

Engaged dads can reduce adolescent behavioral problems, improve well-being

9 December 2020, by Megan Schumann



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In low-income families, fathers who are engaged in their children's lives can help to improve their mental health and behavior, according to a Rutgers University-New Brunswick study published in the journal *Social Service Review*.

The researchers found that adolescents in [low-income families](#) whose fathers are more frequently engaged in feeding, reading, playing and other activities and who provide necessities such as clothes and food throughout their childhood have fewer behavioral and [emotional problems](#)—reducing a significant gap between [poor families](#) and those with higher socioeconomic status.

"On average, children in lower socioeconomic status families tend to have more behavior problems and their fathers have lower levels of overall involvement than those in higher socioeconomic status families," said lead author Lenna Nepomnyaschy, an associate professor at Rutgers University-New Brunswick's School of Social Work.

The researchers analyzed data on the long-term

behavior of 5,000 children born between 1998 and 2000. They focused on the frequency of their fathers' engagement, from ages 5 to 15, through feeding, playing, reading and helping with homework, and providing noncash items as clothes, toys, food and other necessities. They reviewed the associations between such engagement and the children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors, including crying, worrying, fighting, bullying and skipping school.

According to Nepomnyaschy, fathers with lower education, lower skilled jobs and lower wages may find it difficult to engage in their children's lives due to social and economic changes over the last several decades. These changes have resulted in the loss of manufacturing jobs, a decline in union power and criminal justice policies linked to mass incarceration, particularly among men of color.

The researchers urged policymakers, scholars and the public to consider wage, employment and criminal justice policies that increase the opportunity for men to engage with their children to improve their well-being.

More information: Lenna Nepomnyaschy et al, The Role of Fathers in Reducing Socioeconomic Inequalities in Adolescent Behavioral Outcomes, *Social Service Review* (2020). DOI: [10.1086/710546](https://doi.org/10.1086/710546)

Provided by Rutgers University

APA citation: Engaged dads can reduce adolescent behavioral problems, improve well-being (2020, December 9) retrieved 14 April 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-12-engaged-dads-adolescent-behavioral-problems.html>

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