

Greater father involvement in infant parenting is beneficial for paternal mental health

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Credit: George Hodan/public domain

A father's involvement in the parenting of an infant is associated to a lower risk of experiencing paternal depressive symptoms during the first year of the child's life, according to a study published in the open-access journal *Frontiers in Psychiatry*. The investigators in the larger study conducted home interviews with 881 low-income ethnically and racially diverse fathers from 5 different sites in the US, one month after the birth of a child and controlling for social and demographic variables, they examined the three parenting indicators: father time spent with the infant, parenting self-efficacy and material support for the infant. They also assessed paternal depressive symptoms at regular intervals (1, 6 and 12 months after birth) using the Edinburgh Postpartum Depression Scale.

The authors found that all three indicators—greater amount of time fathers spent with their new born, parenting self-efficacy and ability to provide material support—predicted lower rates of depressive symptoms in the fathers during the

following year. The authors also found that only parenting self-efficacy was associated to a higher risk of clinical [depression](#), with the percentage of fathers with symptoms indicating clinical depression being 10% after 1 month, 15% after 6 months and 12% after 12 months.

"We found that fathers who were more involved with their [infants](#) shortly after their birth were less likely to be depressed a year later," says Dr. Olajide N. Bamishigbin Jr., Assistant Professor of Psychology at California State University, Long Beach, U.S., and first author of the paper. "In our paper, we suggest a few reasons that greater father involvement in parenting would lead to less depression in fathers. For example, fathers who are more involved during infancy may feel more competent as parents and be more satisfied in their role as parents over time, and this could contribute to lower depressive symptoms."

The present study is one of the first to focus on a larger community sample of [low-income](#) fathers from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds and is paving the way for more research into specifically paternal well-being after the birth of a child. While previous research has focused on paternal involvement as an outcome or a predictor of mother- and child focused outcomes, this is the first study to examine the link between early paternal involvement with the infant and later paternal depressive symptoms during the first year after a child is born.

"Family researchers are recognizing, more and more, the vital roles fathers play in the lives of their children and the functioning of the entire family unit," said Bamishigbin. "As researchers who care deeply about paternal health, we are excited to be a part of this growing field."

The findings of this study have important implications for future research on the contributors to father involvement, the effects of early involvement, the link between parental self-efficacy and depression and the relationship between paternal and maternal depression. The authors emphasise that a deeper understanding of these and related variables might be helpful in designing interventions for expecting fathers and shaping public policies.

"In our study, greater early involvement was related to less depression later on. This is very important because, it suggests that, if fathers are involved with their infants early and often, their mental health, and the health of the entire family unit, may fare better," said Bamishigbin. "This is why we suggest that paid paternal leave policies which can allow fathers the opportunity to be more involved with their kids and gain confidence as a parent early on in their lives, without having to worry about their economic security, and may help allow [fathers](#) more opportunities to be involved with their kids and be part of shaping healthier and thriving future generations. In turn, this may improve the well-being of the entire family."

More information: Olajide N. Bamishigbin et al, Father Involvement in Infant Parenting in an Ethnically Diverse Community Sample: Predicting Paternal Depressive Symptoms, *Frontiers in Psychiatry* (2020). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsy.2020.578688](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.578688)

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