

Father Involvement and Demographic Factors Influencing Anti-social Behaviours of Adolescent Learners in South Africa

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ASBTRACT South Africa enjoys the highest rates of fathers' absence (not father involvement) among Blacks in Africa after Namibia and in addition, have an increasing living father absence for all racial groups and among blacks in particular, thereby, creating knowledge gaps on father involvement (FI) research. Using a cross-sectional design, 479 participants (299 males, 180 females) were randomly sampled from a community High School in the North West Province, South Africa. Results show that FI ($F(1,471), = 3.359, P < .05$) and gender ($F(1,471), = 33.970, P < .001$) significantly influenced anti-social behaviour (ASB) of adolescents. Age was not significant. Recommendations are made based on the findings of the study including the need to have compulsory clinical psychological services in schools for periodic assessment and early detection of learners with anti-social behaviour and a general attitudinal change among fathers to sensitize involvement and have meaningful impact in their children's lives.

INTRODUCTION

According to Morrison (2015), children's lack of contact with their non-resident fathers is a source of concern among policy makers in Scotland. There is an increase in the number of children living without their biological parents, in particular their biological fathers. Studies in the U.S.A (U.S. Census Bureau 2010; Cobb-Clark and Tekin 2013; Coakley et al. 2014) show that almost four in ten births are to women who are not married, indicating that there is a likelihood of most children growing up with no biological father in their lives, or their fathers being uninvolved and that the 'proportion of children under age 18 living in mother-only families has risen from 8 percent in 1960 to 23 percent in 2010'; in addition, fatherlessness or father absence (FA) or non-involvement is higher among the Hispanic/Latino and African American children.

According to Makusha and Richter (2014), South Africa as a country enjoys having the highest rates of FA among Blacks in Africa after Namibia. 1993-2002 statistics also show an increasing living father absence for all racial groups and in particular among blacks in South Africa (StatsSA 2010).

Despite the enormity of father absence in children's lives in a country where nearly one

third (31 %) of the country's population is under 15 years (StatsSA 2010), the subject, unfortunately, is hardly investigated in psychological literature. Studies on the dynamics of father involvement (FI), gender, age and anti-social behaviour of adolescents are scarce thereby creating knowledge gaps. However, it is important to distinguish between father absence (FA) and father involvement (FI). FA is when a biological father may be away for work purposes of whatever nature, such as travel for diplomatic, military and other professional duties but may be involved in the life of the child or children. FA may also imply absence of a father due to death. On the other hand, FI is when a biological father may be resident or not and yet may be absent from the life of the child. Unfortunately, psychological literature on FI is scarce. According to Human-Hendricks and Roman (2014), parent-child interaction is a central variable in the aetiology of anti-social behaviour of adolescents, and families of anti-social persons are characterized by little positive parental involvement, and harsh or inconsistent discipline. The methodological approach in this study is the biological father-child relationship and involvement.

Anti-social behaviour is a term that covers a wide range of activities. It often refers to unacceptable behaviour within a society, community

etc. Adolescent anti-social behaviour is a major issue of concern to parents, teachers, and the community at large because of its adverse effect on the victims. Anti-social behaviour is defined as the type of behaviour exhibited by a human being which causes or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons within same household as the individual and to the general community (Moffitt et al. 2002; Smart et al. 2004a). An individual who exhibits anti-social behaviour often has feelings of helplessness, he/she is desperate and always has a low quality of life (Smart et al. 2004b). Examples of anti-social behaviours include street drinking, prostitution, vandalism, misuse of fireworks, inappropriate use of vehicles, etc.

Previous literature on age and anti-social behaviour have strongly submitted that mid-adolescents engaged more in anti-social behaviour than their early and late counterparts. This submission is evident in studies conducted by various researchers (Smart et al. 2004a; Smart et al. 2004b; Smart et al. 2003; Vassallo et al. 2002) who found that anti-social behaviour is more pronounced in mid-adolescents than the early and late adolescents. On the other hand, review of studies on gender and anti-social behaviour of adolescents indicated that gender had no significant influence on anti-social behaviour (Smart et al. 2004a; Vassallo et al. 2002). This implies that irrespective of the gender of the adolescent, the level of anti-social behaviour engaged in were the same. According to Smart et al. (2004a), males engaged significantly in all types of anti-social behaviours (for example, excessive alcohol consumption, fighting, and theft) the same way their female counterparts do. Alleyne-Green et al. (2015) also found that perceived closeness with father figures resulted in a reduction in dating violence but not for females, but perceived closeness with father figures resulted in a reduction or lower sexual risk behaviours for girls. Idemudia et al. (2016) also found that high FI reduces risk-taking and self-harm behaviours. Children with highly involved fathers are known to demonstrate increased cognitive abilities and empathy (Holt 2015).

The concept of paternal involvement is a theoretical construct that encompasses engagement, accessibility and responsibility and it is a crucial and influential development to follow within fatherhood studies (Lamb et al. 1987; Roubinov et al. 2016). Studies on how father

involvement influences adolescent anti-social behaviour and the interplay of gender and age differences are scarce and under-reported, particularly in Africa. FI has been reported to be associated with positive psychological wellbeing of parents and family functioning (Cummings et al. 2010; Kwok and Li 2014), stronger effect on adolescent happiness than mother involvement (Flouri and Buchanan 2003) and social and cognitive development, psychological wellbeing and academic performance of children (Downer and Mendez 2005). According to Amato (2004), having a high quality of father involvement is beneficial to an adolescent's wellbeing and development even when provided by a non-resident father. Alleyne-Green et al. (2015) have shown in their study that perceived father involvement or closeness reduces sexual risk behaviours such as dating violence or victimization among black youth. In the same vein, research by Cherlin (1999) and McLanahan and Sandefur (1999) have shown that living apart from one's biological father is linked with a greater risk of adverse outcomes such as Anti-social behaviour for children and adolescents. If father involvement is linked to risky behaviours, criminal activities, and poor school performance (Carlson 2006), then it is important to understand the role of fathers' involvement (FI) with demographic factors such as age and gender differences on anti-social behaviour.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Design

The study used cross-sectional design. In this study the independent variables are father involvement, gender and age and the dependent variable is anti-social behaviour (ASB). Father involvement was introduced at two levels (high FI and low FI), Sex difference at two levels (male and female) and age differences at two levels (younger [<17 years] and older adolescents [>18 years]) hence a 3-way ($2 \times 2 \times 2$) factorial analysis. ASB as a dependent variable was measured continuously. A high score indicates that the learner engages in anti-social behaviours.

Participants

The sample consisted of 479 Learners in a High School based in a predominantly black

Secondary School community in North West Province, South Africa. Of the 479, 299 [62.4%] were males and 180 [37.67%] were females. The average age of the respondents was 16.6 years ($SD = 1.11$), with a range from 14 to 20 years. Grade level of learners were Grade 10, 248 [51.8%], Grade 11, 62 [12.9%], Grade 12, 169 [35.3%].

Instruments

The following psychological instruments were used to collect data:

Father Involvement Scale (FIS) ***(Finley and Schwartz 2004)***

FIS has a list of 20 domains of Father Involvement selected from the review and critique by Hawkins and Palkovitz (1999). The scale has been widely used. For each fathering domain listed, participants are asked to indicate the following: (a) how involved, on a scale of 1 (*not at all involved*) to 5 (*very involved*), their fathers were in their lives and (b) how involved they *wanted* their fathers to have been, relative to how involved their fathers actually were, on a scale of 1 (*much less involved*) to 5 (*much more involved*). According to Finley and Schwartz (2004), factor analyses of the reported and desired involvement items from the Father Involvement Scale in the larger sample yielded three reported involvement scales and two desired involvement scales. Reported involvement scales included *expressive involvement* (care giving, companionship, sharing activities, emotional development, social development, spiritual development, physical development, and leisure; α is .93); *instrumental involvement* (discipline, protecting, providing income, monitoring schoolwork, moral development, developing responsibility, career development, and developing independence; α is .91), and *mentoring/advising involvement* (intellectual development, developing competence, mentoring, and giving advice; α is .90). Desired involvement scales included desired expressive involvement (10 items, Cronbach's α is .93) and desired instrumental involvement (10 items, Cronbach's α is .92). Split-half reliability method of a pre-test among 30 Secondary School Learners showed .90, .85, .97, .91 and .93 for the dimensions mentioned above thereby justifying its use among South Africans. However, a composite score of the scale of all dimensions was used and as a result assisted the dichotomy of father involve-

ment (FI) to high ($N=283$) and low ($N196$), using a half-standard deviation as cut off point.

Anti-social Behaviour Scale (ASB) ***(Schwab-Stone et al. 1999)***

The Anti-social Behaviour Scale is developed by Schwab-Stone. This scale contains and assesses 19 behaviour problems of different severity, measuring behaviours related to vandalism, carrying a weapon, theft with direct personal contact and assault. ASB is measured on a 5-point Likert scale of 0 to 4: (0 = zero times, 1 = once, 2 = twice, 3 = three to four times, 4 = five and more times). Participants were asked to report on a 5-point scale how many times they had been involved in each type of anti-social behaviour during the past year. A composite score is derived for all 19 items. ASB has been used in a number of cross-cultural studies among young people aged 12 to 18 years (for example, Vermeiren et al. 2003; Vermeiren et al. 2004). The internal consistency of the scale has been reported to be high 0.84 (Vermeiren et al. 2003). Cronbach's α for this study is 0.83 justifying its use in South Africa.

Procedure

The authors conducted a cross-sectional survey in a Secondary School located in a predominantly black community in the North West Province of South Africa. In order to have access to the participants, an ethics application was made and approved by the North-West University Ethics Committee, an application to the Department of Education was approved and a date was approved to meet with the school principal, who then introduced the second author to the school team and informed consent obtained. The school authorities were also informed that the study outcome was for research purposes only. Dates and times for data collection were agreed on and thereafter learners were told the purpose of the research and were then informed of their rights not to participate or to withdraw after they had agreed to participate. They were told not to write their names or give any identifiable information as the data would be treated as a group data. Learners were also told that their responses would be treated with the utmost secrecy and confidentiality. The learners were also assured that their name of the school would not be revealed in any way, and, in addition to that, we emphasized that none of

the participants would come to harm by participating in the study and that the surveys should be completed anonymously. It took about 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. To increase response rate and incorporate different age groups, data were collected from three grade levels (10, 11 and 12). Several repeated visits were made to collect completed questionnaires. A total of 523 were filled and collected out of the 600 given out. However, only 479 were well completed and used for the study yielding a response rate of 79.83 percent. Forty-four (44) questionnaires were incomplete and therefore discarded.

Statistics

The Statistical Package for Social Science-version 23.0 (SPSS-v.23.0), was used to analyze data. Descriptive analyses and Analysis of Variance (for unequal N) were used to test the hypotheses. The level for significance was set at $p < .05$. Results are presented in a table and graphs of the ANOVA computed.

RESULTS

To examine whether or not FI, gender and age will significantly influence anti-social behaviour, a 2 X 2 X 2 factorial analysis was computed (Table 1).

According to Table 1, there was a significant main effect for FI on ASB ($F(1,471) = 3.359, P < .05$) and a significant main effect for gender on ASB of adolescents ($F(1,471) = 33.970, P < .001$). Age was not significant. The results show that FI and gender significantly influences ASB of adolescents. The interplay of these significance are illustrated with figures.

Figures 1, 2 and 3 further illustrates the dynamics of play of all the variables. Figure 1 shows

that females have higher scores on ASB than males when FI is low. ASB drops sharply for both sexes when FI is high.

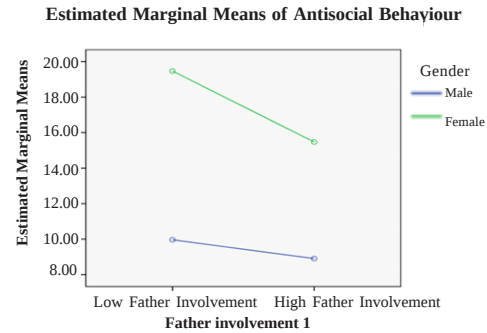


Fig. 1. FI and gender scores on ASB (Anti-social behaviour)

Figure 2 also show younger adolescents scoring higher than older ones when FI is low and again ASB drops sharply for both age groups when FI is high.

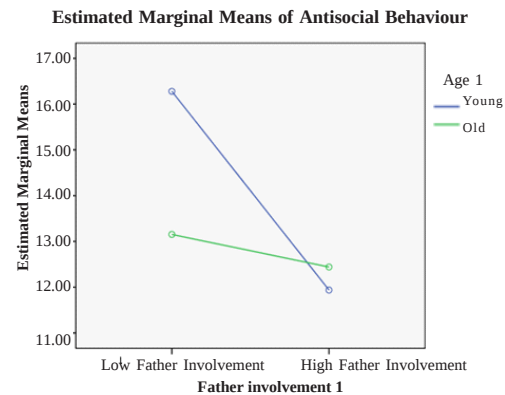


Fig. 2. FI and age on ASB

Table 1: A 2X2X2 ANOVA of FI, gender and age on ASB

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P
Father Involvement (A)	370.422	1	370.422	3.359	.05*
Age (B)	99.842	1	99.842	0.905	ns
Gender (C)	3745.878	1	3745.878	33.970	.001**
A and B	191.196	1	191.196	1.734	ns
A and C	125.350	1	125.350	1.137	ns
B and C	32.335	1	32.335	0.293	ns
A, B and C	35.973	1	35.973	0.326	ns
Error	51937.928	471	110.272		
Total	56538.924	478			

Note: A = Father Involvement, B = Age, C = Gender. * $P < .05$, ** $P < .01$

Finally, Figure 3 shows overall higher scores of females than males with younger female and male adolescents scoring higher than older female and male adolescents. However, there is little difference in the scores of younger and older males.

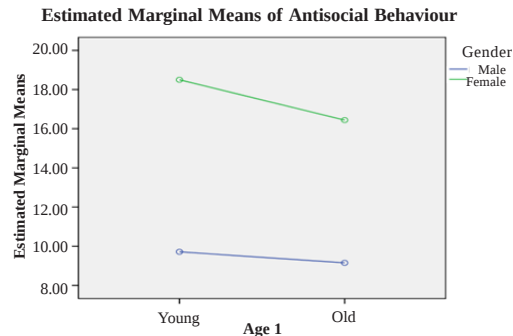


Fig. 3. Gender and age on ASB

DISCUSSION

Study results indicate that FI significantly influenced ASB, and gender also significantly influenced ASB while age was insignificant. The figures of estimated marginal means further show that females have higher scores on ASB than males when FI is low. ASB drops sharply for both sexes when FI is high. In simple terms, ASB declines when fathers are highly involved in the lives of their children. The findings support the claim by Holt (2015) that children with highly-involved fathers are known to show increased cognitive abilities and empathy and Human-Hendricks and Roman (2014) that parent-child interaction is a central variable in the aetiology of anti-social behaviour of adolescents. Carlson (2006) has linked FI with risky behaviours, criminal activities, and poor school performance. Studies by Cummings et al. (2010) and Kwok and Li (2014) have associated FI with positive psychological wellbeing of parents and family functioning. Amato (2004) claimed that having a high quality of father involvement is beneficial to an adolescent's wellbeing and development even when provided by a non-resident father.

Results also show that gender significantly predicted ASB with females generally having higher scores on ASB than males. This result, although significant, is contrary to the past researches by Smart et al. (2004a) and Vassallo et al. (2002) which showed no significant differ-

ences between males and females on ASB. Further studies are needed in this direction to help clarify some of these discrepancies.

Finally, the influence of age of adolescents on ASB was not significant but younger adolescents showed higher scores than older ones. Scores of younger and older males showed almost no difference. Previous studies (Smart et al. 2004a; Smart et al. 2004b; Smart et al. 2003; Vassallo et al. 2002) have submitted that mid-adolescents engaged more in anti-social behaviour than their early and late counterparts. Again, this discrepancy needs further clarification in future studies.

CONCLUSION

The following conclusions are made from this study:

- FI significantly influenced anti-social behaviour of adolescents
- Gender also significantly influenced ASB of adolescents.
- Age was not significant.
- Females have higher scores on ASB than males when FI is low. ASB drops sharply for both sexes when FI is high.
- Younger adolescents score higher than older ones when FI is low and ASB drops sharply for both age groups when FI is high.
- There is an overall higher score for females than males with younger female and male adolescents scoring higher than older female and male adolescents. However, there is almost no difference in scores of younger and older males.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The outcomes of this study are important given the current high rate of father absence among Blacks in Africa. ASB can portend negative outcomes for adolescents and to this end, and on the basis of the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Employment of clinical psychologists in secondary schools for early assessment, detection, interventions and appropriate referrals of youths with tendencies to anti-social behaviour.

- School authorities should be trained in basic programmes of youths and trauma related problems.
- The government should embark on a general programme for fathers that can teach them how to be involved in their families, particularly in the lives of their children.
- Mandatory psychological check-up for suspected violent learners.

LIMITATIONS

This study has some limitations. The data is cross-sectional, thereby making causal inferences in terms of determination to be problematic. A large group with control is also needed in future studies. In addition, researchers should control for the racial group of learners as cultural factors may affect outcomes in future studies. The concept of FI within a cultural framework should be investigated. Therefore, replication of this research across the whole country would be valuable. However, it is our hope that the findings in the present study, has helped in closing knowledge gaps on FI, gender and age on ASB.

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