

Effects of Isolated Fatherhood on Child in Divorces: When Child Becomes “Weapon” Against Father in Custody Rights



Coco Chou
WWS
mc35@princeton.edu

Critical Background

Isolated fatherhood: when the child experiences a separation from the father, physically and/or socially, in an event after birth such as divorce, and lacks proper father-child interactions.

Many research have previously affirmed the negative impacts that the lack of fatherhood has on the child. In context of the problems that organizations such as UIH is combating for child development, negative impacts of isolated fatherhood manifests itself medically in the children in forms such as mental health problems and tendency to indulge in unhealthy behaviors.

Our society is imbued with gender roles, and underlying assumptions of where a mother and a father stands in relation to the child. For example, a mother at times in divorce would claim stronger ownership over the child due to direct biological tie and longer time spent home for care. The father would sometimes be assumed to only take up the role as a monthly finance supplier.

Often times the society and the law would side with the mother, and thereby limiting a father's supposed role and rights to care for and interact with their kids

In midst of familial conflicts, the child is sometimes used as a tool or weapon – the health of the child suffers most, as we've recognized the importance of the father's role in development.

Fatherhood isolation takes a toll on the child's health and growth, and is a gender bias topic in familial law matters that is worth exploring, especially when thinking about humanities

approach to solve a health problem

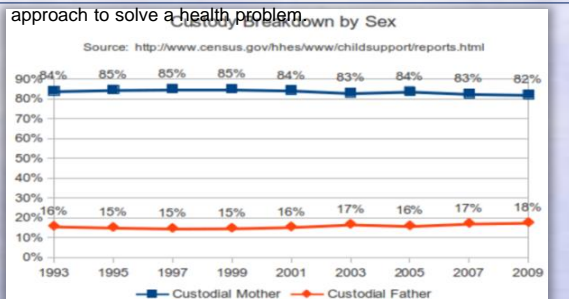


Figure 1. >80% of custodies were won by mothers, compared to <20% won by fathers. Numbers continued to stay consistent as such. "In 2014, about five of every six custodial parents were mothers (82.5 percent) and one of every six were fathers (17.5 percent)" (US Census Bureau)

Curated by the Students of
ANT/HUM 235 | Medical Humanities
Instructors: João Biehl & Amy Krauss
Teaching Fellows: Arbel Griner & Serena Stein

Research Questions

In familial conflicts, the mother sometimes pitch the child against the father, creating a barrier between the child and the father –

➤ **How does isolated fatherhood manifest itself medically on the health of the child?**

➤ **Socially, how does potential issues like gender bias contribute to this problem?**

Insights and Discussion

On effects of isolated fatherhood on child:

■ Effects of divorce and father absence on adult mental health:

5 out of 6 analyses showed negative effects. (McLanahan et al.)

■ "Growing up without a father could permanently alter the structure of the brain." (Spencer)

Cases of child weaponized against fathers:

■ *DS v. CS* case 2017: ex-wife threatened ex-husband's family, and raged over custody rights to the child. Threats could have serious adverse affects on the kids' health. (JUSTIA US Law)

- Unlike this situation, like mentioned in UIH conference, many fathers have no knowledge of fatherly rights, and doesn't know importance of fatherhood to a child's growth.

■ Case investigation of Cecilia Gormey.

On social factors that lead child to have isolated fatherhood:

■ "best interests lie are more likely to favor mothers." Though the gender bias is no longer presumed (law-level), mothers are still more likely to win custody. (Guerin)

■ Although statistics show that more women win child custody, most of these came from within-family decisions. (Meyer)

- Within-family decisions often ended with the father's concession after being threatened by the health/ growth of his child. (As mentioned earlier, lack of knowledge on such matters often helped make these decisions.)

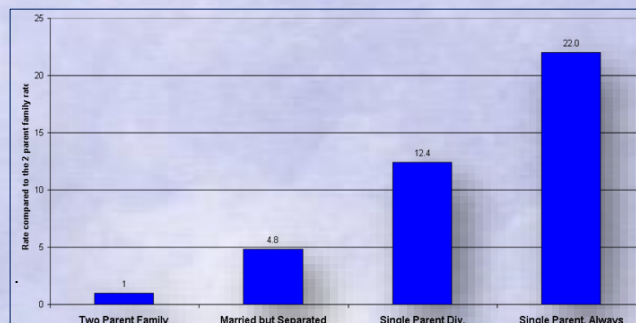


Figure 3. Juvenile Incarceration in Wisconsin 1993 by Family Structure. Context mentioned single parent meant mostly single moms (Fagan). Incarceration rate was significantly higher in the single parent families; along with more recent data, though the rates have decreased, the gap still exists.

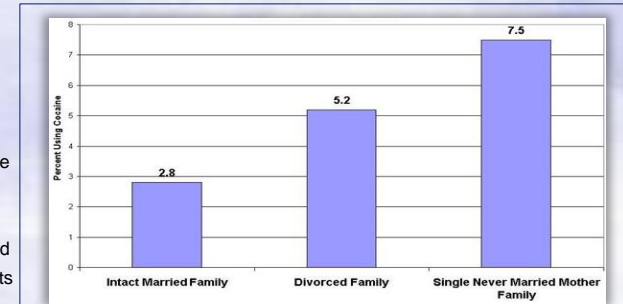


Figure 2. Adolescent Cocaine Use by Family Structure. Less involvement of fathers correlate with higher cocaine usage.

UIH Family Partners, “Master Dads”

Through focusing on enhancing fatherhoods and beneficial father-child interactions, UIH serves its original core purpose of supporting children's social /health development, and providing families self-sufficiency abilities.

-Discussion groups provide fathers with knowledge in resolving familial conflicts, including for situations such as divorce and custody law.

- In face of social norm on masculinity, UIH allows men to open up with father-child relationship difficulties, familial conflicts, divorce issues, etc.

- Orient men with medical/developmental importance of a father's presence in child's growth – not just money supplier.

Acknowledgments

Thank you Professor Joao Biehl, Arbel, Amy, and Serena for all the help. And thank you UIH for the partnership, and Carter of UIH!

References

- “D.S. v. C.S.” D.S. v. C.S.: New Jersey Superior Court, Appellate Division - Unpublished Opinions Decisions, Justia Law, Mar. 2017.
- Fagan, Patrick. Faith and Public Policy. Edited by James R. Wilburn, Lexington Books, 2002.p. 96
- Harris, Kathleen Mullan, and Udry, J. Richard. National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, 1994-2008 [Public Use]. Ann Arbor, MI: Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2017-10-24.
- McLanahan S, Tach L, Schneider D. The Causal Effects of Father Absence. *Annual review of sociology.* 2013;39:399-427.