Developmental Psychopathology Research and Families: Mothers, Fathers, or Both?

Pomerantz, H., Parent, J., & Forehand, R.

University of Vermont

Father involvement has been found to be important for a wide range of developmental outcomes for children. Despite the importance of fathers in the development of adaptive and maladaptive child outcomes, research primarily includes mothers but not fathers. Phares and colleagues have established that research in this area between 1984 and 1991 rarely included fathers. When reviewed again between 1992 and 2005, results showed no improvements in the inclusion of fathers in developmental psychopathology research. The purpose of the current study was to update the literature from the last decade. We examined the representation of fathers in the research literature since the time of the Phares et al. reviews using their same methodology. A total of 871 studies were found to fit the criteria for inclusion from 2005 to 2014. Of these, 39.4% involved mothers only; 24.2% involved both mothers and fathers and analyzed for maternal and paternal effects separately; 35.5% included both fathers and mothers but did not analyze them separately or more frequently involved “parents” and did not specify parental gender; and 0.9% involved fathers only. Separate chi-square analyses were run to determine if the distribution of types of studies had changed between the 1992 and 2005 reviews to the present analyses. The present distribution was significantly different than either the 1992 or the 2005 distribution ($p < .01$), with a reduction in the number of studies that looked at only fathers and only mothers, while the number of studies that looked at the mothers and fathers or “parents” without distinguishing between the two increased. The number of studies that looked at both mothers and fathers simultaneously but analyzed separately did not change meaningfully. Despite calls for the inclusion of fathers in family research, there has been no meaningful change over the last three decades.