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Culture and Parenting among Teen Fathers

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Introduction & Literature Review

- In the U.S. in 2013, over 250,000 babies were born to women between the ages of 15-19 with higher rates among Latinos, African Americans, and indigenous groups compared to Whites (CDC, 2014).
- Awareness and efforts to reduce teen pregnancy focus on the experiences of young mothers with little attention given to teen fathers (Kiselica & Kiselica, 2014). With mothers being recognized as caregivers more often than fathers, adolescent fathers are often overlooked, neglected, and ostracized by their families and service providers (Devault, 2014).
- Teen fatherhood impacts socioemotional, academic, career trajectories, and financial stability which can impact their offspring (Parra-Cardona, Wampler, & Sharp, 2006). Teen fathers are important to their children's wellbeing (Mollborn & Lovegrove, 2011).
- Up to 1/3 of incarcerated juveniles are fathers (Khurana & Gavazzi, 2010; Nurse, 2001; Unruh et al., 2003; Wei et al., 2002). Though not true for all teen fathers, many are less educated, dependent on their families, and may engage in immature and irresponsible behaviors due to their age (Landers, Mitchell, & Coates, 2015).
- Existing literature examining culture and teen fathers in the U.S. is limited. Two studies focus on Mexican American teen fathers and their engagement in programs to become better fathers (Parra-Cardona et al., 2006; 2008).
- One qualitative study examined how teen fathers navigate the stigma of teen pregnancy and masculinity (Weber, 2012).

This Study

- Despite the awareness that fathers play an important role in their children's lives, the research on them continues to be sparse. In this study, we examine factors that contribute to teen fatherhood. To better understand protective factors that may help this population, we examine dimensions of culture and how they impact current parenting.

Research Questions

- How does a man's relationship with his father in childhood impact whether or not he becomes a teen dad? How do these experiences impact current parenting among teen dads?
- How does culture impact parenting practices among teen dads?

Method

Participants

- $N = 260$, ranging in age from 18-67 ($M = 31.25$; $SD = 8.67$)
- 56.54% of the sample ($n = 147$) reported having their first child when they were a teenager
- Among teen dads, 33.3% had an education level of high school diploma, GED, or less. Among non-teen dads, 15% had high school diploma or GED.
- No significant racial differences between teen dads and non-teen dads; 59.4% White/Caucasian, 14.9% Asian American, 12.3% Latino/Hispanic, 7.7% Black/African American, 4.6% multiracial, 0.8% Native American/Indigenous.

Measures

- Relationship with their father (Fatherhood Scale; Dick, 2004)
- Culture (Vancouver Index of Acculturation [VIA]; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000)
- Psychological well-being (Brief Symptom Inventory - 18 [BSI-18]; Derogatis, 2000; Oxford Happiness Questionnaire; Hills & Argyle, 2002;)
- Current parenting practices (Parenting Interactions with Children: Checklist of Observations Linked to Outcomes [PICCOLO Dad version]; Anderson, Roggman, Innocenti, & Cook, 2013)

Results

- Teen dads reported that their fathers had significantly lower levels of positive engagement, good provider role, androgynous role, responsible paternal engagement, accessible father role, and moral father role compared to those who were not teen dads.

Teen Dads and Current Parenting

- No significant differences between teen dads and non-teen dads in current parenting (affection, encouragement, teaching, responsiveness).
- Among teen dads:
 - Relationship with their father was not significantly associated with current parenting.
 - Neither age nor education level were significant predictors of parenting.
 - Current parenting was positively associated with happiness and negatively associated with psychological distress.
 - Culture (see table below): The model accounted for about 1/3 of the variance of parenting among teen dads. Acculturation, social support, and winning positively and significantly predicted positive parenting. Greater levels of power over women and heterosexual self-presentation were significantly associated with worse parenting.

Dimensions of Culture Predicting Parenting

	B	SE	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1				.20	.20***
Enculturation	.003	.03	.01		
Acculturation	.15	.03	.45***		
Step 2				.26	.06**
Social Support	.09	.03	.27**		
Step 3				.36	.10**
Winning	.08	.03	.26**		
Emotional Control	-.01	.03	-.04		
Power Over Women	-.07	.03	-.20*		
Playboy	.01	.03	.02		
Self-Reliance	-.02	.03	-.06		
Heterosexual Self-Presentation	-.06	.03	-.19*		

Discussion

- How fathers engage with their children can influence teen parenthood. More positive engagement and being a positive role model can be a protective factor.
- Despite the influence of a man's relationship with his father on becoming a teen dad, this relationship did not influence parenting practices in our findings. However, greater acculturation and social support were associated with more positive parenting outcomes.
- In terms of masculinity, the inclination to win was associated with self-reported higher levels of parenting. This could reflect the respondents' desire to present themselves in a positive light. It could also reflect their desire to be good at everything and pursue strategies/resources to be a good father. Conversely, beliefs that women were subordinate to men and adherence to strict gender roles were associated with poorer self-reported parenting abilities. Based on both respondents' reports of their fathers and their own parenting, more flexible and respectful notions of gender are associated with positive outcomes.

Counseling Implications

- Provide space to discuss gender roles in relation to their identity as a teen father and as a father in general.
- Adapt parenting classes to meet the developmental stage and experiences as a teen parent.
- Ensure teen dads are engaged in programs to support the completion of their academics and/or vocational training.
- Support continued engagement in developmentally appropriate activities (sports, prom, graduation, overnight fieldtrips, lunch with friends, etc).
- Facilitate network of teen fathers to provide support for each other (including group activities, workshops, play dates).
- Encourage them to access their existing social supports and utilize cultural resources.

