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Andes pediatr. 2021;92(1):50-58
DOI: 10.32641/andespediatr.v92i1.1757

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Meaning and social participation of man when become a father for the first time

Significado y participación social del hombre al transformarse en padre por primera vez

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Received: February 18, 2020; Approved: September 17, 2020

What do we know about the subject matter of this study?

Fatherhood has changed towards greater participation in childcare. When fathers are involved in parenting, the family system is strengthened, which contributes to healthy child development and bonding.

What does this study contribute to what is already known?

To understand the experience of fatherhood from the perspective of the father himself and his partner and the child as a protagonist in the development of the bond with the father. It is an opportunity for the health system to know the needs of fathers.

Abstract

Objective: To analyze the meanings attributed to fatherhood by first-time fathers. **Participants and Method:** Qualitative research of Hermeneutic-Dialectic design. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with fathers and mothers (10 of each) of children older than 12 months. The analysis of the data was carried out through the participants' discourse analysis and their articulation with the historical-social context and the theoretical references of the research. **Results:** The meaning and social participation of men when they became a first-time father were grouped in five categories: meaning of the fatherhood experience; meaning of fatherhood from a gender perspective; meaning of the experience in the father-child relationship; meaning of the parenting experience in the couple relationship; and exercising fatherhood and its relationship with the health system. **Conclusions:** It is necessary to implement strategies to include the father in the upbringing and care of the children, favoring his participation, and thus, the growth and comprehensive development of the child conceived in the different types of families.

Kevwords:

Community Health Nursing; Paternity; Child Care; Hermeneutics

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How to cite this article: Andes pediatr. 2021;92(1):50-58. DOI: 10.32641/andespediatr.v92i1.1757

Introduction

The family structure and the roles within it have varied over time, both nationally and internationally. Likewise, fatherhood has undergone significant changes throughout history, from being almost nonexistent in the early days of Chilean society to a more participatory role at the beginning of the 1990s, when men assumed a more prominent role in some child-rearing scenarios and to be considered in childhood policies^{1,2}.

Therefore, in 2006, the early childhood protection system "Chile Crece Contigo" (Chile grows with you) was created, in order to strengthen healthy child development as a primary determinant factor in the health of future generations. This system incorporates healthy prenatal stimulation for the child and her/his family, encouraging the father's participation from gestation, to involve him in the upbringing of the child^{3,4}.

The inclusion of fathers in parenting has been described as strengthening the family system, contributing to the optimal development of the child, parents, and family, and the establishment of the emotional bond between them. This would have a protective effect against violence and affective disorders^{5,6}. However, studies indicate that the father has a poor involvement degree in parenting, and when he participates, only plays the role of accompaniment and support of the mother⁷⁻¹⁰.

The above results shows the effects of the fathers' involvement in raising their children; however, they do not specify the social participation of men when they become fathers or the social-political context where fatherhood takes place. Social participation refers to how people are inserted in society, which has repercussions on the health and disease manifestations, seeing the individual as a historical being, determined by the space and time in which she/he lives¹¹.

The social participation of men when they become fathers is a subject unknown in the social context and within the Chilean health system. Even when a comprehensive child development policy has been established, which considers paternal participation, its effects have not been evaluated from fathers' perspective¹²⁻¹⁴. Given the existing gaps in knowledge about what men experience when they become fathers, the objective was to interpret the meanings attributed to the experience of becoming a father for the first time from the perspective of men and their partners in the context of Chilean society.

Participants and Method

Qualitative study with a dialectical hermeneutic design, which aims to interpret the story in the present

time of human experience, to establish correlations between what happened and the social-historical context in which his life develops¹⁵. The methodology was assured by applying the COREQ instrument (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research)¹⁶.

The participants in this study were men being fathers for the first time and their partners, from the five income quintiles, users of public and private health centers in the Metropolitan Region. The inclusion criteria were to be men, over 18 years of age, with healthy children older than one year. In addition, their partners were also interviewed. Therefore, men and their partners who met the inclusion criteria were selected through purposive snowball sampling. Those who agreed to participate were contacted by the principal investigator (PI) by phone to arrange the time and place of the interview at their convenience.

The data collection technique was an in-depth interview and the application of a sociodemographic characterization questionnaire. The interviews were conducted by the PI and a co-investigator, recorded upon consent, and transcribed verbatim. The question that guided the interview of men was 'What has it meant to you to become a father?' and the one for the couples 'From your perspective, what has it meant for your partner to become a father?'

The criterion for determining the number of participants was the saturation of the information¹⁷, achieved when data began to repeat, which occurred in the interviews of the tenth couple. Thirteen couples were invited, of which two declined the invitation. Twenty interviews (10 men and 10 women) were conducted between May and September 2014. In two of the couples interviewed only one member participated since it was not possible to arrange interviews with both. In order to anonymize the participants' accounts, each interview was assigned an acronym using the letter M for men's testimonies and the letter W for women's testimonies, a number with the phrase extracted, and another with the income quintile. For example, M4/15/3 means that the story belongs to man four, topic sentence 15, and income quintile 3.

For the information analysis, the hermeneutic-dialectical method¹⁵ was used, which considers the participants as social actors located in their specific context. It includes two levels of interpretative analysis: 1) assessment of the social context and historical perspective and 2) analysis of the testimonies and their relation with the social-historical context and the theoretical references of the research¹⁵. In this article, the second interpretative level was carried out since the first was done in a previous stage^{1,8}. Table 1 shows the interpretative levels of analysis and their stages.

This research was approved by the respective ethics committees (Resolutions: 24102013 and 11-2013).

Results

The study participants were 10 men and 10 women aged between 21 and 43 years. All the participants had completed high school or higher education, and there was a direct relationship between the educational level and the income quintile to which they belonged. Eighteen of the 20 participants were married or living with a partner and had children between 12 and 48 months of age (Table 2. Sociodemographic characterization of the participants).

The meaning and social participation of men becoming fathers for the first time was made up of five categories (Table 3); four of them were previously established based on the literature review and a fifth one that emerged during the analysis phase. Each category was made up of subcategories, which were composed of thematic phrases constructed from the analysis of the participants' narratives.

Category 1: Meaning of the father's experience

Fatherhood for the first time showed that men experience an intense emotion, which fulfills them and overwhelms them in some ways compared to what they had projected. They are aware that it is a dynamic change, facing something new every day:

"It's not just a different experience because it's being experienced for the first time. It is the experience that sets everything apart" (M5/2/3).

Also, the father needs to adapt to a new situation that marks his life. He experiences it as a positive but radical change, which implies profound modifications, in addition to leaving aside activities he used to do periodically, even exemplified as "stop being an adolescent to be an adult" (M6/5/4).

"The father feels responsibility for his new family. He resumes his studies to give a better future to his daughter

and his partner. He is capable of tolerating things that are not so pleasant because of his daughter" (W3/19/1).

Living the fatherhood experience evokes one's own experience. Fathers recall their relationship with their father, a story that was present in all the testimonies, regardless of income quintile:

"In his childhood, he never lacked for anything. His father was concerned about his family to this day, but regarding being present for everyday things like changing diapers or feeding them, that was his mother's responsibility" (M10/9/4).

Fathers visualize their childhood experience and, in some sense, become aware of the "difficult task that their own fathers had to carry out" (M1/9/5). Thus, they put themselves in their fathers' shoes, generating feelings of gratitude, admiration, and empathy with the challenges and difficulties of being a father.

Category 2: Meaning of fatherhood from a gender perspective

Child rearing is attributed to the female role, as part of the collective consciousness of the participants. New fathers relate how they have partially assumed a role, which has always been associated with women and which they consciously choose to carry out. The change is limited because there is still a need for differentiating between men and women regarding roles; men are willing to assume some activities, mainly those that are pleasurable for them, while women assume the rest, with no choice. The role of resource provider is always present in the narrative of all fathers, although it is stronger in the lower quintiles.

All participating fathers aim to build an active relationship with their children. The men are willing to play, read them stories, spend more time with them, as well as set the rules and enforce them.

"The activities he does with his child are the ones he

Level	Stages		
First level: assessment of the social context and historical perspective	1. Description of the socio-economic/political situation that includes the historical context, the specific life/work conditions, the existing policies in relation to the issue and the gender perspective. This stage was carried out through a documentary analysis		
	2. Establishment of general categories to approach the interviews:a) meaning about fatherhoodb) meaning about the affective development of the child with his/her fatherc) meaning about fatherhood from a gender perspectived) meaning about the couple relationship		
Second level: analysis of the testimonies and their articulation with the historical-social context and the theoretical references of the research	 Ordering of the data through a mapping of the information collected during the field work Classification of data by means of an exhaustive and repeated reading of the texts, for the elaboration of thematic sentences through the technique of discourse analysis 		
	3. Final analysis for the articulation between the data and the theoretical references		

Couples	Identification with fictitious name	Age	Income quintile	Educational attainment	Marital status	Child's gender	Child's age in months
P1	JP	32	5	Graduated (Master degree)	Married	F	22
	Trinidad	32	5	Graduated (Master degree)			
P2	Andrés	43	5	Graduated (Master degree)	Married	F	17
	Manuela	40	5	Undergraduated			
P3	Alejandra	21	1	Technical degree (incomplete)	No current relation	F	15
P4	Alberto	26	4	Undergraduated	Live together	F	15
	Andrea	26	4	Undergraduated (incomplete)			
P5	Eduardo	31	3	Technical degree (incomplete)	No current relation	F	18
P6	Opinión de padre	28	4	Secundary education	Live together	F	48
	Estefany	29	4	Technical degree (incomplete)			
P7	Roberto	32	2	Secundary education	Live together	F	19
	Beyonce	33	2	Secundary education			
P8	Mauricio	34	3	Secundary education	Married	М	18
	Baby	32	3	Secundary education			
P9	Atahualpa	26	4	Undergraduated	Live together	M	12
	Ana	23	4	Technical degree			
P10	David	30	4	Secundary education	Live together	F	20
	Camila	30	4	Technical degree			
P11	Francisco	37	5	Undergraduated	Married	М	48
	Andrea	37	5	Undergraduated			

Table 3. Analysis categories and subcategories				
Categories	Subcategories			
Meaning of the father's experience	 Intense emotion Development of a deep love Change of priorities Parents' experience in relation to their own father 			
Meaning of fatherhood from a gender perspective	 The experience of the man who is a father in front of a role associated with the feminine Responsibility towards the role of provider and educator 			
Meaning of the experience in the parent-child relationship	 Father's feeling of being expendable, initial disconnection Process of developing a bond with the child, connection Consolidating the relationship with the child 			
Meaning of the paternity experience in the couple relationship	 The decision to be a father/mother is shared as a couple Period of adaptation and changes in the couple's relationship Extended family support network Status of mutual help and support in the couple relationship 			
Exercising parenthood and its relationship with the health system	 Consideration of the father in the process of raising the children Fathers' needs not always met Exclusion of fathers from the process of raising children Ways to include fathers 			

enjoys; he likes to play, enjoys reading him a story and talking with him; he considers himself lucky that he and his partner complement each other" (M11/11/5).

Other aspects related to child rearing and care are missing in the narrative of fathers and mothers when these are activities that men are not willing to perform. Activities related to feeding, hygiene, and bathing, putting children to sleep, taking them to health checkups, among others, are not the narrative. These are activities considered to be part of "female biology", and are even mentioned when they talk about the things that modern fathers have been forced to do and that meant a sacrifice for them.

"...He does not believe in the equity of roles, because there are biologically determined roles, and in terms of the relationship with the child when he is younger, the relationship with the mother predominates. As the child grows up, it changes, although he believes that his role as support of the household is basic" (M11/6/5).

Category 3: Meaning of the experience in the parentchild relationship

Fathers initially perceive that they are expendable in the parenting process and that their partners do not let them participate as much as they would like.

"From the age of one year, the father begins to feel a greater connection with his daughter, because before she was all about mom, which makes it difficult to get in tune with her" (M1/11/5).

As they interact more with the child, they feel that they are becoming part of the child's life, strengthening and consolidating a mutual bond. Fathers are interested in using postnatal parental leave indeed. This is a reality for some of the fathers in the highest quintiles, who reported the possibility of dedicating more time to caring for their children, allowing them to do part of their work from home.

"In his job, he can reserve the time to dedicate to his child. They let me work part-time from home, I can take unpaid leave when children are born, they are super open to this issue" (M11/12/5).

Fathers reported experiencing the development of an emotional bond with their children, which is triggered as the child grows older and becomes more independent. This bonding is mainly favored by the child's initiative.

"The affective relationship is a constantly growing process, it increases as she extends her arms to him, gives him kisses and with the words she expresses. His affection for his daughter is enormous" (M2/10/5).

Category 4: Meaning of the paternity experience in the couple relationship

The participants agree that the birth of a child has an impact on the couple's relationship, which in turn

is the condition that leads them to become a family. It seems to have a positive influence when the father participates in the upbringing, getting involved in different tasks.

"He perceives the transformation to fatherhood as positive because they have obtained something wonderful, invaluable...now they are a family...even if they have less free time, it was a decision made as a couple" (W1/25/5).

There is a period of adaptation of the couple to the new baby, which challenges them to incorporate a new actor in the dynamics they were used to. During this period, the fathers consider that they take a back seat because all the attention is focused on the child and her/his needs.

"The fatherhood exercise of her partner has greatly influenced their relationship because they are together because they want to, they are not forced and seeing him as a father concerned and loving his son, sharing this stage, makes them love each other more, even when problems arise, the happiness they feel being together makes them overcome everything and makes them be family" (W9/13/4).

Category 5: Exercising parenthood and its relationship with the health system

The incorporation of the father in the health system appears in the participants' narratives, seeming to be determined by the place they have in society. In the higher income quintiles, fathers perceive that they participate to the extent that they intend to do so. They can realize that health professionals may or may not be willing to incorporate them and feel more empowered to demand their rights in case they are not integrated as they would like.

"The system did not support him in his parenting process, although he does not consider that it influences too much" (M2/18/5).

In contrast, people from the lowest quintiles perceive few possibilities for integration. Fathers agree that they participate as companions and not in their "father role", the health system does not allow them to participate, even when they want to.

"The professionals of the emergency service did not allow the father to enter to accompany his daughter. They even compared him with the mother, arguing that he had fewer rights regarding the care of his daughter" (W3/54/1).

To illustrate the experience of a man becoming a father for the first time, we used the example of a tree, where the father is like a seed that has the potential to germinate and, with the categories of gender, couple's relationship, and development of an affective bond with his child as substrates, he shapes his fatherhood, which is determined by the place he has in society. The family, considered as the social space where the ex-

perience occurs, and the health system as an external condition, strongly influence the first opportunities that men have to exercise fatherhood in their social context (Figure 1).

Discussion

The way of living fatherhood is the result of social reality, determined by existing differences between social groups¹⁸. This is connected to the unique and personal experience that men go through in their process of becoming fathers, which are products of personal and social history and how society is organized¹¹.

In fatherhood, men experience deep love and the need to prioritize family life. In line with what has been reported in other studies¹⁹⁻²¹, the participants express expectations and illusions before childbirth, only to feel overwhelmed by the reality, which differs considerably from what they imagined, causing conflict⁵.

The participants seek to repeat the childhood they lived when it was happy and full with their fathers, which coincides with other studies²². In contrast, when the experience with one's own father was not positive, the participants expressed the need to avoid repeating patterns experienced in their childhood, giving rise to the need to be present and involved with their child in daily activities, which coincides with other studies²¹⁻²⁵. This shows that fathers intuitively assign to this process the possibility of progressing and giving the best of themselves.

In the new father, there is a clear need for a change towards another vision with greater participation in child-rearing activities. In Nordic societies, men seek to be involved, and there is legislation that promotes this²⁶.

In this study, all fathers expressed the need to be involved, regardless of income quintile, although the form and extent of their involvement differed. Despite Chilean legislation promotes the active participation of fathers in parenting, it does not provide effective possibilities of involving⁴.

Fathers need to live their role in a different way²⁷. They seek to be available and present for their children and to study in order to access a better quality of life for their family^{27,28}, as is the case with fathers in the first income quintiles in this study.

Thus, although the role traditionally defined as feminine predominates and there are clearly demarcated positions, the parenting exercise is changing. This coincides with other studies that indicate that there is a delimitation in the roles assumed and imposed on men and women, associated with the social circles they are part of^{2,29,30}.

There is a gradual change towards a more active

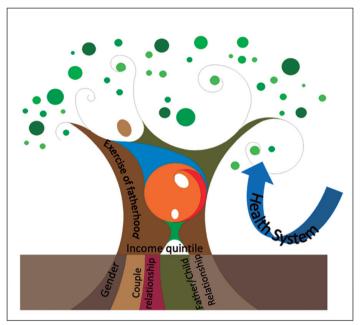


Figure 1. Meaning and social participation of the man when he becomes a father

exercise of fatherhood, mainly related to playing, similar to another study that highlights the participation of fathers in activities related to recreation or with high public visibility³¹.

One finding of this research was the consideration of activities associated with child care as part of "feminine biology". There were no studies that referred to this aspect.

In this study, fathers reported feeling dispensable in the care of their children and indicated the need for their partners to allow them to participate in order to exercise their role. This coincides with other studies in which fathers reported feeling isolated and sad for not being able to interact more with their children since they only seem to need the mother³².

The fathers in this study reported developing an affective relationship with their children. Other studies have also highlighted that the stimulation of the affective bond³³ between father and child is essential to stimulate the child's development^{31,34}, emphasizing the importance of the father's participation in parenting¹².

The process of bonding development is largely triggered by the child's initiative, which was not identified in other research that included this perspective^{25,35}. Given this finding, it is crucial to think of interventions aimed at stimulating and promoting father-child bonding. Apparently, the father remains passive in interacting with the child until he feels the child's need for contact. It is necessary to support new fathers in the

search for sensitive knowledge of their child to promote their interaction from an early stage.

In the couple's relationship, it is noted that there is a period of adaptation to the new baby, which challenges the dynamics they were used to. Coinciding with other studies, fathers consider that they take a back seat, because attention is focused on the child, which requires adaptation to incorporate the men, giving them space to play their role^{20,35,36}.

In line with this study, it is reported that new fathers are in search of a change of role, hoping to participate more actively in daily activities and not only to play the role of provider. This contributes to consolidate the couple's relationship, seeking the welfare of the family group^{5,35}.

Regarding the incorporation of fathers into the health system, the literature reviewed does not specify how they are incorporated but suggests considering them in activities related to the care of the child^{5,10}. In Chile, there have been established initiatives to incorporate the father as a companion of the mother^{4,37}.

The potentialities that emerge from this study highlight the possibility of considering the family as a protagonist in the care of the children, emphasizing its members in the parental exercise, empowering them for a comprehensive growth and development of the family.

It is interesting to discuss how socioeconomic contexts determine priorities when exercising the paternal role. The challenge is to be sensitive to visualize and identify the existence of opportunities to promote a full experience of fatherhood in all socioeconomic contexts.

Recognizing that the process of becoming a father and a mother has common elements and specificities that need to be considered, it is especially necessary to support fathers in the exercise of fatherhood and family development. It is also necessary to work with mothers to support them on how they can encourage their partners to participate.

This suggests the need to establish policies that pro-

mote the fatherhood exercise considering the different types of families and to include this knowledge in the training of health professionals.

This study contributes to the understanding of the fatherhood exercise from a comprehensive view. In order to transfer its results, it is necessary to consider the specific characteristics of this group and of the people to whom the results could be extrapolated.

This study did not include families in the rural sector, so the results may not represent this group. There are plans to expand this study to include groups that provide more insight into fatherhood.

Ethical Responsibilities

Human Beings and animals protection: Disclosure the authors state that the procedures were followed according to the Declaration of Helsinki and the World Medical Association regarding human experimentation developed for the medical community.

Data confidentiality: The authors state that they have followed the protocols of their Center and Local regulations on the publication of patient data.

Rights to privacy and informed consent: The authors have obtained the informed consent of the patients and/or subjects referred to in the article. This document is in the possession of the correspondence author.

Conflicts of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the present study.

Financial Disclosure

This study was developed as part of the main author's doctoral thesis and with the authors' own funding.

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