

A father's influence makes for better grades

November 16 2016



Credit: George Hodan/public domain

The warmth of a father's love has a special influence on young people, and makes them feel optimistic and determined to strive for greater things. It also boosts the math grades of teenage girls and the language ability of boys, says Dr. Marie-Anne Suizzo of the University of Texas in the US, in an article in Springer's journal *Sex Roles*.

Adolescents from [low-income families](#) in particular are more likely than their middle-class peers to underachieve and to drop out of school.

Studies have shown, however, that a positive attitude towards school work and the support and encouragement from their parents can help at-risk youngsters to overcome the economic barriers and lack of resources they face. Most of the evidence about the effects of parental involvement comes from research on mothers. Little is known, however, about how adolescents experience their [fathers'](#) warmth and the beliefs and behaviors that are most affected by it.

This new study is part of a larger one focusing on low-income, ethnic minority families conducted in four middle schools in the southwestern United States. Data were analyzed from questionnaires completed by 183 sixth-graders about how optimistic and motivated they were about their schoolwork, and how they experienced their fathers. The questionnaires were completed primarily by respondents of Mexican American, African American and European American descent. Their maths and language arts grades were also obtained. They were analyzed together with the questionnaire data. The research team took into account the influence that mothers have on their children's well-being in their analyses.

Their findings show how fathers can support their teenagers in ways that result in greater optimism, self-efficacy, and, ultimately, higher achievement at school. This is even true for men with low levels of education or those who are not proficient enough in English to help their children with their homework.

"Low-income fathers affect their adolescents' beliefs about themselves and their future, and these beliefs influence their achievement by increasing their determination to persist on school tasks," says Suizzo.

These positive effects extend to both sons and daughters, albeit in different ways. Experiencing their father's warmth first influences daughters' sense of optimism, and then spills over into their feeling more

determined and certain about their academic abilities. This in turn leads to better math grades. There is a more direct link between their fathers' involvement and teenage boys' belief in their ability to succeed on the academic front. This heightened self-confidence increased their success in English language arts classes.

Suizzo suggests that counselors and educators should encourage fathers to communicate warmth and acceptance to their children, because of the positive influence these emotions have on their well-being.

More information: Suizzo, M. A. et al. (2016). The Unique Effects of Fathers' Warmth on Adolescents' Positive Beliefs and Behaviors: Pathways to Resilience in Low-Income Families, *Sex Roles*. DOI: [10.1007/s11199-016-0696-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0696-9)

Provided by Springer

Citation: A father's influence makes for better grades (2016, November 16) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-11-father-grades.html>

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