

Mothers' Perceptions on Fathers' Participation in the Early Childhood Education of Their Children

J. Mathwasa and C.I.O. Okeke

University of Fort Hare, East London, Eastern Cape, South Africa

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ABSTRACT This study set out to examine mothers' perspectives on the fathers' participation in the academic development of their children in the foundation phase education in Eastern Cape. A qualitative case study approach positioned in the interpretivist paradigm studied six purposively selected mothers as participants in their natural habitation. Through semi-structured interviews, data collected from participants were thematically analyzed. All ethical measures were observed and respondents signed consent forms. The findings revealed that negation of paternity, absent father syndrome, migratory labor and unemployment were the main causes of the fathers' non-participation. The study concluded that despite the circumstances, children had the right to a relationship with their fathers since effective fathers' participation in their lives is essential for achieving the early childhood education goals. The study recommends that programs ought to be tailor-made to suite all classes of fathers whether they are resident or non-resident with their children.

INTRODUCTION

Fathers and mothers have a responsibility towards the lives they introduce to the world and yet by virtue of being the vessel that has access to the creation before birth, the mother develops a special bond with the child. Huppert et al. (2010) ascertain that care and psychological control from both parents were constantly related with the welfare of children more than maternal maintenance and control. Research ratifies that the child's physical and psychological development mostly thrives because of attachment theory that gives basis to mother-child connection (Bornstein 2002). It is also important for the child to connect with the father, as he plays a different role from the mother. Extensive research on parenting provides indication that the quality of caregiving is critical in influencing the level of children's social, emotional as well as cognitive development (Landry et al. 2006; Dexter et al. 2013; Mncanca et al. 2016). Similarly, attentive and approachable parenting encourages a secure attachment relationship leading to progressive outcomes in several spheres of child development (Vondra et al. 2001; Belsky and Pasco Fearon 2002; Bernier and Meins 2008; Nievar and Becker 2008; Dexter et al. 2013). Consequently, adequate maternal sensitivity results in

secure mother-child attachment (Ainsworth et al. 1978). Generally, mothers have been acknowledged for their role as primary caregivers, as they predominantly nurture, train and care for their children (Marsiglio and Hendricks 2012). Their role as primary caregivers has been confirmed by their presence in school functions, meetings and conferences, and they are active volunteers in various school activities more often than fathers, who are imperceptible (Burgess 2010; Marsiglio and Roy 2012; Okeke 2014; Mathwasa and Okeke 2016).

It has been observed that mothers who raise children without the assistance from a supportive partner are prone to challenging situations such as anxiety and exhaustion leading to higher probabilities of psychological glitches (Brousard et al. 2012). A plethora of investigations have documented negative implications such as lower IQ and poor academic achievement for children who are born and raised in low socio-economic status families (SES) (Clearfield and Niman 2012; Yoshikawa et al. 2012). Meanwhile, the difference between mother-child or father-child relationships remain indistinguishable, as their contribution to the wellbeing of children continues to generate interest among educational researchers. It is believed that both parents contribute differently but are complimentary to the development of the child. Theoretically, Bowlby (1988) affirms that the attachment the child has to the primary caregiver, who usually is the mother, remains the fundamental pattern for forthcoming relationships.

Address for correspondence:
Dr. J. Mathwasa
E-mail: jmathwasa@yahoo.com

Nevertheless, there appears to be scarcity in research of a theory that builds a strong connection between fathers and their children. In view of this anomaly, Cabrera et al. (2007) assert that researchers should begin to adjudicate fathers' participation based on the unique and significant influence fathers have on their children and not dependent on the views provided by mothers. Numerous studies commend that father involvement in the early life is critical to the social, emotional and cognitive growth of the child (Potter 2012; Okeke 2014; Khewu and Adu 2015; Mashiya et al. 2015). Then again, fathers' involvement provides children with human capital skills, financial and social support (Day et al. 2003). When fathers are involved, children tend to develop psycho-socially, cognitively and perform well academically (Cabrera et al. 2007; Lamb 2010; Pleck 2010). Children are also inclined to pursue schooling for a longer period, and achieve higher educational and professional mobility comparative to maturity (Sarkadi et al. 2008; Flouri 2010).

Despite the fact that the father's role as a breadwinner for the family's economic sustenance is important (Richter and Morrell 2006), it tends to overshadow the significant role of providing protection, nurturing and care for the children (Grange 2013). According to Grange (2013), a father who is not fervently amenable to his children is considered absent even though he may be physically present. For this reason, Mkhize (2004) put forward that besides being a provider, a father must be accessible to spend quality time and have direct interaction with the child. Following the worldwide attention on fatherhood, South Africa took a keen interest on the state of fatherhood. Research carried out by Richter et al. (2010) exposed alarming statistics indicating that in terms of marriage rate, South Africa was the lowest, causing the country to be rated the second in terms of absent fathers in Africa. Further revealed in this study was the huge number of children who grow up in poverty due to lack of financial support and without any care or positive relationships with their fathers. However, the 21st century South African fathers are more enlightened about the significance of their participation in their children's lives than previously presumed (Marcisz 2013). Hence, the study sought to find the 21st century mothers' perceptions on fathers' participation in the early childhood development.

Research Questions

In carrying out this research, two questions were posed:

1. What perceptions do mothers have on the participation of fathers in the early childhood education of their children?
2. How can fathers be motivated to be enthusiastic about participating in the early childhood education of their children?

Research Objectives

The following research objectives were derived from the above research questions:

1. To explore the perceptions that mothers have on the participation of fathers in the early childhood education of their children.
2. To develop intervention strategies to motivate fathers to take keen interest in the early childhood education of their children.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Erikson's psychosocial theory (Erikson 1950), which shows how fatherhood influences the development of children through the eight stages from infancy through to adulthood. However, the study aligned itself with the first four stages that are relevant to the early childhood education. The theory illustrates the crisis that individuals encounter as they grow. Accomplishment in every crisis is influenced by the social atmosphere and the behavior of the person. Parenting, guiding and encouragements are social forces that contribute to achieving development in each stage. The theory places emphasis on the involvement of parents, as they are the primary caregivers in the first six years of the child and considers this phase to be significant, as it is used to mold the child's future (Doherty et al. 2006; Wardeman 2015). Erikson (1950) believed that fathers had significant influence on the development of the child at every stage. The indispensable challenge that children face from birth to about eighteen months is emerging a sense of trust against that of mistrust (Wardeman 2015). The child depends on the caregiver to provide the rudimentary needs such as safety, comfort, food, being cuddled and treated with care so that they develop trust in the caregiver. The child learns to

trust their father when he is present emotionally, playing, communicating and showing interest in every achievement. In line with Erikson's interpretations on the significance of trust, are the studies by Bowlby (1955) and Ainsworth (1979) who express how the relationships are affected by the quality of attachments from this stage to later in the lifetime.

The second stage in this theory comes in the early childhood years when the child is about eighteen months to three years when the emergent conflict is autonomy in competition with shame and doubt. In this stage, as the child learns how to walk, exploring the surrounding, grabbing things within their reach, Erikson (1950) proposed that the need for support, care and protection from the caregiver is essential as the child's effort is on self-control. When the caregiver is excessively protective or judgmental, the child feels inadequate, leading to doubt and shame. It is at this stage that the child needs to be taught the correct way of doing things. The child develops the sense of autonomy by being allowed to make simple selection of their preference in food, games and clothes to wear. Ideally, the role of the caregiver is to help the child have self-control without losing his or her self-esteem (Gross and Humphreys 1992; Diaz and Fiel 2016).

Preschoolers aged three to six years fall within the phase of the initiative versus guilt stage. It is a stage where a lot of development in fine motor skills, confidence in socializing and appreciating playtime happens. The role of the caregiver is to gently train the child on fair play and setting boundaries without frustrating leading roles that emanate in a child. It is a "time of robustness, of action and of behaviors that the parents may perceive as aggressive" as postulated by Bee (1992). Numerous studies have suggested that this stage is laden with rapid development emotionally, socially and cognitively, and is characterized by exploration of identity and interaction with the environment (Cervone and Pervin 2016).

In stage four, involving six to twelve-year-olds in the elementary to junior primary school, there is basic conflict, as competence versus inferiority happens (Erikson 1997). The role of the parent is to ensure that the child starts formal learning. It is the opportune time when parents should join forces with educators in encouraging learning of a myriad of educational and societal skills. In all these stages of devel-

opment, the child needs both parents who contribute differently but are complementary to the wellbeing of the child. However, not all children have the advantage of being nurtured by both parents, as there are some challenges faced, which are discussed here below.

Challenges of Teenage Motherhood

Teenage pregnancy and early childbirth has been a cause for concern, as it is detrimental for the young mother (Gabel 1988; Dickson et al. 1997) and is the root for or perpetuates endless cycle of poverty, hardship and interrupted education (Gabel 1988; Grogger and Bronars 1993; Diaz and Fiel 2016). According to Panday et al. (2009), more than two-thirds of young women testified that their pregnancies were undesirable because the experience positioned their educational ambitions on hold and inflicted greater economic hardships amidst extreme poverty and high unemployment. Teenagers found out that they were pregnant when they started seeing physical changes, feeling clumsy and unattractive because they were not aware what missing their monthly period meant. This exposes lack of information that empowers girls and teenagers with knowledge on sexuality and reproduction. By then, Mercer (1986) explains that they start experiencing changes physically, emotionally and psychologically, which they do not understand. Since these pregnancies are not planned, young girls fail to report that they are pregnant because of various reasons such as embarrassment, shyness, disappointment, fear of parents or sheer ignorance (Maputle 2006; Diaz and Fiel 2016). Such relationships rarely culminate in marriage as numerous dynamics militate against it. Once a child is born to such parents who are still considered to be juveniles and are jobless youths, grandparents assume the primary caregiver role, leaving the parent without parental authority to the child (Richter et al. 2012). In such cases, the father becomes absent as the parents who assume custody for the baby may deny him access, as he is economically unable to provide for the child (Morwe 2002) confirming Richter and Panday's (2006) finding that in Africa, the marriage rate was the lowest in South Africa. While the South African Schools Act (1996) and Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (No. 4 of 2000) accords completion of schooling for

teenagers who become teenage mothers after childbirth, it does not create an atmosphere for the girls to avoid falling pregnant while pursuing their studies. This was a feminist influence, which was noted by Bhana et al. (2008) as South Africa's legislative reaction to teenagers becoming mothers. Coming up with the similar observation were Artz et al. (2013) who remarked that the South African Constitution (1996) defends the right of every woman including girls in decisions concerning reproduction and admittance to healthcare services. Even though the legislative instruments in place allow teenage mothers to return to school, some fail to go back due to varied reasons such as stigma, no one to take care of the baby while others resort to trying out marriage, which often does not last due to overwhelming responsibilities. The poverty cycle continues and some fathers eventually become estranged from their children.

During pregnancy, some teenagers engage in self-retrospection whereby they make the decision to not let their predicament determine their destiny. Scott et al. (2012) carried out a study that reevaluated the impression that a woman's life was ruined by teenage pregnancy, and it revealed that it also provided the teenager with a different perspective marking maturation and development of a career. Faced with reality of a helpless child, the teenager is forced to find ways and means to fend for the child. Hence, when a second chance is offered to them to continue with their education, they really focus on doing something productive.

Challenges of Teenage Fatherhood

According to Thornberry et al. (2000), there has been slight scrutiny on teenage fatherhood as compared to teenage pregnancy or teenage motherhood. Yet, in comparison to adolescent motherhood, there are also negative consequences to teenage fatherhood such as financial inadequacies, disrupted education and other developmental penalties (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2009). Teenage fatherhood has been scrutinized on the same magnitude as adult fatherhood because the teenage boys have fathered children yet in reality they are also children, some of them barely completed high school. Scott et al. (2012) conducted a study, which revealed that some men had fathered children by age twenty but did not reside with their children and yet went on to

have children in their adulthood with different women. Consequently, when both parents are teenagers there are escalated negative effects of teenage childbearing for both children and parents (Bunting and McAuley 2004; Berrington et al. 2005). Statistics South Africa (Stats SA 2010) showed the cumulative figure of children who do not live under the same roof with their biological fathers. Similar observations elsewhere were noted by Choi and Jackson (2011) who remarked that in the United States (US) single mothers were on the increase in African American families. The high rate of absent fathers was again reported by Statistics South Africa (2011) which revealed that only two-thirds of preschool children living in homes without both their parents includes teenage fathers still living with their parents. Fathers who engage in multiple-partner fecundity negatively affect their families and children, consequentially disadvantaging for teenage fathers and their offspring as well (Bronte-Tinkew et al. 2009). Teenage fathers are also affected by factors such as delayed marriage, migratory labor, gender-based violence and increasing female sovereignty that contribute to father absenteeism (Richter et al. 2012).

Negative consequences that affect both father and the child were observed to be similar to those that affected teenage mothers (Cabrera 2010). These consequences are vivid when these young men were expected to reconcile a changeover to parenthood and at the same time develop as an adolescent (Rozie-Battle 2003; Kimball 2004). Furthermore, untimely role transition caused stress to the adolescent fathers (Kimball 2004) with some of them resorting to delinquency and criminal activities such as antisocial behavior, deviant peer friendship and early school dropout due to poor academic performance (Gavin et al. 2002; Rozie-Battle 2003; Glikman 2004; Kimball 2004) although such stereotypes did not embrace all of them (Wei et al. 2002; Xie et al. 2001). Additionally, there are unconfirmed reports in media, which suggest that teenage fathers are opting to be uninvolved in the lives of their children (Grange 2013; Richter and Morrell 2006; Richter et al. 2010; Swartz et al. 2013). On a more positive note, Magruder (2010) postulates that when men take responsibility of fatherhood, they probably decrease engaging in high risky behavior and maintain stable employment. Notwithstanding the stereotypes, research has evidence that some teenage

fathers desire to participate in their children's lives, although it may occasionally exclude financial support (Gavin et al. 2002).

The Impact of Absent Fathers

Father absenteeism is a phenomenon that has received worldwide attention. It has been propelled by the plethora of research placing fathers' participation in children's lives as crucial in emotional, psychological and cognitive development (Kim and Chung 2011; Potter 2012; Okeke 2015; Wilson 2015; Mathwasa and Okeke 2016). A physically absent father is the one who does not share a home with his children (Khewu and Adu 2015; Mavungu et al. 2013; Mashiya et al. 2015; Mncanca et al. 2016). On the other hand, there are fathers who may be living together with their children but still be considered absent because they are emotionally and socially detached from their children (Change 2015; Mncanca et al. 2016). Studies in South Africa have revealed that the number of African children whose fathers were absent increased from forty-five percent to fifty-two percent as compared to colored and white children, while father absenteeism among Indians had declined (Holborn and Eddy 2011; South African Labor Relations Unit (SALDRU) 2010). Statistics South Africa (2012) also revealed that South Africa's 42.5 percent children were nurtured in households headed by females. The increase is possibly attributed to the high unemployment rate, which is perceived as leading to antagonism, frustration and desperation, which are factors that cause fathers not to be involved in their children's lives (Fagan 2007; Wilson 2006; Richter et al. 2010). Children who are in such situations circumvent being around their fathers fearing being provocative (Richter and Morrell 2006). Although physically present, some fathers cannot contribute financially, socially or emotionally to the wellbeing of their children (Mavungu et al. 2013) due to poverty. A study carried by Mathwasa and Okeke (2016) revealed factors such as the fathers' refusal of the children's paternity, broken families due to divorce or death or a father that never married the mother of his child as the cause of father absence in South Africa. However, some fathers may be temporarily absent due to labor migration where they were compelled to be away from their families for varied extended periods. It is the researchers' observation that while father

absenteeism in South Africa has been for a long time recognized as the impact of apartheid, which fostered migrant labor (1996 to 2009) statistics show that it has been increasing. The new crop of fathers free from apartheid has portrayed father absence in a new concept of irresponsible fathering. Confirming these observations are Ratele et al. (2012) who assert that fathers in Africa are seen as irresponsible, callous and authoritative. Furthermore, migrant labor, which has been aggravated by industrial development, urbanization and the creation of same sex hostel system, has regularized fatherhood absence in South Africa (Department of Social Development 2012). Some men regard their role as economic providers to be more crucial than nurturing, motivating and spending quality time with their children (Mazembo et al. 2013). On the other hand, when a man is incapable of providing financial support to his children due to unemployment, the embarrassment and alienation they experience make them shy away from their family responsibilities (Ramphela and Richter 2006; Wilson 2006).

Importance of Early Childhood Education

It has been established that tremendous development and growth of the child's brain happens in the first eight years. In order to guarantee long-term benefits for children, there is need to offer all children the opportunity to be in the ECD program. ECD is seen as an influential vehicle for breaking the poverty cycle in many families (Arnold 2004) and a substantial pathway to all-inclusiveness and social impartiality in the provision of accessible educational programs to every child in the society (Miyahara and Meyers 2008; Becher and Li 2010). It is through ECD programs that children gain socially, educationally, health wise, intellectually and at the same time it is in response to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Hayashikawa 2008).

METHODOLOGY

The researchers adopted the qualitative research method to learn and understand the connotation people or groups ascribe to a societal or human problem (Creswell 2013). A qualitative study is well-defined as an exploratory process based on constructing a complex and all-inclusive picture that is made up of words, recording

detailed interpretations of informants, and is conducted in their natural scenery (Creswell 2014; Lincoln et al. 2011; Mertens 2010). Through this approach, the researchers were able to understand yonder than the surface of the phenomenon under study hence the case study design was adopted. Six mothers who were purposively sampled responded to the in-depth interviews through which actual rich information was acquired. Collected data was analyzed through step-by-step clarification, interpretation and then coded into meaningful themes (Creswell 2014).

Credibility and Trustworthiness of Instruments

Trustworthiness is a means of supporting the arguments that the inquiry's findings are of worthwhile substance (Richards 2009), and hence the need to maintain factual accuracy of the interpretation (Creswell 2014). Verbatim interpretations collected from the respondents were mechanically recorded using a tape recorder from which transcripts were produced. To ensure credibility and reliability of data transcripts, member checking was done on analyzed texts (Creswell 2014).

Ethical Issues

The authorization to carry out the research was gained from the pertinent authorities, including the Faculty of Education at the university, and the local Education District. Armed with the letter of authorization, the researchers gained access to the research sites through the gatekeepers. Ethical considerations such as protecting and respecting their anonymity, confidentiality, avoiding deceptive practices and minimizing the risk of harm to participants were observed (Creswell 2014) and participants signed the consent forms willingly. For the sake of anonymity and confidentiality, pseudo names were used in recording the findings of the study.

RESULTS

Mothers' Perceptions on Fathers' Involvement

The interest of this inquiry was finding out the perceptions of mothers on the participation of fathers in the early childhood education. The first question inquired if mothers understood

the concept of father participation in the early childhood development. It emerged that the participating respondents acknowledged the significance of the father in a child's life. Thoko and Grace who are married and residing with their husbands shared the view that fathers gave them financial support, disciplined children and sometimes played with them. Amphiwe, the youngest mother living with her parents shyly said, "*I don't know maybe buy food and pay fees.*" Responding to the same question, Rebecca who was looking after her grandchildren admitted that while she knew the significance of fathers in children's lives, some men were not fit to be fathers. Further probing on her opinion revealed the anger she had on the father of her grandchildren because he had killed their mother in the children's presence. Stella and Mercy also indicated that they understood the importance of a father although they both did not have their fathers when they grew up. Emerging from the data was that while all mothers were aware of the fatherhood concept, not all of them had experienced the participation of fathers in their lives or in the lives of children they had.

The participating mothers were asked to share their personal opinion and experience of fathers' involvement in the early childhood. Varied views such as loving, caring, nurturing, indifferent, authoritative and speculative hate were expressed. Mercy, who was in her mid-twenties advanced that she did not know where the man who fathered her child was and said, "*He left me before the child was born saying he had got a job in Cape Town. That was six years ago and I have not heard from him since.*" However, she had seen how some men love their children. "*My sister's husband is like a father to my child, he buys him clothes and takes him with his children for games.*" Stella who was looking after her deceased sister's children expressed similar sentiments when she said, "*Their father is a teacher in Peddie and comes home on weekends, and he spends most of his time with them and they show him their school books.*" On the other hand, Rebecca portrayed the father of her grandchildren as heartless because he had never cared for them even before he went to prison. Her comments were, "*He was not home most of the time and was always drunk. He killed my daughter for asking him for money to buy food. He was going to kill the children but police came soon. He is in jail for a long time...very*

cruel man...ha! How can he take care for his three children now?"

When specifically asked how fathers participated in the learning activities of their children, participants had the following to say. Mercy said, *"My father was not around when I grew up but the father of my child is around though he seldom attends to school activities. He works very far; he comes home very late."* When fathers are absent in the lives of their children they cannot participate in the learning activities, for example, in the case with Amphiwe where it had been established that the father was not around because he chose to be unknown. Similarly, in Rebecca's case, the father of her grandchildren cannot participate in learning because he was incarcerated. While work-related issues may keep fathers away from their children, that does not necessarily destroy their desire to participate in their children's learning as confirmed by Stella who said, *"Although my late sister's husband works far, when he comes, he looks at his children's books and they read with him."* However, being present and living with children does not guarantee their involvement in children's learning as confirmed by Grace who said, *"My husband drives children to and from school but rarely looks at the books, I always ask if they wrote any work, I like to check if what they write is marked."* From the responses, the researchers deduced that in this setting, participation in the learning of the children in the ECD was predominantly the responsibility of mothers. However, one father who was said to be the teacher showed interest in his children's schoolwork. The findings of this study indicate that despite the revelation by Marcisz (2013) that the 21st century South African father was enlightened about father's participation in the lives of their children, fathers were still absent in the education of their children.

Challenges of Teenage Parenthood

The study also found out if teenage parents participated in the early childhood development of their children. The responses indicated that it was rare for any teenage parent to partake in the development of the child. For instance, Amphiwe specified, *"My mother looks after the baby since I have to go to school."* Amphiwe is one of the lucky ones to be sent back to school, a chance that many young mothers do not have

as Mercy remarked, *"After my baby was born, I had to drop out of school. I went back to school after the child was three years old leaving him with my grandmother who had raised me."* In a similar predicament was Thoko who confessed dropping out of school. She remarked, *"I was lucky to get a job at the local restaurant where I met my present husband. But having a child when you are at school is not good. I always wanted to be a teacher, so my father in-law got me a place for training. That is why I am here now."* The participants in this setting collaborated in that becoming a teenage mother was not easy confirming the notion that teenage parenting was overwhelming to mother and child (Swartz and Bhana 2009). Issues related to health, poverty, shattered dreams were some of the devastating consequences of dropping out of school due to pregnancy (Koenig-Visagie and van Eeden 2013; Mashego and Taruvinga 2014; Quinn 2014). However, despite the situation, Thoko's dream did not completely fade away but she pursued it later as Scott et al. (2012) assert that to some, teenage pregnancy affords a different perspective marking maturation and development of a career.

Negation of Paternity

In responsible parenting, the study found that some men did not want to associate with the women after being told of the pregnancy. In her response, Thoko stated, *"I am married now but the father of my firstborn refused that he was the father of my child. I did not force him so he has never seen my girl who is twelve now and she has a stepfather who cares for us."* In a similar situation, Mercy said, *"When I told George about the pregnancy he didn't say anything, he did not see the child because he went away to Cape Town before the child was born."* The study revealed that negation of paternity was common in this research setting, as Amphiwe who was a teenage mother shyly said, *"He said if I told people that he is the one who made me pregnant he will kill me because I want people to laugh at him."* A further probe to find out if her parents made any follow up revealed that the young man had moved to another province as he had been staying with friends. In some cases, where the young men remained in the area and did not deny paternity initially, the responsibility of fatherhood and inadequacy to provide for the baby made them break away from

the mother of the child. Confirming the notion was Grace who said, "*The father of my son was around when he was born but suddenly left me for other women, so I told him he cannot see my child.*" Reiterating similar sentiments was Rebecca stating, "*My husband was supportive at first then lost his job, he started gambling that is when he was stabbed to death, and my children were very young.*" The findings of this study are in line with the assertion that not all men in South Africa take pride in being fathers and regrettably partaking in children's lives is not a desire for many fathers (Richter and Morrell 2006). Similarly, the study conducted in South Africa by Swartz and Bhana (2009) found that the absent father syndrome was mostly aggravated by teenage fathers who have a tendency of denying paternity during pregnancy or abandoning the mother soon after birth. Besides negation of paternity, these findings also show that some fathers are denied access to their children by mothers probably due to estrangements in relationships. For instance, when the mothers and fathers experience high tensions due to disagreement, the mother might deliberately or subconsciously report that father's participation is less than it truly is, based on unsettled matters of their conflict (Coley and Morris 2002). Mothers might sense that fathers negated or provisionally participated, whereas not completely ignoring their entitlements, there may be some degree of prejudice, thus probably leading to flawed and biased ascriptions (Mason 2016).

Absent Father Syndrome

A major finding in this study was father absenteeism, which was experienced by the respondents. Literature indicates that there is a high percentage of fathers who are absent in the lives of the children and the figure embraces the mature and the young fathers (Richter and Morrell 2006; Ramphele 2002; Mashiya et al. 2015). In this study, Rebecca had experienced two types of father absenteeisms in her home. She stated that her husband had died while her son-in-law was incarcerated. Similarly, Mercy, Thoko and Amphiwe said the fathers of their children had disappeared. Although separated by work, Stella indicated that her late sister's husband spent quality time with his children when he came home at weekends. Data revealed is in line with the notion that many children in South Africa stay

without fathers for longer or shorter periods (Kaufman et al. 2010; Khewu and Adu 2015). Contrary to the assertion by Richter et al. (2010) that, to a certain extent, men in the age range of 15 and 54 years not conscious of fathering a child, Amphiwe revealed a new crop of fathers who know about the child but still refuse paternity with threats of death. These fathers are never present for the birth of the child, deny paternity, and hence, cannot contribute in the schooling of their children (Richter and Morrell 2006; Panday et al. 2009).

Migratory Labor and Unemployment

There are fathers who are driven away from their families in search of job opportunities in bigger cities. For instance, Mercy mentioned that the father of her child left for Cape Town, which is more than a thousand kilometers away. Mercy has not seen him for the last six years since his departure for Cape Town. Working far away from the family is a familiar phenomenon in South Africa, a perception expressed by Stella who was a caregiver to her late sister's children whose father works far and comes home only on weekends. Owing to the job demands, children under Stella's care suffered temporary loss and experienced less adverse effects (Carlson and Magnuson 2011) because the father made an effort to make up for the lost time. The finding of this study aligned well with the view that some fathers value the role of being a breadwinner (Warin et al. 1999). The study uncovered that unemployment triggered a lot of stress that made people indulge in criminal activities as witnessed by Rebecca whose husband started gambling, ultimately leading to his death. Possibly, her son-in-law was out of employment since he did not adequately provide for the family hence the frustration that led him to murder his wife. The ordeal experienced by Rebecca's grandchildren corroborates the torment that McIntosh Polela (2011) experienced as he witnessed the murder of his mother by his father who then abandoned him and his sibling. The findings of this study also confirm the assertion that poverty causes family structures to collapse in societies and prevalent unemployment often leads to estrangement from the children (Amoateng and Richter 2003; Panday et al. 2009).

DISCUSSION

It emerged from this discourse that the foremost perception mothers had on fathers' participation was that of the absence of fathers when their children were born (Richter and Morrell 2006; Panday et al. 2009; Swartz and Bhana 2009). Missing out on the birth of children created a void in the lives of both the father and the child, as they failed to secure an attachment with each other. This emptiness is mostly detrimental to the child, as it leads to thwarted emotional and psychological development leading children to engage in delinquent activities later in life (Kim and Chung 2011; Potter 2012; Broussard et al. 2012; Mathwasa and Okeke 2016). This study found that while the mothers were aware that the significance of fathers in the lives of their children could not be undervalued, none of the participants in this study made an effort to encourage the connection between the fathers and their children regardless of their estrangement. The attitude and antagonism that mothers have for being abandoned when in need often leads them to punish fathers by denying them access to their children (Posel and Devey 2006; Richter et al. 2012; Mason 2016). Although fathers are important in their children's lives, there was no evidence indicating that men in South Africa have also taken any initiative against the centrality of mothers hence their absence continues in the early development of the child. Nonetheless, men across Europe engage themselves in father-activism organizations that are argumentative in ensuring their rights as fathers are observed despite hostility actions from their ex-partners (Geary and Ghoshi 2004; Richter and Morrell 2006).

It emerged from this study that some fathers did not partake in the education of their children because of the type of jobs they do (Henwood and Procter 2003). Working away from home means that the father devotes little time with his child (Richter and Morrell 2006). The role of the father as a breadwinner compels the father to spend time in faraway places so as to financially provide for the family. Lack of job opportunities in some areas pushes people to migrate to bigger cities, and hence they fall into the category of absent fathers defined by labor migration (Mboya and Nesengani 1999; Morrell et al. 2012; Mathwasa and Okeke 2016).

Data revealed that besides unemployment and labor migration, fathers were absent from early childhood development of their children because of death (Ngobeni 2006) or imprisonment (Morrell 2001; Hunter 2010). Death adversely affects children because the absence of the father is permanent. Similar to death, incarceration of fathers may be a permanent loss to the child especially if it is a life sentence. In these cases, mothers are left emotionally shattered, and yet, they have to be certain that children are well taken care of. The study also exposed that some children do not reside with their fathers because men negate their fatherhood endorsing the statistical results that only a third of children attending preschool reside the same home with both biological parents (Republic of South Africa 2011). Rabe (2006) ascertained that the shame of being unable to be a breadwinner pushed men to abandon their families. Men's failure to contribute economically to the family continues the cycle of poverty. As a result of father absence, which seems to be on the upsurge, mothers and children continue to live in abject poverty (Roy 2008; Richter et al. 2012).

Data in this study revealed challenges of teenage parenthood that caused children to grow without both biological parents. It came out that those children born to teenage mothers were raised by grandparents or other relatives. In such situations, teen parents do not participate in the development of the child as they are economically disempowered or have to continue with their education (Naidoo 2005; Gouws et al. 2008). Although young fathers may desire to contribute in the lives of their children, like mothers, they are often relegated (Martin et al. 2010). However, there was no indication in this study to indicate that teen fathers were eager to participate in the upbringing of their offspring. The study uncovered a new crop of fathers who do not deny paternity but refuse to be identified. This confirms the assertion that some men are not interested in their children (Morrell and Richter 2006).

CONCLUSION

The study's endeavor was to explore the perception of mothers concerning the participation of fathers in the early childhood development of children. Using a qualitative approach, data was collected through the semi-structured

interviews with sampled mothers. The findings of the study revealed that fathers did not participate in the lives of their children. The study found no evidence indicating the effort that mothers did to connect their children to the fathers. Simultaneously, there was no proof signifying that fathers desired to defend their right of a part of the child's life. In conclusion, the study found that for non-resident fathers to participate in the early childhood development, mothers have to engage them despite their estrangement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the above findings, this paper recommends the following:

1. Extensive campaigns encouraging mothers to involve the fathers in the lives of their children despite their estrangements.
2. Extensive campaigns encouraging fathers to take up their rightful roles in the lives of their children disregarding their differences with their ex-partners.
3. Programs that impart co-parenting skills to non-resident fathers and teenage fathers should be designed to inspire father involvement regardless of their economic status.
4. Further research to be carried out to reconcile perceptions from both fathers and mothers so as to find a common understanding that will be beneficial to the child.

LIMITATIONS

This study was not spared from limitations, as the participants were hesitant in sharing their experiences due to the sensitivity of the subject. The subject ignited past feelings of rejection, hence the reluctance, meaning that responses could have been based on emotions and not on facts. Therefore, those who will read should be alert of the inferences that may be consequent from the findings of the study.

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