


**THE EFFECTS OF FATHER ABSENCE ON FEMALES'
SELF-REPORTED DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AND SELF-ESTEEM**


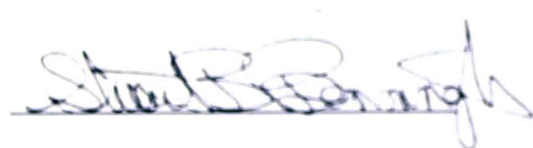
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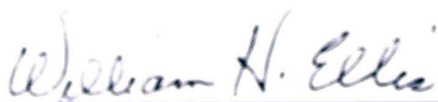
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THE EFFECTS OF FATHER ABSENCE ON FEMALES' SELF-REPORTED DEPRESSIVE
SYMPTOMS AND SELF-ESTEEM.

A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by

Crystal Knowles Halida

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Mrs. Linda Lou Martin and Mr. Larry Delano Knowles and my husband, Larry Joseph Halida who have given me the determination and opportunities to succeed in my educational endeavors.

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the effects of father absence on females' self-reported depressive symptoms and self-esteem. The subjects were divided into father-absent and father-present groups. The father-absent group was further divided into early father-absent and later father-absent groups. Early father absence was defined as the father becoming absent before age five. Later father absence was described as the father becoming absent at age five or later. Both the father-absent and father-present groups completed the Beck Depression Inventory and the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale.

The father-absent and father-present group scores on the depression inventory and the self-esteem scale were compared. The early father-absent and later father-absent group scores on both inventories were compared. Also, the length of time since the father became absent was examined.

The results of this study supported the hypothesis that father-absent females would report more depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem than father-present females. The hypotheses that females from early father-absent homes would report more depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem than females from later father-absent homes were not supported suggesting that the effects of father absence during childhood may be long-lasting. Also, there was no correlation between length of time since the father became

absent and depressive symptoms and self-esteem. The implications of these findings are discussed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The effect of father absence is an important issue today due to the increase in the number of single parent households. Demographers estimate that nearly half of all American children born during the late 1970s and early 1980s will experience the divorce of their parents and will spend approximately five years in a single-parent household. Overall, about 60 percent of children born in the early 1980s will spend some time in a single-parent household before the end of adolescence. When youngsters live with only one natural parent whether in a single-parent or two-parent household, it is almost always with the mother. Only 10 percent of children whose parents have been divorced live with their father (Furstenberg, 1990).

Researchers have been concerned with the effects of father absence on daughters. Several studies suggest that father absence has a negative effect on the sexual attitudes and behavior, self-esteem, self-concept, and anxiety level of daughters (Eberhardt & Schill, 1984; Fleck, Fuller, Malin, Miller & Acheson, 1980; Hainline & Feig, 1978; Hetherington, 1972; Musser & Fleck, 1983; Young & Parish, 1977).

Hetherington (1972) investigated the effects of time of and reason for paternal separation on the behavior of father-absent adolescent girls. Each of the three groups consisted of 24 lower and lower-middle-class, firstborn,

adolescent, white girls who attended a community recreation center on a regular basis. They ranged in age from 13 to 17 years old. The first group included girls who were from intact families. The second group included girls from families in which the father was absent due to divorce and with whom the child had minimal contact. The third group consisted of girls from families in which the father was absent due to death. None of the father-absent families had males living in the household. The study used multiple measures, including: observation of each girl's behavior in the recreation center, a measure of each girl's nonverbal behavior while interacting with a male or female interviewer, interviews with the daughter and the mother, the California Personality Inventory Femininity Scale (Gough, 1957) the Internal-External Control Scale (Rotter, 1966), the short form of the Manifest Anxiety Scale (Bendig, 1956), and the Draw-a-person Tests for mothers and daughters (Machover, 1957).

This study found that disruptions in interactions with males occurred. The daughter's of divorcees showed disruptions in their interactions with males, including more proximity-seeking and attention-seeking behaviors, earlier heterosexual behavior, and various forms of nonverbal communication associated with openness and responsiveness. Daughters of widows manifested more inhibition, rigidity, avoidance, and restraint around males. Early separation

from fathers (before age five) appeared to result in more severe effects than did later separation (after age five).

Fleck et al. (1980) found a significant relationship between the father's psychological absence and a greater extent and frequency of heterosexual behaviors. Father psychological absence was defined as a relationship with a father that the daughter perceives as unloving and unaccepting. This study proposed that father psychological absence, or presence in a negative way, would produce effects similar to those associated with fathers' physical absence. The subjects were 160 unmarried female college students. All subjects came from families in which either a father or step-father was living in the home until the subject was at least 13 years of age. This study found that unmarried girls with psychologically absent fathers showed an increased frequency and extent of heterosexual involvement including: hand holding, kissing, petting, and other sexual activities.

Hainline and Feig's (1978) and Eberhardt and Schill's (1984) findings did not support the general conclusion of Hetherington's 1972 study; that is, that father absence resulted in disrupted interaction with males. These studies did however find variable results concerning father absence and sexual attitudes. Hainline and Feig (1978) studied females ranging in age from 17 to 23 who were from lower-middle and middle class income families. The subjects

were distributed into groups which consisted of six subjects each. The first group consisted of females from father-absent homes whose fathers had died. The second group contained subjects from families in which the father was absent due to divorce or separation. The subjects from the divorce group reported little or no contact with their fathers. Also, the mothers had not remarried since the separation nor were there any males living in the homes. There was an early (before age 5) and a late group (after age 5) for both the widowed and divorced samples. The third group consisted of subjects from intact families with both parents living in the home and with no brothers. Despite the small group sizes, the study found attitudinal differences about the acceptability of engaging in sexual intercourse for the father-absent females. The daughters of widows in particular had stricter views about sexual behaviors than other subjects.

Eberhardt and Schill, (1984) compared sexual permissiveness attitudes and self-reported sexual behaviors of 53 father-absent vs. 37 father-present black, lower-socioeconomic, female adolescents ranging from ages 14 to 17. The results of this study indicated that black, father-absent lower socioeconomic females are not more sexually permissive than black, father-present, lower socioeconomic females. Adolescent subjects whose fathers were absent due to divorce, desertion, or separation were

not more sexually permissive than adolescent females whose fathers were absent due to death. Adolescent females from earlier father-absent homes were not more sexually permissive than females from later father-absent homes. There was a greater difference between self-reported attitude and behavior for father-absent subjects than father-present subjects. The father-absent females self-reported more permissive behaviors than attitudes significantly more times than the father-present females. This may mean that the father-absent females may act more permissive than what their attitudes may reflect. Furthermore, father-absent subjects whose fathers were absent before age five were found to have a significantly higher need for social approval than subjects whose fathers became absent after they were five years old.

In summary, these studies show variable negative effects on father-absent daughters' sexual attitudes, permissiveness and interpersonal relationships with males. The degree of the negative effects appears to be affected by a variety of factors including: age when father-absence occurs, age of subjects studied, and family socioeconomic status. All but one of these studies found negative effects of father absence on daughters' sexual attitudes and behaviors, and that study (Eberhardt and Schill, 1984) did find a difference in the relationship between sexual attitudes and actual behaviors.

Researchers also have found negative effects of father absence on daughters' self-esteem, self-concept, internal-external locus of control, and anxiety level (Fleck et al, 1980; Hetherington, 1972; Musser & Fleck, 1983; Young & Parish, 1977). The results of the Hetherington (1972) study revealed higher scores on the Manifest Anxiety Scale for father-absent daughters when compared to father-present daughters. The father-absent daughters also scored lower on the factor of personal control over the course of one's life on the Internal-External Control Scale when compared to father-present daughters. Father-absent daughters also had lower self-esteem scores as assessed by an interview. Hetherington reported that, during this interview, the subject's feelings of insecurity and anxiety were exhibited through physical manipulations such as nailbiting; hair, lip, and finger pulling; and plucking at clothes and other objects.

Musser and Fleck (1983) studied 72 never-married students aged 18 to 26 who were raised with their natural father present in the home until at least the age of 16. They found a relationship between the daughter's self-esteem, self-reliance, contentment and self-control, and the degree of perceived father acceptance and control. Father acceptance and control were assessed through the administration of the Children's Report of Parent Behavior

Inventory (Schaefer, 1959). Father acceptance was defined as perceived paternal nurturance and positive involvement. Father control included the degree to which the father made rules and regulations, set limits on the child's activities, and enforced those rules and limits. Personality adjustment was measured by the Adjective Check List (ACL) (Gough & Heilbrun, 1980). Musser and Fleck (1983) described the high scorer on the ACL as having a positive attitude toward life, enjoying the company of others, and feeling capable of initiating activities and carrying them through to conclusion. Low scorers were described as anxious, high strung and moody, avoiding close relationships with others, and worrying about their ability to deal with life's stresses and strains.

The results of Musser and Fleck's study revealed a positive relationship between more optimal daughter personality adjustment and high levels of father acceptance and control. As the level of the father's acceptance increased, the college-aged daughter rated herself as having a higher level of personality adjustment. They concluded that authoritative fathers (high control, high love) have daughters who rate themselves as being better adjusted. In addition, these results confirm previous findings that an increase in the amount of control the father exerts on his daughter, when combined with acceptance and love, is positively correlated to higher levels of self-esteem,

self-reliance, assertiveness, contentment, and self-control in the daughter (Baumrind, 1967; Baumrind, 1971; Baumrind & Black, 1967; Coopersmith 1967). One could hypothesize that father-absent daughters would express levels of self-esteem, self-reliance, and contentment similar to those of daughters who perceive their fathers to have low levels of acceptance and control.

Fleck et al. (1980) not only found the previously discussed negative effects on father-absent daughters' sexual behaviors, they also discovered that father-absent daughters exhibited increased anxiety. The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, Gorsuch & Lushene, 1970) was used to measure anxiety in the subjects. The results of this study concluded that father psychological absence was related to increased anxiety as a personality trait and increased anxiety in a dating situation.

Young and Parish (1977) compared fathers-absent females whose mothers had not remarried to father-absent females whose mothers had remarried. Fifty subjects ranging in age from 17 to 22 participated in the study. The instruments used were the Matching Familiar Figures Test (Eagen, 1965), the Adjective Check List (Gough, 1952), and the Security-Insecurity Inventory (Maslow, 1952). The results of this study suggested father-absent females whose mothers had not remarried demonstrated greater insecurity and more negative

self-evaluations than father-present females or father-absent females whose mothers had remarried.

In summary, these studies have shown that father absence whether psychological or due to death or divorce may be associated with lower levels of self-esteem, self-concept, contentment, self-reliance, and high levels of anxiety.

Several studies have suggested that these personality variables are often associated with greater depressive symptoms. For instance, females with greater depressive mood are more likely to display the following psychological characteristics: more obsessiveness and guilt, poorer ego integration, lower feelings of self-esteem, less ability to cope, and greater difficulty in interpersonal relations (Brook, Whiteman, Brook & Gordon, 1988; Puig-Antich et al., 1985; Rutter & Angert, 1980). In addition, Himmelweit and Turner (1982) linked depression with introversion and poor family relations. Adolescent females in particular have been found to report more depressive symptoms than males (Allgood-Merten, Lewinsohn & Hops, 1990). According to Brook, Brook, Whiteman & Gordon (1983), introversion and guilt are more highly related to depressive mood in females than in males, suggesting that difficulties in initiating and forming social relations and a concurrent sense of low self-worth (guilt) may be more contributory to depressive mood in females than in males. The American Psychiatric Association defines depressive mood as a dysphoric feeling

state consisting of sadness, hopelessness, despair, and discouragement or loss of interest or pleasure, which can vary in degree and duration but is often prolonged and affects one's whole emotional life (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). Subjects, in general, may be clinically depressed, exhibit depressive mood, or show only depressive symptoms.

In summary, some of the components that have been associated with depression were experienced by father-absent females in all of the studies cited. This study will directly examine the effects of early and later father absence on both females self-reported depressive symptoms and self-esteem. This is important to study because other areas of a females' lives may be affected by greater depressive symptoms such as relationships and occupations. This study differs from previous studies for several reasons. First, this investigation goes beyond the aspect of sexuality and looks at the depression and self-esteem levels of females. Second, this study examines the effects of father absence on depressive symptoms and self-esteem using a wider age range than previous research. Forty-five percent of the students at the university where this study was conducted are 25 years of age or older (Hupping, 1991). This wider age range will provide a sample with greater variability in time since father absence which will allow the examination on the long-term impact of father absence on

females. The results of this study should demonstrate that females from father-absent homes will report more depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem than will females from father-present homes. It is predicted also that females from early father-absent homes will report more depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem than females from later father-absent homes.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

Subjects

Subjects were college-aged female volunteers recruited from General Psychology, Psychology of Adjustment, and Human Interaction classes at Austin Peay State University. The subjects were divided into two main groups. The first group consisted of females whose fathers were present in the home. The second group was comprised of females from father-absent homes. For some analyses this group was subdivided into females from father-absent homes in which the father became absent before age five and females from homes in which father absence occurred at or later than age 5. Demographic information for the groups is presented in Table 1.

There were 67 female subjects who completed all questionnaires. The final sample included 66 subjects because one subject was omitted from the study due to both parents being absent during her childhood. The mean age for the final sample was 23.26 years of age. Forty-eight of the subjects who participated in the study were Caucasian, ten African-American, two were American-Indian, four were Asian-American and one subject was Hispanic.

Fifty-six subjects defined their childhood family income as having been middle-class. Five subjects reported their income levels during childhood as being poor. Five subjects

reported that they grew up in an upper-class income level. Sixty-two subjects reported that they were referring to their biological father when answering the questionnaire. One subject referred to her step-father as the person she considered to be her father. Two subjects reported that they would be referring to their adopted fathers when answering the questionnaire and one person considered her grandfather to be her father.

Definition of Father-Absence and Father-Presence

Subjects were classified as father-absent if the father was absent due to death, divorce, abandonment or separation. Fathers who are away from the home due to military duties or other career obligations were not classified as father-absent or father-present. None of the subjects in this study reported military or career obligations as the reason for father absence. Females were classified as father-present if the father was present from birth until 18 years of age. Females were classified as early father absence if the father was absent before age 5. Subjects were classified as later father absence if the father became absent at the age of five or older. Table 1 indicates how many subjects were in each group.

Table 1.

FREQUENCIES FOR FATHER-PRESENT, FATHER-ABSENT AND EARLY AND LATER FATHER-ABSENT GROUPS.

| | @FATHER -PRESENT n=38 | FATHER -ABSENT n=28 | EARLY FATHER -ABSENT n=10 | LATE FATHER -ABSENT n=18 |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| POOR | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| MIDDLE-CLASS | 32 | 24 | 9 | 15 |
| UPPER-CLASS | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| BLACK | 4 | 6 | 4 | 2 |
| WHITE | 28 | 20 | 5 | 15 |
| AMERICAN INDIAN | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| ASIAN | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| HISPANIC | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| DEATH | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| DIVORCE | 0 | 21 | 6 | 15 |
| ABANDONMENT | 0 | 5 | 3 | 2 |

Note @ = One subject did not report her race.

Instruments

Depression

The Beck Depression Inventory (Beck and Steer, 1987) was used to assess the number of depressive symptoms experienced by the subjects in each group. The questionnaire consisted of 21 groups of four statements. The subjects were asked to read each group of statements and circle the number next to the one statement in each group that best reflects how she had been feeling the past week, including the day of testing. Higher scores indicate more depressive symptoms. The Beck Depression Inventory is considered to be a good self-report measure of general depression (Sundberg, 1992). It has been used to assess the intensity of depression in psychiatric patients and detect depression in normal populations (Steer, Beck, & Garrison, 1986). The 21-item form used in this study has been found to have a test-retest reliability which ranges from .60 to .90 (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979; Beck & Steer, 1987).

Self-esteem

The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenburg, 1965) was used to assess the level of self-esteem for each subject in each group. The subjects were asked to read ten questions and then respond by circling strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale has reported a reproducibility coefficient of .92 and

scalability of .72 (Kernaleguen & Conrad, 1980). According to Wylie (1974), "It is very impressive that such a high reliability is attainable with only 10 items and that such a short scale has yielded relationships supporting its construct validity" (Wylie, 1974, p. 189).

Procedures

Each subject received extra credit at their professor's discretion for participating in the study. Group meetings were held at different times for the convenience of the subjects. Each subject was given a consent form (see Appendix A) and a packet which contained a biographical questionnaire (see Appendix B), the Beck Depression Inventory, and the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (see Appendix C).

Biographical information on who they were referring to as father, subject's age and sex, father absence or father presence, and subject's age when father left, income of childhood family, and reason father left was obtained. The number of years since father became absent was obtained by subtracting the subjects current age from age when father absence occurred. (See Appendix B) The subjects were asked not to write their name on the packet or questionnaire for reasons of confidentiality. The subjects were informed that all data collected would remain confidential. They were asked to thoroughly read the consent form. Instead of

giving directions verbally, the researcher asked the subjects to read all the directions on the questionnaires before completing them. This was done to maintain standardization. The subjects also were encouraged to ask questions if there was anything they did not understand. After completion of the questionnaires, the subjects were thanked for their time and participation.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

The effect of father absence or presence on depressive symptoms and self-esteem was analyzed by an analysis of variance. Statistical results are presented in Table 2. The mean score for the Beck Depression Inventory was 5.58 for the father-present group and 12.71 for the father-absent group. The analysis of variance indicated that this was a significant difference, $F(1,64) = 13.16$, $MSE = 62.36$, $p < .01$, between these groups so that the father-absent group self-reported more depressive symptoms. The father-present group mean score for the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale was 33.18. The father-absent group mean score for the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale was 28.38. The analysis of variance revealed a significant difference between the scores for the father-absent and father-present groups, $F(1,64) = 11.03$, $MSE = 34.03$, $p < .01$, so that father-absent groups self-reported lower self-esteem.

The father-absent group was further broken down into early (before age 5) and later (equal to age 5 or older) father-absent groups. The mean Beck Depression Inventory score for the females in the early absence group was 10.50. The mean Beck Depression Inventory score for the females in the later absence group was 13.95. The analysis of variance failed to find a significant difference $F(1,26) =$

.650, $MSE = 117.36$, $p > .05$, between these scores. The mean Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale score for the females in the early group was 30.3. The mean score for the later group was 27.28. The analysis failed to find a significant difference $F(1,26) = 1.17$, $MSE = 50.22$, $p > .05$.

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the relationship between number of years since the father became absent, the Beck Depression Inventory, and the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. The number of years absent was determined by subtracting the age of the father-absent subjects at the time when the fathers became absent from their current age. The correlation between number of years absent and the Beck Depression Inventory was not significant, $r = .035$, $p > .05$. There also was no correlation between number of years absent and the scores on the Rosenberg Self-esteem, $r = .024$, $p > .05$. The Beck Depression Inventory and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale were compared to see how well the two correlated. The analysis revealed a strong negative correlation between the Beck Depression Inventory and the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, $r = -.83$, $p < .001$, such that, as depression scores increased, self-esteem decreased.

Table 2.

MEANS (STANDARD DEVIATIONS) FOR FATHER-PRESENT, FATHER-ABSENT AND EARLY AND LATER FATHER-ABSENT GROUPS

| | FATHER -PRESENT n=38 | FATHER -ABSENT n=28 | F | p |
|--------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|-------|---------|
| BECK | 5.6 (4.8) | 12.7 (10.8) | 13.16 | p < .01 |
| ROSENBERG | 33.2 (4.7) | 28.3 (7.1) | 11.04 | p < .01 |
| AGE | 24.0 (7.7) | 22.2 (4.8) | - | - |
| YEARS ABSENT | - | 14.8 (5.8) | - | - |
| | EARLY n=10 | LATE n=18 | F | p |
| BECK | 10.5 (10.9) | 13.9 (10.8) | 0.65 | N.S. |
| ROSENBERG | 30.3 (6.6) | 27.3 (7.3) | 1.16 | N.S. |
| AGE | 20.9 (2.8) | 22.9 (5.5) | - | - |
| YEARS ABSENT | 18.9 (3.7) | 12.6 (5.7) | - | - |

Note. N.S. = Non-significant difference between groups

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The results of this study found that females from father-absent homes reported more depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem than females from father-present homes. There are several possible explanations for this finding. First, the females may have learned less optimal coping mechanisms due to fewer parental resources. Brook et al. (1988) suggest that depression is associated with low self-esteem and less ability to cope. It is likely that the father-absent females in this study learned their coping strategies from only one parent. It may be that daughters with fathers present in the home learned additional ways of coping with life stressors. Also, the mothers of the father-absent females may have had more responsibilities placed upon them due to the absence of the father, for instance, simultaneously working a full-time job and taking care of the home and children. These overwhelmed mothers may have had difficulty optimally meeting all of their daughters' needs. If father-absent females have fewer coping mechanisms than father-present females, it may be that they do not handle stressful situations well. They may internalize the unsuccessful attempts at coping with these situations and develop a sense of low self-esteem and depressive symptoms.

An alternative explanation for the lower self-esteem reported by females from father-absent homes is that they may be less socially competent because they have less experience relating to males. According to Hetherington (1972), father-absent females are likely to be anxious, apprehensive, and lack adequate skills in relating to men than are father-present females. This may be due to their lack of opportunity to regularly interact with a loving and attentive male.

A possible explanation for father-absent females' depressive symptoms may be that regardless of whether the fathers became absent due to death, divorce, or abandonment the females suffered some sort of a loss or trauma which this study suggests may be long-lasting. It may be the loss of the father has an impact that cannot be compensated for by the presence of the mother. This may be because the child has formed a bond with both parents, and the breaking of that bond with one of them can only be felt as a tragic loss. Several studies have suggested that parental loss may be a precipitating factor for depression in children and in adults (Bowlby, 1980; Caplan & Douglas, 1969). The majority of the subjects in this study reported their fathers as being absent due to divorce. Even though the departed father may not be absent due to death, the loss may be felt just as strongly in the case of divorce (Drill, 1987). For this reason, the females perception of the loss of their

father may also be a factor in the development of depressive symptoms (Rosen, 1979; Santrock & Warshak, 1979).

Finally, females may blame themselves for the loss of their father (Brook, Whiteman, Brook & Gordon, 1988; Puig-Antich et al, 1985; Rutter & Angert, 1980). Females in general tend to internalize feelings of anger and guilt more than males. The father-absent females may have blamed themselves for the father leaving. For instance father-absent females may think that their fathers left because of their own misbehavior. Also, females are taught by society that they should be passive and this may be why they tend to internalize and may blame themselves (Gerde & Block, 1991). Due to this societal conditioning, females may look deeper for their own involvement in the fathers leaving.

There may be additional explanations for why father-absent females report more depressive symptoms than father-present females. One of these many explanations may be the correct one, or it may be some combination of these or other explanations. Further research will be necessary to help determine why father-absent females self-report more depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem than father-present subjects.

The results of this study included a strong negative correlation between scores on the Beck Depression Inventory and the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. This correlation

supports the previous findings that depression and self-esteem are related (Brook, Whiteman, Brook & Gordon, 1988; Puig-Antich et al., 1985; Rutter & Angert, 1980). One reason for this relationship may be that females from father-absent homes may report more depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem because of feelings of guilt and loss of control.

The father-absent subjects were divided into early (before age 5) and later (equal to or after age 5) father-absent groups. The hypothesis that females from early father-absent homes would report more depressive symptoms than females from later father-absent homes was not supported by this study. It may be that regardless of whether father absence occurs in early or late childhood, the disruption on the child's current development may affect her personality now or later and in different communicative ways. Previous studies have found that early father-absent females do not differ from later father-absent females on instrumentations measuring aspects of personality (Hetherington, 1972 & Heinline & Feig, 1978). However, these same studies have found that father-absent females differ from father-present females on observational instruments which measured social behaviors such as proximity-seeking and eye contact during conversation (Hetherington, 1972; Hainline & Feig). It may be that early father absence even more readily impacts the behavior of

children than it does their personality which continues to develop throughout childhood. It is possible also that the small sample size in this study may have obscured differences between the early father-absent group and the later father-absent group.

It is interesting that the number of years that had elapsed since the father became absent did not relate to the number of depressive symptoms or level self-esteem in father-absent females. It may be that time doesn't lessen the effect of father absence on females' depression and self-esteem. One reason for this finding may be that the loss of the father is such a traumatic experience that the effects may be long-lasting. It may also be that the process of answering questions about father-absence triggered feelings of depression and inadequacy.

The significant difference in depressive symptoms and self-esteem between father-absent females and father-present females is impressive given the small sample size obtained in this study. There were many variables not accounted for in this study that could have also affected the self-reported depressive symptoms and self-esteem. One variable not examined by this study is the role of the mother and how she portrayed the father to the daughter. Also, current life stressors and other variables known to be related to depression and self-esteem such as substance abuse were not measured in this study. Another variable is

the quality of the mother-daughter relationship. Was the mother rejecting or accepting of the daughter? The frequency of contact of the fathers was also not measured in this study. Another area that was not accounted for in this study was the presence of males in the household. This study collected data on economic backgrounds of the subjects. However, the data were not evaluated because 85 percent of the subjects reported their childhood income as being middle-class.

Many questions about the effects of father absence on females' depressive symptoms and self-esteem remain unanswered. It is important to continue studying the effects of father absence on females due to the rising divorce rates. Also, many studies like this one have found variable negative effects of father absence which suggests that this is an area that needs future research. Future studies may want to examine the coping strategies used by father-absent females and father-present females. An important area that should be investigated is how daughters perceive the loss of the father and how these perceptions relate to an increase depressive symptoms.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

**Austin Peay State University
Clarksville, Tennessee 37044**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form is designed to provide you with information about this study and to answer any of your questions.

1. TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY

The Effects of Father Absence on Females' Self-reported Depressive Symptoms and Self-esteem.

2. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Crystal Knowles Halida, Graduate Student, Austin Peay State University
Clarksville, TN, (615) 648-7233

Nanci Stewart Woods, Ph.D. Austin Peay State University, Assistant Professor,
Clarksville, TN, (615) 648-7233

3. THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This study will examine the effects of early and later father absence on females self-reported depressive symptoms and self-esteem. Low self esteem has been identified as one symptom of depression. Depressive symptoms may have detrimental effects on the quality of an individual's life. Discovering the effects of father absence is important given that only 10 percent of children from divorce homes live with their fathers.

4. PROCEDURES OF THIS RESEARCH

You will be asked to fill out a confidential questionnaire that will ask you about your father, family background and other biographical data. You will be asked to take the Beck Depression Inventory and the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale. These are standard measurements that will evaluate your level of depressive symptoms and your level of self-esteem. The session is expected to last less than one hour. The researcher will be available to answer any questions that you might have about the questionnaire, measurements used or the study.

5. POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU

There are no known risks from participation in this study.

6. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO YOU OR OTHERS

The benefits to you from participation in this study are minimal. You may receive extra credit for a class for participating in this study. The extra credit will be given to you at the professor's discretion. You may enjoy answering the questionnaire, taking the inventories, or assisting in discovering the effects of father absence on daughters.

7. INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

I agree to participate in the present study being conducted by Crystal Knowles Halida, a graduate student at Austin Peay State University. I have been informed, orally and in writing of the procedures to be followed and about any discomfort which may be involved. Crystal Knowles Halida has offered to answer any further questions that I may have regarding the procedures and she can be contacted by phone (615) 648-7233.

I understand that I am free to terminate my participation at any time without penalty or prejudice and to have all data obtained from me withdrawn from the study and destroyed. I have also been told of any benefits that may result from my participation.

NAME (please print)

SIGNATURE

DATE

APPENDIX B

The definition for father in this study is not limited to the biological father. The father is anyone who the child feels cares for their needs and well-being. It maybe a step-father, biological father or adopted father. The term father is relative to each individual. Father-present is defined in this study as the father being present from birth until 18 years of age. Father-absent is defined as the father being absent due to death, divorce or abandonment.

1. Please describe who you are referring to as "father" when you answer this questionnaire

2. Please circle the sentence below that best describes your family situation during your childhood.

Father present from birth until 18 years of age.

Father absent due to his death.

Father absent due to divorce.

Father absent due to abandonment. Please explain:

3. What age were you when your "father" left?

4. Please circle the sentence below that describes the income of your family throughout your childhood.

Poor

Middle-class

Upper-class

5. What is your race?

6. What is your age?

7. What is your gender?

APPENDIX C

Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale

please circle the number below which you think best represents how much you agree or disagree with the statements.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|--|----------|-------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| <hr/> | | | |
| (1) On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. | | | 1 2 3 4 |
| (2) At times, I think I am no good at all. | | | 1 2 3 4 |
| (3) I feel that I have a number of good qualities. | | | 1 2 3 4 |
| (4) I am able to do things as well as most other people. | | | 1 2 3 4 |
| (5) I feel I do not have much to be proud of. | | | 1 2 3 4 |
| (6) I certainly feel useless at times. | | | 1 2 3 4 |
| (7) I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. | | | 1 2 3 4 |
| (8) I wish I could have more respect for myself | | | 1 2 3 4 |
| (9) All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am failure. | | | 1 2 3 4 |
| (10) I take a positive attitude toward myself | | | 1 2 3 4 |

VITA

Crystal Knowles Halida was born in Hopkinsville, Kentucky on July 15, 1969. She attended elementary school in the Hopkins County School System and graduated from South Hopkins High School in May, 1987. The following summer she entered the Madisonville Community College and transferred to Austin Peay State University in August of 1990. She received a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Austin Peay State University in May, 1992. She reentered Austin Peay State University in August, 1992 and will receive a Master of Science in Guidance and Counseling.