Approval of Protocol Number 17-0756-P4S

DATE: November 30, 2017

On November 29, 2017, the Non-medical Institutional Review Board approved your protocol entitled:

Effects of Father Absence on Early Sexual Activity and Current Stress and Attachment Levels of Females

Approval is effective from November 29, 2017 until November 28, 2018 and extends to any consent/assent form, cover letter, and/or phone script. If applicable, attached is the IRB approved consent/assent document(s) to be used when enrolling subjects. **[Note, subjects can only be enrolled using consent/assent forms which have a valid "IRB Approval" stamp unless special waiver has been obtained from the IRB.]** Prior to the end of this period, you will be sent a Continuation Review Report Form which must be completed and returned to the Office of Research Integrity so that the protocol can be reviewed and approved for the next period.

In implementing the research activities, you are responsible for complying with IRB decisions, conditions and requirements. The research procedures should be implemented as approved in the IRB protocol. It is the principal investigators responsibility to ensure any changes planned for the research are submitted for review and approval by the IRB prior to implementation. Protocol changes made without prior IRB approval to eliminate apparent hazards to the subject(s) should be reported in writing immediately to the IRB. Furthermore, discontinuing a study or completion of a study is considered a change in the protocol's status and therefore the IRB should be promptly notified in writing.

For information describing investigator responsibilities after obtaining IRB approval, download and read the document "PI Guidance to Responsibilities, Qualifications, Records and Documentation of Human Subjects Research" from the Office of Research Integrity's IRB Survival Handbook web page [<http://www.research.uky.edu/ori/IRB-Survival-Handbook.html#PIresponsibilities>]. Additional information regarding IRB review, federal regulations, and institutional policies may be found through ORI's web site [<http://www.research.uky.edu/ori>]. If you have questions, need additional information, or would like a paper copy of the above mentioned document, contact the Office of Research Integrity at (859) 257-9428.

see blue.

315 Kinkead Hall | Lexington, KY 40506-0057 | P: 859-257-9428 | F: 859-257-8995 | www.research.uky.edu/ori/

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Appendix C

Informed Consent

You are being invited to take part in a research study about father absence. You are being invited to this study because you are a female undergraduate college student. Your response is highly valued and will contribute to research that may greatly improve the understanding of the effects of father absence on current stress and attachment levels.

Although you will not get immediate personal benefit from taking part in this research study, your responses may help us understand more about our needs as current and future professionals when working with female college students.

We hope to receive completed questionnaires from about 1000 people, so your answers are important to us. You have a choice about whether or not to complete the questionnaire, but if you do participate, you are free to skip any questions or discontinue at any time.

The questionnaire will take about 15 minutes to complete.

The questions within this survey are of a personal nature. Although we have tried to minimize this, some questions may make you feel upset or uncomfortable, and you may choose to not answer them. If some questions do upset you or make you uncomfortable, we can provide you resources for people who may be able to help you with these feelings at the end of the survey.

Your response to the survey is confidential, which means no names or e-mail addresses will appear or be used on research documents, or be used in presentations or publications. The research team will not know that any information you provided came from you.

Please be aware, while we make every effort to safeguard your data once received from the online survey/data gathering company, given the nature of online surveys, as with anything involving the Internet, we can never guarantee the confidentiality of the data while still on the survey/data gathering company's servers, or while en route to either them or us. It is also possible the raw data collected for research purposes may be used for marketing or reporting purposes by the survey/data gathering company after the research is concluded, depending on the company's Terms of Service and Privacy policies.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at saco236@uky.edu or my academic advisor Ronald Werner-Wilson, Ph.D. at ronald.werner-wilson@uky.edu. If you have complaints, suggestions, or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the staff in the University of Kentucky Office of Research Integrity at 859-257-9428 or toll-free at 1-866-400-9428.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this important research study.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Glenn
Department of Family Sciences, University of Kentucky
E-mail: saco236@uky.edu

Appendix D

Demographic Information

1. What is your age?
 - a. 18
 - b. 19
 - c. 20
 - d. 21
 - e. 22
2. What is your biological sex?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Intersex
3. Do your biological parents still live together?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Did your biological parents divorce?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. If your parents have divorced, did your father move out of the home?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. If your parents have divorced, did your mother move out of the home?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. What age were you when your father left?
 - a. Infancy (birth to 2 years old)
 - b. Early childhood (3 to 8 years old)
 - c. Middle childhood (9 to 11 years old)
 - d. Adolescence (12 to 18 years)
 - e. Young adulthood (18+)
8. How old were you when you first had sex or a sexual experience? (oral sex, intercourse, or manual genital stimulation [hand-job])

9. Which of the following best describes your racial or ethnic identity? (Select all that apply)
 - a. Straight or heterosexual
 - b. Gay
 - c. Lesbian
 - d. Bisexual
 - e. Pansexual
 - f. Asexual
 - g. Queer
10. Which of the following best describes your racial or ethnic identity? (Select all that apply)
 - a. American Indian or Native Alaskan
 - b. Asian or Asian American
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Caucasian (non-Hispanic)
 - e. Latino or Hispanic
 - f. Middle Eastern or Arab American
 - g. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
 - h. None of the above

Appendix E

Adult Attachment Scale

Please read each of the following statements and rate the extent to which it describes your feelings about romantic relationships. Please think about past and present relationships and respond in terms of how you generally feel in these relationships. If you have never been involved in a romantic relationship, answer in terms of how you think you would feel.

Please use the scale below by selecting a number between 1 and 5 in the space provided to the right of each statement.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Not at all **Very**
characteristic **characteristic**
of me **of me**

- (1) I find it relatively easy to get close to others. _____
- (2) I do not worry about being abandoned. _____
- (3) I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on others. _____
- (4) In relationships, I often worry that my partner does not really love me. _____
- (5) I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. _____
- (6) I am comfortable depending on others. _____
- (7) I do not worry about someone getting too close to me. _____
- (8) I find that people are never there when you need them. _____
- (9) I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others. _____
- (10) In relationships, I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me. _____
- (11) I want to merge completely with another person. _____
- (12) My desire to merge sometimes scares people away. _____
- (13) I am comfortable having others depend on me. _____
- (14) I know that people will be there when I need them. _____
- (15) I am nervous when anyone gets too close. _____
- (16) I find it difficult to trust others completely. _____
- (17) Often, partners want me to be closer than I feel comfortable being. _____
- (18) I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be there when I need them. _____

Appendix F

Perceived Stress Scale

The questions asked in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to indicate by clicking *how often* you felt or thought a certain way.

0 = Never 1 = Almost Never 2 = Sometimes 3 = Fairly Often 4 = Very Often

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly? 0 1 2 3 4
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control important things in your life? 0 1 2 3 4
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”? 0 1 2 3 4
4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems? 0 1 2 3 4
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way? 0 1 2 3 4
6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do? 0 1 2 3 4
7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life? 0 1 2 3 4
8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things? 0 1 2 3 4
9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control? 0 1 2 3 4
10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them? 0 1 2 3 4

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