

UPF UN Event: The importance of fathers to the development of their daughters

Lynn Walsh
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New York, United States -- UPF was one of the sponsors of an event held at the United Nations on the importance of fathers to the development of their daughters.

"Fathers, Be Good to Your Daughters: Nurturing and Empowering the Greatness of Every Young Woman" was held on November 30, 2017, by the Permanent Mission of Vietnam to the United Nations, the Universal Peace Federation, and the NGO Committee on the Family, New York.

Ambassador Nguyen Phuong Nga, the permanent representative of Vietnam to the UN, opened the event by remarking that the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals -- especially those relating to poverty, education and gender equality -- cannot be achieved without the family; yet the family is often overlooked.

Madame Ambassador stated that as the family forms our personality and character, a good family is essential for creating the fabric of a good society. She focused on the unique importance of fathers, who are clearly valued in her culture.

The ambassador reflected on a Vietnamese analogy seeing the father as a mountain with the characteristics of strength, courage, and reliability. These traits, uniquely provided by a father, she continued, are what give girls confidence and trust to pursue their goals and accomplish their dreams.

Ryan Koch, the co-chair of the NGO Committee on the Family, New York and the director of public and international affairs of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, moderated this session.

Lynn Walsh of the Universal Peace Federation and an executive member of the NGO Committee on the Family, New York, emphasized the pertinence of fatherhood to the SDGs. She explained that the fundamental formation of every person's character, capacities, and much of their future is generated from that primary parent-child relationship. As there has been a large increase in fatherlessness, she said, it is critical that we examine the ramifications on girls' flourishing.

The keynote speaker was Professor Timothy Rarick of Brigham Young University, who is currently doing research at the Catholic University of America on the family and fatherhood. Dr. Rarick opened his presentation by clarifying that although the research indicates that well-fathered girls are more successful than those without fathers, it does not mean that un-fathered girls cannot do well, as many certainly do. Also, the research does not mean that single mothers who do herculean jobs raising their daughters cannot be successful, as they certainly can.

However, the research indicates that the advantages of having an involved biological father are clear, Dr. Rarick said. These advantages raise the likelihood of resulting in thriving young women, he said.

Despite this, Dr. Rarick pointed out, fatherhood has become devalued to the extent that popular female media personalities regard fathers as insignificant for raising children. According to a study by the National Fatherhood Initiative, one-third of fathers believe that they "are not important to the development of my daughter." In 1960, Dr. Rarick said, 90 percent of children lived with their biological father, but today one out of three children lives in a home from which the biological father is absent.

Dr. Rarick then reviewed research on a multitude of areas in which fatherlessness dramatically increases risks for girls. These include poor school performance, dropping out, mental health issues, depression, obesity, crime, substance abuse, suicide, sexually transmitted infections, adolescent pregnancy, abortion, being physically and sexually abused.

Fathers and mothers parent differently, he said, each contributing to build different capacities and strengths. Fathers, more than mothers, challenge daughters intellectually, he said, teaching them not to complain or play victim, to take responsibility for their mistakes, to problem-solve, and to try difficult or new things -- all of which motivate and enable daughters to achieve their potential.



In particular, a father has an impact on a girl's future relationships with other men, he said. One statistic he mentioned was that "35 percent of girls whose fathers left before age six became pregnant as teenagers, in comparison to 5 percent of those raised by their fathers." Well-fathered girls, said Dr. Rarick, are more likely to have a positive sense of self to develop healthy relationships with men and avoid sexual exploitation.

A critical issue that Dr. Rarick raised was the importance of the institution of marriage, as it solidifies the commitment a father makes to take responsibility to love, protect, and provide for his daughter and wife. Strengthening marriage has a special impact on the more disadvantaged, he said.

His presentation included a quote from Linda Nielsen, a professor at Wake Forest College, indicating that poor father-daughter relationships are "associated with many of the most troubling problems in our country today, including poverty, teenage pregnancy and sexual disease, out-of-wedlock births, drug and alcohol abuse, high rates of incarceration, and a host of other problems disproportionately afflicting minority families. In other words, strengthening father-daughter relationships has far-reaching benefits."

In conclusion, Dr. Rarick assured the audience that strengthening marriage and the father-daughter relationship will result in "less dependency on government programs, less supply and demand for sexual exploitation, less poverty, decreased crime and drug use, improved economy, [fewer] teen mothers, better maternal-child health, more educated, skilled, confident, and emotionally healthy women." Dr. Rarick made a final poignant comment that fatherhood also changes men for the better, especially in their capacity to love and sacrifice. How much he cherished his daughter was evident as he read, tearfully, a "Thank you, Daddy" note from her.

The next two speakers gave personal testimonies of the father-daughter relationship. Mr. Nuno Crisostomo, originally from Portugal and a program specialist with UNICEF, described his life-changing experience raising his daughter. He emphasized the importance of being involved with his daughter's life and was grateful that he could accompany his wife during her pregnancy, have a bonding experience with his daughter during a trip to Australia, and even help his daughter get her first bra. Raising his daughter gave him a substantial sense of purpose, love, and pride, he said.

Ms. Min Young Yeow, a young Chinese-Malaysian woman, gave numerous examples of how her father's simple actions of love and thoughtfulness -- such as a warm welcome home or preparing her favorite food -- made her feel loved, valued and confident. From this relationship, she felt encouraged to go out to the world and accomplish what was important to her.

Ryan Koch facilitated questions and answers after the panel presentations. Closing remarks were made by Ambassador Nga, commenting on lessons she has learned from raising her daughter. She also gave special appreciation to Ms. Huong Lien Nguyen, the first secretary for the Permanent Mission of Vietnam to the United Nations, who performed a major role in organizing the event and, coincidentally, whose husband is home in Vietnam raising their two daughters while she serves the mission.