



## **Research Summary: The Impact of Fathers' Own Characteristics on Children**

- Fathers' earnings are linked to their children's educational attainment (Ermish and Francensoni, 2002) and have been found to predict, among other things, sons' years of schooling (Yeung, 2004).
- However, it may not so much be fathers' earnings as family earnings that count: studies that have compared the impact of fathers' and mothers' earnings have found them to be equally influential on children's education success (for review, see Yeung, 2004).
- The father's education level is important (Yeung, 2004) and is of course linked to his income: better educated fathers tend to earn more. One study found that it wasn't simply the father's income but his permanent income that was most significant. Fathers' education level tends to contribute substantially to permanent income (Chevalier et al, 2013).
- In a racially/ethnically diverse US sample of low-income, resident fathers (and their partners) from the National Early Head Start evaluation fathers' education and income were uniquely associated with child measures, and fathers' education consistently predicted the quality of mother-child engagements too (Tamis-LeMonda et al, 2004). This indicates that fathers' education may have indirect as well as direct effects on children.
- Fathers with more education are able to provide more resources and learning opportunities for their children, and are also more likely to engage in positive interactions, such as reading, with them (Tamis-LeMonda et al, 2013).
- There may also be small genetic effects: cleverer fathers/mothers = better educated fathers/mothers = cleverer children = better educated children (Pleck, 2010). However, what is almost certainly most significant is that a father's education (like a mother's) affects his behaviour in ways that are vital to his children's cognitive development, as well as enabling him to provide them with better material and educational resources (Yeung, 2004).
- Fathers' sensitivity in interacting with their children is enormously important and sensitive fathers are not only found among better educated or wealthier fathers: there is enormous variation across social class. Sensitivity/supportiveness by fathers in interactions with their children, their engagement in literacy activities together, fathers' use of wide vocabularies and strategies such as expanding on what

children say, referring to objects and events, eliciting actions, directing attention, prompting play etc. have substantial positive impacts on child outcomes (Tamis-LeMonda et al, 2012).

- Qualitative analysis of low-income US fathers involved in Early HeadStart, suggests that those lacking a high-school education may sometimes use involvement in the program to engage in educational activities to improve their own language, literacy or numeracy. Very often, the fathers accept support in these areas because they perceive this as benefiting their children – enabling them to help with homework, for example (Raikes et al, 2005)

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