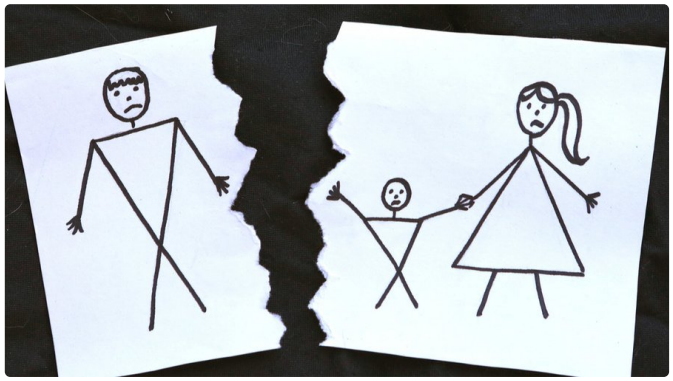
America's Disappearing Dads

A Fatherless Fathers Day Is a Bad Omen for America

Several years ago, AFA of Indiana's Director wrote an item in our weekly email the week of Father's Day that received a huge response from our readers. We are reprinting that item as it appeared here as a factsheet on fatherhood.



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Last Thursday, the above-the-fold headline in the state's largest newspaper concerned a very disturbing new report. The article was titled, "More Dads Live Apart from Kids." According to a Pew Research Center report, 46% of fathers up through middle age have at least one child fathered outside of marriage. An as**tonishing 24 million children now grow up in homes in which their biological fathers do not live.**

Fifteen years ago, David Blankenhorn in his landmark book, Fatherless America, warned the nation that more than half of the nation's children would spend some part of their childhood growing up without a dad.

Historically fatherlessness in America was caused by paternal death. For example, by the time they had reached fifteen, about 15 percent of all American children born in 1870 had experienced the death of their fathers. (Incidentally, the death of mothers was more common then. Divorce was far less common. In 1900 middle-aged, widowed men outnumbered middle-aged divorced men twenty to one.)

Today, the primary cause of fatherlessness is *paternal choice*. In 1900 only 8.5 percent of children were born outside of marriage in America. Sixty years later, that number had barely changed to 9% of children born out of wedlock. Today, according to the Heritage Foundation, 41% of all births occur outside of marriage. In 1960, 23% of births to blacks were outside of marriage. Today that number is a staggering 72.8%. It is 53.2% among Hispanics and 29% among whites. (*By the way, in Japan, the out of wedlock birth rate from 1970 through 1995 remained at a low rate of less than 2%. In Italy, the rate today is only 7%.*)

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The numbers and trends are interesting, but what does it all mean? Answer: Quite a lot*, particularly for the most vulnerable among us – children.*

Out of wedlock births and fatherless households have a huge impact upon society that are far more significant than most realize. Here is a brief collection of items and research findings upon which entire articles, lengthy policy papers, and books have been written.

For the child, the result of being born outside of marriage is that they learn that love is a thing of failure both between adults and between adults and children. As Maggie Gallagher notes, in The Abolition of Marriage, one of the best books ever written on marriage:

"In sharp contrast to children in intact families, children of divorce or non-marriage repeatedly undergo the experience of seeing family-like mem bers enter and drop out of the picture. The initial experience of love's failure and the abandonment most children experience in the immediate aftermath of divorce is confirmed again and again and again in the years ahead . . . Adults in these post divorce, [and non-marital] romances seldom accurately assess the effects these relationships may have on their children."

For the first year or so, many unwed fathers tend to make a special effort to see their children. As life goes on, they may move, or they may acquire new emotional

obligations to new girlfriends. Overall, only one-third of children living apart from their fathers see their dad as often as once a week. For the children of a failed marriage, the numbers are hardly better. Ten years down the road, two thirds of all children of divorce have virtually no contact with their fathers.

On average, a child born outside of marriage spends just six months of his childhood living with his father. Three-fifths of unwed fathers whose children are aged two or younger see their children regularly. But by the time the children reach the age of seven and a half, less than one quarter of all unwed fathers still see their children frequently.

When a father is not in the home the paternal relationship deteriorates rapidly. Sixty-nine percent of children who live with their fathers report a good relationship with them, but only 36% of children with an absent father say they have a good relationship with their dads. In fact, only half of absent fathers were even viewed as "family" by their children.

There is more to this absence than just "father hunger," damaged relationships or lost ideals. Although society often portrays men, male gender roles and masculinity as unnecessary, a danger to society, or even evil itself, the role of husbands and fathers as the family protector is **significant. Women and children are much safer from crime when there is a married father in the home. Various** studies have found that children born outside of marriage are far more at risk of child abuse.

A comprehensive study of child abuse reported by Robert Whalen of the Heritage Foundation found that children living with their biological married parents are much safer than in other family configurations. More specifically, the rate of child abuse is 14 times higher than a traditional married two-parent family if the child lives alone with his biological mother. Child abuse is 33 times higher if a single mother is cohabiting with a boyfriend.

Historically, poverty has stemmed primarily from fathers being unemployed or underpaid. Today, fatherlessness has become the single largest determinant **of child poverty. Today, 92% of children on welfare are from either single parent or divorced homes, whereas the** vast majority of children raised in a married home will never be poor. Children born out of wedlock are 700% more likely to be poor than children from their married counterparts. In fact, welfare dependency is 1,700% more likely for children born out of wedlock than for those born to their married parents.

The increase in fatherlessness has coincided with the massive growth in government. By 2000, America was spending ten and a half times the amount on total welfare spending than when the Great Society, "war on poverty," programs of LBJ began in 1965. (*The federal government has increased spending on welfare nearly every year since 1965. Last year, we spent $890 Billion on welfare, compared to $400 Billion as recently as 1990.*)

Fatherlessness and the breakdown of marriage and the family have an enormous impact upon the size of government. In June 2008, the National Fatherhood Initiative released "The One Hundred Billion Dollar Man," a ground-breaking study that showed that the federal gov**ernment now spends $100 billion each year supporting** father-absent homes. This is probably a very conservative estimate. The study did not include related costs for the criminal justice system, which is flooded with men who grew up in father-absent homes.

Fatherlessness is also a major contributor to crime. A state-by-state analysis in 1995 found that in general **an increase of 10% in the percentage of children living in single-parent homes accounted for a 17% increase in** juvenile crime. A study by Indiana Policy Review found that 80% of the boys sent to the Indiana Boy's School came from divorced or single-parent homes.

A 1998 study of adolescents convicted of homicide in adult court found that at the time of the crimes, 42.9 percent of their parents had never been married, 29.5 percent were divorced, and 8.9 percent were separated. Less than 20 percent of these children were from married parent households.

Fatherlessness also has a drain on our educational system. The National Fatherhood Initiative reports that **fatherless children are twice as likely to drop out of high** school. Students who don't live with their fathers are twice as likely to repeat a grade in school. The National Association for Elementary School Principles found that children from single parent or divorced homes are more likely to be expelled, drop out of school, or have disciplinary action taken against them.

Contrary to what TV might suggest, dads are not buffoons optional to a family unit. They are not mere income providers as the courts system seems to imply. Neither are they humorous lazy couch potatoes who drink lots of beer, hog the TV remote as your search to buy a Fathers Day card might imply. Fathers, present

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Obviously, there are many dads out there who are not living in their child's home against their own wishes. (*Two-thirds of divorces are filed by women. Under no-fault divorce, a marriage can be ended without recourse by the unilateral decision of one spouse, unlike virtually all other legal agreements or contracts.*) **Yet, fatherhood should still be more important, more valued, and more expected than it is today in America.**

I do not agree with President Barack Obama on most matters. I am pretty certain that he does not understand the vital role that marriage plays in our social structure. He seems to think that two women are the equivalent of a married mom and dad. Whatever else they might be, two moms are not a dad.

I am also certain that he does not understand how mothers and fathers together, bound by marriage, play an enormous role in educational and cultural stability or in limited government. Apparently, he also does not understand how his worldview has destroyed the family over the last fifty years. (Many liberals have a problem effectively transferring liberal public policies to their daily private lives, because of conflicts with reality. It is often seen most shockingly when you hear of a Hollywood actor who makes millions off of R-rated movies admit that he does not allow his children to watch his movies or limits their TV; Or when a critic of the 2nd Amendment defends his home and property with a handgun; Or when a big government type goes to extremes to shelter his income from US tax law; Or when a politician who praises public education, yet sends their children to private schools.)

However, President Obama does seem to understand the vital role a dad plays on the individual level between father and his children. Here is what he observed on June 19, 2009:

"In many ways, I came to understand the importance of fatherhood through its absence-both in my life and in the lives of others. I came to understand that the hole a man leaves when he abandons his responsibility to his children is one that no government can fill. We can do everything possible to provide good jobs and good schools and safe streets for our kids, but it will never be enough to fully make up the difference. That is why we need fathers to step up, to realize that their job does not end at conception; that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child but the courage to raise one."

Our nation is in very deep, grave trouble by almost every measure available. Many, perhaps most, people now realize this fact. Yet, too few see how the breakdown of the traditional family is such a big root cause of our national crisis.

The Bottom Line is that Dads matter. One of the unfortunate things about the national debate regarding justice, racism, and law enforcement is that almost no one is mentioning the links between fatherlessness and it's role in neighborhood, economic and social disparities.

-- Micah Clark, AFA-IN Executive Director, Weekly email, June 21, 2011