



SCHOLARS
STRATEGY NETWORK

The Complex, Misunderstood Problem of Absent Fathers

Rafael E. Pérez-Figueroa, Rutgers University-New Brunswick

Antonio Garcia, North Carolina State University at Raleigh

With Father's Day upon us, many of us will take a moment this weekend to show our appreciation to our dads. But what is often forgotten is that around **20 percent of fathers** in the United States will likely not hear their child say "Happy Father's Day." For a number of reasons, they are absent fathers. For some, this is due to custodial entanglements with mothers; others are homeless, grappling with addiction, or incarcerated.

In 2021 and 2022, as a group of **interdisciplinary researchers**, we spoke with dozens of fathers who were working day in and day out to enhance connections or relationships with their children. Each of the fathers had been grappling with these challenges—and still struggling to strengthen relationships with their children. From countless hours of interviews and focus groups, one of the key messages we received from these fathers is the need to feel heard.