



"Whatever Happened to Daddy's Little Girl?"

New book reveals the profound impact of fatherlessness on women

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June 16, 2000

This Father's Day many children will greet their fathers with school-made cards, ties and the like. But what of those children who don't have fathers to greet? Much has been written about the effect of fatherlessness on boys. But what about its effect on girls? What kind of women do they grow up to be?

The pain of not having a reason to celebrate June 18 goes beyond this one day.

Jonetta Rose Barras, author of the newly released book, *Whatever Happened to Daddy's Little Girl? The Impact of Fatherlessness on Black Women*, and herself thrice fatherless, writes that losing her father is a profound event in a girl's life. Though she may manage it, she never gets over the loss. Such women are always looking for love. Barras' book focuses on black women, but the problem affects all women. "When you talk percentages, it's a disproportionate number of African-American families affected," Miss Barras told [USA Today](#) (6/7/00), "but in raw numbers, there are more white families without fathers."

She cites statistics that paint a grim picture of American family life:

- In 1995, nearly 25 million children were living in homes without their biological fathers.

- About 40 percent of those children had not seen their fathers in at least a year; 50 percent had never been in their fathers' homes.
- By 1996, 60 percent of black children, 19 percent of white children and 30 percent of Hispanic children lived in homes without a father.
- A study of 22,000 children ages 12 to 17 found that adolescent girls in mother-only families were nearly twice as likely to use illegal drugs, alcohol or tobacco as girls living with both biological parents.

Barras says it is simply not possible for a girl to escape a fatherless home without scars. "Your family is your first social interactive group. It's the foundation," she says.

Some of these scars include:

- **The "un" factor.** Feeling unworthy and unlovable.
- **The triple fear factor.** Fear of rejection, abandonment and commitment.
- **The R.A.D. factor.** Rage, anger and depression.
- **The sexual healing factor.** Sexual expression, from promiscuity to an aversion to intimacy.
- **The "over" factor.** The need to overcompensate, overachieve and oversaturate.

At a recent book symposium on Capitol Hill, Barras blamed the plight of fatherlessness on the move away from the traditional family model. She rejects the "new family" argument-which says that single-parent and same-sex families are no different from traditional ones.

Barras also said fatherlessness hinders women from raising healthy children.

Further, she makes no distinction between an absentee father and one who is physically present but "emotionally unavailable." The impact on daughters is

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Barras said that forgiveness is the key to dealing with fatherlessness.

"Acknowledging our loss permits the opportunity for us to grieve," she says, which can lead to forgiveness. "If there is no forgiving of her parents, especially for her father, then there can be no moving on to her future," she writes.

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