

[Research Shows Importance of a Father's Love \(press release\)](#)

Research Shows Importance of a Father's Love

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By Allison Thompson, Office of University Communications

STORRS, Conn. -- Researchers who look to children's mothers to understand the youngsters' development are getting only half the story, says Ronald Rohner, director of the Center for the Study of Parental Acceptance and Rejection in the School of Family Studies at the University of Connecticut.

A father's love -- or lack of it -- is a critical yet understudied factor in child development, according to research by Rohner and his colleague Robert Veneziano, an assistant professor of social work at Western Connecticut State University.

"What we find surprising and new is that a father's love is turning out to be just as important as, sometimes more important than, a mother's love," Rohner says.

Fathers are cited more than mothers in issues such as psychological maladjustment, substance abuse, depression, and conduct problems, says Rohner, a professor emeritus. On the positive side, a father's love provides a buffer against the development of these difficulties and can contribute to a child's good physical health.

In an article, "The Importance of Father Love: History and Contemporary Evidence," published in the December 2001 issue of *Review of General Psychology*, Rohner and Veneziano examine nearly 100 studies that explore the effect of parenting on children's behavior. The studies, published between 1949 and 2001, are some of the few that deal with fathers. Prior to the 1960s and 1970s, many behavioral scientists assumed fathers were relatively unimportant to their children's healthy development, the authors note.

"At the very most, fathers were thought to be peripheral to the job of parenting because children spent most of their time with their mothers," Rohner and Veneziano write. "Some even argued that fathers have no biological aptitude for childcare, though women were said to be genetically endowed for it."

Because mothers were assumed to be so important in child development, researchers tended to study mothers' behavior. When they found significant effects of maternal behavior, the researchers were motivated to study mothers more. That tended to reinforce their belief that fathers weren't very important.

In the 1960s and 1970s, researchers gradually turned their attention to the importance of fathers and father love. Some of the studies yielded surprising results, the authors write.

"Researchers discovered that father love sometimes explains a unique, independent portion of the variance in specific child outcomes, over and above the portion of variance explained by mother love," Rohner and Veneziano note. "Indeed, some studies reviewed later found that father love is the sole significant predictor of specific child outcomes, after removing the influence of mother love."

According to the authors, the studies they examined can be divided into six categories, with each one attributing a different degree of importance to father love. Although the studies drew many different conclusions about the importance of fathers, the mere fact that fathers are being examined with more frequency is crucial.

"Widespread recognition of fathers' influence may help motivate many men to become more involved in nurturing child care," Rohner and Veneziano write.

That increased involvement benefits both mothers and children, the authors note.

"The evidence seems clear that mothers are more effective parents when fathers are both supportive partners and nurturing parents," Rohner and Veneziano write. "And children are major beneficiaries when they are raised by warm, loving mothers and fathers."

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