Where Are the Fathers?

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A study using the tracking data of China Education Panel Survey (CEPS) in 2014-2015 to described the current situation of fathers’ involvement in childrearing in China, and further to discuss the level of fathers’ input, influencing factors, and the effects on the development of teenagers. The conclusions are as follows:

- In contemporary China, it is common for a father to participate in childrearing, but the level of participation is still obviously lower than that of the mother. This result may be related not only to the Chinese traditional division of gender roles but also to the family tradition of grandparents and the living pattern of separation caused by population mobility.

- The level of fathers’ input in childrearing is not only influenced by children’s gender, age, one-child status, household registration, and residence, but also affected by their family’s socioeconomic status, the situation of grandparents’ participation in childrearing, and the pattern of the family residence. Specifically, the level of fathers’ rearing improves significantly when the child is male and single-child. Migrant children and children living in cities receive more care from their fathers; but when it comes to emotional communication, fathers’ input could be relatively low. The higher the parents’ educational level and professional status, the more the fathers’ input in childrearing; in addition, the better the financial situation of the family, the less likely for the father to participate in the transactional parenting activities, while the degree of emotional communication with the children and the degree of intimacy with the children will be significantly improved. In addition, fathers are less likely to participate in transactional childrearing activities when there are elderly people living in the family. Meanwhile, the separated living condition caused by fathers going out to work or doing business will greatly reduce the level of parental investment.

- Fathers’ input in childrearing has a remarkable influence on the development of teenagers in all aspects, and this influence is of equal importance compared with that of mothers. Comparing with participation in transactional parenting activities, the emotional
communication between fathers and children is more important for the development of adolescents, and the parental input has a significant impact on both sons and daughters, among which, in terms of academic performance, behavioral performance and the number of friends, the fathers’ input has a stronger impact on sons.