

Perception of fathers' involvement towards child care and development in Ekiti-State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Despite that Nigeria has ratified and domesticated the Child Rights Act and other protocols that seek to protect the child, the right rights of the child are still being trampled upon by parents and other caregivers. Hence this study seeks to assess the perception of fathers towards the maintenance of socio-cultural values among the children and their involvement in the psychosocial development of the child in Ido/Osi Local Government Area of Ekiti State. The family-centred care theory was used to explain the importance of fathers in childcare. The study utilized a cross-sectional research design. About one hundred and forty (140) fathers were selected across six out of eleven political wards in the LGA using multistage sampling techniques. The data were collected using the questionnaire method. Findings showed that 55% of the fathers agreed and 40% strongly agreed that children who are in good relationship with their fathers were less likely to experience depression and exhibit disruptive disorder. Also, most 59% of the fathers agreed and 31% strongly agreed that father warmth and nurturance significantly predict children's moral maturity. Therefore, child welfare social workers should be responsible for the prompt action against perpetrators of child abuse and neglect.

Keywords: father's involvement, childcare, child development, father, Nigeria

Introduction

The global review of relevant literature on the impacts of parenting on childcare and development revealed that good parenting greatly increased healthy child development and family wellbeing (Okobah, 2018). It is therefore important for parents and caregivers to consider taking adequate care of their children at early childhood and even before they were born by providing the basic needs for the optimal development of the child (Jeong, Siyal, Fink, McCoy & Yousafzai, 2018). However, some global report has it that studies were focused on the roles of mothers in parenting with only a few studies on the roles of fathers in childcare and development (Cabrera, Volling & Barr, 2018; Panter-Brick et al., 2014).

Childcare is described as supervisory and nurturance care provided by parents or caregivers (Mbulayi, Makuyana & Kang'ethe, 2020). Socially, childcare helps foster emotional security through interpersonal relationships which helps the child develop a sense of trust (Hughes et al., 2020; Janssen et al., 2020; Mbulayi et al., 2020). Child development also helps the child to function at a greater facility of functioning (Lustigman, 2020). The few available studies on male involvement in child care revealed that men should be involved at different levels of care. However, in Africa, the role is skewed to the women or mothers as it is seen as a woman's job (Ekpo, Ikughur & Udoumoh, 2019). The involvement of fathers in childcare is dependents on many contextual factors such as the cultural values, communication skill and style of the father, gender norms, ethnicity, knowledge, and attitudes of fathers towards care, religious affiliation of the father, and family values (Ekpo et al., 2019; Mbulayi et al., 2020; Moosa & Bhana, 2020).

Recently there have been calls for more involvement of fathers in childcare in developing societies like Nigeria (Ekpo et al., 2019). Some scholars noted that fathers should be involved in making positive impacts on the child through the display of love, understanding, authority, provision, protection, and continuous guidance of the child (Jones & Mosher, 2013; Van Lissa & Keizer, 2020). More so that the traditional African society revolves around maintaining positive family relationships and ties (Salami et al., 2020). Thus, for the balanced development of a child, the role of the father should complement that of the mother. These two roles, though complementary, are different. The absence of one may lead to negative consequences on the development of the child (Van Lissa & Keizer, 2020).

Previous studies indicated that children who lived without the fathers' care are more likely to perform low academically (Roopnarine, Krishnakumar & Vadgama, 2013; Van Lissa & Keizer, 2020). They are more prone to emotional and psychological issues (Saladino et al., 2020). Boys without fathers' care are more likely to feel unhappy, dejected, depressed, dependent, and hyperactive while girls without father's care are more likely to be dependent. Also, it has been reported that children who lived with step parent or single parent are more likely to use and abuse illicit drugs, alcohol, or tobacco, engaged in early sexual debut and birth compared to children who live with both biological or adoptive parents (King, Stamps Mitchell & Hawkins, 2010; Vanassche, Sodermans, Matthijs & Swicegood, 2014).

There are a lot of benefits reported from the close interaction between father and their children in literature. For instance, close interaction between children and their fathers recorded a decrease in alcohol intake (Goncy & van Dulmen, 2010) and pre-marital sexual intercourse (Baker et al., 2018; Guilamo-Ramos, Bowman, Santa Maria, Kabemba & Geronimo, 2018). Also, fathers' involvement in child's care can influence school performance (Taylor, 2019). Trahan & Cheung (2018) noted that fathers who have a strong early life relationship with their children are likely to have a positive quantity and quality of fathers' relationship with their children later in life because of the emotional attachment (Nicholson, 2020; Trahan & Cheung, 2018). Hence the absence of fathers' care could lead to a stressful childhood experience which can have negative consequences on the child in adulthood (Anderson, 2015).

This study adopted the theory of Family Centred Care (FCC) to understand the roles of fathers in childcare and development. Family-centred care theory is a partnership and collaborative method to healthcare decision-making of the child. In other words, when the father and mother are collaborating as partners in the care of a child, then the outcome will be good. Studies examining family roles and levels of involvement of parents found that the strongest evidence for the efficacy of FCC is in the efficient use of resources at minimal cost in supporting health/mental health/well-being of the children when parents are collaborating (Kuhlthau et al., 2011; Kuo et al., 2012).

FCC is essential in this study in that it will enable one to understand the relationship between father's involvement and quality of care and outcome for the child (Kuo et al., 2012). The theory can help us to describe and understand the need for both parents to collaborate in child care to achieve optimal health for the child. Terms such as partnership and collaboration associated with the theory help to bring home the need for fathers to get involved in family matters especially as it concerns the child (Kuo et al., 2012). The majority of the mothers who are unemployed or underemployed are expected to be at home doing house chores for the extended family and sometimes are excluded from major decision-making in the family (Jeong et al., 2018). This according to FCC will not augur well for the child as collaborative decision making is lacking. Family-centered care has been criticized for its insistence on the impact of parents participation in child's welfare without taking into consideration the ability of parents to provide standard care based on their broad interpretation of family issues in the context of health care delivery (Abdelkader, Arabiat, Holmes & Hamdan-Mansour, 2016; Uniacke, Browne & Shields, 2018). Also, Holtz (2013) observed that parents in hospitals that practice FCC were becoming resentful based on the belief they are being "made" to do the nurses' work because the hospitals insist, they care for their children. Despite these criticisms, FCC had gained acceptance can help social workers create awareness and educate the populace on the need to understand why fathers ought to be fully involved in the care of their children.

The Child Rights Act and other protocols that Nigeria has ratified provided the platform to protect the rights of a child. This means that both fathers and mothers should take responsibility for such protection. However, in Nigeria and many African nations, this role is majorly attributed to the mothers due majorly to the patriarchal nature of the society and this stereotype is being passed from one generation to the other. This practice has negative consequences on the social, physical, and psychosocial development of the child. It then becomes important to change the narrative through research and policy implementation. The majority of studies on fathers' involvement in Nigeria focused majorly on the influence of fathers on the sexual behaviour and reproductive health of the child (Tinuola, Omolola, Irinoye & Augustine, 2020) with very few on the psychosocial development of the child (Basil & Ndiujye, 2019). Therefore, this present study contributes to the existing literature by assessing the involvement of fathers in the psychosocial development of the child, and the perception of fathers towards the maintenance of socio-cultural values among the children in the Ido/Osi Local Government Area of Ekiti State. It is hoped that this study will provide the necessary data important for research and policy implementation for the family and childcare.

Materials and methods

Study area

The study area was selected due to the rampage and oral reports of fathers not getting involved in childcare in the Ido/Osi Local Government Area (LGA). Ido/Osi Local Government Area (LGA) is one of the LGAs in Ekiti State created in May 1989. It has its headquarter at Ido-Ekiti with thirteen towns and various farm settlements. The major occupation of residents of the local government is farming especially cash crops, root crops, and grains like cocoa, coffee, kola, yam, cassava, maize. The 2006 Census estimated the population at 159,144 people with a total land area of 332 square kilometres. The major religions are Christianity, Islam, and traditional religion respectively.

Study Design

This study employed a quantitative research method informed by survey design. The design fitted the current study as it was appropriate to understanding fathers' involvement in child care and development. The study purposely selected Ido-Osi Local Government Area because of oral reports of poor father's involvement in childcare in the LGA. Also, fathers were purposely selected because they are heads of the families and problem is associated with them. About 140 copies of the questionnaire were administered among fathers in the selected local government. The instrument measures fathers' involvement in child care and development. Section A comprised questions on the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents, section B was on the influence of fathers' relationship on the psychosocial development of the child and section C was about the opinion of fathers towards the maintenance of a high standard of socio-cultural values in a child. The respondents were selected from the six electoral wards of the LGA using a multi-stage technique. The sample size (140) was calculated using an estimate (Fottler, Ford & Bach, 1997). The questionnaire was pretested among 20 respondents in two wards, Ifaki 1 and Orin/Ora ward to remove ambiguity. Cronbach alpha of the pretest was 0.71. The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Scientist Version 21 and the results were presented in simple percentage.

Ethical approval

Permission to carry out this study was taken from the community chief as well as the full consent of each respondent that participated in this study.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Results

The analysis and presentation of the results begin with the sociodemographic characteristics of the fathers involved in the study.

Socio-Demographic analysis of respondents

Table 1: The frequency distribution of socio-demographic analysis of respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics	Frequency N=140	Percentage (%=100)
Age		
25-30	10	7.1
30-40	58	41.1
40-50	54	38.6
50 and above	18	12.9
Tribe		
Yoruba	108	77.1
Igbo	22	15.7
Hausa	3	2.1
Others	7	5.0
Religion		
Christian	96	68.6
Islamic	39	27.9
Others	5	3.6
Occupation		
Farming	14	10.0
Trading	34	24.3
Civil Servant	82	58.6
Self Employed	10	7.1
Education		
PhD	4	2.8
M.Sc	7	5.0
B.Sc	71	50.7
Diploma	28	18.6
Others	32	22.9
Children Number		
One	38	27.1
Two	37	26.4
Three	43	30.7
More than three	22	15.7

Table 1 above table shows the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. One hundred and forty respondents completed the questionnaire and were analyzed in this study. As regards age, the majority of the respondents fell within the age range of 30-40years (41%) and the respondents with the lowest percentage were within the age

range of 25-30years (7%). Others with the age range of 40-50years were 39% and those aged 50 years and above were 13%. The greater percentage (77%) of the respondents were from the Yoruba tribe while 16% were from the Igbo tribe, 2% from are Hausa and others were 5.0%.

For religious affiliation, 69% of the respondents were Christians while 28% were Muslim. Also, 53% were of Ekiti State origin, while others were not non-indigents that reside in Ekiti State. The civil servants make up 59%, 24% were traders, 10% were farmers and 7% were self-employed. The educational profile shows that the majority of the respondents were literates (77%) and 23% were illiterates. Also, 31% had three children, 27% had one child, 26% had two children and 16% had more than three children.

Involvement of fathers in the psychosocial development of the child

Table 2a: Involvement of fathers in the psychosocial development of the child in Ido-Osi Local Government Area, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Fathers involvement in psychosocial development	Frequency 140	Percentage (%) 100
<i>Children in good relationships with their fathers are less likely to experience depression and exhibit disruptive behaviour</i>		
Disagreed	7	5.0
Agreed	77	55.0
Strongly Agreed	56	40.0
<i>When a child experiences positive interactions through play, reading a story, or singing a song, the bond between father and child increases.</i>		
Strongly Disagreed	7	5.0
Disagreed	7	5.0
Agreed	42	30.0
Strongly Agreed	84	60.0
<i>Children who experience affectionate behaviour from their fathers are more likely to treat their future spouses in a similar fashion</i>		
Agreed	56	40.0
Strongly Agreed	84	60.0
<i>Children of involved fathers are popular in society</i>		
Disagreed	42	30.0
Agreed	77	55.0
Strongly Agreed	21	15.0

Table 2b: Involvement of fathers in the psychosocial development of the child in Ido-Osi Local Government Area, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Father's involvement in psychosocial development	Frequency 140	Percentage (%) 100
<i>The quality of a father's interaction is crucial to the overall development of the positive social and emotional skill of a child.</i>		
Strongly Disagreed	7	5.0
Disagreed	7	5.0
Agreed	49	35.0
Strongly Agreed	77	55.0
<i>Even after children are grown and ready to leave home, they still look to their father for wisdom and advice.</i>		
Disagreed	7	5.0
Agreed	56	40.0
Strongly Agreed	77	55.0
<i>When fathers nurture their children, not only are the children physically healthier but they are also more mentally acute and emotionally sound.</i>		
Agreed	63	45.0
Strongly Agreed	77	55.0
<i>Fathers symbolize intelligence, will and family discipline to unite children</i>		
Agreed	63	45.0
Strongly Agreed	77	55.0

Tables 2a and 2b show the effect of fathers' relationship on the psychosocial development of the child. The result shows that 55% of the fathers agreed and 40% strongly agreed that children who are in good relationships with their fathers were less likely to experience depression and exhibit disruptive disorder. Also, 84 (60%) of the fathers strongly agreed and 42 (30%) agreed while 7 (5%) disagreed that when a child experiences positive interactions the bond between father and the child increases. More so, 84 (60%) strongly agreed and 56 (40%) agreed that children who experience affectionate behaviour on the part of their father are more likely to treat their future spouses similarly. About 77 (55%) and 21 (15%) agreed that children of involved fathers are popular in society while 42 (30%) disagreed with this statement.

Most of the fathers 77 (55%) strongly agreed and 49 (35%) agreed that the quality of the father's interaction is crucial to the overall development of positive social and emotional skills while 7(5%) of the respondents disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed. In addition to this, 77 (55%) of the fathers strongly agreed and 56 (40%) agreed while 7 (5%) disagreed that children still look on to their fathers for wisdom and advice. Furthermore, 77 (55%) of the fathers strongly agreed and 63 (45%) agreed that children are mentally acute and emotionally sound. Again, 77 (55%) of the fathers strongly

agreed and 63 (45%) agreed that fathers symbolize intelligence, will and family discipline to unite children.

Perception of fathers towards the maintenance of socio-cultural values in children

Table 3a: Perception of fathers towards the maintenance of socio-cultural values in children in Ido-Osi Local Government Area, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Perception of fathers towards socio-cultural values	Frequency 140	Percentage (%) 100
<i>Father warmth and nurturance can significantly predict children's moral maturity.</i>		
Strongly Disagreed	2	1.4
Disagreed	12	8.6
Agreed	82	58.6
Strongly Agreed	44	31.4
<i>Educating children should be the most important training from fathers to the children</i>		
Strongly Disagreed	2	1.4
Disagreed	6	4.3
Agreed	48	34.3
Strongly Agreed	84	60.0
<i>Fathers should be the leading influence and have direct impacts on the socialization of children.</i>		
Strongly Disagreed	2	1.4
Disagreed	12	8.6
Agreed	62	44.3
Strongly Agreed	64	45.7

Table 3a shows the perception of fathers towards the maintenance of socio-cultural values among children in Ido-Osi Local Government Area, Ekiti State, Nigeria. The result revealed that most 82(59%) of the fathers agreed and 44 (31%) strongly agreed that father warmth and nurturance significantly predict children's moral maturity while the minority 12(9%) disagreed and 2 (1%) strongly disagreed. This result clearly shows the importance of a father's love on the development of a child. On the perception of fathers towards educating the children, majority 84(64%) of the fathers strongly agreed and 48 (34%) agreed that educating children should be the most important training from fathers to the children as opposed to 4% and 1% who disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. Once again, the result reiterates the importance of education in child development. Ekiti State known as the fountain of knowledge in Nigeria has a lot of educated persons and this has shown in the category of respondents in this study. Furthermore, majority 64(46%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 62(44%) agreed that fathers should be the leading influence and have direct impacts on the socialization of children whereas 12 (9%) disagreed and 2(1%) strongly agreed on this statement.

Table 3b: Perception of fathers towards the maintenance of socio-cultural values in children in Ido-Osi Local Government Area, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Perception of fathers towards socio-cultural values	Frequency 140	Percentage (%) 100
<i>Fathers are in the best position to assist their children to exercise their religious, cultural and language rights, particularly in younger years</i>		
Strongly Disagreed	2	1.4
Disagreed	10	7.1
Agreed	58	41.4
Strongly Agreed	70	50.0
<i>Father's role in the maintenance of native language is an important development need for all children as it allows for the preservation and reinforcement of cultural values and identity</i>		
Strongly Disagreed	3	2.1
Disagreed	18	12.9
Agreed	84	60.0
Strongly Agreed	35	25.0
<i>Children need religion to grow up healthy, happy and with morals.</i>		
Strongly Disagreed	20	14.3
Disagreed	1	7
Agreed	57	40.0
Strongly Agreed	62	44.3

Table 3b shows that 70(50%) and 58(41%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that fathers are in the best position to assist their children to exercise their religious, cultural, and language rights particularly in younger years just like only 10 (7%) and 2(1%) disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. Equally, most 84 (60%) and 35(25%) of the respondents agreed that the father's role in the maintenance of native language is an important developmental need for all children, while 18(13%) disagreed and 3(2%) strongly disagreed respectively. According to the table, most 62(44%) of the fathers strongly agreed and 57(41%) agreed, 20(14%) strongly disagreed that children need religion to grow up healthy, happy, and with good morals. The question stressed the importance of religion in shaping the lives of individuals and families.

Discussion of findings

This study presents is on fathers' involvement in child care in a rural local in Nigeria. Findings seem to suggest that fathers are aware that their involvement has great implications for children on their route to adult development in terms of social, cultural, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. This according to Siu et al., (2017), will also enhance the relationship between mothers and fathers as partners and parents.

The socio-demographic data indicated that most of the fathers that participated in this study were between 25-40 years old suggesting a younger age of men in union or

fathers in the study area. The result also revealed that the majority of the fathers are educated, the education of fathers is one of the factors that may encourage fathers' involvement in childcare and development (Crowell-Edghill, 2020). The high level of education as observed may have accounted for the trend of the answers obtained from the questionnaire. Besides, the majority of the respondents had a moderate family size of one to three children while few with more than three children. The high educational status of the respondents can be a possible reason why the fathers have a moderate number of children.

Furthermore, the study showed that the majority of the respondents are in a good relationship with their children as evidenced by their responses on the quality of interaction with the father. One can therefore conclude that with such quality of interaction, children are less likely to experience depression and exhibit disruptive behaviour. A positive father-child relationship could positively impact the cognitive, social, and moral development of young children. A study that supports this statement showed that when a child experiences positive father interactions through play, reading a story, or singing a song, the bond between father and child increases (Hembree-Kigin & McNeil, 2013; Ogundele, 2018).

The study indicated that the majority of the respondents strongly supported the notion that when a child experiences positive interaction with their fathers, they may experience positive peer relations and a good sense of humour. This result agrees with the findings of Ward and Lee, (2020) which reported that when children experience affectionate behaviour on the part of their fathers, they are more likely to treat their future spouses similarly. This points to another important role of fathers in childcare which is to serve as a guide for their children to the world outside the home.

The majority of the respondents indicated that for effective guidance, the father should set the limit with the understanding of the child's perspective. These included but not limited to encouraging children to study hard, teach them about money management, learning about teamwork, and choice of career, profession, or vocation. Findings show that the majority of the respondents supported the statement that the quality of a father's interactions is crucial to the overall development of positive social and emotional skills. This agrees with the findings by De Santis and Barham, (2017) which reported that the quality of the relationship between father and child positively influences the cognitive, social, and moral development of such a child.

Findings from the study show that majority of the respondents indicated that even after their children grow up and ready to leave home, they will still look to their fathers for wisdom and advice. This result agreed with the study of Adetoye, Irinoye, Adetoye & Idowu (2020) who reported similar findings. In many cultures, men are the decision-makers in terms of what happens both within and outside the family because it is generally believed that fathers symbolize intelligence and will (Keenan, Evans & Crowley, 2016). This notion was fully supported by the respondents in this study.

Education is the bedrock for sustainable development in any nation and it is often said that an uninformed individual is a deformed person. The present study supports this assertion as the majority of the fathers indicated that fathers should prioritize the

education of the children. Close to this is the strong agreement from fathers in this study that fathers should be leading influence in socializing the child. Fathers ought to provide the needed support for the socio-cultural integration of the child. Basil and Ndiyuje (2019) in their study found that fathers contribute to the child's education and learning outcome through various means like learning resources, school uniforms, books, and other writing materials.

Also, the majority of respondents supported the view that fathers are in the best position to assist their children to exercise their religious, cultural, and language rights. Most of the respondents supported the view that the father's role in the maintenance of the native language is an important development need for all children as it allows for the preservation and reinforcement of cultural values and identity. This is rightly view had earlier been suggested by Davies, (2010).

In conclusion, findings showed that majority of the respondents agree that no parenting is balanced without the input of the fathers' role. Considering the needs (social, emotional, physical, and spiritual) of children in Nigeria today, this study demonstrates that the father's role is vital and when it is absent, it may lead to a great defect on the child, family, and the society at large. This, therefore, bring to the fore the need for social workers to raise more awareness in society on the importance of father's involvement in the care of children. By imbibing the FCC model, social workers can help educate fathers and everyone in the society as a whole on the need for deeper involvement in the affairs of their children. It is generally known that abnormal childcare devoid of a father's care can lead to developmental distortion, rudeness, arrogance, perpetually immature and self-centered individuals. Thus, fathers enhance family and societal morals and values as well as the maintenance of positive socio-cultural standards of the child.

Also, social workers in family and child welfare or related agencies can conduct counselling for individuals, families, and groups on the need for fathers to be more involved in family life. Counselling should play preventive, remedial, and rehabilitative roles toward the maintenance of family stability and childcare. Also, it is a well-known fact that socio-cultural factors are at play in the involvement of fathers in child care and psychosocial development. To this end, social workers should create awareness and advocate for the eradication of these cultural factors that hinder the full participation of fathers in childcare through socio-counselling education.

Social workers should also play a rehabilitative role by helping to rebuild families and children who have been seriously affected by the lack or inadequate level of care which may manifest through failed marriages/unions, alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution, and other social vices. More so, social workers should advocate the need for federal and state governments to enact laws or ratify and implement the international conventions seeking to protect the rights of children in Nigeria.

Furthermore, child welfare social workers should be responsible for the prompt action against perpetrators of child abuse and neglect. They should be responsible for removing children from homes or families that are harmful to the health of children or homes that do not meet the minimum standards for childcare and development. Social

workers ought to be proactive in helping parents meet the needs of children by connecting them with available resources from the government and other non-governmental agencies. They should give adequate advice and therapy for children through short- and long-term care plans most especially those whose families cannot take care of them. They should be pragmatic in making working with children and their families on a reunification plan in collaboration with child courts.

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