

VIOLENT OUTCOMES IN ADULT MALES RAISED IN ABSENT BIOLOGICAL FATHER
HOMES DURING EARLY CHILDHOOD

by

Wallace Roberto Ascencio

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:



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Abstract

The absence of a biological father during early childhood can evoke numerous and often potentially violent or life-altering adverse outcomes for adult males during adulthood. Research on the long-term effects of father absence on adult men raised without a biological father during early childhood has garnered considerable attention among institutions, U.S. policymakers, and criminologists. The goal of this research was to extrapolate data related to the absent father phenomenon in Southeastern Washington state and how it leads to violent outcomes in adult males. This transcendental phenomenological qualitative study used structured interviews and assessments to explore the lived experiences and outcomes of 14 adult males raised with absent biological fathers during at least the first six years of their early childhood. Results indicated that participants' lived experiences included living in single-mother households where they felt absent of fatherly love and drew negative comparisons to other children with active fathers or two parents. Participants reported struggling with forming secure attachments, a history of aggression and mental illness, intrusive thoughts to cause harm to others (including animals), property destruction, and incarceration. By gaining an understanding of the effects of father absence and the lived experiences of adult men with absent biological fathers during early childhood, healthcare professionals, churches, and social services will be able to refine interventions and strategies to provide improved assistance to youth and adult males struggling to cope with their father's absence.

Keywords: absent biological fathers, adverse, aggression, attachments, father absence, mental illness, violent outcomes

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my firstborn son Cristiano Javier Ascencio. My entire life changed when you came into this world. Your birth gave me a drive and purpose to pursue a higher education, and to be better for you. You are the reason I work so hard and tirelessly. I will never stop working to make you proud and to love you unconditionally. I am blessed to be your father.

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I would not be at this point in my life and career without my amazing supporters, mentors, and loved ones. I owe an immense amount of gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Ralph Ogburn, whose expertise, constructive feedback, mentorship, and uplifting guidance pushed me to keep moving forward and to never let myself get stuck. I am incredibly thankful for my 2nd committee member, Dr. Laura Rolen, who more than willingly accepted me as her doctoral student and gave me her unwavering support to succeed. I am also very thankful for my amazing and influential supervisors Dr. Cynthia Preszler, Dr. Jake Dean-Hill, and Dr. Jennifer Dean-Hill. My parents Ana Mary Lira and Javier Mendoza have also been some of my loudest supporters from afar, and I physically would not be here without them. My wonderful and incredible aunt, Veronica Lira, you picked me up when I was down and lifted me up with pure grace, love, and unconditional support. And last, but certainly not least, to my blessed wife Amanda Christine Ascencio, thank you for being my rock and for being such a dedicated, loving spouse and mother throughout this journey.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

A father's absence can be felt across several generations (Pougnnet et al., 2012). Children's development is said to be strongly influenced by factors such as their environment, genetics, medical issues, and experiences during the prenatal and infant stages of life (Maccoby, 2000; Tierney & Nelson, 2009); however, one of the most important factors to development is a child's bond with their biological father (Cabrera et al., 2018; Frosch et al., 2019). Depending on the circumstances, early childhood attachment between a father and child can positively or negatively affect children's psychosocial development and overall well-being (Cabrera et al., 2018; Rees, 2007). Father absence has been associated with increased internalizing and externalizing behaviors in children, but through adulthood can lead to attachment issues, psychological distress, violence and aggression, and other adverse outcomes (Da Fonseca et al., 2023; Schwartz, 2003).

Background

Father absence has been an ongoing social issue for centuries (McLanahan et al., 2013). Leupnitz (1988) asserted that traditional marital and family life was patriarchal and headed by fathers. Fathers earned more money than women, giving them more power (patriarchal trait) over the rest of their family (Auerbach, 1996; Balcom, 1998). During the nineteenth century, fathers increasingly migrated out of the home for economic reasons; therefore, men spent less time in a parental role and were more of an economic provider of the family (Balcom, 1998, Griswold, 1993). Over time, the expectation that fathers would be active and present changed to being physically absent and intermittently

involved (Balcom, 1998, Pleck, 1987). As a result, fathers lost their opportunity to be involved in their children's lives (Balcom, 1998).

According to Balcom (1998), fathers can be emotionally or physically absent, but the prevalence of father absence suggests that this social issue also affects children and families with profound developmental and behavioral consequences. With father absence being so common, it is no surprise that a large number of households are now headed by single mothers (East et al., 2006; McLanahan et al., 2013; Owens, 2022). A 2022 U.S. Census report stated that 18.4 million children (equal to the entire population of New York state in 1999) were living without a biological, step, or adoptive father in the home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Children have thus felt abandoned by their fathers and experience emotional, behavioral, and psychological issues as a result (Balcom, 1998; Mao et al., 2020).

Paternal involvement during early childhood has been viewed as one of the most important factors that help foster and shape children's abilities and emotional regulation (Choi et al., 2021; Mao et al., 2020). A study by Russell (1957) concluded that children from father absent homes exhibited significantly more behavioral problems than children from two-parent homes. Children from Russell's (1957) study were more prone to lying, cheating, stealing, anger, and oppositional defiance. A similar study by Hoffman (1967) also reported that males from single mother-led homes showed more aggressiveness and directed it at individuals in a role of leadership or authority (Patriarchal traits). Present day, research institutions such as the Institute for Family Studies suggest that children who grow up in households without two biological parents or single-mother homes are still at risk for behavioral issues, discipline problems, crime, and incarceration later in life

(Hymowitz, 2020). The longitudinal effects of father absence across adulthood have been widely under-researched, but research suggests that complexities stemming from father absence can evoke potential aggressive, antagonistic, antisocial behaviors in adult men (Kim & Glasgow, 2018; Wylie & Delgado, 1959).

For males, a father's absence can lead to a rejection of the importance of a father (Balcom, 1998; Rigby, 1968). Balcom (1998) states that abandoned male children often have harsh feelings related to their absent fathers and typically display them in one of two common variations. The first variation is an emotional reactivity characterized by statements such as "I'm never going to be like him!" In doing so, the son positions himself to a long-term battle with unresolved grief and related symptoms (e.g., anger, depression, denial) (Balcom, 1998). The second variation is an over-identification with the father, where the abandoned son idealizes and glorifies the absent father. Sons may base their worship on the actual father they experienced or a fantasy father they wish they had (Balcom, 1998; Corneau, 1991).

A father's absence impairs a child's ability to form positive, safe, loving relationships with others, including God (Preszler, 2023). Through a biblical lens, when a father is absent, children's faith and spirituality can also be disrupted by believing that God, the Heavenly Father, is also absent (Donihue, 2019). Throughout scripture, Jesus Christ refers to God as our father (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, John 20:17), but God gave earthly fathers the responsibility of modeling Him and demonstrating unconditional love and compassion just like him (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, 1 Genesis 1:27; Psalm 103:13). However, when a father is absent, apathetic, or abusive, children conceive the belief that God too is uninvolved and

abusive (Donihue, 2019). Unfortunately, absent fathers are inherently leaving patterns of absence and abuse to their sons who do the same when they become fathers (Dean-Hill, 2023).

Research shows that children who grow up without their fathers are more likely to exhibit aggressive, violent behaviors in adulthood (Mackey & Mackey, 2008). Therefore, as the U.S. continues to experience a rise in crime and incarceration, it is important to consider the impact that fatherlessness has on these social issues (Owens, 2022). Father absence affects children and families in the U.S. and causes adversity and devastation worldwide (Brown, 2014). Researchers and policymakers must recognize and advocate for father-child relationships and approaches for reducing father absence. God-fearing fathers are also asked to make more intentional efforts to love, mentor, and support their children and fatherless children in their communities so they may know the Heavenly Father.

Problem Statement

There is comprehensible research evidence that a parent's early presence and childrearing have lasting effects on children's development into adulthood (Maccoby, 2000; Simmons et al., 2018). However, how do adults heal from a relationship they never had? The vanishment of active, stable, family-oriented biological fathers has generated considerable concern among U.S. policymakers and criminologists (Cavanagh & Fomby, 2019; Schwartz, 2003). Due to the high prevalence of biological father absence in the United States, father absence has continually been investigated as a leading cause of aggression, juvenile delinquency, and violence toward others (Kim & Glassgow, 2018; Schwartz, 2003).

In the case of male children who grew up without a biological father during early childhood, research has shown that father absence can create long-lasting emotional and psychological damage in later adulthood (Culpin et al., 2022; Little et al., 2019; McLanahan et al., 2013), and a greater risk of being involved in delinquent crimes and violent behaviors (Brown, 2023; Schwartz, 2003; Simmons et al., 2018). It is still unclear why fathers are leaving their children or why father absence strongly predicts maladaptive behaviors and adverse outcomes. However, recognition of the critical importance of early father-child relationships on children's cognitive, emotional, physical, psychosocial, and neurobiological health is further important in identifying relative determinants of developmental outcomes (Frosch et al., 2019).

Currently, there are numerous non-profit agencies and initiatives such as The Fatherhood Project (2003), the National Fatherhood Initiative (2023), and The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) (2023) that strive to empower all types of fathers to be active and involved with their children and families. However, these specified agencies are still lacking in some areas and require additional funding, prudent partnerships, and training to keep up with the growing number of absentee fathers in the U.S. There are several other agencies and studies that have attempted to highlight the importance of early paternal involvement with their children. However, they were not funded or publicized further than online articles and blogs. For example, a small 2014 research study found that showing ultrasound images of unborn babies during the second trimester helped biological fathers to take in the reality of the impending birth and to begin forming an attachment, but the study only went as far as being published in a journal and was never strongly considered as a standardized protocol among clinics and

hospitals (MacDonald, 2019; Preidt, 2014). More research is required to target and support new pre-and post-natal fatherhood programs and policies. Hopefully, this research on father absence will contribute to the growing efforts to recognize and expand fathers' involvement in their children's lives.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative case study aimed to explore how the absence of a biological father during the first six years of a male child's life influences later violent outcomes in adult males raised in absent-biological father homes. A concurrent transcendental phenomenological approach helped to highlight these young adults' subjective experiences and memories to uncover perspectives, rationales, and justifications for their psychological responses.

Research Questions

Research Questions

R.Q. 1: What are the lived experiences of adult men who grew up without a biological father during early childhood?

R.Q. 2: How does father absence during early childhood affect attachment styles in adult men?

R.Q. 3: What psychological implications does father absence have on males across early childhood and adulthood?

R.Q. 4: What are the experiences of father-absent adult men involved in violence?

R.Q. 5: How do adult men view the relationship between childhood father absence and violence in adulthood?

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

This research study is anchored on the assumption that adult men are violent, hostile, or aggressive because they were raised in absent-biological father homes during their early childhood. In addition, it is presumed that participants of the study are not violent, hostile, aggressive, or severely mentally ill due to a preexisting diagnosis or other healthcare issues, but rather because they experienced biological father absence as adolescents. It is also believed that respondents will be truthful in completing assessments and answering structured interview questions.

Several potential limitations may compromise the procedure and reproducibility of this type of research. First, accessibility to sealed legal records makes it difficult to collect information that supports the thesis central to this study. Second, due to the nature and type of study, this research is limited by sample size and focused only on adult men aged 18 and older. Third, the findings of this research is limited to the accuracy of self-reported data and whether online or telephone interviews can capture the full impact of biological father absence from participants. Research regarding the longitudinal effects of father absence on males is also limited to the reviewed studies; however, other areas of probable research will be included in the recommendations for future studies.

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

This research explores the relationship between father absence and adult male violent outcomes within the context of attachment and psychodynamics. The attachment theory is a contemporary psychodynamic approach focusing on human relationships, behaviors, and unconscious processes (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2005). Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth's (1971) attachment theory was based upon Freud's early notion that the

emotional and spiritual bond between mother and child forms due to the child's need for the mother to provide nurture and nourishment. The need for bonding between father and child is equally important as other psychoanalysts such as Dr. James Herzog (2002) and Dr. Tabitha Freeman (2008) later cited "father hunger" as a growing concern that causes emptiness among children stemming from their physically or emotionally absent biological fathers. Both psychoanalysts and attachment theorists believed that early caregiver interactions and experiences ultimately determine adult mental health and developmental outcomes (Cassidy et al., 2013; Deal, 2007; Newman et al., 2015; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2005; Traylor et al., 2022).

Attachment Theory

Attachment refers to the deep emotional and enduring spiritual bond between a caregiver and child (Anderson, 2023; Bowlby, 1969). After studying and observing the mental health and behaviors of children who were absent of their biological parents following World War II (1939-1945), British psychologist John Bowlby (1907-1990) published qualitative research that revealed that the orphaned children he observed during that time were "affectionless," "oppositional," and involved in maladaptive behaviors as a result of being separated from their biological parents (Bowlby, 1969; Chinyoka & Mugweni, 2020; Tizard, 2009). From this research, Bowlby (1969) was the first attachment theorist to posit that humans are born with an intrinsic motivation to survive and maintain self-preservation through their primary attachments (Anderson, 2023).

Mary Ainsworth (1913-1999) was a Canadian-American developmental psychologist who later expanded on Bowlby's attachment research by identifying three major styles of attachment shared between children and their caregivers: secure

attachment, ambivalent-insecure attachment, and avoidant-insecure attachment (Granqvist & Duschinsky, 2021; Main, 1999). Although researchers Main and Solomon (1986) later added a fourth attachment style, disorganized-insecure attachment, Ainsworth broadened Bowlby's research on early attachment and developed an experimental approach for observing a child's style of attachment with their caregiver now known as the "Strange Situation" (Duschinsky, 2020; Granqvist & Duschinsky, 2021; Mcleod, 2023).

Ainsworth focused primarily on the mother-child relationship (Duschinsky, 2020). According to Ainsworth, how a child behaves during the separation and return of their mother could reveal vital information about their bond and attachment (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Duschinsky, 2020); however, the same could be said about the father-child relationship (Jessee & Adamsons, 2018). In her "Strange Situation" procedure, infants ranging in age from 9 to 30 months were briefly left alone in a private room while their parents left, and researchers observed their emotional and behavioral reactions (Cassidy et al., 2013; Duschinsky, 2020; Granqvist & Duschinsky, 2021; Simonelli & Parolin, 2016). From these interactions, Ainsworth and her research team categorized and highlighted individual attachment styles related to the bonds between each participating caregiver and child (Mcleod, 2023; Simonelli & Parolin, 2016).

Psychodynamic Theory

Psychodynamics is an area of psychology related to the conscious and unconscious mental and emotional drives that determine personalities and motivations (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). First developed between 1890 and 1930, psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud suggested a relationship between personality formation and how primary

caregivers interact with their children (Freud, 1915; Traylor, 2022). Over time, Freud's psychodynamic research grew to become one of his most well-known theories that emphasized how unconscious psychological processes and early childhood experiences still play a modern role in shaping adult behaviors and personalities (Bornstein, 2023; Grzybowski & Żołnierz, 2020; Traylor et al., 2022).

In the 1900s, Freud believed that losing one's father was the single greatest poignant loss an individual could ever experience (Jones, 2008; Woodward, 1990). A father's absence through the scope of the psychodynamic is pertinent to numerous discussions surrounding child development, and it continues to stress the significance of child relationships with their primary caregivers (Newman et al., 2015).

The psychodynamic theory has grown considerably since its inception into psychoanalytics and now includes new innovative approaches such as the object relations theory, attachment theory, neuropsychanalysis, and lifespan integration (Bornstein, 2023; Dean, 2007; Fulmer, 2018). The psychodynamic theory has further helped to explain the effects and implications of father absence on children and adults by describing the importance of the father's role in child development (Jones, 2008).

Biblical Perspective of the Study

Contemporary fatherhood also holds biblical roots in today's society. Fatherhood was one of the first tasks given to man by God (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Genesis 1:26). In Genesis 1:28, God commanded Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and increase in number" (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Genesis 1:28). Fatherhood is the core of masculinity and what it means to be a man of God (Freeks, 2020; *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Ephesians 3:14-

15). Biblically, a father is also the spiritual leader and protector of his family, and he holds a vested purpose in shaping and guiding his children as God intended him to (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Proverbs 22:6; Lopes, 2020; Preszler, 2023). However, fatherhood has changed over time, and the rising challenge to meet biblical principles has led to the U.S. having the largest percentage of fatherless children in the world (23%) (Glanzer, 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). One of the many characteristics of God is that he is the “father to the fatherless” (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Psalm 68:5), but Christian researchers and doctors today suggest that absentee fathers are sacrificing their children’s relationship with God by moving away, and by doing so, are conditioning future fathers to do the same to their children (Dean-Hill, 2023; Preszler, 2023). Despite the negative trend of absentee fathers among U.S. families and children, God calls fathers to fulfill their God-given roles and to be accountable for guiding their families according to these biblical principles (Freeks, 2020; *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Ephesians 6:4).

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of definitions of terms used in this study.

Absent father – An absent father includes the biological father, stepfather, or adoptive father of any child where the father is reported to be absent from the household.

Concerning a child in foster care, an absent father also includes a biological father, stepfather, or adoptive father of any child where such father was present in the household when the child entered foster care (Office of Children and Family Services, 1990).

Absent parent – An absent parent is a parent who is not living with their child. Father absence can happen when parents get divorced or separated, or if one parent is not involved in their child’s life (LSD.Law, 2023).

Aggression – (A) a forceful action or procedure (such as an unprovoked attack), especially when intended to dominate or master (B) the practice of making attacks or encroachments (C) hostile, injurious, or destructive behavior or outlook, especially when caused by frustration (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Attachment – A strong emotional bond that an infant forms with a caregiver (such as a mother) especially when viewed as a basis for normal emotional and social development (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Psychodynamic – (A) The psychology of mental or emotional forces or processes developing especially in early childhood and their effects on behavior and mental states (B) Explanation or interpretation (as of behavior or mental states) in terms of mental or emotional forces or processes (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Violent outcomes – (A) All types of physical violence against others, including general violent acts and specific types of violence (e.g., sexual offenses, dating violence) (B) Violent outcomes of all severity (e.g., assault, homicide) and frequency (single assault, repeated battery) (Fitton et al., 2018).

Significance of the Study

Father absence has been a long-standing pandemic for several decades; however, it has not been addressed to the degree of other social issues (McLanahan et al., 2013). Between 1970 and 2022, over 15.78 million children were growing up in single-mother homes in the United States (Statista Research Department, 2023), and according to a

2019 Pew Research Center article, the U.S. holds the highest rate of children living in single-parent households (Kramer, 2019). Those numbers have increased to 18 to 20 million (Owens, 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

Father absence is an important topic to be more aware of because studies show that there is a strong prevalence of absentee fathers across numerous countries, cultures, ethnicities, and social classes (Boothroyd & Cross, 2017; DeWaard et al., 2018; McLanahan et al., 2013; Schwartz, 2003). Advances in father-child relationships and developmental studies ultimately depend on research that explores long-term effects and adverse outcomes stemming from father absence. Properly controlled phenomenological research, such as this qualitative study, is vital in affirming any theory related to aging, development and behaviors, health, neuroscience, psychology, and social work.

Although father absence can happen to anyone, this study focuses on the father-son dyad to explore why adult males who grow up without their biological fathers during early childhood become aggressive and violent in later adulthood. It is imperative to further understand the cause and effects of father absence during early childhood and time. However, it is equally important to understand a man's lived experiences of growing up without a biological father and why generational paternal absence continues to exist (Kotelchuck, 2021).

Very little is known about early childhood father absence's psychological and neurological effects on adult males (Incan, 2023). This proposed study aims to contribute toward creating interventions tailored specifically for children of absent fathers and to fill the current gap in the literature around father-son relationships. Additionally, this study hopes to help create future treatments that could determine the approximate severity and

impact of paternal absence in males and females. Creating interventions that help to explain, track, and treat the effects of father absence could introduce positive social change and improvements in child development and developmental psychology. Advancing research on human development requires a persistent and deliberate expansion of previous research.

Summary

This chapter concludes the background and problematic features of father absence and how it affects fatherless male children into adulthood. Father absence continues to be ubiquitous in society, but this research study aims to explore the correlation between biological father absence during early childhood and later violent outcomes in adult males. Despite assumptions and predicted limitations, this study proposes specific research-based questions and uses a theoretical and biblical foundation to further explore father absenteeism and the father-son dyad. Chapter two will provide an exhaustive review of preexisting literature and key concepts relevant to this study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Children who grow up in absent-biological father homes during the first several years of their lives can consequently suffer from long-lasting emotional damage and are at a greater risk of being aggressive, delinquent, and violent (Liu et al., 2023; Mao et al., 2020; McLanahan et al., 2013; Meng et al., 2020). Biological fathers influence how their children develop into young adults, socialize with others, and conduct themselves in society (Lansford, 2021). However, the early roles of a biological father can often be overlooked, especially considering how a majority of existing research on child development and parental relationships focuses primarily on the mother-child dyad (Cabrera et al., 2018). Other research on parental relationships and father absence suggests that children who grow up without their biological fathers in the home are more likely to experience emotional dysregulation and issues reaching their developmental milestones (Biller & Bahm, 1971; Cabrera et al., 2018; Culpin et al., 2022). Male children are also more susceptible to aggressive behaviors and violent tendencies, especially when their parental figures are absent (Boothroyd & Cross, 2017; Mao et al., 2020; Meng et al., 2020; Van Der Laan et al., 2021).

A child's emotional regulation is not yet fully developed until approximately the age of eight or nine, which even then still requires parental nurturing, regulation strategies, and support (Meng et al., 2020; Sanchis-Sanchis et al., 2020; Theurel & Gentaz, 2018). Fathers, in particular, are a pillar of a young man's emotional, psychosocial, and cognitive development (Cabrera et al., 2018; Jessee & Adamsons, 2018; Simmons et al., 2018). Male children look to their biological fathers for strength,

confidence, direction, and physical and emotional connection (Cabrera et al., 2018). Research has shown that when biological fathers are affectionate, compassionate, engaged, and present in the home, it greatly increases the likelihood of healthy social cognition and psychological development (Cabrera et al., 2018; Cassidy et al., 2013; Hoffman, 1971; Narváez et al., 2019).

Father absence is prevalent across various countries, cultures, ethnicities, and social classes, indicating that it also applies to the United States (Boothroyd & Cross, 2017; Campbell et al., 2015; DeWaard et al., 2018; McLanahan et al., 2013; Schwartz, 2003) Leupnitz (1988) asserted that contemporary fatherhood in the U.S. included a degree of abandonment. The concern over father absence in the United States proved true when a 2022 U.S. Census Bureau report outlined that nearly 18.5 million children were being raised in father-absent homes (Owens, 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). With a staggering number of children across the United States being raised in father-absent homes, U.S. lawmakers and public health professionals have prioritized reducing these numbers and addressing their physical, mental, and emotional health issues (Azuine & Singh, 2019).

Description of Search Strategy

A search for 2018-2023 peer-reviewed articles was conducted via online libraries. A majority of open-access, peer-reviewed articles came from Google Scholar and the Jerry Falwell Library. However, other research databases such as APA PsycNet, Bible Gateway, Frontiers, JSTOR, ProQuest, PubMed Central, Science Direct, Springer Link, and Taylor & Francis Online were also used to obtain research article information. Most research articles were between 2018 and 2023; however, I included some articles before

2018 that were deemed relevant to the case study. Boolean operators (AND, OR, AND NOT) were used in conjunction to combine or exclude keywords. The following search terms were entered to locate scholarly, peer-reviewed articles specific to this case study: *abandonment, absentee biological father, absent father, adult male, adverse outcomes, aggression, assault, attachment, delinquency, emotional instability, and violent outcomes*. Multiple variations of these terms were used to ensure a comprehensive search for results.

Biblical research focused on the study of online biblical encyclopedias and passages. Additionally, biblical commentaries from videos, audio, and face-to-face structured interviews with three participating Christian Doctors of Ministry assisted in explaining the Bible passages associated with this case study. The following biblical keywords were entered on Google Scholar and Bible Gateway to locate theological works: *aggression, anger, blessing, curse, father, and fatherhood*.

Theoretical framework

This case study is grounded in the historical research of Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) psychodynamic theory, as well as Mary Ainsworth (1971) and John Bowlby's (1969) theories on attachment to explain how adult men raised in biological father-absent homes during the first six years of their lives are subsequently predisposed to violence and aggression later in life.

Attachment Theory

The theory of attachment was originally studied and developed by John Bowlby (1907-1990) to attempt to understand the visible anguish and maladaptive behaviors in infants separated from their biological parents (Bowlby, 1969). During Bowlby's research, psychodynamic writers postulated that these reactions stemmed from

underlying motivations and defense mechanisms (e.g., denial, projection, regression) (Richardson et al., 2022). Bowlby, however, drew from an ethological perspective and believed that these attachment behaviors were a direct response to children being separated from their biological parents (Richardson et al., 2022; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010).

Mary Ainsworth (1913-1999) broadened Bowlby's research by suggesting that maintaining proximity to one's child is a key aspect of developing a strong and secure attachment with parental figures (Cassidy et al., 2013; Duschinsky, 2020; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). Ainsworth's "Strange Situation" procedure involved controlled observations and recordings of reactions between children and their mothers (McLeod, 2023). Ainsworth's findings led to the creation of attachment styles and the conclusion that they result from early interactions with their primary caregivers (Cassidy et al., 2013; Duschinsky, 2020). One criticism of Mary Ainsworth's research was that she focused primarily on the attachment between mother and child, and not with fathers (Duschinsky, 2020).

Attachment theory is a secure base to explore the intricacies of parent-child relationships and early child development. Since its development, the attachment theory has helped to explain the source of adverse outcomes and negative effects of separation between a parent and child (Richardson et al., 2022; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). Although attachment styles can change with time and intervention, researchers believe that childhood attachment styles can have a lasting influence on adult attachments (Duschinsky, 2020; Granqvist & Duschinsky, 2021; McLeod, 2023). Numerous research

studies have supported Ainsworth and Bowlby's conclusions that early attachment can help predict behaviors later in life (Cassidy et al., 2013; Granqvist & Duschinsky, 2021).

Attachment Theory Propositions

According to Ainsworth and Bowlby, attachments with primary caregivers develop during the first 18 months of a child's life (Kennedy and Kennedy, 2004). Much like Ainsworth's 1971 "Strange Situation" experiment, research by Kennedy and Kennedy (2004) came to the same conclusion as Ainsworth et al. (1971) that children protest against caregivers leaving and grieve for their absence (Ainsworth et al., 1971). Attachment theory suggests that early interactions with caregivers are important because they help to form a continuity of positive attachment and behaviors, but adversely assume that a caregiver's absence can lead to emotional dysregulation, anxious resistance, aggression, and low self-worth in children (Kennedy and Kennedy, 2004; Mcleod, 2023).

Because Bowlby (1969) emphasized developing a biological parent-child relationship between 6 to 30 months of age, recent attachment theorists proposed that delaying parenting until after the age of two is impractical because a lack thereof will constitute psychopathology (Brown, 2023; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012; Tizard, 2009). Any inability to form a strong and continuous caregiver attachment can lead to emotional responses such as anger, depression, hostility, hypervigilance, and other behavioral conduct problems in children and adults (Anderson, 2023; Bowlby, 1969; Brown, 2023; Culpin et al., 2022). Furthermore, these consequences can result in interpersonal dilemmas, including the inability to develop secure bonds with others (Brown, 2023). Research on the unique connection between a caregiver and child offers remarkable implications for understanding the trajectories of an offspring's personality development,

psychological upbringing, and emotional regulation (Anderson, 2023; Bowlby, 1969; Culpin et al., 2022).

Attachment Theory: Applications

Over the last decade, the relationship between fathers and sons has received more attention from empirical researchers (Cabrera, 2019). Increased research of father-child relationships is particularly important because most research on parent-child relationships has focused on children's attachment to their mothers (Cabrera et al., 2018). The attachment theory has been predominantly used as a framework for understanding early parent-child relationships, child pathology, and attachment style formations (Cabrera, 2019; Cassidy et al., 2013).

For men, the transition to fatherhood is considered a major life event that can strain their mental health and ability to securely attach to their child (Bruno et al., 2020). Bruno et al. (2020) explored first-time fathers' lived experiences and the probability of paternal perinatal depression in fathers (PPND). Much is known about maternal perinatal depression and postpartum depression, but little is known about the emotional and behavioral disturbances among fathers during and after pregnancy (Bruno et al., 2020; Madsen, 2019). There are no official DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for paternal perinatal depression, but the defined symptoms and negative impacts of PPND outline future risk factors for father absence, insecure attachments, and paternal stigmatization (Bruno et al., 2020). Bruno et al. (2020) hypothesized that several factors led to PPND and a father's ability to attach to their child securely. The study extracted data from 103 combined quantitative and qualitative articles on maternal and paternal depression, perinatal depression, and fathers. Also, data from semi-structured interviews and self-report

assessments were included to gauge the perceptions of fatherhood through lived experiences, couples' conflict or marital dissatisfaction at the time of pregnancy, psychosocial risk factors, and perceived stress levels.

Investigations showed that the early stages of pregnancy served as a vulnerability factor for future fathers in terms of identifying with their own fathers. Fathers with insecure attachment styles were reported to be more anxious, depressed, hostile, and disadvantaged in establishing a father-child relationship (Bruno et al., 2020). Insecure fathers also presented poorly in their behaviors and hindered the early psychosocial development of their children. Those with secure attachment patterns were able to have an early positive influence on their child, which in some cases supplemented the deficiencies in mother-child interactions (Bruno et al., 2020). Additional research is required on the early recognition and treatment of paternal depression and its impact on early childhood attachment.

Fatherless children are likelier to report struggles with emotional regulation, social adjustment, and attachment formation (Brown, 2023; McLanahan et al., 2013; Meng et al., 2020; Waters et al., 2010). In largely populated countries such as China, father absence and paternal migration have significantly impacted children's attachment formation and mental health (Lu et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2021). Wu et al. (2021) examined the phenomenon of large numbers of fathers in China migrating to other cities for work and the implications their absence had on their children left behind. The study hypothesized that parental involvement contributed to life satisfaction, positive social behaviors, and was a mediating factor in the mental health of left-behind children (LBC). Two-waves of longitudinal data of 613 LBC's were analyzed using a Dual-Factor Model

of Mental Health. Participants completed assessments twice about their father's involvement, life satisfaction, maternal and paternal attachment, internalizing and externalizing behaviors, and social behaviors. The theory of attachment supported the results of this study as it disclosed that a father's presence and involvement had a significantly negative impact on the LBC's perceived life satisfaction, attachment style, social behaviors, and mental health. Additionally, mother-child attachment at times mediated the association between father involvement and problematic internalizing and externalizing behaviors in LBC's (Wu et al., 2021). The study highlights the negative implications of father absence and migration in largely populated regions and the need for more involvement and investment in children's overall well-being who are left behind.

According to attachment researchers, children who are abandoned or detached from their parental figures during early childhood face profound emotional and behavioral challenges (Ainsworth et al., 1971; Bowlby, 1969; Lahousen et al., 2019; Waters et al., 2010). The absence and migration of primary attachment figures can give rise to enigmatic feelings of aggression and grief (Lu et al., 2019). In similar situations, the attachment theory claims that children have difficulties adjusting to the absence of their parents and the uncertainty of when they will reunite (Ainsworth et al., 1971; Lu et al., 2019).

Lu et al. (2019) conducted a similar study on the impact of parental migration on the psychosocial development of Chinese children across different social groups. Within the study, a 2016 China National Bureau of Statistics report outlined that a sizeable fraction of China's children are effected by parental migration during early childhood due

to the roughly 168 million parents that leave their townships to seek work elsewhere (China National Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Lu et al., 2019). Currently, that would account for approximately 50.26% of the United States population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

Lu et al. (2019) compared different groups of children ages 3-15 affected by parental absence (migrant, left-behind, rural, and urban) against children of the same age and social groups who had both parents to assess the differences in psychosocial development. Lu et al. (2019) hypothesized that children of all groups who had either one or both parents absent would be more impaired psychologically and socially than those with both parents. Additional hypotheses predicted that parental migration not only increases emotional distress and depressive symptoms but also limits the educational attainment and available support of children and remaining caregivers.

Survey data collected on over 4,338 migrant and non-migrant children across multiple rural and urban regions was analyzed statistically using a structural equation model (SEM). Information was primarily drawn from assessments such as the Behavioral Problems Index (BPI) (Peterson & Zill, 1986) and children's primary caregivers. Results revealed that children abandoned by both parents were significantly more impaired psychologically and behaviorally than non-migrant children. Children with single parents were also impaired compared to non-migrant children, but findings also showed that parental migration affected family systems. When fathers migrated, mothers assumed the primary caregiver role 95% of the time; when mothers migrated, fathers assumed the primary caregiver role 68% of the time; and when both parents migrated, almost all migrant children were cared for by their grandparents, according to Lu et al. (2019).

The study highlighted parental migration and abandonment as an ongoing global issue that likely has significant ramifications on the mental health, attachment formation, and psychosocial development of children (Lu et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2018). Many European countries and neighboring U.S. countries, such as Canada and Mexico, have substantially migrated parents to the United States (Lu et al., 2019). This issue only exacerbates the internal issue of parental migration and abandonment among families in the United States (Brown, 2023; Venta et al., 2021).

Attachment theory: Rationale

For as many times as it has been revised and expanded, the attachment theory at its core highlights the developmental importance of a child's emotional and spiritual bond with their biological caregivers (Culpin et al., 2022). Interference with or an absence of this bond affects a child emotionally and psychologically well into adulthood and can have a long-term impact on their future relationships and socialization with others (Bowlby, 1969; Brown, 2023; Culpin et al., 2022; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012; Tizard, 2009).

Recent research has also suggested a strong connection between attachment and mental health (Spruit et al., 2019; Zheng et al., 2020). Fatherless children are more likely to be anxious, aggressive, depressed, low in self-esteem, and exhibit other concerning externalized behaviors (Brown, 2023; Culpin et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023; McLanahan et al., 2013). This association has been closely examined by meta-analyses that suggested that a father's absence and insecure attachment may be a predictor of adverse mental health outcomes in children (Culpin et al., 2022; Ramatsetse & Ross, 2022; Spruit et al., 2019).

Attachment remains a cardinal factor in developmental psychology and lifespan integration research (Cassidy et al., 2013). For all that the attachment theory has done to encourage developmental research and shape models, the vast majority of empirical research still focuses on the role of mothers in a child's life (Cabrera et al., 2018). This theory is relevant to this case study because, in adulthood, early attachment between a father and son can shape the way that males conduct themselves socially and how they connect emotionally with others when they are older (Cabrera et al., 2018; Jethava et al., 2022; Lansford, 2021). However, there is still a major need for additional research on attachment to fathers and the father-son dyad (Ahnert & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2019; Azuine & Singh, 2019).

Psychodynamic Theory

Sigmund Freud's psychodynamic theory led to Ainsworth and Bowlby's findings by initially proposing that human behaviors are encouraged by basic needs and motivations and can be shaped by unconscious childhood experiences (Grzybowski & Żołnierz, 2020). Liu et al. (2023) stated that there is currently a lack of research on the underlying mechanisms surrounding father absence and youth hostility. Freud believed that a father's absence hinders a son's accession to the traditional masculine role and that parenting by a single mother could only further distort a child's development (Mcleod, 2023; Remmo, 2009). The father's absence can also become the basis for infantile and adult neurosis (Tolpin, 2017; Zengel Mora, 2021).

Psychodynamic Theory Propositions

Freud's psychodynamic approach highlighted the importance of the unconscious mind and intrinsic motivations (Bargh & Morsella, 2008; Mcleod, 2023; Traylor et al.,

2022). It also included theories from some of his followers: Alfred Adler, Anna Freud, Carl Jung, and Erik Erikson. Freud's followers supported and expanded on his research because they believed that behaviors were not only driven by intrinsic motivations, but also that behaviors and emotions are rooted in childhood experiences (McLeod, 2023; Solms & Zellner, 2012).

Psychodynamic research suggests that the unconscious part of the human mind is the primary source of behaviors (Freud, 1915). Freud famously described the unconscious mind as an iceberg and confidently attested that the largest and most influential part of the mind is that which you cannot see (Freud, 1915; McLeod, 2023). A person's emotions, behaviors, decisions, and motives are strongly influenced by past experiences and stored in this unconscious (Freud, 1915; McLeod, 2023; Traylor et al., 2022). Experiences such as a father's absence are not always readily available to the conscious memory, especially during the first five to six years of a child's life (McLanahan et al., 2013; Traylor et al., 2022).

Most of what is stored in the unconscious mind is believed to be negative and repressed (Bargh & Morsella, 2008). Research of the unconscious mind by Bargh and Morsella (2008) viewed it as a part of the individual. Freud and his daughter, Anna Freud (1936), developed the concept of defense mechanisms from this belief. The unconscious mind represses unacceptable or unpleasant experiences that could easily cause hostility and conflict, especially when surfaced (Bargh & Morsella, 2008; Di Giuseppe & Perry, 2021; Traylor et al., 2022).

The psychodynamic approach benefits this case study because it recognizes social and environmental factors influence while explaining why humans are driven emotionally

and physically by intrinsic biological motivations (Bargh & Morsella, 2008; Bonn, 2017; Mcleod, 2023). Additionally, research has shown that when it comes to short-term psychodynamic therapy, a conclusion can be drawn that connects the adverse experiences of infants and their attachment to primary caregivers and how it involves the development of personalities and behaviors later in life (Cassidy et al., 2013; Midgley et al., 2021; Traylor et al., 2022).

Psychodynamic Theory: Applications

The psychodynamic theory is based on the idea that most human behavior is influenced by internal forces and repressed experiences outside the mind's conscious awareness (Pitman & Knauss, 2020). By extension, research by Pitman and Knauss (2020) presumed that the unconscious conflicts associated with the psychodynamic theory indicate an anxiety disorder and related symptoms such as anger, fear, and hypervigilance. Psychodynamic therapy aims to help patients become more aware of their internal drives and how their past psychological and emotional experiences impact their present circumstances (Routledge.com, 2022).

Pitman and Knauss (2020) examined empirical research and data on psychodynamic techniques to treat patients with symptoms of several anxiety disorders. The researchers found that psychodynamic interventions (PI) were beneficial in reducing anxiety symptoms at posttreatment. More importantly, psychodynamic therapy also helped to provide a new understanding of anxiety symptoms as they relate to the individual self and associated relationships, thereby identifying the repressed emotional traumas that the patients found to be overwhelming and painful to bear. The authors concluded that a psychodynamic approach is fundamental to providing meaning and

context for mental health issues such as anxiety, anger, and depression. They added that such issues could be viewed as a check engine light in a car and that the light indicates further investigation and cautious assessment of the whole system; however, finding ways to turn off the light without understanding the underlying issues would only be a temporary solution at best.

The impact of father-absence through the lenses of the psychodynamic theory is central to numerous other discussions surrounding child development. Literature by Jones (2008) described father-absence from a wider-developmental perspective to assess the quality and nature of attachment to a father, the father's roles, oedipal issues, and paternal representation. The qualitative study took a phenomenological approach to explaining the clinical implications of father-child relationships during infancy and early childhood. Jones (2008) added to the theory that the absence or loss of a father is believed to have negative consequences for children as early as during prenatal periods and is associated with later behavioral problems. Father absence or loss before the age of two was also thought to have strong ties to personality disorders such as narcissism, anti-social personality disorder (ASPD), and borderline personality disorder (BPD) (Beauchaine et al., 2009; Jones, 2008; Oltmanns & Balsis, 2011).

A referenced case involving a 14-year-old adolescent male named Sam told the story of him growing up as a "daddy's boy" by his mother until the age of two when his biological father left. The quality and nature of Sam's budding attachment with his father took a negative turn when he began acting aggressive and inconsolable. By the age of seven, Sam's aggression and violent tendencies escalated when he began destroying the

inside of their home and threatened self-harm. Sam's mother was also affected because she was left with overwhelming guilt and fear of her son's behaviors.

A distinguishing theme among children who grow up without their fathers is a degree and intensity of abandonment, anger, anxiety, and dependence on their mothers (Jones, 2008). Jones (2008) found that the absence of Sam's father caused pathological deficits across several domains. Much like Freud and his oedipal theory, Jones (2008) wrote that a father's early roles and emotional attachment were important factors related to Sam's behaviors. Moreover, Jones (2008) also mentioned that paternal loss or abandonment during latency stages of development results in over-idealization of the paternal representation. Jones (2008) mentioned that children such as Sam idolized their fathers as "protectors" and "God-like" but after a loss view, them as "forgotten parents" and opposition.

Although father figures such as stepfathers are presumed to fill the role of a child's biological father, it does not always mean that they will replace or replicate the uniqueness of a relationship with biological fathers. The irreplaceability of a biological father is evident within the case study when at age eight, Sam's mother remarried, but Sam's aggression and violence continued to worsen to the point that his mother had to admit him to a psychiatric facility involuntarily. At this point in Sam's life, he was physically abusive to his mother and stepfather and went as far as threatening to fatally harm them both. Sam was never able to bond with his stepfather despite his stepfather's reported attempts, and it led to frequently provoked arguments between his mother and stepfather, who one year later divorced.

Throughout the next several years, Sam's violent behaviors continued increasing until his mother arranged a visit for Sam to visit his biological father. At age 10, Sam was sent across state lines to visit with his biological father, who was at the time living in another state, unemployed, and addicted to drugs and alcohol. Despite his father's health and welfare concerns, they bonded over similar interests and spent a week together working on old cars. Upon Sam's return to his mother, his mood and behaviors quickly regressed.

When Sam turned 11, his mother remarried again and his behaviors escalated even further. Sam was reported to have gone back to destroying their home and repeatedly opposing his mother and new stepfather. Sam was again admitted into a psychiatric facility due to his erratic and violent behaviors. Jones (2008) notes that during one visit with a therapist, Sam had reported that he felt like his stepfather was "trying to take his place" in his mother's life. Despite the oedipal struggle with his stepfather, Sam was reluctant to speak ill of his biological father and instead talked about wanting to become a mechanic just like him someday. Sam went on to remain in treatment for several years and gradually confronted his underlying anger and disappointment toward his biological father. In doing so, Sam could accept the reality and responsibilities of his actions and learned more effective methods of managing his emotions and inner drives.

The case exemplifies the importance of considering and understanding the underlying mechanisms at work within abandoned children such as Sam when they are growing up with a present biological father. Jones' (2008) research was in line with the works of psychoanalysts such as Margaret Mahler (1897-1985), who saw the father as an important object during the rapprochement stages of infancy, where children form an

inner image of fathers that is often idolized. The research concludes by highlighting societal trends that provide a need for a greater understanding of a father's role in child development and a need for mental health professionals to assess paternal-based issues during clinical treatment.

According to Freeman (2008), patriarchy has helped to shape the psychoanalytic concepts associated with fatherhood. The characteristics of the paternal role are embedded in Freud's Oedipus complex theory and give a central place to the father as a symbol of authority. Freeman (2008) argued that from a cultural perspective, the symbolic role of a father also carries a strong religious connection to God, the heavenly father. However, despite the symbolic prestige bestowed upon being a father, a majority of parental relationship studies have focused on mother-child relationships and stigmatized absent fathers as either "deadbeats" or "forgotten parents" (Freeman, 2008). Over recent decades, father absence has been problematized in empirical, theoretical, theological, and political terms, but it has yet to be fully addressed (Freeman, 2008). Freeman (2008) purported that a systematic neglect of fathers and an exclusive focus on maternal relationships has led to criticism and marginalized efforts to discern the relationship between fathers and their children.

Using a psychoanalytic approach, Freeman (2008) sought to explain the relationship between the symbolic presence and qualitative absence of fathers within family systems. Fathers hold a prominent role within family systems and children's lives, but when absent, they cause a fundamental reassessment of a family's dynamics and the development of children within the home. The same can be said with respect to mothers within the family system, but Freeman (2008) believed that society today has "silenced"

and contradicted the accounts of Freud's Oedipus complex and the importance of paternal relationships. The study cited father hunger as a notable reason for yearnings and negative consequences commonly associated with father absence and children's maladaptive behaviors. Freeman (2008) supported Freud (1915) in that the internal crisis experienced by father-absent children leads to underlying paradoxes of patriarchy and behavioral complexities. Children, especially males, need their biological fathers to model a strong presence in the family and to assume the patriarchal traits and values bestowed upon men by God (Freeman, 2008). The complex and misunderstood realities of a father and son's unparalleled bond have their place within the psychodynamic theory and psychoanalysis.

Psychodynamic theory: Rationale

The psychodynamic theory encompasses numerous psychological approaches that associate human functioning with intrinsic drives and motivations within individuals (Boag, 2018; Mcleod, 2023). Over time, the theory has been expanded to explain typical and pathological dynamics of the mind (Boag, 2018). It emphasizes the importance of childhood experiences and object relations to understand emotional effects, motivations, unconscious mental processes, inner conflict, and defense mechanisms (e.g., acting out, displacement, projection, and splitting) (Boag, 2018; Traylor et al., 2022).

Freud's postulation that personalities formulate during the first several years of life and that how parents interact with their children will have long-lasting implications has guided developmental research for decades (Jones, 2008; Traylor et al., 2022). Despite any criticisms of Freud's theories, researchers have supported the importance of recognizing early childhood experiences as contributing to shaping the psychological self

(Saracho, 2021; Traylor et al., 2022). The psychodynamic theory has heuristic value in this case study because it provides a framework for elaborating on why fatherless sons experience developmental complexities and violent outcomes.

Review of the Literature

Father absence

Father absence occurs when parents separate, a father passes, or a father is not actively in the lives of his children (Haux & Platt, 2020; McLanahan et al., 2013). According to the Minnesota Psychological Association (MPA), the number of single-mother households in the United States has been its highest in recent decades (Brown, 2023). Over those years, sociological research has well documented the negative association between father absence and adverse effects across several developmental domains (Liu et al., 2023; McLanahan et al., 2013). Research evidence supports that a biological father's absence in early childhood is consistently linked with increased mental health issues in early adulthood (Culpin et al., 2022). An extension of similar research states that children raised in single-mother households tend to experience more hostility and psychological complications than those raised in two-parent homes (Brown, 2023; Daryanani et al., 2016). However, the association between the biological father's absence and mental health issues may depend on the age and developmental stage in which the father left (Culpin et al., 2022; McLanahan et al., 2013; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2004).

Father absence: Early roles of fathers

Fathers and their children can be as equivalently attached as they are to mothers (Keizer et al., 2019). Longitudinal pediatric research studies have stated that when

biological fathers are present since birth, they can greatly increase the likelihood of positive outcomes in their children (Culpin et al., 2022; Yogman & Garfield, 2016). Yogman and Garfield (2016) compiled modern studies of the epidemiology of father involvement, including residential and nonresidential, to highlight the positive developmental outcomes within each phase of a child's early life. The study emphasized father involvement across childhood ages and proposed that a father's presence and involvement would positively influence their children's physical and mental health. Multidisciplinary findings revealed several positive key components associated with father involvement during the early stages of childhood.

During perinatal stages, biological father involvement throughout pregnancy corresponded with mothers being less likely to give premature birth or have a miscarriage (Shannon et al., 2009; Yogman & Garfield, 2016). After birth, newborn infants that received father skin-to-skin contact cried less and fell asleep faster (Yogman & Garfield, 2016). The study also found that prenatal involvement and attendance to wellness- or acute-care visits for the mother was the strongest predictor of father involvement by the time the child reached the age of 5 (Yogman & Garfield, 2016).

Later in infancy, fathers were reported to be more likely to be involved in infant play than mothers, leading to more infant stimulation and arousal (Yogman & Garfield, 2016). Infant play is important because the quality and intensity of father-child interactions can influence exploration and independence, whereas with mothers, it is less intense and provides safety and balance (Raeburn, 2014; Yogman & Garfield, 2016). Fathers were equally successful, competent, and capable as mothers in aligning with their child's emotions and responding to their needs during social interactions.

When a biological father is present during early childhood, it is most often associated with positive psychological outcomes and children meeting developmental milestones (Yogman & Garfield, 2016). Despite most other studies on children's development, Yogman and Garfield (2016) differentiated benefits from both a mother and father to highlight key facts to consider, such as that father-child communication is a strong predictor of advanced language development but not as much as mother-child communication. As children moved into later stages of development, positive father involvement was accompanied by reduced maladaptive behaviors, less depressive symptoms in the mother and child, and a much lower risk of child behavioral problems and developmental delays (Yogman & Garfield, 2016).

During adolescence, a compilation of national longitudinal studies gathered by Yogman and Garfield (2016) showed that father involvement decreased the likelihood of aggressive behaviors in boys (Caldwell et al., 2013). These findings also suggest that the types of activities that fathers are involved in and the quality of the time spent do matter to their children's social and emotional well-being (Adamson & Johnson, 2013; Culpin et al., 2022; Jessee & Adamsons, 2018; Yogman & Garfield, 2016), and fuel the growing consensus that a father's involvement and influence in their child's growth and development is important in numerous ways.

Pediatric researchers have slowly integrated this study's findings into family-centered healthcare settings (Yogman & Garfield, 2016). Yogman and Garfield (2016) concluded that fathers should be seen to have more expanded roles in early childhood and be less associated with the stereotypical disciplinarian, masculine roles that society has brought it up to be. Fathers are protectors, providers, friends, teachers, role models, and

pillars in a child's life. Additional research is required on a father's role in promoting inner growth, self-determination, and resiliency.

Father absence: Quality of father-child relationships

Research by Li and Guo (2023) posits that the quality of the father-child relationship is important, but the time spent together is more important as a factor in the growth and development of a child's well-being and mental health. To further promote research and resources to promote children's well-being, Li and Guo (2023) utilized data from a 2017 China Time Use Survey (CTUS) to explain the relationship between parental time and children's well-being.

Young people associate their well-being with positive experiences (Li & Guo, 2023; Vujčić et al., 2019). Li and Guo (2023) hypothesized that when parents spend more time with their children, their children's well-being and outlook on life improve. A regression analysis revealed that the time spent with parents is a crucial positive factor in several developmental domains: academic performance, emotional and psychological health, and quality of parental companionship. Li and Guo's (2023) study is one of few that explored the effects of parental companionship on children's well-being through the lens of the amount of time spent together; however, this area still requires more attention and could be improved upon by promoting more ways that a parent and child can bond together.

Locally, The Children's Bureau of Southern California (2023) supported Li and Guo's (2023) China-based study by attesting that children in the United States and Canada rank alarmingly low among other countries in social and emotional well-being and that higher levels of parental involvement do correlate to academic success, self-

confidence, emotional stability, and increased sociability. Additionally, when it comes to fathers, increased father engagement reduces the likelihood of children's behavioral issues in school, delinquency, and psychological problems associated with father complexity (e.g., aggression, anxiety, conduct disorders, and depression) (Yoon et al., 2018).

Father absence: Father complexity in children

Unfortunately, growing up with a biological father is a privilege in today's society that many children are deprived of (Dean-Hill, 2023). While not having a father is not considered a serious mental illness, the absence of a biological father can significantly affect a child's early development, including their mental health (Little et al., 2019; Mao et al., 2020). Culpin et al. (2022) found evidence that the biological father's absence during early childhood is persistently associated with higher rates of depression in youth (birth to 5 years) than in children ages 5 to 10. The study analyzed whether the relationship between biological father absence and mental health outcomes varied by gender and the time in their development when father absence occurred (early or middle childhood). Using data from a longitudinal study of parents and children, participants were provided self-report assessments of depression (Clinical Interview Schedule-Revised) at 24 years of age and a Short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire (MFQ) between 10 and 24 years. Biological father absence was measured through maternal questionnaires at consistent intervals between birth and age 10. A quantitative analysis of the data revealed that early childhood biological father absence was strongly associated with increased levels of depression by age 24. The intensity of depressive symptoms varies by age, gender, and the father's time of absence but narrows going into adulthood

(Culpin et al., 2022). Culpin et al. (2022) concluded that early childhood biological father absence is the strongest risk factor for adverse outcomes, depression, and father complexity.

Sigmund Freud submitted that early childhood father absence can cause a “father complex” in children (Blos, 1987). The term “father complex” was first used by Freud during his development of the Oedipus complex (Blos, 1987). Freud attested that male children with a father complex can experience unconscious impulses that stem from their poor or nonexistent relationship with their father and tend to struggle with approval, aggression, depression, and self-worth (Blos, 1987; Tisano, 2015; Traylor et al., 2022).

The effects of the father complex were further evident when research by Little et al. (2019) discovered that there were conflicting internalizing and externalizing behaviors in children when their fathers were absent. The study aimed to examine longitudinal connections between father-child conflict and externalizing and internalizing symptoms in children who lived with resident fathers and those who did not. Children in the study were asked to complete measures about their perception of conflict with their fathers in both 8th and 9th grade, and mothers completed measures on the externalizing and internalizing symptoms of their children. Their results stated that while there was conflict between children with resident fathers and their fathers, higher levels of father-child conflict and both externalizing and internalizing symptoms were associated with father-absent children. The study concluded that a father’s live-in status and the quality of the father-child relationship vary, but situationally, they can predict emotional and behavioral outcomes in children. Additional comprehensive research is required on how father

absence can also have a deep and lasting negative impact on a child's faith and spirituality (McCutchen, 1972).

Father absence: Fathering the fatherless

Psalm 68:5 states, "a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, Is God in his holy dwelling" (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Psalm 68:5). God promises security and unfailing love to the fatherless (Dean-Hill, 2023; Preszler, 2022). He embodies the essence of a father and mother (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Isaiah 66:12-13) and designed the family as the foundation for society (Preszler, 2023).

Father absence can further complicate children's feelings when the teachings of Christianity are involved, which emphasize having strong family attachments and relying on God as a father figure (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). By design, a relationship with a biological father should prepare their son for a relationship with God (Dickie et al., 2006; Preszler, 2022). A father who is present and guides their son through God quells the curse of anger and devastation and instead provides direction and nurture through which a son can experience the heart and love of God (Preszler, 2022; *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Ephesians 6:4).

Early theologian studies describe fatherhood as "God like," or even Godhood (McCutchen, 1972). In his book, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung (1875-1961) maintained that the father complex stemmed from a distorted or absent view of a "spiritual" or patriarchal figure (Jung, 1969). Traditional patriarchal concepts describe patriarchal figures as being courageous, dominant, strong, and supreme (Boothroyd & Cross, 2017; Freeman, 2008; Gupta et al.,

2023). Western society today predominantly views God as patriarchal, therefore recognizing fathers as authority figures, disciplinarians, peacekeepers, and the head of the household (Dean-Hill, 2023; Families et al., 1994; Wagner et al., 2022). Since it was believed that fathers were the primary source of obtaining patriarchal traits and modern values, the absence of a father was also said to cause unresolved father complexity in young men (Novianti et al., 2023; Tisano, 2015). Freud and Jung's proposal of the father complex was heavily criticized for only focusing on the development of young boys, but it led to the formation of the attachment theory that centers around the relationship between parents and their children (Traylor et al., 2022).

Father absence: Attachment issues

The early role of fathers is crucial to a child's attachment style and development (Olsavsky et al., 2019; Yogman & Garfield, 2016). Although children can form attachments to their fathers just as well as to their mothers, an attachment to their biological fathers is unique and vital to fostering healthy and secure relationships later in adulthood (Bowlby, 1969; Olsavsky et al., 2019; Yogman & Garfield, 2016). The intrapsychic space filled by present fathers leads to positive experiences, a secure father-child attachment, healthy cognitive development, and equanimity (G. L. Brown et al., 2012; Rollè et al., 2019); however, research by Tisano (2015) produced qualitative results that revealed that father absence leads to negative, empty arenas of mental space in their children.

Tisano (2015) surmised that father-absent men would have distorted thoughts, feelings, and views about their personal experiences growing up without a biological father, and the image of a father. Like many similar studies, Tisano (2015) deduced that

whatever was within this space would ultimately play a major role in a man's life trajectory. The study conducted semi-structured interviews and observations of 10 men who participated to share their lived experiences using a phenomenological approach. The findings revealed that the image of a father is shaped by numerous factors such as collateral information, known details, memories, and mothers. In his thesis, Tisano (2015) wrote that a mother's role is so distinct that she might as well be seen as an "architect" or "guardian" of the father-image. Tisano (2015) postulated that the greater influence of a father's image came from details and perceptions from their mothers, and for those who did not grow up with a mother or father, their mental representation of parental caregivers was void.

The study concluded that there is a space for fathers in every man, which cannot be collapsed. Men who grew up without their biological father's craved information about them and sought out supplemental father figures that could step in to fill that void (Tisano, 2015). Some were able to find father figures to create memories and experiences with, but others were left with a vastly complex and resentful feeling of abandonment (Tisano, 2015).

Freud established that the "father complex" was the reason for this type of human neurosis and the origin of his closely related Oedipus complex theory (Furniss, 2014; Tisano, 2015). Freud's proposal of the Oedipus complex began in his book, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), where he claims an Oedipal relationship between all children and their parents during early childhood (Freud, 1899). The Oedipus complex describes the attachment of a child to the parent of the same sex as being accompanied by envious and aggressive resentment (Freud, 1899; Furniss, 2014). Over time, these

feelings can proliferate, resulting in a heightened sense of anger as the child transitions from adolescence into young adulthood (Bonnie et al., 2019; Brown, 2023). Although still heavily scrutinized today (Furniss, 2014), Freud believed this myth is revived and relived in every young man without a present biological father during their early childhood (Freud, 1899; Furniss, 2014; Tisano, 2015). While father complexity can manifest itself differently in men and women, it leads children of absent fathers to seek validation and support from other men (Boothroyd & Cross, 2017; McLanahan et al., 2013).

Father absence: Generational trauma

Research has shown that males who experienced father absence during childhood were likelier to repeat the same behavior by becoming and remaining absent fathers themselves in adulthood (Boothroyd & Cross, 2017; Little et al., 2019; McLanahan et al., 2013; Taylor, 2016). According to Jessee and Adamsons (2018), patterns of father absence and the quality of father-son relationships tend to be passed down generationally. This study looked at factors of involvement that could be associated with the quality of father-son relationships and whether relationship quality is transferred across generations. Using data from a Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study, the study used a structured equation model to assess the quality of relationships between fathers and their fathers (paternal grandfathers) during childhood between ages one and nine, and their involvement with their sons between the same time frames.

Father absence is most notable in disadvantaged populations (Pouget et al., 2012); however, the intergenerational continuity of father absence remains a focus for future generations. Analyses by Jessee and Adamsons (2018) showed that the quality and

time of paternal grandfathers' involvement with fathers was positively associated with reciprocating those types of relationships with their children. A similar study by Pougnet et al. (2012) found that women raised in father absent homes were likelier to have children with absent-prone fathers. Father absence can have a lasting ripple effect across generations. Therefore, the lack of parental modeling and its subsequent effects on men and women generationally cannot be understated.

Psychological Impact on Men

The psychological effects of growing up without a biological father during childhood can have numerous ramifications on a male's state of mind (East et al., 2006; McLanahan et al., 2013). Father absent men consistently overrepresent a wide range of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression; however, the amount of research examining the longitudinal effects of father absence on adult outcomes is significantly smaller than it should be (The Fatherhood Project, 2023). Strong evidence suggests a critical need to understand further the psychological consequences of father absence experienced during early childhood that can last throughout adulthood (Culpin et al., 2022; East et al., 2006; McLanahan et al., 2013). Although the negative effects of father absence on children can vary by age and gender, there are historically common behavioral symptoms and adverse outcomes that can be expected from males, such as relational and hostile aggression, depression, difficulty adjusting socially, development of personality disorders, juvenile delinquency, and criminal justice involvement (Brown, 2023; Culpin et al., 2022; Hoeve et al., 2009; Kim & Glassgow, 2018; McLanahan et al., 2013). Father absence is a complex phenomenon caused by several circumstances and situations, but if left unresolved, it can continue to plague generations to come.

Psychological Impact on Men: Violence and Aggression

Children who grow up without a biological father are more likely to exhibit aggression and other externalizing behaviors (Liu, 2004; McLanahan et al., 2013); however, father absence has also been a strong predictor for violent behavior in adult men (Mackey & Mackey, 2008). Research by Mackey and Mackey (2008) analyzed data on adult violent crimes and the connection to father absence and out-of-wedlock births in the United States. The study hypothesized that the absence of a resident biological father encourages violent behaviors in their sons. Similarly, Mackey and Mackey (2008) also suggested that the prior presence of a residential biological father hinders tendencies for violent behavior in their sons well into adulthood.

A cross-sectional analysis revealed that violent crime rates among adult males born out of wedlock and experienced father absence had a significant correlation. The study also found that father absence was a stronger predictor of violent crime rates in adult men than other factors, such as poverty. Mackey and Mackey (2008) concluded that public health officials and researchers should vehemently consider father absence as a predictor of violent crimes and that resident biological fathers who remain in their son's lives through birth and childhood decrease the likelihood of violent behaviors, even in adulthood. It is also important for future researchers and lawmakers to create or expand opportunities for fathers to have ongoing relationships with their children.

An article from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) agreed with Mackey and Mackey (2008) when they wrote that between 2016 and 2020, males ages 25 and older held the highest rate for offenders of violent crimes such as arson, assault, burglary, robbery, vandalism, and murder (Thompson et al., 2023).

After reaching a remarkable 30-year low between 2020 and 2021, those numbers significantly increased again in 2022 and showed that males ages 18 and older still held the highest rate of violent victimization between 2021 and 2022 (Thompson et al., 2023). To further highlight the national problem, states such as Washington gained large numbers of new state residents between 2021 and 2022 (93,262), but as a result, also saw an increase of 8.9% in violent crimes, 16.6% in murders, 18% in robberies, and 34.1% in vehicle theft, according to a 2022 annual crime report by the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) (Smith et al., 2022). There were 64,913 more crimes committed by adult males in Washington state during 2022, and research suggests that a common trend among male offenders was the absence of a father during their childhood (Mackey & Mackey, 2008; Smith et al., 2022; Thompson et al., 2023).

Psychological Impact on Men: Depression

Father absence during early childhood has been strongly linked to depression in adulthood (Inoue et al., 2022). Father absence and its connection to depressive symptoms in adults has been a widely understudied international concern for decades (Incaln, 2023; Inoue et al., 2022). In other parts of the world, such as Vietnam, Inoue et al. (2022) explored the historical association between parental absence during childhood and depressive symptoms among adults who were separated from their parents during and after the Vietnam War (1955-1975). Inoue et al. (2022) hypothesized that parental absence during childhood would significantly increase the probability of depressive symptoms in middle adulthood. The study analyzed data from 3000 adults between the ages of 40 and 60 who participated in a Khanh Hoa Cardiovascular study. Symptoms of depression were assessed using an 11-item Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression

Scale, and additional self-reported symptomology and parental absence experiences due to death, divorce, or migration before the age of 15 were also collected.

The results revealed that parental absence by or before age three had a 1.21 to 1.41 times higher likelihood of depressive symptoms later in adulthood for adults who experienced parental absence through either death or migration to other cities during childhood. Given the large death toll during the Vietnam War, it was likely that a high number of Vietnamese children experienced parental loss and absence during their childhood. The same could presumably be said for children of foreign country military service members who fought in the Vietnam War (e.g., U.S., Canada, France, Soviet Union) (Greenspan, 2023). The study concluded that it is important to be aware of the likelihood of chronic depression in parent-absent adults and that more attention should be paid to the potentially harmful consequences of parental absence and loss that still occur in other contemporary parts of the world.

Psychological impact on men: Psychosocial issues

The earliest contributions of a biological father can be seen within the attachment theory. Fathers are a launching pad for their children to become autonomous and socially inclusive adults (Soria & Lawton, 2022). Bowlby (1969) was one of the first researchers to assert that children learn from their biological parents to form secure attachments with safe and trustworthy individuals. As children age, social exchange and forming relationships become an integral part of their ability to integrate into society, make public contributions, meet their needs, and abide by the rules of society (Soria & Lawton, 2022).

Research by Soria and Lawton (2022) explored the relationship between having an active and empathetic father in an adult child's social network and those with

disengaged or absent fathers. The study hypothesized that fathers are a major contributing factor to their children's psychosocial development and that adult children would have more social relationships when their fathers were present and emotionally attuned. Alternatively, the researchers also predicted that adult children with disengaged or absent fathers would have significantly fewer social ties and struggle to integrate into social networks.

The study collected longitudinal data of 1159 people aged 21-30 and 50-70 from the 2015 UC Berkeley Social Networks Study (UCNets). UCNets sought to improve an understanding of people's social lives and how social connections affect health and happiness (UC Berkeley Social Networks Study, 2023). Surveys were used to gather data on the participant's social networks, engagement in social activities, the type of relationship with their father (active or absent), and other interpersonal relationships. Results revealed that male and female participants who reported having an active and emotionally attuned father had more social ties, especially with other males. Participants who did not name a father did not have nearly as many social ties as those with active fathers. The study's findings are consistent with the attachment theory in suggesting that the presence of a father is important for developing social ties, emotional connections, and social skills. The researchers concluded that fathers are important not only for psychosocial development during childhood, but throughout adulthood as well.

Psychological Impact on Men: Personality Disorders

Personality traits are developed through a combination of growing up with two parents; however, research shows that a child's relationship with their fathers has a significantly strong long-term impact on their social skills and personality traits (Dey,

2022). Dr. Jenisha Shah, a clinical psychologist in Kemps Corner, Mumbai, went on record to say:

When children have a positive relationship with their fathers, it is generally seen that they have better attachment patterns and are able to form secure attachments in other relationships too. They have less trust issues while exploring new relationships. They are not afraid of conflict, and are more independent. Their social connections are better, and they view the world more positively (Dey, 2022).

When children grow up in a home without a biological father or their father is abusive, they can inherit negative behavioral traits that can later manifest into antisocial and borderline personality disorders (Carrasquillo, 2019; Dey, 2022). Pfiffner et al. (2001) examined antisocial characteristics among families with or without a resident biological father. The researchers explored several hypotheses: whether father absence was associated with increased antisocial traits among family members, if the presence of a father mitigates the development of antisocial personality disorder (APD) and conduct disorders, and whether the presence of an active stepfather reduced the likelihood of absent-father children developing APD or conduct disorders. The study's participants came from 159 families of school-aged children (5-11) who were repeated referrals to a university-based clinic for children's attention-deficit and disruptive behaviors in Irvine, California. Of the sample, there were 128 boys ($n = 128$) and 31 ($n = 31$), with a mean age of 7.95 (Pfiffner et al., 2001). The participants were divided into three groups: children with "in-home" biological fathers ($n=107$), children with fathers who lived outside of the home but were located and consented to the study ($n = 26$), and children

whose fathers were absent and had been out of the home for a minimum of 4 years (n=26). Of the families with absent biological fathers, 35% (SD = 18.2) had a stepfather living in the home. Additional survey data and symptomatology (aggression, anxiety, delinquency, depression, oppositional defiance) came from rating scales and questionnaires completed by parents and teachers of the participating children.

Findings consistently revealed that children with biological fathers at home had fewer antisocial behaviors, but adversely, antisocial characteristics were highest among father-absent children, even when they were living out of the home. Additionally, the study found that the presence of a stepfather did not moderate antisocial behaviors in children associated with father absence. Therefore, the researchers conclude that the departure or absence of a biological father has been proven to be associated with antisocial behaviors and delinquency in children that can carry through adulthood, especially if left untreated and the father remains absent (Pffiffer et al., 2001).

Psychological Impact on Men: Juvenile Delinquency and Crime Involvement

Researchers have pinpointed father absence as a strong predictor of juvenile delinquency and criminal justice involvement in young adults (Simmons et al., 2018). In addition, male children who grow up in father-absent homes hold the highest rate of juvenile offenders, gang involvement, and incarceration (Brown, 2023; Simmons et al., 2018). Simmons et al. (2018) found that even when fathers were present, if they were “harsh,” it still led to offending behaviors and more substance use in juveniles and young adults.

Simmons et al. (2018) explored the differential influence of father absence and harsh fathers on juvenile delinquency. The roles and influence of a biological father have

been closely examined through the scope of attachment and Freud's psychodynamic theory, in which both works have highlighted the importance of high-quality father-son relationships; however, Simmons et al. (2018) and a similar study by Hoeve et al. (2009) found that at times the contrary was also true in father-son relationships where paternal hostility was high and nurture was low. Simmons et al. (2018) hypothesized that male youth who lived in single-mother homes or homes with abusive fathers would engage in frequent delinquency and are at greater risk of incarceration than youth in two-parent homes.

The study used a diverse sample of youth ages 13-17 from a longitudinal Crossroads Study that examined the effects of criminal justice involvement on the development of 1216 first-time male offenders. Included in the analyses was a subsample of youth who identified their fathers as absent ($n = 291$) or their fathers as harsh ($n = 58$). Youth were sampled from three cities with high rates of juvenile justice involvement: Jefferson Parish, Louisiana ($n = 151$), Orange County, California ($n = 532$), and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania ($n = 533$). Youth participated in structured interviews and completed a Quality of Parental Relationship Inventory (QPRI) to assess the tone of their father-son relationship, if any. The QPRI evaluated parent-child relationship hostility and warmth. Delinquent behaviors were assessed using the Self-Report of Offending Scale (SRO), which included 24 criminal acts ranging from dealing drugs to homicide. Substance use was evaluated using the Substance Use/Abuse Inventory (Chassin et al., 1991).

The study used a negative binomial regression analysis, revealing that harsh-father youth had higher rates of delinquent behaviors than those with absent fathers.

Youth with harsh fathers self-reported more offending behaviors and increased substance use than absent-father youth. Youth with harsh fathers also reported using a greater variety of substances than the absent-father group. A concurrent regression analysis was conducted, which further indicated that both groups of youth with absent fathers and harsh fathers engaged in more delinquent behaviors and were at greater risk of incarceration than youth with high-quality father-son relationships and two-parent homes (Simmons et al., 2018).

Given the sizeable research base that suggests father absence is a key contributor to juvenile delinquency and criminal justice involvement in young adults, the study highlights that not all involved fathers develop secure, high-quality father-child relationships with their sons and that abusive fathers, in some cases can be just as damaging as father absence. The implications of the study's findings suggest that future research should focus on developing or improving delinquency prevention programs in areas with high rates of juvenile delinquency and crime, and youth who are reportedly father absent or involved in an abusive relationship with their father.

Biblical Foundations of the Study

The highest glory of God is not only that he created all, but that he so chose to become the heavenly Father and blessed us His children (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, 1 John 1:12). One of the first mentions of God being proclaimed as the heavenly father comes in 1 Corinthians 8:6 which reads, “yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live” (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, 1 Corinthians 8:6). Jesus emphasized God as both his Father and our Father (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, John

20:17). When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, his first word was God “Abba, Father,” and it was Jesus who taught us to pray to God as our Father (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Luke 11:2; Mark 6:9; 14:36). God also blessed man by passing down that which binds the hearts of father and son, fatherhood and creation (Ortlund, 2022; *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Genesis 1:26-28).

The blessing of a father is well-known and engraved in the passages of Genesis. A blessing in the Holy Bible signifies a unique and special relationship between a blesser (the father) and his son (the blessed) (Preszler, 2022; Wruble, 2021). In the book of Genesis, Esau weeps over not obtaining his father’s blessing, which introduces how impactful a father is to the masculine spirit (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Genesis 27:38). For men who have received the blessing of a father, the path to God has been well paved (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Psalm 128; Ephesians 6:4), however for those that who have not, there is no purpose or enjoyment in life (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Ecclesiastes 2:25).

It is no secret in the Holy Bible that with blessings also comes curses (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Genesis 3:14-17). It is true that God is a father, but when some do not have a positive connection with the word, it can crush the human spirit (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Proverbs 18:14). A life absent of a father can become a curse for a child that leads to aggression and devastation (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Genesis 49:7). A crushed human spirit resulting from the absence of a father can only provoke sin, revenge, acts of evil, and it leads man

away from the righteousness of the heavenly father (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, James 1:20; Proverbs 6:34; 14:17).

Featured in *The Christian Post*, a recent Nationwide Study of Faith and Relationships suggests that absent fathers and divorces are the presumed reasons why Christianity has experienced a decline in the United States over the last several years. (Alcindor, 2023; De Gance, 2023). JP De Gance, the Founder and President of *Communio*, a non-profit Christian organization that trains churches to evangelize relationships, marriages, and the family, stated that “family decline appears to fuel faith decline” (De Gance, 2023). The study revealed that marriage rates had dropped 31% since 2000, 61% since 1970 and less than half of all adults under age 30 today grew up in a home with two parents.

In the U.S., 80% of people who attend church likely had present fathers and were raised in homes where their biological parents remained married to each other throughout their childhood (De Gance, 2023). In addition, the study confirmed that young men who grew up in homes with two married parents were noticeably more likely to attend church regularly. However, according to De Gance (2023), the acute and culturally disruptive decline in married husbands and fathers over the past 60 years appears to be driving the force in drastically declining church participation. De Gance (2023) concluded that the absence of a present, warm, and engaged father in the family is the reason that fewer and fewer people believe in Christianity and that unless churches begin focusing on effective strategies to improve Christian marriages and involve fathers in the home, the U.S. will continue to see an increase in religious non-affiliation.

Summary

This chapter concludes that through the theoretical framework of attachment and psychodynamics, father absence will likely cause father complexity in children and adults. Father complexity can follow through adulthood, leading to attachment issues, psychosocial problems, and emotional and psychological trauma that diverts young men away from God and toward violence, aggression, and crime involvement instead. The topic of adverse and violent outcomes in adult males raised in biological father-absent homes during early childhood will return in the following chapter, where I will discuss a comprehensive proposal of procedures designed to contribute qualitative data to the long-standing gap in the literature surrounding the father absence phenomenon.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Overview

Chapter three introduces the methodology for this qualitative research study regarding what influences violent outcomes and behaviors in adult men raised in absent biological-father homes during their early childhood. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of adult men's lived experiences growing up without a resident biological-father and provides an opportunity to understand better the longitudinal effects of father absence between childhood and adulthood. The applicability of a concurrent transcendental phenomenological approach is discussed later in this chapter. The research design, including the methodology, participants, study procedures, instrumentation and measurements, data analysis method, and ethical considerations, are additional components of this chapter.

Research Questions

R.Q. 1: What are the lived experiences of adult men who grew up without a biological father during early childhood?

R.Q. 2: How does father absence during early childhood affect attachment styles in adult men?

R.Q. 3: What psychological implications does father absence have on males across early childhood and adulthood?

R.Q. 4: What are the experiences of father-absent adult men involved in violence?

R.Q. 5: How do adult men view the relationship between childhood father absence and violence in adulthood?

Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how the absence of a biological father during the first six years of a male child's life influences later violent outcomes in adulthood. A concurrent transcendental phenomenological (TPh) approach was best suited for this study to help highlight these adult men's subjective experiences and memories to uncover perspectives, rationales, and justifications for their responses. Additionally, a qualitative phenomenological approach was appropriate for the current study because it helped to explore the lived experiences of adult men raised in absent biological-father homes, and the longitudinal effects on them as functioning fathers, partners, citizens, and decision-makers in society.

Qualitative research explores and details a deeper insight into real-world problems, such as father absence and adult violence, and involves systematically collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand concepts, constructive experiences, and opinions (Brown, 2018; Tenny et al., 2022). Qualitative research also addresses the "how" and "why" forms of research questions and allows for a deeper understanding of lived experiences and phenomena (Cleland, 2017). Qualitative research does not include analyses of processes or specific variables normally found in quantitative studies but instead provides researchers with an in-depth subjective understanding of an individual's perception of a specific phenomenon (Brown, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The range of answers and explanations in qualitative research varies based on the open-ended nature of the data collection tools used (Brown, 2018; Silverman, 2013).

Participants

This study aimed to conveniently sample 14 adult males aged 18 and older from the Tri-Cities (Kennewick, Pasco, Richland) area of Southeastern Washington state. Participants were required to meet the age criteria, be residents of Washington state, live within 60 miles of the specified Tri-Cities, WA area, and give explicit and verbal consent for participation in the study. This research sought out a minimum of 14 adult males raised in absent-biological father homes between birth and age six.

Printed invitations to participate in the research study were distributed and posted on message boards with in-kind assistance from Grace Clinic in [REDACTED] and their leadership, Executive Director Avonte Jackson and Counseling Director Dr. Cynthia Preszler, and the Columbia Community Church (C3) in [REDACTED]. Upon voluntary acceptance to participate in the study, participants were initially screened for exclusion criteria and asked to divulge any history of preexisting neurological or mental health disorders that could impair their assessment performance. Additionally, participants must also have been raised without an adoptive father or stepfather between birth and age six, and confirm whether they were native English speakers that could provide consent and demographic information.

In order to maximize the strength of research findings, participation and data was required from approximately 14 male participants. The rationale for the sample size was based on data saturation, which was vital to establishing the study's credibility (Brown, 2018). Similar research by Brown (2018), Hennick and Kaiser (2022), and Francis et al. (2010), found that data saturation is often achieved at approximately 12 participants in

qualitative studies; however, data saturation is unique to every study and may occur earlier or later than the recommended sample size (Brown, 2018; Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Study Procedures

Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was sought out and approved through Liberty University. Once approval was granted, an outlined letter to potential participants (see Appendix A) was sent to the assisting organizations, Grace Clinic and Columbia Community Church (C3), to request permission to post the invitation-to-participate letter to their message boards and in-house resource departments. The sample did not include personal contacts in order to meet the eligibility criteria and to prevent bias or unethical research practices related to voluntary participation or coercion. I initially made contact with volunteering participants either in-person, via online (email or Zoom), or by phone call, depending on their preference. As shown in Appendix B, a signed informed consent form was required from each participant before entering the study. Eligible participants were all primarily invited to Grace Clinic, located at [REDACTED], where surveys and one-on-one structured interviews will take place; however, participants were also encouraged to select an alternate place of their choosing if they were unable or willing to meet at Grace Clinic. Participants were either interviewed in a private meeting room within Grace Clinic or a private setting of their choosing. The study utilized paper assessments, an audio recording device, and scientific journals to collect data and responses from participants. Participants were first be asked to complete the two required assessments (10-15 minutes) and then participate in post-structured interviews that lasted approximately 45 minutes (see Appendix C). Data collected from each qualified

participant included self-report assessments that measured for aggression, propensity for violence, psychopathy outcomes, social cognition, and perceived stress levels. The average duration of the entire study for each participant was expected to be approximately 60 minutes. Upon completion of the study's assessments and interviews, participants were entered into a drawing for two NBA Portland Trailblazers' home game tickets.

Instrumentation and Measurement

This research study collected data using the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ), the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), structured one-on-one interviews, an audio recording device, and scientific journals. Credibility, reliability, and transferability are important in qualitative research because they enhance the results' integrity or trustworthiness (Brown, 2018; Lincoln, 1995). I ensured that each of these factors was met as it pertained to the participants' lived experiences and perceptions.

Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire

The Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) is a 29-item self-report scale designed to measure four primary components of aggression: anger, hostility, physical aggression, and verbal aggression (Buss & Perry, 1992). Items on the questionnaire are rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (extremely uncharacteristic of me) to 7 (extremely characteristic of me). Archer (2004) reported that because men historically

show higher levels of aggression in comparison to women, the BPAQ is a popular assessment for measuring aggression in males aged 9 to 88.

Perceived Stress Scale

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is a 10-item self-report assessment designed to measure individual stress levels to the degree that situations in a participant's life were appraised as stressful (Cohen et al., 1983). Items on the scale are scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 5 (often). According to Cohen (1994), the PSS is a widely used psychological instrument that assesses stress levels in individuals aged 12 and older, and is further designed to explore how uncontrollable, unpredictable, or overwhelming respondents find their lives to be. Questions on the PSS asked respondents to indicate their thoughts, feelings, and frustrations over the last month. The PSS was also selected for this research study to obtain a baseline stress level from participants over the last month prior to entering the study.

Credibility

Credibility is fundamental to qualitative research because it serves as the foundation of valid and reliable findings (Stahl & King, 2020). According to Stahl and King (2020), credibility also asks the question, "How congruent are the findings with reality?" Within the scope of transcendental phenomenology, credibility also safeguards against alternate experiences and perspectives that may otherwise have obscured the results of this research study, and instead reflects the true lived experiences and perceptions of adult men raised without a biological father during early childhood (Brown, 2018; Houghton et al., 2013).

To improve the credibility of this research study, I only used peer-reviewed research that was assessed for appropriateness and validity by field experts (peer debriefing). Interview questions and assessments used in the study were also screened and approved by field experts. I then synthesized a collection of data that became the basis of this study's research questions. The study's sample size for the study was based on data saturation, which was important for establishing credibility (Brown, 2018). Furthermore, following testing, the credibility of the results were ensured through a process of respondent validation, or "member checking," where I emailed participants a summarized report of their interview during the data analysis stage, with instructions to provide written or verbal feedback about the accuracy of the summary report in capturing their lived experience of growing up without a biological father.

Reliability

According to the University of Miami School of Education and Human Development (2020), reliability in qualitative research refers to the stability of responses to multiple coders of data sets. Reliability in qualitative research can be improved by providing detailed notes, using audio recording devices, and by transcribing the data into files (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; McMullin, 2021). Authenticity, confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability all lead to "trustworthiness" in a study (Brown, 2018; University of Miami School of Education and Human Development, 2020). Brown (2018) further suggests that researchers strive for "trustworthiness" in qualitative studies in place of validity and reliability. This research aimed to achieve trustworthiness in its content and accurate responses as best reported by the participants and me.

Transferability

The trustworthiness of this study was enhanced through its transferability. According to Lincoln (1995), transferability refers to the degree in which findings can be generalized to other settings or replicated by other researchers. To improve the transferability of findings, I produced a sufficient description of methodological procedures and data analysis. A thick description of comprehensive and detailed data will provide future researchers with a sufficient context of this research on father absence effects on adult men.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research is linked to reliability and transferability, and relates to the extent to which other researchers can replicate the results can replicate the results can replicate the results (Brown, 2018; Houghton et al., 2013; Tenny et al., 2022). I aimed to ensure dependability of the research by conducting a thorough collection and analysis of the data, using open-and close-ended interview questions that elicit unbiased responses, audio recordings, audit logs, and extensive notetaking. The study's audit log includes all notes and records of steps and procedures of the research. Dependability can be further ensured by providing transcripts and audit logs that give other researchers step-by-step details to replicate the study (Brown, 2018; Houghton et al., 2013).

Confirmability

Confirmability denotes the extent to which results can be justified as objective, and meet the standards of trustworthy research (Brown, 2018; Lincoln, 1995). Additionally, confirmability of qualitative data is guaranteed when data within the

research is rechecked often throughout the data collection and analysis processes, thereby further ensuring dependability that the results can likely be replicated by others (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Tenny et al., 2022). I aimed to enhance confirmability by using member checking and keeping an audit log of how I conducted the research.

Data Analysis

In this study, I used a transcendental phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of adult males who grew up without a resident biological father during the first six years of their childhood. Transcendental phenomenology (TPh) was developed by Austrian-German philosopher Dr. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) as an approach to qualitative research that sought to understand the human experience (Beyer, 2002; Brown, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Researchers utilize phenomenology when the subjective experiences and perceptions of a group of people, in this case absent-biological father adult males, are central to understanding a specific phenomenon (father absence). Transcendental phenomenology surfaces added dimensions to studying human experiences, given its abstract complexity (Moustakas, 1994; Sheehan, 2014).

I conducted structured interviews to obtain first-person experiences and perspectives of growing up without a biological father in early childhood. Using a convenient sample method, I sought to identify and recruit 14 adult males aged 18 and older who had been raised without resident biological fathers during the first six years of their lives. Interview transcripts from the participants, including audio recordings and journals, were analyzed using four guidelines for phenomenological research analysis developed by Hycner (1985) and Moustakas (1994). The four guidelines of analyzing

phenomenological data involved: (1) bracketing, (2) intuiting, (3) analyzing, and (4) describing (Greening, 2019; Moustakas, 1994).

After the transcript process was completed, audio recordings generated from the structured interviews were stored on a WD Easystore portable USB 3.0 external hard drive, and journals were stored and locked in a Vaultz locking storage clipboard. Data analysis involved coding the participant's data into themes, based on Hycner (1985) and Moustaka's (1994) guidelines for analyzing and collecting data from phenomenological research.

The first step in the data analysis, bracketing, involved setting aside any preconceived notions or opinions concerning father absence. Sanders (1982) states that during this step of data analysis, the researcher brackets out any presuppositions or biases to isolate the phenomenon in its "purest form." Bracketing is a central component of phenomenological data reduction, which is the process of reducing large amounts of data within a context into smaller units such as codes (Brown, 2018; Greening, 2019).

The next step in phenomenological data analysis was intuiting, where I became solely focused on attributing the meaning of the phenomenon (father absence) using existing research (Greening, 2019). Through the intuiting process, I provided a variance of shared, existing data that explained the problem, cause and effect, and the gap in the literature surrounding the effects of biological father absence on adult males. After intuiting the data, it was analyzed, coded, and clustered into themes that made sense of violent outcomes in adult males who experienced biological father absence during the first six years of childhood. Moustakas (1994) ascertains that persistent work in categorizing and labeling data results in the emerging "essences and universal themes" of

the researched phenomenon. I developed several categories that represented the essence of the lived experiences of adult males who grew up without a resident biological father and the adverse effects on them that led to later violent outcomes.

The fourth and most critical step of data analysis was describing the phenomenological research (Greening, 2019). In the descriptive stage, I generated a composite, narrative description of the participant's interviews to complete a final results section that best explained the correlation of themes, causes, effects, and summaries of lived experiences surrounding absent biological-father adult men. Also, the description did not rely solely on the experiences of a single participant but on the experiences that occurred among several participants in the sample group.

Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations

Delimitations

The scope of the research was delimited to adult men aged 18 and older from the Southeastern region of Washington State (Tri-Cities) who were raised without residential biological fathers, adoptive fathers, or stepfathers during the first six years of their life. This study did not delimit father absence as a result of death or incarceration because although both situations can lead to different lived experiences, it still represented the focus of this study that explored the longitudinal effects of father absence across childhood and adulthood. This study was also delimited to collecting assessment and structured interview data from adult men aged 18 and older to explore the long-term effects of father absence among men since a majority of existing research focuses on women and the mother-child relationship (Cabrera et al., 2018). It was expected that

structured interviews would produce sufficiently trustworthy data that could provide a deep understanding of the participants' lived experiences.

Assumptions

This research first assumed that participants would be truthful and detailed in their responses on assessments and during the structured interviews. Due to the topic's sensitivity, biological father absence, it was expected that some participants may have experienced apprehension in sharing their thoughts and feelings during the interviews. However, I aimed to establish a safe and therapeutic environment to encourage participants to candidly discuss their personal experiences and thoughts on father absence outcomes. I also emphasized the importance of keeping data confidential and untraceable.

The second assumption was that the assessments and structured interviews would sufficiently capture the participants' lived experiences growing up with or without a resident biological father. I anticipated that the assessments and structured interviews would provide fruitful and detailed responses relevant to adult men and their relationship status with a resident biological father.

Third, the research was based on the assumption that adult men experienced violent tendencies and outcomes as a result of not growing up with a residential biological father. Additionally, it was presumed that the participants who displayed violent tendencies were as such not because of neurological issues (CTE or TBI) or preexisting mental health disorders (e.g., anxiety, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, intermittent explosive disorder).

Limitations

As mentioned in chapter one, the first limitations of this research study are that sealed legal records and data related to criminal cases or violent incidents that proved violent outcomes were not accessible unless it was already public information. Without verifiable records, participant data would become solely subjective (Tempelaar et al., 2020). The study's sample size and focus was also limited to only males aged 18 and older from the Tri-Cities area of Southeastern Washington state, which is further limited to the reviewed studies. Additionally, if participants shared their responses by phone, it might not have captured the full impact of father absence on the participant and their perspectives or feelings surrounding growing up without a present biological father.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to explore the lived experiences of adult males raised in absent biological father homes, and the long-term effects and violent outcomes that result from father absence. A qualitative approach was appropriate for exploring and gaining deep insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of participants who had absent biological fathers during at least the first six years of their lives (Brown, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

The sample consisted of 14 adult males aged 18 and older who had absent biological fathers during at least the first six years of their life. The rationale for the sample size was based on data saturation, which was vital to establishing the study's credibility, reliability, transferability, and overall trustworthiness (Brown, 2018; Lincoln, 1995). Data was collected using assessments and structured one-on-one private interviews. The collected data was stored securely and analyzed across four phases of

phenomenological research developed by Hycner (1985) and Moustakas (1994).

Delimitations, assumptions, and limitations were also highlighted. The following chapter will include the presentation of descriptive results of testing and data analysis and findings supported by direct quotes from the participants in the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to explore the lived experiences of adult men raised in absent biological father homes between birth and at least age six, and the subsequent developmental effects and violent adverse outcomes on them as adults. The main objective of this study was to explore how the absence of a biological father during early childhood is connected to the formation of attachment styles, aggressive behaviors, violent tendencies, and the overall psychological functioning of adult men across early childhood and adulthood. A concurrent transcendental approach helped to highlight the subjective experiences and memories of the participants to uncover perspectives, rationales, and justifications for their responses. Five research questions were used to guide the study's data collection process:

R.Q. 1: What are the lived experiences of adult men who grew up without a biological father during early childhood?

R.Q. 2: How does father absence during early childhood affect attachment styles in adult men?

R.Q. 3: What psychological implications does father absence have on males across early childhood and adulthood?

R.Q. 4: What are the experiences of father-absent adult men involved in violence?

R.Q. 5: How do adult men view the relationship between childhood father absence and violence in adulthood?

Descriptive Results

Demographics

The sample included 14 adult men from Southeastern Washington state whose biological fathers were nonresident and absent during the participants' early childhood (ages birth to 6) due to either death, divorce, incarceration, migration, separation, or other causes. Additionally, only one of the participants reported also having an absent mother, and a majority of the participants reported inheriting a stepfather or adoptive father after the age of seven. No organizational or personal conditions influenced participants or their interview experience that may affect the interpretation of the results.

A summary of each participant's experience is as follows:

Jack

Jack reported being absent of his biological father as both an infant and adolescent up until his high school graduation when his biological father unexpectedly showed up for the first time in his life. Prior to his high school graduation, he had no memory of ever seeing his biological father and grew up in a household with a single mother and cousin who also did not have a biological father. As a child, Jack recalled often feeling confused, isolated, and "always different compared to others," yet he also believed it was normal that his biological father was not around. Despite having a father figure in his stepfather at the age of 10, Jack still grew up feeling "broken" and "capable of hurting others and destroying lives," just like his biological father. As a teen and young adult, Jack found it difficult to trust others and to be committed, and therefore he struggled to form and maintain close relationships. Jack never achieved closure with his biological father as an adult, and he is convinced that his father's absence has had a long-

lasting negative effect on his ability to form secure relationships, regulate his emotions, make good decisions, and be a present father himself.

Xavier

Xavier described his early childhood as “Norman Rockwell-ish” but with “less boy stuff.” He lived with his mother, who was still married to his biological father, but his father was predominantly stationed at sea on an aircraft carrier and deployed several times as a member of the United States Navy. Xavier said that according to his mother, during his formative years as an infant and adolescent, his biological father’s relationship with him was very “touch and go,” and to this day, Xavier’s earliest recollection of spending “actual” time with his biological father was not until age 8. Growing up, he felt anxious and “very unsure” of his life, and frequently wondered whether he was doing things the right way. As a young adolescent and adult, he missed his biological father’s readily available support and advice, particularly when it came to forming secure relationships, decision-making, managing his aggression and anxiety, and learning how to be a man and father. His biological father retired from the Navy when he was age 13, but even then, throughout the years, it was a “condescending relationship” in the way that when he asked his father for support or advice, his father would say things like, “you should know this.” At the time of the interview, Xavier stated that he still does not have a positive or engaging relationship with his biological father.

Sean

Sean grew up without any involvement from his biological father and lived only with his older siblings and a single mother who was always working.

His childhood was described as “interesting” but also “normal,” given it was the only

perspective on life that he had. He grew up living with siblings who were also absent of their biological father. He had a very loving and hard-working mother, but felt that for many of his early childhood years, he and his siblings were missing “oversight.” Sean characterized his household growing up as “dysfunctional” but added that despite missing direction and guidance in his early life, he did not think much about his father’s absence, even after his passing, and later understood exactly why his parents were not compatible with each other. Sean did not feel like his ability to socialize and form secure relationships was affected by his biological father’s absence. Sean felt like he still had typical developmental milestones to work through from time to time but did not think or feel that he ever struggled with aggression, anxiety, decision-making, or staying out of trouble. Sean stated that his successful outcome as an adult and parent was a testament to his mother, who was a dual parental figure to him.

Allen

As an adolescent, Allen struggled with the absence of his biological father. His early childhood was described as “tough,” growing up with a single mother who was always working. He was mainly watched over by his grandfather, uncle, and other male figures, such as his older cousins, but he felt like he was resented and ostracized for not having a biological father in the home. Over the years, Allen found it difficult to form close, secure relationships and often “drifted” to other groups or people for praise and attention. Allen struggled with his aggression, anxiety, depression, and self-harm. Allen became involved with the “wrong crowds” and got into trouble, which affected his relationship with his mother. He felt that if he had a father figure during his early life, he would have been better able to learn how to express and regulate his emotions, form

bonds with “the right people,” and make good decisions. Allen never formed a successful relationship with his biological father.

Jim

Growing up, Jim firmly believed that it was in God’s plans not to have his biological father actively in his life. Because of his belief, Jim described his childhood upbringing as being “different than most.” At the time of the interview, Jim had just learned within the prior days that his mother removed his biological father from their home sometime within the first two years of his life because he was “abusive” and had a serious drug problem. Throughout his childhood, Jim tried to make sense of his father’s absence and often asked himself questions like, “why didn’t he want me?” Although he grew up in a faith-based community, Jim still struggled at times during his adolescence and adulthood with forming close romantic relationships, feelings of abandonment, aggression, anxiety, and not feeling accepted. However, the most challenging aspects of his life were mitigated by having a strong religious faith and stepfather who adopted him at a young age. Jim attributes being able to stay out of trouble to his stepfather’s guidance and presence in the home. Jim took his personal lived experiences growing up without a biological father as a motivation to be more like his stepfather and to break the cycle of father abandonment by being present at all times for his wife and children.

Joshua

Growing up, Joshua was absent of both a biological mother and father. However, the experience of growing up without a biological father was much more impactful, according to Joshua. Joshua expressed feeling neglected and not cared for from a young age. During middle school, Joshua learned that his father had a separate family, so he did

not believe having a father-son relationship was possible because he already had “his own family.” He frequently thought about the absence of his biological father and asked himself questions such as, “why wasn’t I good enough to stick around for?” and “why didn’t he love me?” Before his father’s eventual passing, his father had asked to meet with him only to tell him that he could not be his father, but he was willing to “be friends.” From then on, coupled with his biological mother’s absence, Joshua felt like his life was in his own hands now. Joshua struggled with trusting others and forming close, secure relationships, and instead secluded and isolated himself from others.

Joshua did not feel that he struggled with aggression and staying out of trouble, but in hindsight believed that it was better not to have a relationship with his biological father because he would have taught him to hurt others just like his father did to him and his siblings. As a result of growing up on survival and not love, Joshua buried himself in his work and academics to create a stable and safe environment for his infant daughter and girlfriend.

Edward

Edward characterized his childhood as a “free range” of independence. His biological father has been incarcerated for his entire childhood and adult life. Although his mother was around, he felt like he did not have much of any structure. Edward grew resentment and anger towards his father but projected his emotions onto others over the years. Edward kept close friends and partners, but rejected the support and attention of anyone that was an adult or authoritative figure. He pushed certain people away, and got in with the wrong crowd. Edward struggled with depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety,

and loneliness.

Edward had a negative outlook on life and often thought to himself, “what’s the point?” as he went on to make decisions that ultimately had him incarcerated numerous times between the ages of 13 and 20. At the time of this interview, Edward stated that he had over 39 charges on his legal record and still battled with bouts of anxiety, anger, and depression up until six years ago when he found his significant other and began working through his emotions. In the days leading up to the interview, Edward had found out that his biological father was finally being released from prison but that he would not be visiting with him or his siblings and instead going straight to another state. Edward believed that if his biological father had been a healthy and active parental figure in his life, he would have potentially been able to avoid serving in prison for over seven years and perhaps graduated high school and gone to college instead.

Ricardo

The absence of Ricardo’s biological father left a big impact on his life as he was also absent of a mother. Raised by his elderly grandmother, Ricardo and his siblings still felt isolated and alone without biological parents as they watched other kids around them have a close and active relationship with their parents. His grandmother did her best to fill both roles as a parent, but as the oldest child, he also had to look to others for guidance on how to be a man. Ricardo recalled looking up on the internet how to do things such as shave, bake, tie a tie, make friends, and talk to girls. Feeling uncertain and isolated, he struggled with relationships and felt scared to go to anyone else for support or help with decision-making.

Over time, Ricardo battled with depression and suicidal ideation, but one major

factor that kept him alive was when he had to assume guardianship of his younger sister and her child after she gave birth at age 15. After also losing his younger brother, Ricardo felt angry with everyone, including his absent father and God. He continued to struggle with his anger, depression, anxiety, and decision-making as he got older. Ricardo felt that growing up, having a present biological father or authority figure would have been “the greatest gift” because he and his siblings would have had protection, stability, guidance, and perhaps they would have been better off as adults. Ricardo still hopes to be able to meet his biological father someday.

Steve

Steve’s single mother hid and distracted him and his brother from their biological father, who was not involved in his early childhood life. “I didn’t ask many questions,” said Steve, but from time to time, Steve still felt his biological father’s absence when he struggled in certain areas of his life, such as school, sports, and other “manly stuff.” His stepfather entered his life around the age of 12 and became his “number one supporter.” Once his stepfather was in his life, he claimed to have not thought much about his biological father, but when he was 16, his biological father moved to Washington state and revealed to Steve that he had been diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). Despite the news of his diagnosis, Steve felt conflicted and thought that after his biological father had missed so much time in his life, perhaps he did not deserve the opportunity to have a relationship with him, considering he had already done so much in his life without his support.

Steve’s biological father passed in 2020, and although he did not have an active and engaged relationship with him, he still felt himself “shut down” and began to isolate

from others and keep people at “arm’s length.” Steve acknowledged that he struggled with depression, grief, anxiety, forming secure relationships, trusting others, and making the best decisions for himself. His mother and stepfather helped him to understand later why his biological father was gone during his early childhood and to process his feelings of grief and abandonment. Looking back, Steve wished that his stepfather would have been the one to have always been a part of his life instead of his biological father. “It would have been a completely different situation if my mom had not met and married my stepdad,” said Steve.

Jensen

Jensen described his experience as a child without a biological father as being “my mom and me against the world.” Jensen relied greatly on his mother because he felt that for much of his time growing up, he was more feminine and took after her, but as a result was also ostracized by other males for being “in touch with his feelings.” He later learned that his biological father had taken his own life when he was an adolescent. Without a male parental figure in his life, he drew comparisons to others and grew resentment and anger toward his father for not being around. Over the years, Jensen eventually found some closure in his biological father’s passing, which helped draw him closer to God; however, he “dove” into intimate, close relationships and yearned for constant closeness and connection. Jensen struggled with boundaries and “catering to others” in order to maintain close relationships, particularly with his previous partner. By learning to put himself first, he was able to have a good handle on his emotions and temperament in adulthood. In retrospect, Jensen felt like growing up without a biological

father caused him to miss the opportunity to learn confidence and assertiveness as a man.

Roger

Roger described his childhood without a biological father as “confusing” and “unfair.” His single mother was always working and in retrospect, “did her best,” but there were still times when he could not help but question why he did not have a present biological father. Roger stated that for the majority of his adolescence, his mother avoided his questions about his father and so he grew to feel abandoned, rejected, and different compared to other children his age. Even after his stepfather entered their life at the age of 8, he refused to accept any type of father or authoritative figure in his life. Throughout his life, Roger felt that he had struggled with what he described as “deep-rooted” anger. He also found it extremely difficult to keep close relationships, make safe decisions for himself, manage his anger and anxiety, and have a healthy self-esteem. Roger was never violent toward others or animals but he felt he had violent capabilities and also made several bad decisions that got him incarcerated for a brief period of time. Roger now attends therapy to work on his deficiencies, which he attributes to his biological father’s absence as a child. Roger still has not met his biological father or his side of the family, and does not have any plans to.

Hector

Looking back, Hector felt as if he did not understand any of his childhood. He stated that his mother never wanted to explain his biological father’s absence and avoided his questions about him. “Apparently, he didn’t live too far from us,” said Hector. Hector grew up in a “close-knit” community where the kids and parents were very much into sporting events. As a child, he remembered seeing other kids’ fathers come to their game

and wondering if his father would someday show up as well. Although his mother was hardworking and did her best in a dual parental role, Hector still struggled with accepting that his biological father did not want to be in his life. Hector recalled trying to reach out to him several times, but after several years of not receiving a response, he moved on and “never looked back.” He eventually met his stepfather, who became his “biggest supporter.” “I cast him out of my life by the time I got into high school. My stepdad, that’s my dad. Not that other guy. Fuck him.”

Hector struggled to be committed in his relationships and engaged in numerous risky behaviors. Hector also recalled drinking excessively to the point where he got into various fights and risky situations that nearly got him expelled and incarcerated. Hector later had his own kids after high school and now uses his past experiences as a motivation to break the cycle of father absence in his family.

Nicholas

Nicholas saw his early childhood without a biological father as “normal.” In his eyes, his mother and grandmother were the only sources of parental figures that he needed throughout his life. He knew that growing up, he did not have a present biological father, and although he occasionally encountered comparisons to other kids with two parents, he chose not to think about his absent father and instead leaned more into his relationship with the women in his life. He became a father at the early age of 17 with his high school sweetheart, and although he admitted not knowing how to be a father at such a young age, his mother was his biggest support and role model. Nicholas did not feel that he ever struggled to form bonds or regulate his emotions. Nicholas also never had violent experiences or got into trouble. He attributes all of his success to his mother, who

he believes gave him all of the guidance and support that he needed.

Jason

Jason grew up with a single mother for the first six years of his life until she met his stepfather. Although his parents separated before he was born, he claims that it was difficult growing up without a biological father, especially for his mother, who worked tirelessly in dual parental roles. As a young man, he never questioned not being able to see his biological father; he just knew that he was “away.” After age six, he learned that his biological father lived on the opposite side of the state. He began seeing his biological father around 3 to 4 times a year and saw it as a “holiday” when he was able to visit him. His long-distance relationship with his biological father was complicated because he was able to call him frequently, but he struggled to accept that he could not have his father there or see him when he needed him. He later accepted that his biological father was never going to be ready to be a present father because of his inability to commit to Jason. Much like with his biological father, Jason wanted relationships that would be close to him, but even then, he still struggled to trust the people who said they would be there for him in his life. Jason also felt that he used to struggle with emotions such as anger, anxiety, and sadness. Looking back, Jason was grateful to have had his stepfather in the home during his adolescence. When he later became a father himself, he felt motivated to be a stronger role model to his children.

Composite Summary of Participants’ Experiences

Participants’ lived experiences of growing up with an absent biological father was characterized by emotional distress, developmental delays, attachment issues, and problematic behaviors. The majority of participants reported having grown up in a single-

parent home with a mother who was single or separated for at least the first six years of their childhood and who was always working in order to sustain their household.

Although initially considered normal for the participants to be without a father figure, they drew negative comparisons to other children with actively engaged fathers.

Participants also described feeling confused, uncertain, different, and ostracized within their environments.

Participants reported that during their early childhood, they had felt uncertain about what the absence of their biological fathers meant and that this had resulted in feelings of abandonment, rejection, anger, and in most cases, low self-worth and suicidal ideation. As adults, none of the participants were able or willing to form positive, secure relationships with their biological fathers; however, most were able to find some form of closure by coming to an understanding of their father's absence as a result of substance abuse, conflict with their biological mothers, incarceration, illness, death, or irresponsibility. A majority of participants reported that their biological father's absence strongly influenced their emotional dysregulation, inability to form early secure attachments, their history of aggression or violent behaviors, and shaped their patterns of decision-making. Lastly, participants were divided about whether their adolescent and adult lives would have been better given the quality and type of biological father they had, or if they could have had healthier, positive lives and stayed out of trouble.

Study Findings

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of adult men who grew up without a biological father during early childhood?

Themes related to participants' lived experiences included growing up in a single-mother household, being absent of fatherly love, and drawing negative comparisons to other children with active and engaged fathers.

Single-mother household

Twelve out of 14 participants described living in a single-mother household where their mother was "always working." The only exceptions were participants Joshua and Ricardo, who grew up in homes absent of both their biological father and mother; however, all 14 participants expressed feeling like they lacked structure and guidance very early on and for several years of their childhood.

Participant Sean described his earliest known experience of growing up with a working single mother of five and no resident biological father as being "interesting" and "dysfunctional." Being the youngest by seven years, he recalled often being watched over by a babysitter and his older siblings because his single mother was always working long shifts. He added that although he had a hardworking-loving mother, at such a young age, he was known for being "footloose" and had a "huge amount of independence" as a result of not having consistent parental oversight. It became a serious issue when it got to the point where he regularly could not be found by anyone after school.

Participant Jason felt his experience growing up in a single mother household was tough and difficult, but also "normal" to him because, at the time, he did not know what he was missing. "She was all I had, and in retrospect, I was very much so a 'momma's

boy,” said Jason. He added that his single mother was always working a full-time job and needed a lot of help with him. Jason acknowledged that his mother worked very hard to provide for him and tried her best to fill a dual parental role in his early life.

Participant Hector remembered he and his sister being raised by their single mother. “We always asked about him and he apparently didn’t live too far, but our mom would always just say that he wasn’t around,” said Hector. He was heavily involved in sports growing up, thanks to his mother, but he would see other children his age with two parents and thought, “where is mine at?”

I remember asking about him a lot and asking what he looked like. My mom said I looked just like him, but that just made it worse haha. I felt abandoned for sure. I was the only kid I knew, besides my sister, who lived with just his mom.

Participant Allen felt his early childhood growing up with a single-mother was “tough.” Allen was watched over primarily by his uncle, who he began to view as a father figure over the years, but his uncle was later deported to his home country. After his uncle’s deportation, he felt lonely and isolated within his home, given that his mother was always working.

Participant Roger recalled his childhood without a present biological father as being “confusing” and “unfair.” Although he felt his single mother did her best to support him and meet his needs, he felt lonely without a male figure in his life. Roger remembered being watched over by various individuals, such as his grandfather, his uncle, his aunt, and their neighbors. Missing guidance and having little to no parental oversight, Roger would often stray from their home and school. “I remember walking out of school a bunch of times and not seeing anyone chase after me or go looking for me,”

said Roger. When asked where he would go, or if he would leave school to go home, he said:

I would just keep walking around neighborhoods. My mom would have the neighbors walk me to school in the mornings because she went to work early, but she or the neighbors never picked me up or walked me back home so after a while I wondered what was the point? And no, I didn't go home because it was locked and my mom was always gone anyways. I would eventually go home when I knew she was home from work.

Absent fatherly love

Nine out of the 14 participants emphasized feeling absent of fatherly love for a majority of their childhood and still in adulthood. Eight of the 14 participants had stepfathers by the time they turned seven, but they still reported feeling abandoned, unloved, and angry about their biological fathers not being a part of their lives.

When asked interview questions pertaining to his understanding of his biological father's absence, participant Nicholas just replied, "I just knew I didn't have one (biological father)." Nicholas added:

For me, if you don't grow up with a father figure, it just becomes a normal part of your life. I had buddies that obviously had both parents, and I guess that's nice. It would have been nice to have.

Nicholas became a father at the young age of 17 and remembered feeling like he had to "grow up pretty fast." Having no initial first-hand knowledge of how to love and build an attachment with child, Nicholas relied on other father figures around him to teach him how to be a "guide." Nicholas was grateful for the adult men around him in his life, such

as his friend's fathers and coaches, who were positive examples, but Nicholas felt like he was still trying to learn how to be a father today.

Participant Xavier often questioned his father's absence, but over time, he made sense of his absence and better understood why he had to be gone; however, Xavier still yearned for his father's love and approval. "I never heard him say I am proud of you or I love you," said Xavier. Despite his mother's best attempts to meet his needs, Xavier often wondered why one of the two people that were supposed to want him the most did not.

Participant Joshua grew up without a resident mother and father, but he felt arguably more neglected by his biological father at a young age. "I wondered why wasn't I good enough to stick around for. Why didn't he love me?" Joshua eventually met his biological father as a teenager after he had been emancipated, but he learned that his father already had a separate family with other children whom he was present for. During their meeting, his father told him, "we can be friends, but I can't be your dad." The feeling of being unworthy of his father's love grew worse, but Joshua came to terms within himself that a relationship and love from his biological father was not going to be possible for either one of them. "We could never be a family because he already had a family," said Joshua. His biological father passed away when he turned 20, leaving a void in his need to be loved by a father.

For participant Jason, although his mother eventually met his stepfather, growing up he felt neglected and abandoned by his biological father, who lived on the opposite side of the state with his own family. Growing up, Jason did not initially question his biological father's absence, but over the years began to ask his mother questions such as, "why did you have me?" and "why wasn't he ready to commit and be a father?" Now as

an adult, Jason believed he understood his relationship with his biological father for what it was. Jason called himself a “result of one college party that went way too well” and felt like his biological father was “down to keep him, but not necessarily down for being father.”

Negative comparisons to other children with active fathers

Eight out of 14 participants recalled drawing negative comparisons during their early childhood to other children around them who had active and engaged fathers. Five of the eight participants described spending the majority of their time with their mothers, and added that they developed more “feminine characteristics” in comparison to other boys with two parents. All eight participants collectively felt confused, different, unsure, and ostracized from other boys when they were younger.

Participant Jack did not initially see any abnormalities in his childhood growing up without a biological father because he lived with a male cousin who was also absent of his father. “It was normal that my dad wasn’t there,” said Jack. As he became older, he felt confused and “always different to people.” Jack added that aside from others having a present father, they had common knowledge, social skills, guidance, and direction that he did not have. “I didn’t have the substance to realize how important a father was.”

Ricardo was the second participant to be raised with both a biological mother and father but felt an arguably greater impact and disappointment from his father’s absence. As a child, Ricardo would watch other children his age and wondered why he was not able to also to “father-and-son-like” things. “I felt isolated, like I was in a shell,” said Ricardo. He craved the attention and love of a father just like that which he saw around him. He struggled to make connections with males and instead connected better with

females.

Jensen described his childhood as being “my mom and me against the world.” Being without his biological father, he relied heavily on his mother, who was caring, nurturing, and expressive of her feelings by nature. “I definitely felt like there was a time in my life that I was more feminine than normal. Like, more feminine than guys in my class were.” Jensen added that he felt ostracized for being “in touch with his feelings” and not as competitive or aggressive in youth baseball as his male peers. Participant Steve uttered similar thoughts and feelings about being very close with his mother and described how confusing and frustrating it was for him as an adolescent to be negatively compared to other teammates on his baseball team who had present fathers at their games.

Participant Allen felt it was tough on him to be compared to other children his age who had male figures in their lives. Allen recalled seeing and hearing others make side remarks toward him about not having a father, such as, “at least I know my dad” and “that’s why your dad left.” Allen added, “so then you see the others with their dads and think, yo, where’s my dad?” Allen’s father’s absence impacted particularly more during the holidays because, as the first born, he often wondered if his father was even thinking about him. Growing up he also felt ostracized by other boys his age, including his cousins, who were able to do things such as have sleepovers at their friend’s homes but always left him out of their plans.

Research Question 2: How does father absence during early childhood affect attachment styles in adult men?

Eleven out of 14 participants self-reported signs and confirmation of having an attachment style other than secure. Four participants reported having an avoidant attachment style (dismissive), three participants reported having an anxious attachment style (fearful), and four participants reported having a disorganized style of attachment (mixed fearful-avoidant). The only exceptions were three participants who felt they were not affected by their abilities to form attachments and also reported that they had secure bonds with their partners, children, and friends.

Avoidant Attachment

At an early age, Jim felt he often struggled with his biological father's absence despite his mother's and grandmother's best efforts to protect him. The effects of his father's absence were evident when he recalled a time when he asked himself questions such as, "why didn't he want me?" Jim also struggled with frustrations and fears of abandonment or rejection throughout his life but found some security and support from his strong religious faith and stepfather after he entered his life. Jim's stepfather later adopted him, so he chose to stop associating his biological father with being absent because, to Jim, for all intents and purposes, his stepfather was his father. Jim had connections with his immediate family members, friends, and church-goers but was reportedly never interested in close-intimate relationships to avoid being abandoned or rejected. His first "long-term" relationship was not until the end of high school, but before that any relationships with other women lasted only an average of 2-3 weeks. "If anything bugged me, I was out," said Jim. Jim married his girlfriend when he was an

adult but experienced abandonment again when his wife one day abruptly left him and moved to another state while he was away for work. After a number of years, Jim remarried and now has a comforting wife and stepchildren, but he continues to work through unresolved feelings of anger, abandonment, and rejection stemming from his biological father's absence and previous marriage.

As a young adult, Joshua avoided close, secure relationships and kept people at a distance, or "arm's length." After his biological father abandoned him for a separate family, Joshua found it difficult to trust and allow others to get close to him, including his biological mother whom he also had an estranged relationship with. Joshua associated relationships with betrayal and felt like he then always had to protect himself wherever he went in his life. "There came a point when I began to tell myself, 'I don't need him and I can be better without you.'" As the years went on, Joshua felt that people had "hidden motives" and questioned why people would ever want to get close to him. When asked what he felt contributed to his anxiety in his current relationships, Joshua said:

I can't fully let my guard down because he scarred me. A lot of my trust issues stem from family. So, it's like, if my family can do me like that, then what's stopping you?

Participant Steve was also someone who kept people at "arm's length," and at the time of the interview, he felt like he did so more now as an adult than he did before in his childhood. Steve grew up feeling like attachment and affection was never reciprocated toward him, despite having a close relationship with his mother. Steve struggled intermittently with his biological father's absence during his childhood but recalled feeling like he "really shut down" after then learning that his father passed away from

amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). “After that, I didn’t trust anyone enough and I wasn’t going to put myself in a friendship or relationship that someone doesn’t want to be a part of with me,” said Steve. In college, Steve pushed people away and expected them to leave from the beginning, so he started withdrawing and isolating himself from others.

Participant Ricardo was another person who felt “shut down” and weary of who he spoke to or allowed to be close to him as a result of experiencing an early biological father absence. Ricardo believed that a present biological father in his life could have been “the greatest gift” because he would have helped him learn “how to be a man” and talk to other people, but he stated that instead, he grew up feeling isolated and scared to connect with others. Ricardo already had a low self-worth and struggled to form connections with males, but unfortunately, did not fare much better with females. When asked if he had any past or current concerns about his relationships, Ricardo said:

It took a lot for me to trust someone and to know what their intentions were. I feel like I’m still scared to jump into something that’s going to take commitment. I’m older now and I think I should settle down and do this and that, but I feel like I just don’t know how to do it. I don’t know how to be in a relationship. I question myself and think ‘why does she like me?’, ‘what does she see in me?’, ‘like, why me? You know?’ I’d rather just, as dumb as it sounds, be alone and not have to worry about those emotions.

Anxious Attachment

Participant Xavier described feeling afraid to lose friends or upset them, but when it came to romantic relationships, he hoped he would always have “someone” that he could go and spend time with. Xavier referenced watching older sitcoms that depicted

close father-son relationships and observing how boys would go to their fathers for advice about girls and life in general. However, fearful of experiencing more abandonment and rejection in his life, Xavier grew up feeling unsure of himself and did not know how to form those “solid” relationships, especially when he did not have a secure relationship with his biological father.

I grew up trying to prove to myself and to him that I was worth sticking around for, but I was never good enough. Even when I thought I did well enough, I was never good enough. I want to be with someone who feels I am worth sticking around for. I guess I’m still hoping for that perfect relationship.

Participant Edward expressed having anxiety about being alone as a child and adult. “It has a little bit to do with him (biological father) being gone because he could have taught me about life and what a man’s role was in a family,” said Edward. Edward found himself trying to connect with anyone who would want to be around him. Edward kept a close circle of friends and partners because he felt that he always wanted to be around “happy” people, or anyone that would be willing to accept or help him; however, he resented and rejected adults and authoritative figures. Participant Nicholas was also someone who felt that he always needed people to be close to him. “I always wanted someone to be close. That’s what a dad is supposed to do. In fact, I show more love to my kids than my wife,” said Nicholas.

Participant Jensen was someone who described having anxiety about his relationships as an adult. Jensen felt that he longed for unconditional love and acceptance, so he “dove” into intimate relationships sooner because he was also “more emotional” than others. Jensen acknowledged at times being a “people pleaser” and

“letting the world run over him” to prevent others from leaving him, which he attributed to growing up without a biological father.

Disorganized Attachment

Participant Jack stated that growing up, and as an adult, there were always times that he wanted someone to be close, yet also at a distance from him. Jack further clarified that his unbalanced needs for both connection and distance affected his immediate family members, friends, and romantic relationships. Jack found it difficult to trust others and to be committed to one romantic partner. “I was never able to fully open up to anybody or be monogamous,” said Jack. If he was ever in a relationship or felt he was becoming close with someone, Jack described doing several self-destructive behaviors that would end things between them. He also added that he knew he manipulated others for his self gain. “Whatever I wanted from someone, I would receive that, but then I would fight against it,” said Jack.

Participant Roger was also someone who became later aware that he had a distorted view on close, intimate relationships. Roger spoke about the uncertainty of his relationships with others by saying:

Growing up I really wanted to be in a healthy relationship, but once I got older and after I had been in a few relationships already, I realized that I didn't actually know what I wanted. I never had someone to teach me how to be good to someone. Looking back I guess I didn't even know what a healthy relationship looked like. I'd get into a relationship and it would be going good, and it would be with a nice girl, but then I'd find myself either feeling bored or not trusting them so then I'd want to go talk to someone else instead. Or like, I'd hurt them

emotionally because I felt like they hurt me first. It was crazy that I even felt that way considering I didn't even think very highly of myself. I feel awful though that I ruined a lot of good relationships. Who knows if one of them could have been a really good thing, you know? I guess I'd just get what I wanted from the relationship and then I'd want to leave, but I honestly didn't know I was doing that most of the time.

As an adult, participant Allen described "drifting" to other people for praise and attention, even when he had a close, intimate relationship with someone. Allen said:

I always wanted someone to be close, but I felt like I couldn't commit. It's gonna sound bad, but it's like got what I needed, and then I lost interest. I'd just continue with my life. There was a lot of girls who were good to me and cared about me, but I didn't realize it until I got older. I'd be like, 'damn I missed out on a good one.

Despite feeling unsure of his needs, Allen knew he had chronic anxiety about being abandoned again by someone close to him. After his biological father left and his closest uncle was deported, Allen believed that "everyone just leaves."

Participant Hector stated that he struggled to be committed in his relationships as a teenager and young adult and instead got what he wanted sexually out of the relationship before moving on to someone else. "I was a real player in high school, haha. I never wanted anything serious, just to mess around and leave. I didn't want to let people close to me, but I wanted to be liked. After awhile, I realized I wanted kids and to settle down," said Hector.

Research Question 3: What psychological implications does father absence have on males across early childhood and adulthood?

Themes related to psychological implications of father absence on participants included a propensity for aggression and hostility, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation, emotional instability, and lack of empathy and oppositional defiance.

Aggression and Hostility

Eleven out of 14 participants self-reported struggling with elevated levels of aggression and a propensity for hostility toward others. The only exceptions were participants Sean, Jensen, and Nicholas, who claimed they did not struggle with anger or hostility towards others as a result of growing up without a biological father.

Participant Xavier recalled that he was a “fairly aggressive child” and that his aggressive behaviors carried throughout high school. “I resorted to choosing violence,” said Xavier. He added that most of the time, it did not take much for him to be “set over the edge.” Xavier did not see himself as being aggressive or hostile toward others or animals but acknowledged he was destructive towards property because it gave him a “sense of relief.” Participant Jim was also someone who believed he was never physical toward others, especially women, but felt that his “deep sorrow” and “deep-seeded” anger from being abandoned by his biological father influenced him to be aggressive towards property or objects and “blow up over little things.”

Participant Jack described feeling “a lot of things” as an adolescent growing up without a biological father.

Not having a father made me hurt animals when I was younger. Now I could never do it, but when I was younger, I used to cut the legs off of toads and then

throw them back in the water and stuff, and do some really fucked up shit to things that were smaller than me.

Jack resented himself for the pain he believed he was able to cause to anything or anyone innocent but he struggled to stop himself from acting out aggressively. Jack added that as a teenager, he frequently had “dangerous thoughts” and felt that he could have easily seen himself becoming a “school shooter” or murderer, given he was also bullied and had access to firearms.

Participant Edward stated that his biological father’s absence “definitely made me an angry kid growing up.” “I was a mad kid,” said Edward. He did not know how to express his anger and it got him into trouble later on in life. Edward added:

I didn’t know how to express my feelings in a non-negative way. When I would get mad as a kid, I would get into a lot of fights. I still get mad. I get mad a lot actually, but now I have a lot more self control compared to when I was a kid.

Participant Roger felt that he has always had a “deep-rooted” anger that scared him and others growing up.

I was always ready to be angry. I’d even make myself angry sometimes. Other people could see it too because sometimes they were afraid of me. I took out my anger on others, and it definitely made it hard to make friends, but I felt like I couldn’t help it.

Although he claimed never to have been intensely violent toward others, Roger recalled getting into various schoolyard fights as a teenager and often wanting to “unleash hell” on anyone and anything whenever he began to feel angry. Despite such a strong-willed feeling of aggression and hostility toward others, Roger also wrestled with the feeling

that, deep down, his mother had raised him to be a “gentle person.” Unfortunately, according to Roger, he realized over the years that the absence of his biological father left a long-lasting feeling of resentment and pain from his abandonment.

Anxiety

Seven out of 14 participants reported struggling with anxiety throughout their childhood and adulthood. Only four out of the seven reporting participants felt that their biological father’s absence influenced their anxiety. However, all seven felt that anxiety and fear of abandonment lingered throughout other relationships and experiences in their lives.

Participant Xavier felt that growing up, he experienced anxiety “twenty-five hours a day, eight days a week.” From a young age, Xavier always felt “very unsure” of himself and nervously questioned whether he did things the right way or made good decisions. Xavier claimed that he struggled with his anxiety just as much when his father was gone as when his father was home later in his childhood. “He always expected me to know things even though he was never around to bestow ‘life’s nuggets of wisdom’ on me.” Xavier stated that throughout his childhood and adulthood, he often questioned several aspects of his life, such as his relationships, decision-making, academics, work ethic, and self-worth. “I had no assurance, no outlet, and no rubber wall. I didn’t have another male figure to learn from or exchange ideas with growing up,” said Xavier. Up until four years ago, Xavier continued to struggle with the same anxiety and stressors as when he was growing up, but since then turned it into a motivation to become the best father he can be for his daughters. Xavier added:

So can I blame him? I could, maybe. Wouldn’t do me any good. Can I say it’s the

cause and effect of my anxiety? Not definitively, but I can say he's definitely a variable that played a part in things that happened in my life. Absolutely.

Participant Hector stated that he struggled with anxiety more early on than he did now as an adult, but he also felt as if he could never let anyone else see it (anxiety). "I didn't know what I was doing a lot of the time and it made me super anxious. But I couldn't let anyone else know that. I had to look like I knew what I was doing even though I was panicking on the inside," said Hector. Hector added:

I still get pretty anxious sometimes, but that's because I deal with stupid people. I don't have the patience for it. It still takes me a little bit to calm down, but when I was younger, my anxiety was a lot worse.

Depression and Suicidal Ideation

Ten out of 14 participants reported struggling with depression throughout their childhood and adulthood in connection with their biological father's absence. Four of the 10 reporting participants also self-reported having had a history of suicidal ideation with intent and a plan to harm themselves fatally.

Participant Steve felt that his biological father's absence and passing made him "completely shut down" as a young adult. Steve described always wearing his "heart on his sleeve," but after his biological father's passing, he internalized his feelings of depression and grief because he also did not want anyone's pity or fake "I'm sorry's." "After that, I just kept everything bottled inside, and that's when I just kind of, turned off my emotions on the outside," said Steve.

Participant Allen believed he had always struggled with depression as a child and stated he still did as an adult. What began as sadness about his biological father's

abandonment, over the years, turned into jealousy and resentment that left him feeling different from others, including his family. “I felt like my family didn’t want me around,” said Allen. “It was bad enough that my own dad didn’t want me.” Allen resorted to isolating and internalizing his emotions because others also saw him as “sensitive” and “always down.” As a young adult, Allen recalled that he would both run away and be kicked out his mother’s home with the thought in mind that “he couldn’t do this anymore.” Allen admitted he self-harmed often, but the thought of leaving his siblings behind kept him from doing something fatal.

Participant Ricardo struggled with depression as he grew up without both a biological mother and father. Ricardo felt he was more impacted by his father’s absence because he wanted to be what he did not have (a father figure) to his younger siblings. Ricardo described feeling like he was “in a shell” throughout his childhood.

I felt like I had to isolate myself from people a lot. I would just go to school and come home to take care of my grandmother and my siblings. There was a lot of pressure to be the father figure of the house, even though I didn’t know how. Ricardo further explained that he tried to repress his depression and frequent suicidal ideation as best as he could; however, his depression was later exacerbated after his youngest brother was murdered at age 17. Ricardo believed that for the sake of his remaining family, he had to learn to repress his depression and accept the fact that he was then without a biological father and younger brother. Ricardo added:

And so I am still angry at life. Deep down, I’m angry at whatever you want to call it; God, the universe, or life throwing certain things at you. But I almost don’t

know who to be angry at. Like, am I angry at my father for not being there? Am I angry at myself for not protecting my brother?

Emotional Instability

Six out of 14 participants described struggling to regulate their emotions as both an adolescent and an adult. The six reporting participants detailed not feeling “in control” and acting out on impulse or anger, but two of the six reporting participants also stated that their mothers warned them “not to be like their fathers.”

Participant Steve was another person in the study who recalled “not feeling in control” and “bottling up” his emotions throughout his childhood and young adulthood. “In college, it got me into a couple of fights,” said Steve. Steve felt he had to teach himself to deescalate and process his emotions safely mostly, but added that he experienced frequent frustration, pressure, and high expectations from his mother, who, on more than one occasion, would warn him and his brother in her own way “not to turn out like dad.” According to Steve, he, his brother, and their biological mother believed that their biological father was not someone who was a good example of how to self-regulate and work through life’s problems, but his stepfather, who entered his life later on, was a positive example for him throughout the years which kept him out of trouble.

Participant Jensen believed that if he had grown up with a positive, resident biological father, he would not be “as emotional” as he is today. “My mom catered to me, but a dad would have helped me more in those ways,” said Jensen. Jensen recalled several experiences where he acted out and reacted out of emotion but then thought to himself, “that wasn’t me.” Jensen drew some early comparisons to his father but more so wanted to understand what he had gone through in his absence.

Participant Ricardo stated that as children, he and his brother were in anger management classes for several years between elementary school and middle school. Ricardo recalled feeling various challenging emotions and encounters throughout his life, but he did not know how to process or express them correctly. "I repressed my emotions a lot," said Ricardo. Ricardo believed that if he had a parental figure growing up, namely, his biological father, he would have had "more control" over his emotions and possibly could have prevented himself from acting out the way that he did as a child and young adult. Ricardo then went on to say:

I have it controlled now, pretty well. I just told myself one day that I didn't have to be like that anymore, but I had to learn that on my own.

Lack of Empathy and Oppositional Defiance

Six out of 14 participants described feeling like they lacked empathy and respect for others throughout their childhood, particularly toward grade school teachers and female partners. Participant Jack believed that his biological father's absence turned him into "the worst parts of humanity." "I had a lack of empathy and turned to violence," said Jack. Jack was aware that he hurt people mentally and emotionally throughout his lifetime, but still had a disregard for other's feelings and well-being. Jack added that it was difficult for him to take guidance or direction from others, especially in school. Jack described how, as a teenager, he would consciously choose not to listen to teachers and would walk out during the middle of class. When it came to past girlfriends, Jack believed he was never monogamous and knew that he manipulated women without remorse for his self-gain.

Participant Roger was also someone who recalled as a teenager yelling back at teachers, walking out during the middle of class, and leaving his school's campus abruptly despite the consequences. "I didn't feel like anyone cared, so why should I?" said Roger. As an adult, Roger also acknowledged having hurt others throughout his lifetime but felt that a majority of the time he acted out unconsciously. Roger added:

I get how it sounds, considering I just said that, but I swear sometimes it was like I was on autopilot. Like, no one was home (metacognition), and I just did stuff without caring about anything or knowing why I was hurting others. I mentioned it already, but when it came to girls, especially the ones I felt had hurt me first, it was like I was getting revenge, but I didn't know I was doing it (emotional abuse) in the moment. You know, with this whole dad stuff, I didn't realize how much it affected me early on, but looking back, it made me an angry, manipulative, dishonest asshole.

Research Question 4: What are the experiences of father-absent adult men involved in violence?

Themes related to participants' experiences of biological father-absent adult men involved in violence included destruction of property, intrusive thoughts of hurting others physically, getting into schoolyard fights as an adolescent and young adult, and incarceration.

Destruction of property

Nine out of 14 participants recalled taking their aggression and hostility out on public or private property. All nine reporting participants stated that the damage and

destruction of property was a primary source of relief for their aggression and feelings of abandonment or resentment related to their biological father absence.

Participant Jim stated that he never had a history of violence toward others, especially women, but affirmed that he had a “deep-seeded” anger that he took out on inanimate objects and property. Participant Roger also described having a similar feeling of aggression and hostility that he described as “deep-rooted” and took out on others, but more often on objects and property that did not belong to his family. “I’d see my other friends who didn’t have dads doing it (vandalizing and damaging property), and I just thought, okay, I guess this is just what we do. And I didn’t care.”

Participant Allen shared that growing up, he had a difficult time staying out of trouble due to his obstruction of personal and private property. When Allen was younger, he would destroy things and also “tear his room up.” As a teenager, Allen was also handcuffed and taken to his mother’s home on more than one occasion after he was caught by the local police doing graffiti on the sides of public structures.

It was the best thing (that he was caught). It wasn’t good, but it’s just so crazy how I remember it so vividly. I had a smile on my face when my mom opened the door because it was like, ‘oh, now you see me.’

“Everyone saw me as trouble,” added Allen. At the time of the interview, Allen felt that now, as an adult, he had “gotten it all out of his system” and that he is much calmer and reserved, but that having a present biological father growing up would have helped him to develop “differently” and keep him out of trouble.

Intrusive thoughts of hurting others

Eight out of 14 participants self-reported having intrusive thoughts of hurting others throughout their adolescence and young adulthood. Participant Jack was someone who felt his biological father's absence turned him into the "worst parts of humanity." Jack acknowledged that not having a biological father when he was younger influenced him to hurt animals and resort to violence or bullying on numerous occasions, but he also believed he had the capability of becoming a school shooter. "I could easily see myself being one of those kids that went into a school and shot up schools, said Jack. Jack then added:

I could never envision myself passing along what I have inside of me to somebody else because I know what I have inside of me, and I think they're very terrible things that could be passed on to another child. I would never. I would hate to just see that something I brought into this world go through those same mental things of killing little animals because they think they're better than them? Or, whatever they thought about themselves at the time. The irresponsibility of knowing that I have that in me. I have that in me. I have those murderous...you know, I could have been a murderer. I could have shot up a school. I could have, you know, tortured animals my entire life. Thank God that I didn't and that I grew out of that, you know? I do care about people and things. If I was bullied a little more, maybe? You know, to go from a thought to doing it? Because it doesn't take a lot. I thought about it all the time and I had access to guns and stuff. I could have done it, but luckily I just wasn't bullied to that point where I was like, you know what? I'm going to go shoot John Doe in the head. It could have easily gone

that far, and I know that I have that in me. And I know that I could easily pass that on to some other child. What a disservice to the world if it did turn into that.

Later in life, when Jack's stepfather asked to adopt him and asked whether he would take him as a father, Jack said that there was "no better feeling" and no one else that he could think of to have as a father.

Although he claimed never to have been intensely violent toward others, participant Roger recalled often wanting to "unleash hell" on anyone and anything whenever he began to feel angry. "I was such an angry person for a long time. I feel a lot calmer now, but sometimes I still feel a deep burning rage inside of me, and I want to explore," said Roger. Roger firmly believed that the absence of his biological father "started everything."

Schoolyard fights

Eleven out of 14 participants described being involved in numerous schoolyard fights between elementary school and high school. Seven of the 11 reporting participants stated that their involvement in physical fights continued well into their time in college. The only exceptions were participants Sean, Jensen, and Nicholas, who claimed that they did not engage in physical altercations with others as a result of growing up without a biological father.

Participant Hector stated that when he was younger, he was someone who was involved in many fights, especially during high school; however, Hector highlighted that once his stepfather had come into his life, he was taught to make better decisions and to "pick his battles." Participant Edward had a tougher time as he was without both a biological father and stepfather throughout his entire life. "When I would get mad as a

kid, I would get into a lot of fights because I never learned other outlets for my anger,” said Edward. Edward recalled being expelled from school, experimenting with drugs as an attempt to cope with his anger, resisting arrests numerous times, and even assaulting an officer. “If my dad were around, I wouldn’t have been in so much trouble.”

Participant Xavier described himself as a “very, very aggressive” child and added that his propensity for physical altercations with others continued throughout high school. Xavier also felt that he was involved in fights more than most kids. “In fights, I always had enough anger to bubble over. Then, it’s like the ‘balloon popped,’ and I resorted to choosing violence,” said Xavier. Xavier recalled his mother enrolling him into karate as a means of getting his aggression out in a safer way, and although it helped over time, he still felt “short-fused,” and rather than continuing to get into physical altercations with others, he instead resorted to taking his aggression out on objects to bring himself a sense of “control and relief.”

Participant Joshua claimed he picked fights in school with other kids who had a present and active father in their lives or who thought they were better than him. “I wanted to show them that just because they had a dad, that doesn’t mean they were tougher than me. It was really me just being jealous that they had a dad, but like, I still wanted to show them that they weren’t better than me.” Joshua added, “kids without dads, you have to make each other tough, so we fight. You know? And that’s how you become a man. You’re actually taught those things.” Joshua discussed getting into a fair share of “street” fights that got him suspended from school numerous times and expelled once from middle school due to his aggressive nature.

I would say I had a violent mindset for a while. I’ve seen people go and hurt other

people, and the outcomes, and what they did wrong. I knew that if it ever came down to it, and I had been watching (violence) for so long, that I knew all the mistakes that they made, so I could probably go do it and not get in trouble.

Joshua added that over time, some of his friends and other kids would stay away from him, and that their parents viewed him as a bad influence on their children at the time. At age thirteen, Joshua also recalled standing before a judge and looking at a possible sentence of 15 years, but he was able to avoid going to prison at that time. “Now, I am very slow to get angry, but before I got in trouble, I ‘snapped’ pretty quick,” said Joshua.

Incarceration

Seven out of 14 participants were incarcerated as a result of different types of offenses, such as domestic assault on others, reckless or negligent driving, substance use, shoplifting, destruction of property, gang affiliation, and assaulting an officer.

Participant Edward stated that at the time of the interview, he had 39 charges on his legal record. Edward spent most of his young adult life in prison, and drew some comparisons from others toward his biological father, who he later learned had also been incarcerated for a majority of his life. “I messed up my decision-making,” said Edward.

I didn’t know how to express my feelings in a non-negative way. I didn’t know how to express my anger, and it got me into a lot of trouble. It does have a little bit to do with him being gone because he could have taught me about life and a man’s role in a family. I wouldn’t have been in so much trouble. I would have gone to college instead, and I would have stayed in sports.

Participants Jack and Roger also reported having been incarcerated numerous times throughout their young adulthood for driving under the influence of alcohol and

causing public endangerment. Both Jack and Roger expressed in their own way that at the time of their incidents, they did not care what happened to them because “no one else cared about them,” and that although they would have been “better off” having a biological father in their early lives, they still could not see themselves becoming a father to children because of their previous mental state and history of legal issues today.

Research Question 5: How do adult men view the relationship between childhood father absence and violence in adulthood?

Themes related to participants’ views on the relationship between childhood biological father absence and violent outcomes in adulthood included acting out of emotion for not having a biological father as a child or young adult, genetic disposition, the type and quality of a father, and factors that go “beyond biology.” Twelve out of 14 participants had more than one response to the interview questions pertaining to the fifth research question. The only exceptions were participant Sean, who claimed that the association between biological father absence and adult violent outcomes was based only on genetics, and participant Nicholas, who believed violent outcomes in adult males were based solely on the type and quality of a father.

Emotional reactions to biological father absence

Nine out of 14 participants claimed that the violent outcomes in adult males raised without biological fathers is caused by the underlying emotions stemming from a biological father’s abandonment of their children.

Participant Roger believed that his conscious and unconscious behaviors that led to his violent and adverse outcomes stemmed from his jealousy, resentment, and anger of not having a biological father growing up.

My mom tried in her own way I guess, but she wasn't much of an example either. And I didn't let my stepdad be a parent to me so I made dumb decisions based on emotion and not caring what happened to me.

Roger also noted that whenever he was reminded in any capacity that his biological father was not in his life or ever going to be, he would react outwardly based on anger and feeling abandoned. Roger also added:

People didn't know how much I was hurting inside. Heck, I didn't even know I was hurting inside from my biological dad abandoning me. I didn't get help or realize all that until it was already too late. I ruined a lot of relationships with people and nearly took myself to the point of no return just because of how emotionally messed up I felt on the inside. A boy needs a father just like he needs a mother.

Genetic disposition

Four out of 14 participants believed that adult males raised without a biological father will have adverse and violent outcomes in their adulthood because aggression, violent tendencies, father absence, and generational abandonment is a genetic disposition. Participant Sean believed that some of the causes of aggression, hostility, and violent outcomes in adult males were tied to genetics and that, to him, it did not matter whether a biological father was absent or present in the household as long as he (the biological father) had violent tendencies in his lineage.

My older brother, my sisters, and even my nephews all had to go to anger management," said Sean. Sean added that in his family, there was a history of volatility despite some of his siblings growing up with a biological father. "In my

family, some of my brothers and sisters had a biological father, and they're screwed up. Their childhood was screwed up because he was in the house, and he was the problem.

Types and qualities of fathers

Seven out of 14 participants firmly believed that the type and quality of a father is what directly influences adult males raised without a biological father since birth to become involved in violence as an adult. Participant Jim vehemently believed that he would not be where he is today if his absent biological father had been in his life. "It depends on the quality and type of dad. Is it better not to have a dad? Or to have a crappy dad?" asked Jim. Jim added that in his case, he felt it was better to have an absent biological father than to have a "bad" biological father. Jim had a stronger connection to his stepfather growing up and felt that things would have been "completely different" had he (his stepfather) been his biological father throughout his life, but he attested that having an absent father or "bad" father can both negatively effect a young man growing up.

Participant Steve was also someone who wished his stepfather would have been entirely in his life rather than his biological father.

My father wasn't a great person. He was greedy, slick in a bad way, he was cheating on women, and I feel like he would have been a very bad influence on us if we were around him more. I wouldn't have wanted to pick up those traits because I like who my mom formed me into and who I formed myself into. I would have possibly been worse in character if he was around because of the type of person that he was. I feel like it would have really been a completely different

situation, my entire growing up with just my mom, my brother, and I, if she had never met my stepdad. It would have been even more difficult. After he came into our lives, it was a huge turnaround.

Participant Joshua felt that having his biological father in his life would have further hurt him because he believed he would have mimicked the type of person and father that he was. "I would have gone down the same road as him," said Joshua. Joshua added:

Thinking back I thought it would have been better if he were there to guide me, but I didn't realize that the type of father really, truly matters. I didn't realize that until I was 'eighteen-ish' that I was better off without him.

Participant Jason had a difficult time envisioning whether or not things would have been better or worse by not having his biological father involved in his life, considering the type of person that he found out that he (his biological father) was. Jason added:

My grandfather was huge in my life. He was, at least in those years, the closest thing I had to a father. He did a phenomenal job. I also had my grandmother. I had a single mother who was working full time and just trying to make it to the next paycheck, so I was at my grandparent's house a lot. The other thing that changed who I am today, is that later in my life I had a stepfather who, although wasn't emotionally present whatsoever, was very physically present. He never missed a football game, he never missed a soccer game, he never missed a concert, and he always drove me to practice whenever I needed it. He made every school concerence. He just was not the type of guy to reach out and give ya a hug when

you need it, or just sit there and listen when you need to vent about something. I couldn't tell ya if for better or for worse, probably for worse, but the more and more I thought back on it, and I'm sure there is some sort of science behind it, but kids, when they're younger, they really need a physical presence. And as they get older, they really need an emotional presence. I kind of had each at the wrong time. When I was a teenager, I didn't need someone who was going to show up at every game. I needed someone I could confide in. I needed someone I could talk to. Whereas, when I was younger, I wanted to see that face in the crowd at my soccer game when I was six years old and stuff.

Beyond biology

Seven out of 14 participants believed the association between biological father absence and violent outcomes as adults goes “beyond biology” and is based upon whether certain morals, values, and teachings are bestowed by a father during their lifetime, but especially during the first decade of their lives. Aside from believing that the type of father in a child's life was one of the most important factors in either influencing or preventing violent outcomes in adulthood, participant Jack stated that having a father figure early in his life would have given him certain positive characteristics, “unwavering” values, and “foundational structure.” “Those are certain things that I could have always fell back on, but I viscerally didn't have anything to fall back on. So I'd revert to the most awful things of humanity,” said Jack. Jack also believed that if he had a biological father growing up, he would have possibly also had a stronger faith and involvement in religion and an awareness of who he really was or could have become.

Participant Xavier believed that father absence went “beyond biology.” From his

own lived experience growing up without a present, engaging biological father, Xavier also believed that whether or not someone had a biological father or any father figure, it is important to have someone to go to for life's "forks in the road." Xavier went on to further say that a father should be not only their children's "safe place" but also their children's biggest supporter and teacher. "Kids need to have that person that teaches them right from wrong, and consequences to making bad decisions. Someone to bestow life's nuggets of wisdom."

Data Collection

Data was collected through in-depth, structured face-to-face interviews with 14 participants (see Appendix C for interview questions). I conducted a single structured interview with each participant in a private counseling office. Participants spent an average of 9 minutes completing two self-report assessments and then 39 to 53 minutes in audio-recorded structured interviews. There were no variations in data collection from the proposed plan in Chapter 3 aside from the actual time it took for participants to complete their assessments and structured audio-recorded interviews. One unusual circumstance was that one participant's biological father was stationed and deployed at sea for the majority of the first eight formative years of his adolescent life.

Data Analysis

Interview and assessment data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed without software. The analysis process was based on phases developed by Hycner (1985) and Moustakas (1994). The first step of data analysis, bracketing, was achieved by setting aside personal biases and preconceived ideas about the thesis in preparation for the analysis of the collected data. The next step of the data analysis was intuiting, where I

became solely focused on attributing the meaning of father absence using existing research and data collected from the participants. Through the intuiting process I also provided a variance of shared, existing data on father absence that explained the problem, cause and effect, and the known gap in the literature surrounding the effect of biological father absence on males between childhood and adulthood.

After intuiting the data, data analysis involved reducing large amounts of data within the transcripts into smaller units of meaning (or codes), which represent smaller units of experiences from the participants. Data was coded and clustered into themes that made sense of pathological and violent outcomes resulting from long-term father absence. The resulting themes and sub-themes represent the core of the self-reported lived experiences of the adult participants who experienced biological father absence during at least the first six years of their childhood. The fourth and most critical step of data analysis was describing the phenomenological research (Greening, 2019). During the descriptive state, I generated a composite, narrative description of the participants' interviews to depict a brief results section that best explained the correlation of themes, causes, effects, and summaries of their personal lived experiences of growing up without a resident biological father. The description phase did not rely solely on the experiences of a single participant but rather on the experiences as a whole that occurred among a majority of the participants in the sample group.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this research study's results was enhanced by strict adherence to procedures recommended by Hycer (1985) and Moustakas (1994). From start to finish, bracketing and intuiting were used to set aside any preconceived notions or

opinions concerning father absence in order to isolate and focus on the father absence phenomenon in its purest form (Greening, 2019; Sanders, 1982). Credibility of the results was also ensured through an actively ongoing process of member-checking, in which I, the researcher, reviewed each participant's responses with the participant at the conclusion of the interview and, as needed, emailed a participant's summary of their responses for personal review in order to gain final approval of their captured lived experiences growing up without a biological father during early childhood. Participants did not recommend changes. To improve the transferability of the results, I also provided a sufficient description of the methodological procedure and data analysis in a manner in which other researchers could replicate the study (Lincoln, 1995).

Summary

Five research questions were used to guide this study. Results indicated that participants' lived experiences growing up without a present biological father were characterized by being raised in single-mother households, feeling absent of their biological father's love, and negative comparisons to other children with active fathers or two parents. Eleven out of 14 participants described having an attachment style other than secure. Participants self-reported then experiencing different psychological implications throughout their lives such, as aggression and hostility, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation, emotional instability (affect dysregulation), lack of empathy, and oppositional defiance toward authority figures (including educators), and romantic partners.

Throughout their childhood and adulthood, some participants' behavioral responses to their biological father's absence varied between being repeatedly involved in physical altercations with others, having intrusive thoughts to cause harm to others

violently (including animals), and destruction or vandalization of public or personal property. Seven out of 14 participants were incarcerated during at least one point in their lives for their actions and offenses. Participants' conclusions to their outcomes were summed up to include conscious and unconscious emotional reactions to their biological father's absences, genetic disposition, the quality and type of father in their lives, and specific factors or traits in a father that are believed to go beyond just biology inherently.

Chapter 5 will offer a discussion of key findings and how they compare to existing research. Furthermore, Chapter 5 will also include a discussion of how this research study contributes to a greater understanding of the psychoanalytic theory and attachment theory, as well as how it fits into the biblical worldview. The discussion of findings and theoretical constructs will be followed by implications of the results, identified limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research that emerged from the findings.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide a transcendental phenomenological account of the lived experiences of adult males who grew up in absent biological father homes between the ages of birth and at least age six, and the associated adverse-violent outcomes in their later adulthood. This study's approach also helped to highlight the participants' subjective experiences and memories surrounding their biological father's absence to uncover further perspectives, rationales, and justifications for the psychological responses and outcomes associated with father absenteeism. This study aimed to address the gap in the literature with regard to the adverse effects and violent outcomes of growing up without a biological father during early childhood.

Five central research questions guided this study:

R.Q. 1: What are the lived experiences of adult men who grew up without a biological father during early childhood?

R.Q. 2: How does father absence during early childhood affect attachment styles in adult men?

R.Q. 3: What psychological implications does father absence have on males across early childhood and adulthood?

R.Q. 4: What are the experiences of father-absent adult men involved in violence?

R.Q. 5: How do adult men view the relationship between childhood father absence and violence in adulthood?

Summary of Findings

The results of 14 phenomenological structured interviews revealed numerous themes related to participants' lived experiences of growing up without a biological father. Responses pertaining to the first research question showed that participants' early childhood without a biological father was characterized by being raised in single-mother households, drawing negative comparisons to other children with biological fathers or two parents, and feeling absent of fatherly love. Participants' mothers were their primary source of parental attachment, but they recalled at the time still struggling to adjust as a father-absent child to being left alone or being watched over by others while their mothers were away at work for long periods of time. Approximately half of the participants felt, as a result, that they obtained more feminine qualities than masculine, and began to question their security in connections with those around them.

For the second research question, a majority of participants self-reported having an attachment style other than secure. Participants were conflicted about whether they wanted others to be close, to be further away from them, or both. Responses for the third research question then revealed that participants' childhood development and formation of attachment styles were also psychologically impacted by various responses such as aggression and hostility toward others, depression and suicidal ideation, emotional instability, lack of empathy for others, and oppositional defiance. Participants further described internalizing their emotions, but also acting outwardly toward others and in various settings. Similarly, findings for the fourth research question showed that such behavioral responses led to a greater frequency of physical and verbal confrontation with others, intrusive thoughts to harm others violently (including animals), destruction or

vandalization of private and personal property, and incarceration.

Participants' scores from their self-report assessments related to individual aggression levels and potential for certain types of aggression, and perceived stress levels, revealed average-to-above average scores in their propensity for hostility and ability to manage anxious or stressful situations. Participants' stress scores were based on the month prior to the structured interviews in order to obtain a baseline of their anxiety and stress entering the study.

Finally, for the fifth research question, which asked how adult men viewed the relationship between childhood father absence and violence in adulthood, participants' concluded that their outcomes were connected to various factors such as conscious and unconscious emotional responses to their biological father's absence and abandonment, the type and quality of a father in a child's life, genetic disposition, and specific factors such as morals, values, and religiosity that go beyond just biology inherently. What follows is an in-depth discussion of these findings, with attention given as well to implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Findings

The first research question, "what are the lived experiences of adult men who grew up without a biological father during early childhood?" found that participants' early upbringings were characterized by being raised in single-mother households during at least the first six years of their formative lives. Although not every participant described having substantial financial hardships in their single-parent homes, it was reportedly still stressful for them at a young age to observe their mothers struggling alone. Participants recalled having difficulty adjusting to either being not watched over,

or being watched over by others while their mothers were away working hard to be the sole provider of the household. When their mothers were not working, a majority of the participants described spending most of their time around their mother. As a result of having more exposure to their mothers, participants also described having obtained more feminine, nurturing qualities and having to rely on other male figures such as uncles, grandfathers, and coaches as sources to learn “manly stuff” from.

Over the years, participants wrestled with understanding their father’s absence and reported on average, feeling confused, different from others, lonely, unloved, ostracized, or uncertain of themselves. Despite their mother’s and later stepfather’s best efforts to help regulate their challenging emotions, participants still felt the physical and emotional absence of their biological fathers. In addition to their biological father’s physical absence, participants felt the overall absence of a father’s love and drew negative comparisons to other children who had present, active biological fathers, or two parents. Participants recalled questioning why they specifically did not have a biological father in their lives and contemplating why they were not good enough to be loved or be present for. These findings relate to research by Li and Guo (2023), who discussed that the quality of father-child relationships is important, but the time spent physically together is arguably more important to the growth and development of a child’s well-being and mental health.

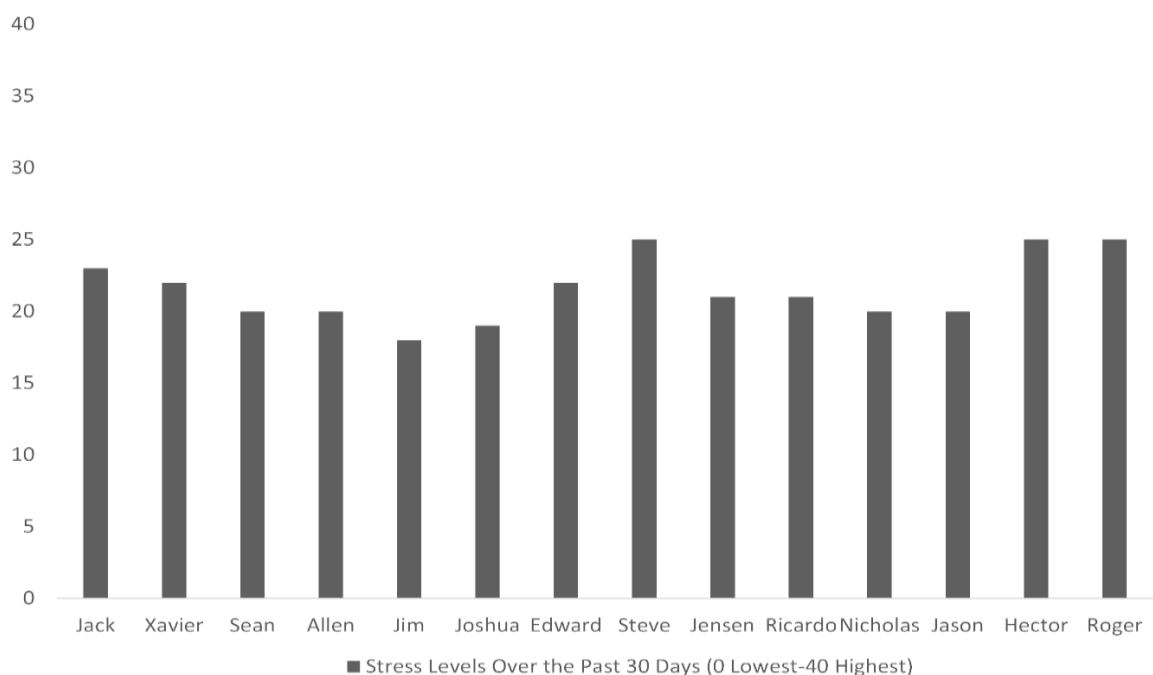
A father’s presence early on can be pivotal to the formation of a secure attachment style (Olsavsky, 2019; Yogman & Garfield, 2016). With regard to the second research question, “how does father absence during early childhood affect attachment styles in adult men?” only three out of the 14 participants reported that their biological

father's absence did not affect their abilities to form attachments and secure relationships with partners, their children, or friends. Throughout their childhood and adulthood, participants who reported attachment styles other than secure described not knowing how to form secure relationships and struggling to commit to someone out of fear of rejection or abandonment. While some participants sought out consistent closeness and attention, others became more closed off and kept people at "arm's length." Even when participants were able to be a part of platonic or romantic relationships, they felt that they did not know what they wanted out of the relationship, or just obtained what they wanted from the relationship (attention, intimacy, closeness, company) before moving onto someone or something else.

These findings are significant in terms of Bowlby's (1969) and Ainsworth's (1971) theories of attachment. It was postulated that attachment behaviors are a direct response to children being separated from their biological parents (Richardson et al., 2022; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). According to Bowlby and Ainsworth, attachments with primary caregivers develop during the first 18 months of a child's life (Kennedy and Kennedy, 2002). Ainsworth (1913-1999) expanded Bowlby's research by further suggesting that maintaining proximity to one's biological child is a key aspect of developing an enduring and secure attachment style with parental figures and others (Cassidy et al., 2013; Duschinsky, 2020; Shlafer & Poehlmann, 2010). Although attachment styles can change with time and intervention, previous research also suggests that childhood attachment styles can have a lasting influence on an adult's ability to form attachments and relationships (Duschinsky, 2020; Granqvist & Duschinsky, 2021; Mcleod, 2023).

Numerous psychological implications emerged from the participants' responses as a result of their childhood biological father's absence. For findings pertaining to the third research question, "what psychological implications does father absence have on males across early childhood and adulthood?" the majority of participants reported behavioral issues or emotional affects that made them either aggressive and hostile, anxious, depressed, apathetic, or defiant towards others. At the time of the study's interview, participants were asked to complete the Cohen Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), which is designed to measure individual stress levels over the prior 30 days, in order to obtain a baseline of the participants' stress levels and the frequency of their anxious thoughts and feelings leading up to the study. See Figure 1 for PSS results.

Figure 1



According to Cohen (1994), PSS scores at or near 13 are considered average; however, testing has shown that "high stress" individuals typically have a stress score of

around 20 points. Individuals with scores of 21 or higher are considered to have detrimentally high psychological stress and it is further recommended that individuals in that scoring margin seek immediate support from a medical provider and mental health professional as the high stress is also usually associated with other medical concerns such as high blood pressure, higher body mass index (BMI), higher cortisol levels, suppressed immune function, decreased sleep, and increased alcohol consumption (Cohen et al., 1983; Cohen, 1994). Each listed risk factor can contribute to possible later cardiovascular disease (Cohen et al., 1983; Cohen, 1994).

Participants recalled often “bottling up” their emotions because they did not have the learned skills to control or exercise them safely and appropriately. Participants’ further isolated their affective dysregulation as being a factor that directly led to hurting others or making poor decisions in their lives. Participants believed that their past actions and behaviors could have been curved if their biological fathers had been present. Participants also felt that the role of a father should be to love, guide, mentor, support, and protect their children. Without these morals and values, most participants struggled to regulate their emotions and stress, and got into further trouble.

Findings from the fourth research question, “what are the experiences of father-absent adult men involved in violence?” revealed that biological father-absent men were involved more frequently in physical altercations and the destruction or vandalization of public or private property. Most participants found that their only source of temporary relief from their anger was to act on it by harming others, or hitting inanimate objects, and damaging property. Higher aggression, poor decision-making, and intrusive thoughts to cause harm to others (including animals) were some factors that also led to half of the

participants having a history of incarceration and legal issues.

Findings from the third and fourth research questions are directly associated with Freud's (1915) psychoanalytic theory because they align with the perspective of a person's emotions, behaviors, and motives being influenced and shaped by past childhood experiences (Freud, 1915; Grzybowski & Żołnierz, 2020; McLeod, 2023; Traylor et al., 2022). Freud (1915) also believed that the unconscious mind was where a person's emotions, behaviors, and motives were stored until they became readily available to the conscious (Freud, 1915; McLeod, 2023; Traylor et al., 2022). There were times that the participants described being unaware of their emotions and behaviors, but research by Bargh and Morsella (2008) suggested that most of what is stored in the unconscious mind is negative and repressed. Once surfaced, unacceptable or unpleasant experiences can easily cause hostility and conflict (Bargh & Morsella, 2008; Di Giuseppe & Perry, 2021; Traylor et al., 2022). For BPAQ assessment results see Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 2

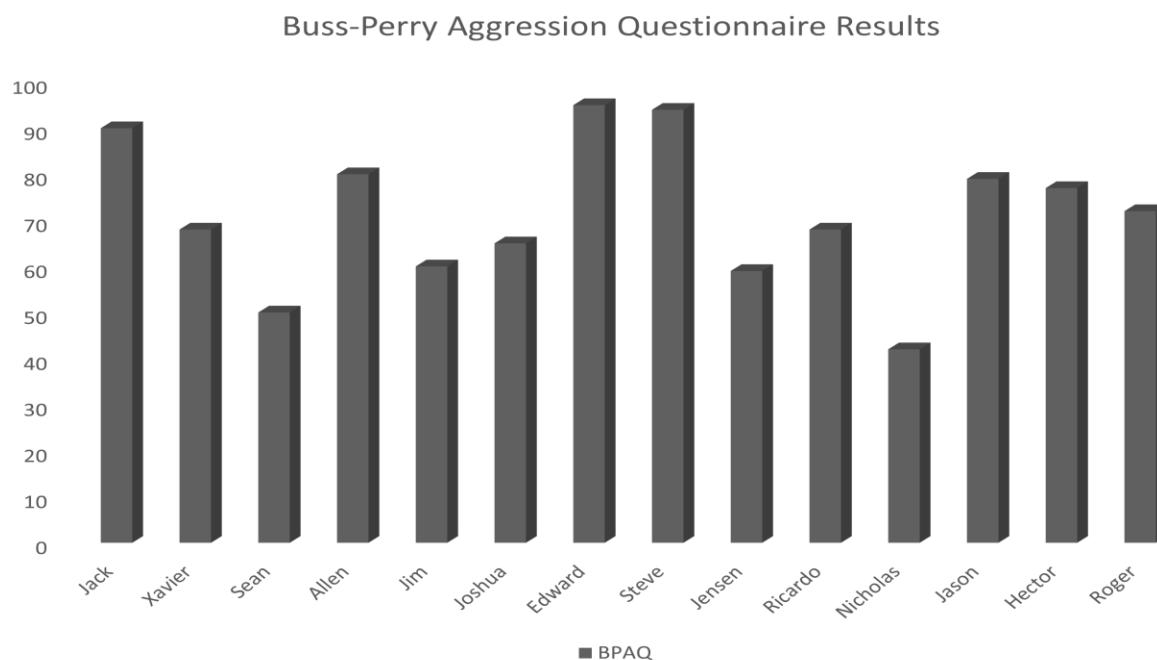
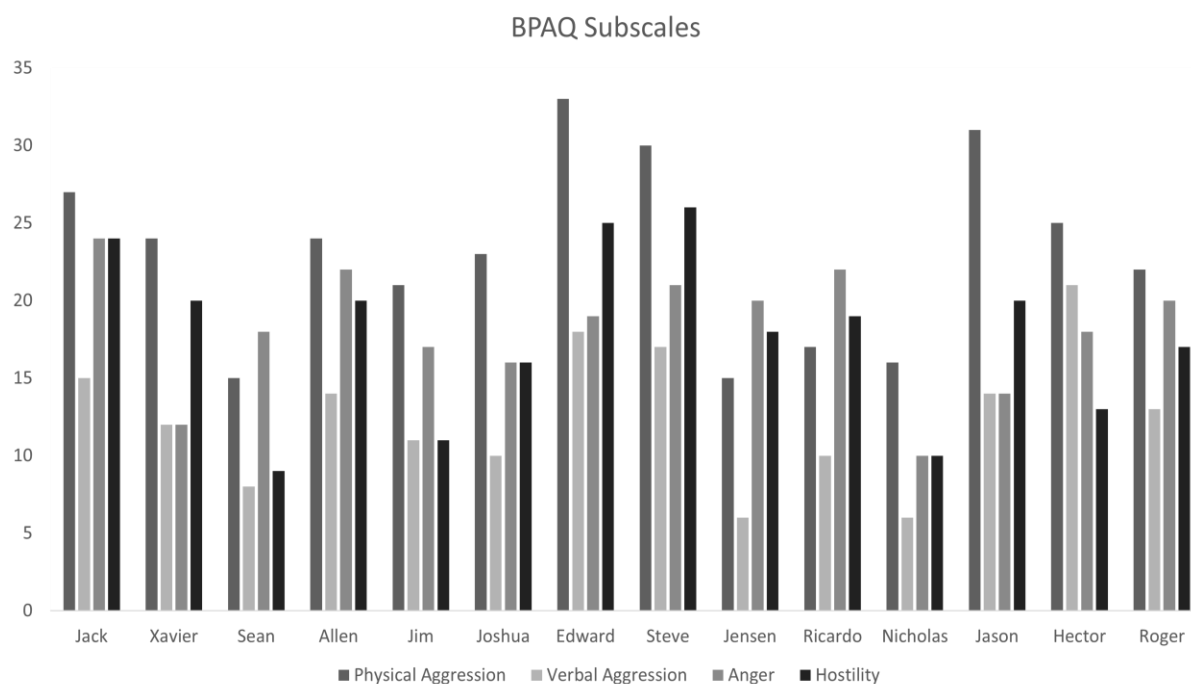


Figure 3*Subscale scores for individual potential of aggression*

Lastly, the fifth research question, “how do adult men view the relationship between childhood father absence and violence in adulthood?” revealed several conclusions by the participants. Some participants concluded that their outcomes were associated with their conscious and unconscious emotional reactions to their biological father’s early childhood absence. Six out of the 14 participants who met their biological fathers during adulthood reported still feeling angry, conflicted, and resentful toward their fathers and others at the time, because of how long they had to endure life without them. One participant recalled telling his biological father, “I’m glad you’re back, but do you even deserve it?” in regards to the opportunity to have a father-son relationship with him. Five of those six participants had also reported a history of incarceration and legal issues.

While some participants were aware that they were acting out of emotion, some

others reported feeling cognitively unaware of their actions and behaviors until after they had already harmed someone or damaged something. These findings further speak to Freud's (1915) psychodynamic theory, but also to Tolpin's (2017) and Mora's (2021) research on father absence being the basis for infantile and adult neurosis. A father's absence can also distort child development and metacognition, especially between the ages of five to nine, and can carry well into adulthood (Mcleod, 2023; Mott, 1993; Remmo, 2009). Liu et al. (2023) state that there remains a lack of research on the underlying mechanisms surrounding father absence and youth hostility.

Four out of 14 participants considered that their adverse or violent outcomes during their youth and adulthood were part of a genetic disposition. Participants drew their conclusion of a genetic disposition based on a known history and comparisons to what they knew about their biological father and the males on his side of the family. One participant also vocalized that the physical presence or lack thereof does not matter as long as there is an existing lineage of violent tendencies in the family (e.g., John Gacy, Edmund Kemper III). While there is not enough research on the association between genetic confounding and father absence during early childhood, Pingault et al. (2021) suggest that the associations between exposures and outcomes are commonly reported in epidemiological research but often without estimating or accounting for genetic contributions.

Some participants also concluded that outcomes in adulthood are tied to the type and quality of a father. Participants worried that their outcomes could have been worse, given the type of person they knew their biological father was. Participants were certain that the long-term exposure to their biological fathers would have caused them to mimic

his actions and behaviors or model their parenting style after him, given that some people view fathers as patriarchal figures in the household (Boothroyd & Cross, 2017; Dean-Hill, 2023; Families et al., 1994; Freeman, 2008; Gupta et al., 2023; Wagner et al., 2022). A majority of participants also stated that they wished their stepfathers had been their biological father their entire lives. Participants recalled initially struggling to accept their stepfathers, but later praising them and holding them in high regard because of the quality of father they had shown to be. These findings reinforce existing research by Yoon et al. (2018), who state that increased father engagement reduces the likelihood of children's behavioral issues in school, delinquency, and psychological problems associated with father complexity.

Father absence can also complicate children's and adult's feelings surrounding religion and faith (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Six out of 14 participants self-reported having little to no relationship with the church. "My father didn't love me, so why would he?" (God), said one participant. Preszler (2022) and Dickie et al. (2006) attest that a relationship with a biological father should prepare their son for a relationship with God. God is a father, but when some do not have a positive outlook or connection with the word, it can crush the human spirit (*The Holy Bible, New International Version*, 2011, Proverbs 18:14).

Approximately half of the participants also believed that the relationship between the biological father's absence and violent outcomes in adulthood was reliant on specific factors that go beyond just biology. Participants stated that their outcomes were dependent on whether fathers introduced certain morals, values, and teachings (e.g., Christianity) during early childhood. One participant recalled feeling like it was God's

plan not to have his biological father in his life because his stepfather was someone who later taught him good morals and values and made sure he maintained a consistent, positive relationship with God and their Christian community. Others argued that morals and values taught by a father, such as compassion, honesty, respect, integrity, and boundaries could have been crucial to their development.

Not originally included in the findings was the result of earlier exposure to substances and pornography. Six out of the 14 participants self-reported that they were exposed to substances and pornography much earlier than their counterparts. One participant recalled being shown pornography by his cousin's grandfather and being sexually assaulted at the age of seven by his neighbor during a time when his guardian was away. A different participant told the story of drinking alcohol with his uncle and grandfather at a young age because "that's what men in our family do." Kleponis (2024) states that some men may use pornography either as a way of coping with deep emotional wounds or to self-medicate when they are feeling stressed, angry, sad, or abandoned. The same can be said for substance abuse, but Kleponis (2024) further posits that the development of addictions is due to wounded attachment and that attachment wounds with the father tend to be more critical. Regretfully, most men who become addicted to something, such as substances or pornography, do not have a healthy attachment with their fathers (Caponnetto, 2020; Kleponis, 2024).

Implications

This phenomenological study is unique because it is an in-depth qualitative study that focuses on the life experiences of adult men raised without biological fathers between the climacteric developmental ages of birth and age six, which may be the basis

of adverse and violent outcomes across childhood and adulthood. The data from this study can lead to numerous advancements in the areas of human development and biological parent-child relationships. By achieving a greater understanding of the lived experiences of adult men without biological fathers during early childhood, churches, mental health professionals, and social services could potentially provide more appropriate assistance and services to men struggling to cope with their anger and abandonment and to avoid violent outcomes in households and communities.

To date, most studies over the past decade on father absence and parental relationships have been predominantly centered around the mother-child dyad or daughters' father absence (Brown, 2018; Cabrera et al., 2018). The findings of this study provide additional insight and qualitative data related to how adult men with absent biological fathers function and develop with regard to their psychosocial behaviors, attachment formation, emotional regulation, and developmental trajectories. From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study are also largely consistent with the foundations against which they were interpreted, specifically Freud's psychoanalytic theory and Bowlby and Ainsworth's theories of attachment. Therefore, the nature of this qualitative phenomenological study serves to further future research and literature in terms of displaying how to proceed with similar analyses of adult men with absent biological fathers.

Father absence is an important societal topic because father absence is prevalent across various cultures, ethnicities, and social classes (Culpin et al., 2022), and very little is still known about the psychological and neurological effects of father absence on adolescent and adult males, which is why the findings of this study could also find a

useful place within the school systems (i.e. school counselors and social workers), crisis intervention programs, and after school extracurricular programs such as the Boys & Girls Club and Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBS). Creating interventions and measurements that aim to understand further the approximate severity and impact of father absence in males would bring about positive social change and improvements in children's and developmental psychology. Advancing human development and life expectancy requires the expansion of prior research and it is ultimately dependent on properly controlled studies with human participants.

Limitations

As noted in chapters one and three, the previously mentioned limitations of this research study relate to the accessibility of sealed legal records from participants' criminal backgrounds or domestic violence incidents, and the findings of this study being limited to the accuracy of self-reported data and completed assessments. Also, the sample size and focus were solely on adult men aged 18 and older who lived within 60 miles of Tri-Cities, Washington, who grew up without a present biological father between the ages of birth and at least age six, which is further limited to the reviewed studies. Additionally, the physical and emotional response of a participant's lived experiences could not be fully captured if participants were interviewed by phone.

New limitations

Due to the delicate nature of the research topic and the uniquely specific population involved, the demographic information of the participants with regard to age, race, socioeconomic status, and religion was not included in the analysis of the data as it could bear exposure to privacy and confidentiality within the relatively small Tri-Cities,

Washington area. Doing so also prevented the confinement of the father absence phenomenon in Southeastern Washington state to certain age groups, institutions, communities, and religious groups. This study acknowledged, but excluded some primary data on adoptive fathers, stepfathers, and same-sex couples in an effort to keep the focus on biological father absence among males. Additional research in the review of the literature specifically related to male children of biological fathers with addiction or severe mental illness and blended families was not included in the current study.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current research study provides several recommendations for future research in the areas of developmental psychology and father-son relationships. First, the psychological implications of father absence across generations could provide an additional layer of useful information to the findings in this study. Particularly as a key addition to genetic predisposition outcomes that emerged from participant's responses.

Another recommendation for future research is to explore the association between crime and the convictions of fathers of their biological children. In 2008, the *British Journal of Criminology* elaborated on the need to understand the relationship between the convictions of fathers and the development of convictions on their children over a lifespan (Van De Rakt et al., 2008). Thirdly, a unique direction for future research in this field of data would be to explore the association between early childhood biological father absence and early exposure or addiction to substances and pornography. Lastly, the inclusion of the demographic information for biological father-absent adult men from larger regions and populations could explain further the father absence phenomenon among specific races, age groups, communities, religions, and education levels.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide a transcendental phenomenological analysis of the lived experiences of adult men who grew up with absent biological fathers between the ages of birth and at least age six and the associated adverse-violent outcomes in their later adulthood. By highlighting the participants' subjective experiences and memories surrounding their biological father's absence, findings uncovered perspectives, rationales, and justifications for their psychological responses and outcomes. This study addressed the key findings with an in-depth qualitative analysis and comparison to existing research, and known limitations of the research from before and after the study procedures commenced.

The field of children's and developmental psychology has needed more in-depth research on males who are raised without a biological father. This type of data and research was significant because a majority of it focused on biological father absenteeism during early childhood, and it not only relied on in-person structured interviews as a methodology but also presented only adult males as participants. The findings of this study also impact theories, professional practices, the Christian church, and the scientific community in identifying possible new methods and interventions of assisting and serving biological father absent adult men. Additional recommendations were made for future research to explore in-depth perspectives and variables within this topic.

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APPENDIX A: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Dear Potential Participant:

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy in Developmental Psychology. The purpose of my research is to explore the long-term effects and violent outcomes associated with father absence and adult men aged 18 years and older who experienced biological father absence during at least the first six years of their childhood. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

I am currently looking for participants who meet the following criteria:

- Male 18 or older in age.
- Resident of Washington state.
- Lives within 60 miles of the Tri-Cities area of Washington state.
- Grew up without a present biological father between birth and at least age six.
- No adoptive father or stepfather between birth to at least age six.
- Native English speaker that can provide written and verbal consent.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to:

- Provide written and verbal consent to participate in the research study.
- Complete two written questionnaires (approximately 10-15 mins in duration)
- Participate in a private structured interview: The interview will be approximately 45 minutes and will be audio recorded.

You will be allowed seven days to review and return the interview transcript to me.

An informed consent document will be mailed or emailed to you after you have contacted me to express interest in participation. The informed consent document will contain additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you must sign the informed consent document and mail or email it to me before any testing procedures can occur.

At the end of the study, each participant will be entered into a prize drawing for two NBA Portland Trailblazers home game tickets.

If you meet the study criteria and would like to participate, please contact me at the phone number or email address listed below.

Sincerely,

Wallace Robert Ascencio, MSW, LICSW

Tel #: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent

Title of the Project: Violent outcomes in adult males raised in absent biological father homes during early childhood.

Principal Investigator: Wallace Robert Ascencio, Doctoral Candidate, Psychology
Department of Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

To participate, you must be a male 18 years or older in age, be a resident of Washington state, live within 60 miles of the Southeastern Washington Tri-Cities area, and grew up without a resident biological father from birth to at least the age of six. Participants must also be native English speakers that can provide written and verbal consent. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please read this entire form. Ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The study aims to explore and address the violent behaviors and outcomes in adults aged 18 years and older who were raised in absent-biological father homes during at least the first six years of their life. The presence of a biological father occupies a vital role in people's lives. Through several pathways, a biological father's presence in early

childhood can positively influence child behaviors and mental health, while adversely, their absence can cause long-term psychological trauma, shape anti-social personalities, and hinder development from infancy through childhood and into adulthood. Father absence is a national crisis in the United States, requiring additional research and intervention to mitigate it.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Complete two self-report questionnaires.
2. Participate in a private audio-recorded structured interview and answer research questions honestly based on your thoughts, feelings, concerns, frustrations, and lived experiences surrounding your biological father's absence. The interview is expected to last approximately 45 minutes.
3. Review your interview transcripts for accuracy.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from this research study.

Participation in this type of study will contribute to the scientific knowledge surrounding biological father absence and adverse developmental outcomes. Also, participation in the study will add to the knowledge related to how society currently addresses and attempts to treat early childhood father absence in children and adults.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The risks involved in this study include:

Psychological or emotional risks (e.g., anger, anxiety, confusion, depression, guilt, loss of self-esteem, neglect, triggering of past emotional or physical experiences). To reduce risk, the researcher will create a safe and therapeutic test setting for participants. The setting also allows and encourages participants to take a moment if needed to collect themselves. The primary test site, Grace Clinic, has offered the emergency aid of a social worker, resident practitioner, and registered nurse in the event of an emergency.

I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or any intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of your participation in this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses and observations made of you will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.

- Interviews will be conducted in a private location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked USB hard drive and placed in a key-locked storage. Only the researcher will have access to the stored data. In three years, all electronic records and audio recordings will be deleted.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants have the opportunity for compensation for participating in this study. At the conclusion of the research procedures, each participant will be entered into a drawing for two (2) tickets to an NBA Portland Trailblazers home game. The participant who is randomly selected from the drawing will be contacted by email or phone and can pick up the tickets from Grace Clinic in [REDACTED].

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Grace Clinic. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number:

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Your data and information will be destroyed if you decide to withdraw. Study results will not include your data if you withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Wallace Robert Ascencio. Ask any questions you have at any point. You are encouraged to contact Wallace Robert Ascencio at the above phone number and email. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Ralph Ogburn, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board. The IRB's physical address is: Institutional Review Board, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]; their phone number is [REDACTED], and their email address is [REDACTED].

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensures that human subjects research will be ethically conducted as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered, and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are

those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study's researcher using the information provided above.

Private structured interviews will be audio-recorded only. Recording data will be stored and destroyed in the same manner as other data. This consent form also serves as your permission to be audiotaped during the study. Feel free to ask the researcher about any questions or concerns you have regarding the purpose of electronic recordings and the use of the audiotape.

The researcher, Wallace Robert Ascencio, has my written and expressed verbal permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Printed Participant Name

Participant Signature & Date

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your experience growing up as a child without a biological father?
2. As a child, what did you understand about your biological father's absence?
3. Over the years, how would you describe your experience growing up as an adult without a biological father?
4. As an adult, how have you understood or made sense of your fathers' absence today?
5. Growing up, did you find yourself avoiding close relationships or did you keep people at an arm's length in relationships? If so, how?
6. Were there times that you wanted someone to be close, but at other times wanted someone to be away from you? If so, how?
7. Do you have any anxiety about your current relationships? If so, what do you believe contributed to your anxiety?
8. What do you believe is the role of a father?
9. How do you feel a lack of a father has affected you in your life emotionally?
10. How did having an absent biological father effect your decision-making and ability to cope with life's struggles?
11. What are some examples where having an absent biological father effected your decision making?
12. In your life, have you had any difficulty with managing your anger? If so, how?

13. Do you find that you experience anxiety and/or anger frequently? If so, how often?
14. Do you feel there is a connection between your anger or anxiety and not having a biological father during childhood?
15. Do you have history of violence? If so, what happened?
16. Have you ever been incarcerated? If so, how many times and for how long each time?
17. How would having a biological father in your early childhood have made a difference in your life today?
18. What else would you like to add that might be important in understanding your experience with violence or not having a present biological father?