

Relationship Demise After Having Children: An Analysis of Abandonment and Nuclear Family Structure vs. Supportive Community Cultures

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Abstract : There is an epidemic of couples separating after a child is born into a family, generally with the father leaving emotionally or physically in the first few years after birth. This separation creates high levels of stress for both parents, especially the primary parent, leaving her (or him) less available to the infant for healthy attachment and nurturing. The deterioration of the couple's bond leaves parents increasingly under-resourced, and the dependent child in a compromised environment, with an increased likelihood of developing an attachment disorder. Objectives: To understand the dynamics of a couple, once the additional and extensive demands of a newborn are added to a nuclear family structure, and to identify effective ways to support all members of the family to thrive. Qualitative studies interviewed men, women, and couples after pregnancy and the early years as a family, regarding key destructive factors, as well as effective tools for the couple to retain a strong bond. In-depth analysis of a few cases, including the author's own experience, reveal deeper insights about subtle factors, replicated in wider studies. Using a self-assessment survey, many fathers report feeling abandoned, due to the close bond of the mother-baby unit, and in turn, withdrawing themselves, leaving the mother without support and closeness to resource her for the baby. Fathers report various types of abandonment, from his partner to his mother, with whom he did not experience adequate connection as a child. The study identified a key destructive factor to be unrecognized wounding from childhood that was carried into the relationship. The study culminated in the naming of Male Postpartum Abandonment Syndrome (MPAS), describing the epidemic in industrialized cultures with the nuclear family as the primary configuration. A growing family system often collapses without a minimum number of adult caregivers per infant, approximately four per infant (3.87), which allows for proper healing and caretaking. In cases with no additional family or community beyond one or two parents, the layers of abandonment and trauma result in the deterioration of a couple's relationship and ultimately the family structure. The solution includes engaging community in support of new families. The study identified (and recommends) specific resources to assist couples in recognizing and healing trauma and disconnection at multiple levels. Recommendations include wider awareness and availability of resources for healing childhood wounds and greater community-building efforts to support couples for the whole family to thrive.

Keywords : abandonment, attachment, community building, family and marital functioning, healing childhood wounds, infant wellness, intimacy, marital satisfaction, relationship quality, relationship satisfaction

Conference Title : ICDPPS 2017 : International Conference on Developmental Psychology and Parenting Styles

Conference Location : Sydney, Australia

Conference Dates : December 04-05, 2017