

Black Fathers' Involvement in the Early Education of Their Children and Associated Factors: South African Context

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ABSTRACT Father's absence in their children's early lives is very prevalent in South Africa, especially among Black fathers. The purpose of this study is to examine the level of Black fathers' involvement in the early education of their children and other associated factors in South Africa. The paper has two main findings; firstly, with regard to non-involvement in their children's early lives, Black fathers have a high percentage due to their socioeconomic status and HIV/AIDS-related high mortality rate. Secondly, South Africa has acknowledged the criticality of the absent fathers' problem and is embarking on programs meant to address the internal and external causative factors as well as to promote father involvement through sharing of ideas on responsible fathering. Thus, it is recommended that to address this problem there is a need to undertake the following: research studies, benchmarking, community counselling, policy reviews and integration of responsible fathering ideology in the school curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Posel and Devey (2006) reported that South Africa occupies a second position after Namibia with regard to the high rate of father absence in their children's early lives. Khunou (2006) and Ritcher and Dawes (2008) also mentioned that, in addition to father absence, South Africa has low rates of paternal maintenance and high rates of children neglect by their fathers. Findings from Statistics South Africa (2011) also revealed that as a result of father absence only about a third of South African pre-school children live in the same homes as their fathers. The above mentioned view was also confirmed by Grange (2013) who further noted that a recent South African Institute of Race Relations survey found that only 36% of South African children have their fathers living with them. Most children live with their mothers, maternal uncles, grandfathers as well as siblings (Ritcher et al. 2011).

Posel and Devey (2006) shared that several national household surveys estimated that in 2002, 55% of rural Black African children (age 15 years and younger) did not live with their fathers. A survey conducted in 2007 also suggested that father absence was increasing, partly because HIV/AIDS-related mortality was increasing (Richter and Morrell 2008). In 2008, Richter

and Morrell (2008) discovered that from South African men who are estimated to be fathers, approximately 50% do not have daily contact with their children. As much as the findings of Statistics South Africa (2011) shared that "many" absent South African fathers support their children and remain in contact with them despite living apart, this was challenged by a study undertaken by Hosegood and Madhavan (2012). The study investigated social and residential arrangements of biological fathers and children in 11,000 households in the northern KwaZulu-Natal and its findings were that rural Black African children (age 15 years and younger) did not live with their fathers and only a few fathers maintained constant contact with their children (Hosegood and Madhavan 2012).

Posel and Devey (2006) explained that father absence varies across racial groups; for example, in 2002, fewer than 40% of Black children, ages 15 years or younger lived with their fathers, compared to almost 90% of White and Indian children. Posel and Devey (2006) and Hill (2008) noted that the racial disparity was linked to the socio-economic status; an example given was that in 2005, 51% of the 22,732 resident children with living biological parents lived in a household where their biological father was not a member. Out of 49% children whose fathers,

were considered to be a member of the household, 44% of these children were not co-resident with their fathers because the father was living primarily somewhere else (Posel and Devey 2006; Hill 2008). Posel and Devey (2006) and Hill (2008) further added that among children whose mothers had died, the proportion of children whose fathers do not belong to the same household is significantly higher than among non-orphans, that is, 68% compared to 49% among non-orphans. The proportion of African children under the age of 15 years with absent living fathers increased from 45% to 52% between 1996 and 2009 (Eddy and Holborn 2011). It is important to note that the absence of fathers in their children's early lives is not only a South African social problem, many countries are experiencing it, Garcia et al. (2008) reported that, *In Africa, fathers are absent from nearly a third of households, after Namibia and South Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Kenya have the same problem...* (p. 153).

Lamb and Day (2003) noted that absent fathers are also very prevalent in Canada; Britain and United States. It is also imperative to caution that in an African context, fathers' involvement with children may be underestimated if it is measured only in terms of current physical co-residence (Richter et al. 2006). Desmond and Desmond (2006) argued that from a Black man's perspective responsible fathering mainly means economic support for their children. A popularly held belief is that if a Black man is not financially supporting his children, he should rather distance himself from his children (Mavungu 2013). Rabe (2006) also interviewed mines' workers that were living in single-sex hostels around the gold mines and only got home to their rural families once a year. The interviewed mine workers considered financially supporting their children as the core responsibility of a good father, and stated that they undertook to work in dangerous conditions so that they could support their children (Rabe 2006). To confirm the criticality of the role of a Black man as a provider for his children, in the northern KwaZulu-Natal, Hill et al. (2008) also investigated which parents mainly paid for the children's school fees and the findings were that biological fathers were the persons primarily responsible for paying school fees for 47% of children between 6-17 years and with both biological parents living. Desmond and Desmond (2006) said that men feel like fail-

ures and are shameful when they cannot support their children, largely because they are out of work and this often lead man to avoid being involved fathers. Unemployment obviously exacerbates this problem, one man who participated in a research study said,

As you lose your job, you start feeling the distance, you start making the distance. All the time when I go there, I don't have anything. I must stop going there. How is my child going to look at me? What will my child say? (p. 228).

Ramphele (2006) confirmed this truth by noting that,

Desertion by fathers is often prompted by their inability to bear the burden of being primary providers. The burden of failure becomes intolerable for those who lack the capacity to generate enough income as uneducated and unskilled labourers (p. 1).

As much as Black man put more emphasis on their role as providers, Richter and Morrell (2006) cautioned that it is critical to share ideas about fatherhood because it is dangerous to mostly equate fatherhood with being a provider. Grange (2013) argued that the father's role is not only to provide but also to protect, care and nurture for children. Grange (2013) added that father's absence can be defined as either physical or emotional-therefore whilst he may reside at home, a father can also be emotionally unresponsive to his family. Mkhize (2004) further argued that in addition to being a provider, fatherhood must also consider dimensions like access or time spent in the presence of the child, paternal engagement and direct interaction with the child. Although, many authors agreed that providing for children is the main role of a Black father, Rabe (2007) argued that the father's socio-economic status has an influence on the role Black fathers play in their children's lives. Rabe (2007) reported that where work patterns and employment have been favourable, there is evidence of working class men embracing an engaged form of fatherhood like reading to their children and taking an interest in their schooling.

As much as the role that Black fathers claim to play in their children's lives is explained, that is, to be providers, it is imperative to note that there are a number of other factors that also inhibit Black fathers from being involved in their children's lives. Cultural practices like being unable to afford to pay *intlawulo* (damages for impregnating a girl) or *lobola* (bride wealth/dow-

ry) cause Black men to prefer not to acknowledge paternity, therefore, opting to be absent in a child's life (Hunter 2006). Patriarchal attitudes related to their perceived superiority to women and children also exacerbate the distance between fathers and their children (Grange 2013). In addition, in an African kinship, children are valued by the whole family and are frequently sent to live with close relatives for varying lengths of time to get to know the extended family and kin and to consolidate ties, however, this also results in fathers being absent in their children's early lives (Anderson 2005).

Absent fatherhood is also not a recent phenomenon in South African because the apartheid era also had negative consequences that also led to absent fatherhood. Social unrests were prevalent as a result children's schooling was always disrupted and families were forced to send their children to urban areas to access better quality schools, or to rural schools to find stability and safety from violent urban protests and school closures (Richter et al. 2006; Ntshoe 2002). Colonial powers also forced local people into paid work by levying taxes that required them to earn money (Horwitz 2001), therefore, a large number of fathers left their homes in search of job opportunities. Posel (2003) also supported the argument that the migrant labour system contributed greatly to the alienation of fathers from their children as he noted that a pattern of male migration from rural to urban areas was established with families separated for long periods of time. As women were left to raise the children alone, as much as girls were also affected, many Black men grew up without fathers and had no role models to teach them how to be fathers themselves (Grange 2013). Although, from an African perspective being a provider is seen as an honourable role of a father, it must also be mentioned that beside other cultural and political factors that may lead to absent fathers, there are also cases that are a result of heartlessness and indifference to the welfare of children as well as a callous disregard for legal obligations of care. In a story set in KwaZulu-Natal in the 1980's, Polela (2012:3) described how,

"...his father murdered his mother and then turned his back on him and his sister (him aged 3 and the sister 5)"

This indifference to the welfare of children as well as the disregard for law is also highlighted by the concept of social fathers that is highly

prevalent with Black fathers. A social father (non-biological) may pay maintenance for a child of a former partner with whom he has regular contact or pay for his sisters or brother's children but may not have acknowledged a child of another partner he no longer sees (Mkhize 2004; Rabe 2007). A social father may also have little contact with his own children in a former household because he has moved in with a woman who has children from her previous relationship and he has become their primary source of support (Mkhize 2004; Rabe 2007). Thus, it means for social fathers, having a close relationship with the mother of the child is a determinant for the father's closeness and support for his children.

In explaining the consequences of absent fatherhood, Lindegger (2006) shared that grown men who never knew their fathers or who experienced violence, neglect or abuse through the hands of their fathers, communicate deep sadness about their experience and a longing to have had a father or a better father than they had, and to be themselves better fathers to their children. Despite the negative results linked to absent fatherhood, Morrell and Jewkes (2011) noted that there are positive results that can be observed if correct intervention measures are implemented. Some boys that had fathers to care, received affectionate care, were socialised to understand men's roles and were chosen to take on the role of being a father, looking after siblings, parents and/or grandparents-some of these cases yielded very positive results.

Rationale

Grange (2013) cautioned that while fatherlessness might have become common, it should never be regarded as "normal"-therefore redressing the state of fatherlessness has become nothing short of urgent, as the fallout can be devastating. Grange (2013) noted that the absence of a father in a child's life, physically or emotionally, can profoundly disadvantage the child in adulthood. Global research has found that children growing up without fathers are at a significant disadvantage when it comes to education, employment, behaviour and relationships (Grange 2013). Boys growing up in absent father households are more likely to display "hyper-masculine" behaviour, including aggression, while girls who grow up without fathers are more

likely to have low self-esteem, engage in risky sexual behaviour, and have difficulties forming and maintaining relationships (Grange 2013). Richter and Morrell (2006) posited that absent fathers account for many young adults contributing directly to the health, crime and other social crises being faced today. Richter et al. (2011: 2) believed,

“Supportive fathers give girls self-confidence, and help boys develop healthy masculinity and clear identity. One of the biggest impacts of an involved father is that he gives credibility to school work. Children stay at school longer if their fathers support them in education. Children benefit from the financial support, care and protection of men. A man can make all the difference to a child’s life by preventing or stopping abuse perpetrated by other men. Supportive fathers give girls self-confidence and help boys develop healthy masculinity and a clear identity.”

Richter et al. (2011) also noted that one of the biggest influences of an involved father is that he gives credibility and encouragement for educational achievement, as a result children stay longer at school and achieves far more if their fathers support them in education. It is against this background that it is critical to examine the level of Black father’s involvement in the early education of their children and other associated factors.

Theoretical Framework: Responsible Fathering

Responsible fathering in Levine and Pitt’s theory that suggests that there “ought,” to be a set of desired norms for evaluating fathers’ behaviour, therefore, there is a moral code (right/wrong) that suggests that some fathering style could be judged “responsible or “irresponsible” (Levine and Pitt 1995). Responsible fathering refers to both resident and non-resident fathers which is a reflection of the diversity of fathers’ situations and also addresses both fathers that are absent, that is “deadbeat,” as well as those that are emotionally uninvolved (Doherty 1990). McGraw and Walker (2000) noted that the responsible fathering theory applies to fathers across all social classes and racial groups, not narrowly to men in lower social classes or minority groups. Levine and Pitt’s (1995) explained that a man who behaves responsibly to his child

does the following: he waits to make a baby until he is prepared emotionally and financially to support his child; he establishes his legal paternity if and when he does make a baby; he actively shares with the child’s mother in the continuing emotional and physical care of their child, from pregnancy onwards; and he shares with the child’s mother in the continuing financial support of their child, from pregnancy onwards.

In examining the extent in which Black fathers are involved in their children’s early education, and what influences their involvement, it is clear that there are a number of moral values Black fathers need to uphold, in order for them to be viewed as responsible fathers. As aforementioned, Desmond and Desmond (2006) noted that to some Black men responsible fathering mainly means economic support for their children, therefore, a Black man who is not financially supporting his children should rather distance himself from his children. However, Day and Lamb (2004) reported that there is a new emerging breed of fathers called “*new fathers*”; these fathers are both providers and caregivers for their children. These men are willing to attend health centres, walk and drive children to and from school as well as provide care at home, if their female partners are employed (Richter 2006; Cabrera et al. 2000). Thus, it is clear that South Africa has two sets of Black fathers that subscribe to different moral values and have different interpretations of what responsible fathering means. These different interpretations also influence the way and the extent in which these Black fathers get involved in their children’s early education lives as well as in other factors.

CONCEPTUALISATION OF A FATHER

According to Ponzetti (2003), a “*father*” is a man who has engendered a child, a male parent, or a person who takes responsibility for protecting, caring, and rearing. Kervorkian (2010) and Stibbe (2010) noted that a biological father is obliged to maintain contact; pay partial child support and also support the child in other ways, for example, morally, emotionally, academically or physically. It must be noted that there are people that contest the appropriateness of using the term “*father*”, to every man that has impregnated a woman as Mkhize (2006) strongly argued that there is no direct correspondence between being a biological father and discharg-

ing the roles of a father. Mkhize (2006) believed that there are men who are not biological fathers but often play critical roles in the lives of children that they share a space with. Mkhize (2006) further added that a father provides financial support, constancy, presence and emotional support. However, for the purpose of this study, the father under discussion is a biological father, that is a father that has engendered a child.

As aforementioned in the introductory remarks Desmond and Desmond (2006) shared that from a Black man's perspective responsible fathering mainly means economic support for your children. However, Nosseir (2003) challenged Desmond and Desmond (2006) assertions by noting that in a traditional African context a father's role is defined as a provider or breadwinner, however, in addition to economic support; fathers have a responsibility as well for moral oversight over children and gender role modelling. In addition, traditionally, a father still constitutes the authority figure and in consequence he shoulders major responsibilities for the members of his family (Nosseir 2003). In the light of that, Lamb (2000) cautioned that due to emerging social trends, with regard to Black men in South Africa, the traditional definition of a father is being reviewed. Cabrera et al (2000) noted that as the socio cultural contexts are changing there is an emergence of a new grouping of Black fathers, the "new father". A "new father" notion has emerged with the increasing commitment of men to their families and the well-being of their children (Marsiglio and Roy 2012; Roy 2008). According to Day and Lamb (2004) the "new father" is a man who is both a provider and a caregiver for his children and doesn't subscribe to the belief that fathers are only supposed to financial providers.

Causes of Absent Fathers

Various factors have been identified as causal factors to absent fatherhood. Factors that have a direct link to fathers are the following: the father honestly doesn't know that he is the father of a child (Hunter 2006); the father had an absent father so fatherhood wasn't modelled to him (Swartz and Bhana 2009); suspicion of paternity fraud as biological links are often assumed (Bellis et al. 2005); allegations of promiscuity and multiple partners levelled towards mothers (Kaufman et al. 2000); young fathers

refusal of paternity due to their unpreparedness to assume financial and social obligations of parenthood (Kaufman et al. 2000); parents warning their young sons against claiming paternity if that will force them to abandon education or strain the family's meagre resources (Swartz et al. 2013); a poor relationship between the mother and the child's father (Swartz et al. 2013); unemployment or low earning power causing a father to be denied access to a child or the father deciding to keep his distance (Desmond and Desmond 2006); fathers migration to other parts of the country in search of employment (Richter et al. 2011); the belief that caring for a child is a duty of a woman (Mavungu 2013) and plain heartlessness and indifference to the welfare of children as well as a callous disregard for law (Mkhize 2004; Rabe 2007). Some of the latter causes are a reason why some fathers are called "deadbeat fathers". In Xhosa there is an idiom that describes a "deadbeat" father, as: "*ufe ethwele umnqwazi*", that is he is dead with his hat on, meaning the father is as good as dead because physically, he is walking around but economically he is useless (Magona 1990).

Craddock (2013) noted that mothers served as gatekeepers in the father-child relationship, both inside and outside marriage, therefore, access to the child can be influenced by mothers in the following ways: mother's personal feelings about the father (Richter et al. 2011; Khunou 2006); young mothers under their parents care being dictated by their parents to deny fathers access to the child (Swartz et al. 2013); and women's empowerment which challenges the notion of men as heads of families may cause a father to resent his family (Grange 2013).

A child's gender, age and developmental stage can be a cause for father absence in the following ways: fathers find it easier to be more involved with their sons, especially with older ones, presumably because they can identify with them and are more comfortable communicating with them (Oliker 2011); fathers may not be comfortable with their daughters because they cannot relate to them (Krohn et al. 2001) and lastly, some fathers withdraw more from parent-adolescent conflict than mothers do (Nielsen 2014).

Consequences of Absent Fatherhood

Many authors noted that absent fatherhood have both negative and positive consequences

in the lives of children. Amongst the positives that were mentioned Desmond and Desmond (2006) believed a household with a father in residence is likely to be better off as children's nutrition, health care, and schooling are likely to be encouraged and supported, and if present, the mother is likely to feel assisted in her role. With regard to safety fathers protect and buffer children against neglectful or harsh parenting by a distant, demoralized or overburdened mother and fathers can also shield their children from potential exploitation and abuse by other men (Guma and Henda 2004). With regard to identity, acknowledged biological fatherhood is an important element of identity development as Black children take their fathers clan names and become part of the wider circle of family and kin (Richter et al. 2010). Academically, researches indicated that children whose fathers remain present achieve better results at school and have higher self-esteem (Carslon 2006; Richter et al. 2011).

The negative consequences of absent fatherhood is that with regard to a child's moral and emotional development, Ramphele (2002) believed that being considered fatherless generates in children a sense of loss and confusion and such children are more likely to experience emotional disturbances and depression. Absent fatherhood is identified as one of the contributing factors to the spread of HIV/AIDS, violence and the high incidence of rape (Grange 2013). Richter et al. (2011) advised that girls without fathers are prone to early pregnancy, bearing children outside marriage, marrying early, or getting divorced. Rossenberg and Bradford-Wilcox (2006) noted that there are more consistent evidences that father absence can have a negative impact on the child's educational attainment. In support of that Eddy and Holborn (2011) suggested that the presence of a father can contribute to cognitive development, intellectual functioning, and school achievement of a child. Numerous studies also found that an active and nurturing style of fathering is associated with better verbal skills, intellectual functioning, and academic achievement (Rossenberg et al. 2006). Rossenberg et al. (2006) further added that children with involved caring fathers have better educational outcomes as a number of studies suggest that fathers who are nurturing and playing have children with higher IQ's as well as better linguistic and cognitive capabilities. Palk-

ovitz (2002) also believed that toddlers with involved fathers start school with higher levels of readiness and can handle stress and frustration associated with schooling.

THE EXTENT OF BLACK FATHERS INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EARLY EDUCATION AND OTHER FACTORS

With relation to the level of Black fathers' involvement in the early education of their children and associated factors, firstly, literature revealed that non-involvement of Black fathers in their children's early lives is highly prevalent in South Africa, the country occupies a second position after Namibia and is also leading in low rates of paternal maintenance and high rates of children neglect (Hosegood and Madhavan 2012; Lamb and Day 2003).

Secondly, it was also found that, in South Africa the father's non-involvement in their children's early lives varies across racial groups; Black fathers have a higher percentage compared to Whites and Indians and this racial disparity is linked to socioeconomic status and HIV/AIDS-related mortality of Black fathers (Hill 2008).

Thirdly, some Black fathers view active involvement as meaning mainly financial support for their children but there is an emerging new breed of fathers (*new fathers*) that is reviewing the traditional view of father involvement and are actively involved as both providers and caregivers and this "*new fathers*" emergence is linked to work patterns and employment that is favourable (Day and Lamb 2004; Desmond and Desmond 2006; Mavungu 2013; Rabe 2007).

The fourth discovery is that, there are various factors that impede father involvement, and these factors are external and internal; external factors are those that the child's parents or anyone involved has no control over them, like unemployment and cultural prescripts and internal factors are those linked to the decisions taken by the child's parents, like a mother preventing a father to see a child because of their personal differences (Morrell and Jewkes 2011).

The fifth thing that was unearthed was that South Africa is becoming increasingly aware of the need to support and promote father involvement through a platform of sharing ideas and mentoring and there is a belief that the strategy is highly effective as there are reported positive

results related to its implementation despite constant unsubstantiated media reports that young fathers are choosing to be uninvolved in their children's lives (Grange 2013; Richter et al. 2010; Richter and Morrell 2006; Swartz et al. 2013).

The sixth and the last discovery was that, delayed entry into fatherhood as one moral value promoted by the responsible fathering theory produced positive results because there are evidences that men who delay fatherhood until their thirties and forties are more involved in their children lives (Ponzetti 2003).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is clear from the latter discussion that, although, there is an emergence of the "*new father*", that is, the father that is willing to be involved in all aspects of his child's development, however, there is still a concerning number of Black fathers who believed that a father's duty is only limited to financial support. As much there are other reasons for Black father's non-involvement, it has also been discovered that the father's inability to provide financial support to his child is the main source of uninvolved fatherhood, whether that is linked to child maintenance or the cultural prescript that a man must pay damages after impregnating a woman. Lack of finances, thereof, causes fathers to be hindered from accessing their children or out of embarrassment fathers decide to keep their distance from their children. Thus, it is a clear the fathers financial strength is a determinant for his involvement in his child's life. In the light of the above, there is an urgent need to address this belief and its negative implications on children's growth and well-being need to be highlighted as well.

From personal experience the author never got to see "*my father*" till he passed on in 1985, the reason shared was that when the delegation was sent to his home, his family promised to come and pay the "damages" - they never came - and that was a reason he never made an attempt to see me or was never allowed to see me. The opinion shared about "*my father*" not having contact with the author is a "protected" statement because the author only heard one side of the story (from my maternal family) and "*my father*" never had an opportunity or never gave himself time to share his reasons with the son. It is possible that the father may have had

other reasons not to make contact with the author. However, reasons given by the author's maternal family or those that could be given by "*my father*" can never compensate for the pain, the disappointment, the longing, the waiting, the questions and the hope that the author would see his "*father*" one day - only to be told that the author's father had passed on a few years ago.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings of this study the researchers recommend that the following be done:

Conduct research studies, firstly, to investigate why there has not been an improvement with relation to Black father's involvement in their children's lives after the implementation of policies and programs that were meant to address poverty and unemployment in Black communities and secondly, investigate whether the "*new fathers*" active involvement is linked to their favourable employment status or is it linked to their moral obligation to be involved fathers whether they can/cannot provide for their children. Learn from the success stories related to the intervention /mentoring programmes that have been implemented for Black orphaned and abandoned boys and to share learnt lessons with other communities. The media can also be used to popularize issues around responsible fathering as well as the success stories related to the intervention/mentoring programs.

Review relevant policies to ensure that all issues related to responsible fathering are mainstreamed into all policies and to implement these policies and programs in different government and community platforms.

Conduct community counselling with an aim of highlighting the positives and the negatives of "culture based" decisions and how at times such decisions can produce "unintended" consequences, children's rights violation. Incorporate in the school curriculum issues related to different family forms so that children can be assisted to understand the dynamics of family life as well as father absence and this could assist in preventing problems like depression and indiscipline that may be emanating from the child's anger issues. Black fathers must also be encouraged to participate in school activities so that they can give support aimed at improvement of student achievement and inculcation of good values.

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