

Boys with absent fathers more likely to become young dads

September 8 2011, By Alexandra Back



Boys' voices break later if their fathers are absent during adolescence, according to new research. Credit: Flickr/Tom A

Boys who grow up without a dad around are more likely to reach puberty later, but father their own children earlier, according to a new study.

Researchers from the London School of Economics used data from the UK National [Child Development](#) Study to look at the [relationship](#) between the presence of [fathers](#) and the time their sons' voices broke.

The study found that if the father left during their son's adolescence

their voice broke later, when compared to boys with present fathers.

“It’s particularly surprising to see that a boy’s [puberty](#) can be delayed as a result of events that happen in adolescence,” said Paula Shephard, a researcher from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

“We’ve previously assumed that these things are ‘locked-in’ in early childhood.”

According to the study, [boys](#) with absent fathers were less likely to be married by the age of 23 and more likely to have children by that age.

“These findings suggest that father absence exerts an influence on male reproductive decisions, even after controlling for other indicators of early life adversity,” the authors wrote.

Dr. Richard Fletcher, leader of the Fathers and Families Research Program at the University of Newcastle, said that the rising proportion of single mothers has usually been the focus of investigations on child development but this research offered a new perspective.

“They’re identifying an alternative explanation: that there’s something about having a father in the family that influences children’s development,” said Dr. Fletcher, who was not involved in the study.

Dr. Fletcher said the research has implications for governments when designing family policies.

“The state’s responsibility might be seen as directing more resources to the separated mother instead of supporting families to stay together,” he said.

“But this research suggests there might be a benefit to keeping the father

involved that we shouldn't lose sight of."

The paper was published in [Biology Letters](#) on Wednesday.

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Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Boys with absent fathers more likely to become young dads (2011, September 8)
retrieved 9 April 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-09-boys-absent-fathers-youngdads.html>

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