

## **Children who are read to and played with by their fathers do better in school, new study finds**

By Jeffery M. Leving SM

Over the last couple of decades, society has rightfully focused on equal opportunity and equal pay for women and men. While this is a just cause, I fear that what can get lost is the realization that women and men are different, and thus have unique attributes. This is especially so in the case of fathers, who a new study found have a “unique effect” on children’s educational outcomes.

There is no doubt that mothers play a vital role in bringing up their children, but for too long, fathers have been considered mere helpers who, when it comes to children, help with financial needs and discipline. While this is often true, a new study shows that they bring much more to the table.

A study from the University of Leeds in Great Britain shows that fathers who read and play with their children see an increase in their children’s educational achievement. The research showed an impact with as little engagement as 10 minutes a day. Obviously, the more time a father spends engaged with his children the better, but it’s important to note that even a small amount of time makes a difference.

The study, which was funded by England's Economic and Social Research Council, drew a distinction between the impact of mothers and fathers. It showed that while fathers' involvement helped with educational achievement, mothers had more of an impact on a child's emotional and social behavior.

The study showed that fathers who get involved with reading and playing with their children before they enter first grade increase educational achievement in several areas, including math.

While the study advises fathers to spend as much time as they can to engage in educational and playful activities with their children, it said even as little as 10 minutes a day results in positive impacts.

The study also recommends that schools take note of this and have both parents develop positive strategies to engage fathers.

The leader of the study, Helen Norman, a research fellow at Leeds University, also emphasized the importance of father involvement with their children.

“Mothers still tend to assume the primary carer role and therefore tend to do the most childcare, but if fathers actively engage in childcare too, it significantly increases

the likelihood of children getting better grades in primary school. This is why encouraging and supporting fathers to share childcare with the mother, from an early stage in the child's life, is critical," Norman said in the study.

Over the course of my career, I've been advocating for more father involvement with their children because I know how important it is.

The Fatherhood Educational Institute has shared statistics showing that 72% of all teenaged murderers grew up without fathers; 60% of rapists were raised in fatherless homes; and 70% of kids now incarcerated in juvenile corrections facilities grew up in a single-parents environment. Additionally, a growing body of evidence shows a high correlation between fatherlessness and violence among young men (especially violence against women).

This new study just reinforces what I've personally witnessed over the decades — that children do better in school when their fathers are involved in their lives and engage in educational activities with them.

It also showed that it is absolutely crucial that fathers aren't treated as an afterthought by schools.

It is refreshing to see the light shined on this and a reminder that while it is good to have parity among men

and women in some areas, men and women, specifically fathers and mothers, are not the same. Mothers bring certain traits that impact their children, and so do fathers. The fact that fathers' impact is being talked about is a positive and I hope it encourages more fathers to spend more time playing and reading to their children.

*Attorney Jeffery M. Leving is the recipient of President Biden's 2023 Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award.*

*Leving, who has dedicated his career to safeguarding children and reuniting them with their fathers, has written three acclaimed books: "Fathers' Rights," "Divorce Wars" and "How to be a Good Divorced Dad," the latter of which was praised by President Obama and by Cardinal Francis E. George, then the Archbishop of Chicago. Follow Jeffery M. Leving on Facebook and X @DadsRights.*