



## Do Fathers Benefit from Parent Training Programs?

**Source:** Lundahl, B. W., Tollefson, D., Risser, & Lovejoy, M. C. (2008). A meta-analysis of father involvement in parent training. *Research on Social Work Practices, 18*, 97-106.

This meta-analysis sought to investigate the effects of parent training programs on fathers. More specifically, it sought to examine previous studies to determine (1) whether including fathers in parent training enhances children's outcomes and (2) whether mothers and fathers benefit equally from parent training programs.

### Method

Studies used in the meta-analysis were found through computer searches of PsychInfo and Educational Research Information Center (ERIC) using various combinations of the search terms "father," "dad," "parent training," and "parent education." Additional inclusion criteria were: (1) the parent training program targeted disruptive child behaviors; (2) the study included a treatment group and either a control or wait-list group of at least five participants each; (3) target children and/or parents were not identified as developmentally or cognitively delayed; (4) the intervention was given directly to parents in a community setting; and, (5) the studies reported means and standard deviations in order to calculate effect sizes. In total, 28 studies were assessed; 11 of these separately reported data from mothers and fathers, two reported aggregated data from fathers and mothers, and 15 included data only from mothers.

Where possible, several confounders were controlled for including socioeconomic status, child's age, and whether the training was delivered individually or in a group setting. In addition, the quality of each intervention was estimated and scored based on randomization, fidelity of the program model, and use of valid and reliable measures. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's *d*. In general, a *d* around .20 is small, but significant; a *d* in the .50 range is moderate, and a *d* in the range of .80 is considered to be large.

### Results

When the effects of the program were measured immediately after the parent training, studies that included fathers demonstrated stronger effects for child behavior ( $d = .48$  vs.  $.20$ ) and parenting behavior ( $d = .54$  vs.  $.06$ ), but not for perceptions toward parenting. At follow-up periods, however, the effects of father participation were no longer significant.

Comparing the effects of parent training on mothers vs. fathers, it appears that these programs have stronger effects on mothers ( $d = .91$ ) than fathers ( $d = .68$ ) regarding reported improvements on child behavior immediately following treatment; however, this difference was no longer significant at follow-up measurements. Similarly, mothers ( $d = .68$ ) compared with fathers ( $d = .37$ ) reported significantly more positive perceptions of parenting immediately after treatment, but not at follow-up. However, mothers also reported

significantly greater improvements in parenting behaviors ( $d = .84$ ) than fathers ( $d = .53$ ) and this difference did maintain its significance at follow-up periods.

### **Discussion & Conclusions**

This meta-analysis supports the belief that father involvement in parent training is beneficial to some extent. Although changes in child and parent outcomes were not as strong for fathers as they were for mothers, the effect sizes of program outcomes in fathers generally fell in the moderate range (whereas effect sizes for mothers were generally large). In addition, programs that included both fathers and mothers had a stronger effect than those just including mothers. However, since these programs did not seem to have many long-term effects overall, instead only affecting changes only immediately after program completion, it appears that parent training programs in general would benefit from booster sessions to better support families.

Taken together, these findings suggest that father participation does increase the likelihood of the success of parent training programs. Therefore, where possible, fathers should be included in these trainings and program leaders should encourage their engagement. Yet, since fathers did not change their behaviors or perceptions of child rearing as much as mothers, it is possible that future parent training programs could be adjusted to better meet father's needs and concerns.



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