

Utilization of Fathers' Fortes when Parenting: Analyzing their Perspectives and Experiences in a Focus-Group Interview Format

Sung Hee Hong^a and Pyong Ho Kim^b

^a Assistant Professor, Early Childhood Education Department,
Changshin University, Changwon, South Korea

^b Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Psychology,
Seoul Women's University, Seoul, South Korea

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Abstract: The study attempted to explore the methods that fathers tend to apply when parenting their children, particularly from their own perceptions and experiences of applying their fortes or strengths. In the study, six fathers residing in Busan and Southern Gyeongsang Province located in South Korea. As a studying method, the researchers implemented a 'focus group interview' with the six participants in which a series of in-depths discussions occurred to draw their opinions and ideas as they made interactions. The researchers placed three participants in each of two groups, and each group had two 2-hours-long sessions. The results reflected how the participants perceive their fortes, which then had been categorized into four aspects: namely, i) full usage of fortes when parenting, ii) discovering their fortes and successfully playing their roles, iii) reinforcing their fortes and supplementing weaknesses, and iv) adapting to the fast-changing social requirements for fathers. The findings implied that rather than performing a problem-solving approach, the supports for fathers need to be based on their fortes.

Keywords: Fathers, Parenting, Childcare, Fortes, Positive Psychology

1. Introduction

1.1 Background Of The Study

The modern society in South Korea encounters a wide range of social problems including low birth rates, economic deprivation, and political corruption, thus leading to swift changes in demands for many individuals' roles. There has been increased attention paid to the roles of fathers' participation in parenting among those with children [1-2]. In particular, fathers' issues such as their maternity leave and parental leave have become social issues, and the need for preparing and supporting a social system for practical implementation is also emphasized. These incidents demonstrate how our society no longer confines responsibility for child-rearing to mothers only; rather, the society recognizes that parenting is an accountability that both spouses and the whole society should work together. The role of fathers and desirable image of fathers are also changing depending on the changes and demands of the times. Recently, fathers have recognized the desirable father of this modern era as a friend-like father who can talk and play comfortably, a father who is like a mentor, a father who is like an emotional supporter, and a father who provides their children with necessary economic stability as well as a good environment [3-4]. All of such approachable images had not been evident a few decades ago.

The problem evident in these cases is that the absolute majority of the fathers does not necessarily meet the standards given, which is creating conflicts because of discrepancies that fathers observe between the 'ideal figures' that society seems to require and the actual performance and behavior that they are demonstrating as to childcare. Fathers are often placed under a considerable amount of pressure in their workplaces as well, resulting in dual burdens (i.e., successfully becoming a good father at homes, and a good employee at their workplaces). The combination of stresses and pressures from both inside and outside of their homes tend to give fathers degraded quality of their lives [5-7].

More specifically, CONCOR analysis using big data showed that the keyword "father" was closely linked to words including "health," "activity," "help," "safety," and "understanding," while the directors of numerous kindergartens reported that fathers' participation in parent education, including orientation at the beginning of the semester, has increased [8]. The combination of these two incidents indicates that fathers' interests in childcare have been significantly heightened recently. It also implies that the perception of fathers' role has changed. However, as aforementioned, there is a discrepancy between the social perception of fathers' participation in childcare and the actual father's behavior. Despite the longtime recognition that both spouses need to participate in parenting, many fathers were not be able to take their roles seriously or intensely because they are busy with their work. Examining the fathers' participation levels in playing with their children, it was observed that they played a passive role in all categories of playing [9,10]. In sum, changed perspectives in fathers' roles, society's increased attention paid to fathers' responsibilities, and the discrepancy between high expectations and their actual performance are likely to cause fathers to encounter difficulties and stress, resulting in other negative psychological outcomes.

Such a substantial amount of stresses and pressures given to fathers because of parenting appears to negatively affect their levels of happiness, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships with others, and general satisfaction in lives. Moreover, it even negatively impacts those of their spouses and the children [11,12]. Thus, a wide range of efforts and supports need to be provided in an efficient fashion to foster fathers' successful parenting. More specifically, more studies need to be conducted on methods designed to reduce fathers' parenting stresses and pressures and to heighten confidence levels that consider their psychological as well as personal aspects. Ultimately, these efforts are likely to lead fathers' higher level of their happiness.

Doh [13] (2008)'s study shows what kinds of positive impacts fathers' active participation in parenting could result in. The author reported that the father's participation in child rearing the academic achievement of their child(ren) are positively associated. A report of Suh [14] (2015) also demonstrated that the more fathers participate in physical plays with their children, the more the children are likely to show strong relationships with peers, parents, and display more positive emotions. Additionally, children's level of happiness appeared to become negatively associated with the quality of fathers' communication skills with them. These studies indicate that the father's participation in parenting is significant in terms of positively affecting the healthy growth and development of their children and improving the quality of their happiness.

The perspectives of positive psychology define happiness as a subjective psychological state in which individuals experience their life with pleasure as a result of the long duration of subjective well-being. Positive psychology also suggests that individuals with strengths or fortes and positive qualities are more likely to play their given roles more efficiently and become more contended in a process of applying their strengths or fortes [15-17]. Programs that have been designed to foster individuals' happiness through utilization of their strengths are shown to prove its effectiveness [18-25]. Recently, South Korea has observed growth of researches designed to foster individuals' happiness levels and their competencies that are based on personal strengths or fortes. With its positive results, more and more studies in its relations are introduced not only to the academic fields, but also to the public.

1.2 Definition Of Terminologies And Relevant Studies

Fathers' strengths or fortes refer to the competencies they possess which can help them to successfully play their roles as a father according to the social and personal standards. In other words, these fortes imply some constructive abilities fathers personally identify, which can be attained in the context of their parenting for future applications. From this perspective, one could find previous researches on fathers' fortes and their parenting participation [26-28] helpful as to understanding the application of such strengths. As for competencies fathers are required to attain, Jung and Shin (2012) [29] proposed parents' abilities to practice, and communicate, and Jung, Kang, and Ryu (2016) [30] suggested ability to make positive contribution as a social member, self-determination, developmental child-rearing capability, and positive parenting ability. Additionally, Lee [31] recognizes fathers' participation in parenting as the following seven aspects: daily caring, interaction, instruction, going out together, emotional supports, staying together, providing time and energy.

Hong (2017) [32] suggested greater potential of forte-based approach, rather than a problem-solving approach, in order to support fathers' parenting with children, particularly by analyzing and having fathers become aware of the strengths they possess and examining its utilization. However, researches conducted on fathers' strengths with children are much limited, implying the need for studies from various approaches. In this respect, the present study attempted to provide fundamental data on fathers' strengths as well as parenting strategies by investigating how fathers with children identify the utilization of strengths, how the utilization of strengths appear in their everyday life, and what problems fathers encounter as to utilizing strengths.

Despite the increased number of researches on personal strengths, there also has been a great lack of studies focusing on the strengths of fathers raising children. Recently, the focus has been on theoretical and empirical research on the fathers' stress and mental health, which appear to impact their children's development. It is now necessary to discuss methods to promote fathers' positive psychology, satisfaction in life, and happiness in general.

In addition, the role of utilizing fathers' strengths could result in a better level of achievement [15]. In other words, humans have limited potential of growing only by supplementing their weaknesses; but by utilizing their strengths or fortes, they are more likely to enjoy meaningful and successful life. Thus, helping fathers discover and enhance their fortes, rather than focusing on their inadequacies or weaknesses could help them maximize their potential as a father. The results could even contribute to enhancing their children's and families' happiness.

1.3 Research Questions

RQ 1. How do fathers with children recognize the utilization of their fortes?

RQ 2. What kinds of experience do fathers with children have regarding the utilization of their fortes?

RQ 3. What kinds of difficulties do fathers with children encounter regarding the utilization of their fortes?

2. Research Method

2.1. Selection Of Participations

The study implemented a 'focus group interview' approach as its method in order to conduct in-depth discussions among participant fathers with children and extract ideas and opinions during courses of interactions.

Its detailed guidelines and questionnaire are provided in the Appendix. To this end, the participants in the study were chosen through a ‘purposive sampling’ method to form a bond of sympathy; all were raising children when the study was conducted. A greater detailed description of the six participant fathers is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. BACKGROUND OF THE PARTICIPANT FATHERS

Group Number	Participant	Age	Children’s Age and Gender	Highest Degree	Occupation	Spouse Employed
Group 1	Father 1	38	2 (Female), 3 (Male)	Master’s Degree	Office Worker	No
	Father 2	41	5 (Female), 7 (Male)	Master’s Degree	Office Worker	Yes
	Father 3	41	4 (Male), 6 (Female)	Doctoral Degree	Researcher	No
Group 2	Father 4	43	4 (Male), 7 (Male)	Associate Degree	Office Worker	Yes
	Father 5	43	3 (Female), 7 (Male)	Bachelor’s Degree	Office Worker	Yes
	Father 6	48	3 (Female), 3 (Male)	Bachelor’s Degree	Researcher	No

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Two focus group interview sessions were conducted per group, taking approximately two hours per session. For an interview tool, an open questionnaire was implemented that Kruger & Casey (2000) [33] suggested: i) imposing questions, ii) introductory questions, iii) major questions, and iv) concluding questions. Followed by a preliminary interview, a researcher revised orders and contents of the questions appeared prior to conducting focus group interviews. Analysis of the interviews were conducted based on transcription data that were recorded during each session. In order to enhance reliability and validity of the qualitative data analysis, a triangulation means was adopted. Two participants with a master’s degree and a doctoral degree were selected as research assistants to confirm the veracity of the discussion contents, followed by two early childhood education professors reviewing collected data.

Additionally, Willis and colleagues (2008) [34] suggested that analysis of focus group data need to involve observing three “layers” of discussions: the individual, the group, and the group interaction, which are not considered as “steps” of the examination for researchers. In fact, borderline between two layers is rather vague, making it hard to separate them from each other. Hence, the researchers attempted to follow the guidelines provided by Willis et. al. to generate more of in-depth analysis.

TABLE 2. BACKGROUND OF THE PARTICIPANT FATHERS

Group component	Aspect of interaction for analysis
What?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What topics result in agreement? • What statements seemed to make conflict? • What were the contradictions in the discussions? • What common experiences were observed? • Did the collective interaction make new insights or precipitate an exchange of information among the participant fathers?
Who?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whose interests were being seen as the representative one in the group? • Was a sense of alliances made among the participants? • Was a particular member or viewpoint ignored?
How?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How closely did the group stick to the issues presented for the discussion? • How did the participant fathers respond to the ideas of other participants? • If any occurred, how did the participants resolve disagreements? • How were negative emotions handled, if any occurred? • How were non-verbal signs and behaviors used to contribute to the discussion?

3. Results And Analysis

3.1 How Fathers With Children Perceive The Strength Utilization

The participant fathers mostly agreed on the need to utilize their strengths while raising their children, recognizing their strengths as sources they could use successfully playing their father roles. On the other hand, the participants reported that rather than focusing only on strengths, efforts should be made to supplement weaknesses; they also stated a need to adapt to new social standards of being ‘a good father’ as such requirements change swiftly in the modern society.

TABLE 3. ANALYSIS ON HOW FATHERS WITH CHILDREN PERCEIVE FORTE UTILIZATION

Category	Statement	Date	Participant
Sufficiently utilizing strengths for parenting	“I suppose that taking advantage of my strengths as a father would make the most of my strengths when I'm with my child. I'm a quiet person, but I'm good at finding information and collecting data. So, if there's anything my children are curious about, we search it together, visit there, and collect pictures and play. My children seem to be having a lot of fun, and it was fun for them to do what I'm good at.”	January 26, 2018	Father 2
Recognizing strengths as a father, and playing the role successfully	“I should focus more on what I am good at as my children’s father and use it [the strengths] when raising my children. If my children get satisfied and I feel that I am a good father, that’s a good use of my strengths.”	January 26, 2018	Father 4
Strengthening the strengths, and supplementing the weaknesses	“It could be a matter of how we perceive the problems from different angles. Instead of focusing much on what I’m good at, I think enhancing my weaknesses is more important. When my children observe me trying to overcome my weaknesses, they could consider that as fathers’ strengths.”	January 24, 2018	Father 1
Adapting to the required strengths that constantly change	“I think the definition of fathers’ strengths change very fast as generations go by. In the past, fathers who earn much money seemed to be a good one, even if they were not friendly. But these days fathers need to play well with [their] children, go to camping occasionally, cook for family, etc. So, more aspects could be considered as their strengths. I think we need to adapt ourselves to such changes.”	February 12, 2018	Father 6

3.2 EXPERIENCES IN STRENGTH UTILIZATION OF FATHERS WITH CHILDREN

The participant fathers found themselves capable and satisfied as they utilize their strengths to the fullest when parenting, and experienced that the types of strengths change depending on the children’s age. The fathers appeared to attempt to gain a sense of happiness as they recognize different strengths each spouse possesses and reduce parenting burden together. They also found a need for recognizing and respecting their children’s strengths as well.

TABLE 4. ANALYSIS ON HOW FATHERS WITH CHILDREN UTILIZED THEIR FORTES

Category	Statement	Date	Participant
Utilizing strengths to the fullest	“I think my strengths are apparent when I play with [my] kids. I have an active personality that helps me socialize with the others very well. Even when I’m tired, I tend to play harder than [my] kids when they want me to do so. My spouse often says that I looked more excited than [my] kids.”	February 12, 2018	Father 3
Changing definitions of	“According to the test results, my strengths are love, sociability, and honesty.”	January 24, 2018	Father 6

strengths depending on the children’s age	When my children were very young, I usually loved and hugged them often. But when they went to kindergarten, they started fighting with [their] friends and lying. So I had to use much energy to discipline them to be law-abiding and to get along with the others [in a harmonized fashion]. I suppose that it's one thing I can do better than my wife.”		
Gaining a sense of happiness with the spouse’s strengths	“My wife and I are very different; my strengths are being a little bit tolerant and comfortable, my wife is very rigorous and organized. So, when I play with [my] kids, I play the ‘good’ roles; when I have to scold them or set limits on something, my wife does a great job on it. It was not like we made plans for each other in advance, but the roles became naturally divided. I think it's comfortable for me and effective for the parenting.”	January 24, 2018	Father 3
Strengths becoming challenges for the children	“I’m a little worried about using my strengths a lot. I like my strong points, but I have a question about whether it would be good for my kids. In fact, my younger child seems to be very uncomfortable with my humor. It's unclear how to leverage [my] strengths [for my children].”	February 16, 2018	Father 2

3.3 Difficulties Fathers Experience regarding Utilization of Strengths

Due to the lack of their knowledge and experience related to parenting, the participant fathers appeared to have difficulties in recognizing the utilizing their strengths while raising their children. It was also evident that the fathers acknowledged the importance of understanding the different between the spouses and each other’s supports. They found it significant that the society spreads out an atmosphere in which fathers could live a balanced life at work and home.

TABLE 5. DIFFICULTIES FATHERS EXPERIENCE REGARDING UTILIZATION OF STRENGTHS

Category	Statement	Date	Participant
Parenting as an unfamiliar occupation	“I was so scared when my kids were born. I never learned what dads are supposed to do. The images of my father that I remember are those I gained after I grew up [not when I was in my child’s age]. As a result, I lose confidence and it's hard to find what I'm good at. I don’t think there is any.”	February 16, 2018	Father 5
The stereotype that spouse has	“I don’t think my spouse recognizes my strengths. Well, actually, she does, but she says that my strengths are not the strengths when it comes to parenting. Because she focuses on my weaknesses, I become hesitant when I try new things for my kids. I want someone to tell me how spouses can respect each other’s strengths.”	January 26, 2018	Father 2
Disequilibrium between work and parenting	“In my head, I know what needs to be done for good results, but it’s very hard to actually do it in reality. Even if get off work on time, I often take things home to work on. My boss doesn’t like it when I go home early to see my kids; taking paternity leave is like a dream to me. I hope someone will give a chance to show my strengths to my	February 16, 2018	Father 5

	kids.”		
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4. Discussion And Conclusion

4.1 Discussion

The present study attempted to analyze the father's perception on how they utilize their strengths or fortes as a father, the experience of using strengths in parenting, and the difficulties of using the strengths. Based on the research issues presented in this study, we summarize and discuss the main findings. There are three categories of participants fathers’ responses and opinions shared during the study.

The first category includes fully utilizing strengths in parenting, discovering strengths as fathers, and becoming successful in playing fathers’ roles, strengthening fortes, supplementing weaknesses, and adapting to strengths that change with times. These outcomes show that the participant fathers recognize their strengths as the process of successfully playing their roles as a father, and developing parenting capabilities. This result is equivalent to that or prior studies [29-31], which has a positive impact on individual strengths and their performance and happiness.

The second category includes the participants fathers’ actual application of their strengths when parenting, such as showing their talents to the children, fathers’ strengths that change as the children age, and co-playing as a whole family. Such experiences of using fortes as fathers showed their senses of self-esteem is maximized as they utilize their strengths for the happiness of their families.

The third category includes their concerns, such as stereotypes they have, and the way how they deal with parenting and work in an unbalanced fashion. It appeared that the father participants are more worried about their duties than initially expected. These results could be used as a basic data to design programs to help fathers to successfully play their roles.

4.2 Conclusion

There are a few implications the study proposes. First, parenting-related educational programs need to be designed based on a strength-based approach, rather than taking a problem-solving perspective, so that they help fathers to enhance their self-efficacy as they play their roles, resulting in their psychological stability. To this end, a wide range of studies on specific methods that utilize strengths is required.

Second, in order to promote parenting-related educational programs designed for fathers, it is necessary to provide sufficient amount of time for couples to understand, share, and respect the strengths they have. Generally speaking, according to Lopez and colleagues, the process of utilization of fathers’ strengths as parenting requires the following components: continuous social support, experience of being successful, and enhancement of personal strengths [24,38]. Among them, social support, is the initial stage of the utilization of strengths, which was also evident in the present study. From this perspective, a series of educational programs needs to be implemented for both caregivers to explore utilize their strengths.

Third, social recognition and conditions need to be changed for fathers’ participation in parenting. Of course, the awareness of fathers' participation in parenting has increased compared to the past, but in fact, fathers still demonstrate difficulties in paying attention to or participating in child supporting due to practical limitations, for example, in their workplaces. In other words, efforts should be made to change social systems, resulting in reduced or flexible work hours, and longer and more autonomous maternity leave for fathers.

Appendix A – Focus Group Interview Guidelines And Questions

- The following are suggested questions by each type or category that can be used to facilitate the focus group interview discussions.
- Try to ask all of the questions listed below. Feel free to modify any of these questions or ask your own. Try to cover all of the types if possible, and transit from one type to the next smoothly.
- Note that most of the father participants are not familiar with an interview format like this. Try to form a comfortable and open atmosphere in which they feel free and comfortable. At the same time, encourage them to give details, examples, and illustration when possible, and use follow-up questions to get them to elaborate as needed.

Round	Type of Question	Contents
Round 1	Opening Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you briefly introduce yourself, please? You can tell us your name, age of your child of children, and a brief background of yourself.
	Introduction Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think your fortes or strengths are in general? • Can you tell us how you successfully utilized your fortes or strengths in real-life situations in general? It could be from your personal experiences in general. (Note that this is not about parenting; it is only an introduction question.)
	Transition Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think your father’s fortes or strengths were? • Have you observed how your father utilized his fortes or strengths?
	Core Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think your fortes or strengths are in parenting?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you tell us how you successfully utilized your fortes or strengths in real-life situations in parenting?
	Conclusion Question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will summarize our opinions. • (The researcher summarizes the opinions and shares them with the father participants.) • Do you find this summary well organized? If anything is missing that needs to be added, please let us know now.
Round 2	Core Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you notice any difference between your personal fortes or strengths and those when parenting? • Do you have any difficulty in terms of utilizing your fortes or strengths when parenting? • What kinds of impact of fathers' fortes or strengths do you think there are when parenting?

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