



STATE OF **SOUTH AFRICA'S FATHERS** 2018

SONKE GENDER
JUSTICE

HUMAN SCIENCES
RESEARCH COUNCIL

The MenCare Global Fatherhood Campaign

MenCare is a global campaign to promote men's and boys' involvement as equitable, non-violent caregivers. With activities in more than 45 countries, MenCare partners carry out joint advocacy initiatives, research, and programming to engage men in positive parenting; in equitable caregiving; in violence prevention; and in maternal, newborn, and child health. The campaign is co-coordinated by Sonke Gender Justice and Promundo, with Save the Children, Plan International, Oxfam GB and MenEngage Alliance serving as Steering Committee members. For more information about the campaign and its partners, visit www.men-care.org.

This "State of South Africa's Fathers 2018" report is produced as a MenCare Global Fatherhood Campaign affiliated resource. The report forms part of a set of country- and region-focused reports on men's involvement as caregivers around the world, inspired by the "State of the World's Fathers" reports. The first-ever "State of the World's Fathers" report was published in 2015, and followed by the "State of the World's Fathers: Time for Action" in 2017. "State of the World's Fathers" reports available in multiple languages, and regional and country reports in the same series, are available at www.sowf.men-care.org.

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Sonke Gender Justice &
Human Sciences Research Council

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Family Time

Sikhangele works for Sonke as a prisons specialist, doing health and violence prevention education in correctional facilities. He often speaks about how his work at Sonke has influenced his personal life, and the gendered division of care work in his home.

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Opening Reflections

I was shot in the head by the police on the 15th of September 1986. Due to this incident I began to miss the love of a father I did not know, and it changed my life. I needed a father figure so desperately as I was lying on that bed in a Sebokeng hospital, not knowing if I would ever be able to walk again or even to perform any basic function such as washing and feeding myself. Also, I did not know if I would ever father a child with my wife. These were some of the thoughts that were torturing me, and that I could not share with my mother, Lathiwe Elizabeth Botha, who kept a lone vigil next to my hospital bed.

Although my mom kept assuring me that all will be well, I desperately needed my own father at that time to also affirm me, as a man, that I will be fine. Unfortunately he wasn't there at that critical moment in my life. I had to learn to rely on my mother and family and to look for 'social fathers' – a term that Linda Richter had coined through her work on the Fatherhood Project at the Human Sciences Research Council.

I found one Ntate Moagi, who diligently guided me on what it means to be a man. He taught me that it was possible to be non-violent, compassionate, to be loving, and above all to believe in the equality of men and women. I am therefore continuously grateful to have had these two personalities in my life, my mom and Ntate Moagi.

It was in 1996 that we gathered as men at the Eskom conference centre in Midrand to launch the South African Men's Forum. The slogan was "RESTORING THE SOUL OF THE NATION".

It was at this launch that I again was forced to finally face the fact that I did not know who my father was. I was flooded with mixed emotions in that I began to ask the emotionally excruciating questions to myself: Why did he abandon us? What did we do as his children for him to find it in his heart to be so cold and mean?

Why did he allow whatever differences he must have had with my mom to affect us? She who single-handedly raised seven of us with her meagre earnings as a domestic worker? I could not find answers to all of these questions, and the pain continues to this day.

Sadly in my adult life, I still miss having a father. However, the experience of not having a father has taught me to love and to unreservedly get closer to my own children Raphakisa, Lathiwe and Sbonganjalo. I have tried to be an emotionally present father in their lives and to avoid being just an ATM, or only a physically present father. I hope that with the emotional investment I have made in their lives they will turn out to be men and women who would believe and embrace gender equality and have respect for both men and women.

This report comes out at a time when our country is battling with high levels of violence directed at women and children. It reminds us of the importance of fathers in the lives of their children, and that we should all support the emotional involvement of fathers, resident and non-resident, in their children's lives.



Mbuyiselo Botha
*Commissioner from
the Commission for
Gender Equality*

From Providers to Carers: Men as Fathers

Twenty years ago, fatherhood wasn't much of a political issue. Gender activists in South Africa focused on the ravages of HIV and gender-based violence. Concerns about fatherhood centred on men as abusive or absent fathers, not accepting responsibility or paying maintenance for their children. This trope in the media and popular discourse in many parts of the world ultimately prompted a global fatherhood movement calling for men to be more engaged and for governments and society to be active in facilitating their involvement with their children.

In 2002, Linda Richter began working on the issue of fathers. Then at the Human Sciences Research Council, she had recently completed co-editing a book on the sexual abuse of pre-pubertal children, prompted by the gruesome rape of Baby Tshepang in Louisvale in 2001. Details of cruelty perpetrated by men on children struck deep because, in her own life, she was surrounded by good and loving men – her father, brothers, husband, son, friends and colleagues.

Together with her late husband, Dev Griesel, she started the Fatherhood Project, initially a naturalistic photographic record of men in affectionate and caring moments with children. From this grew a research network with strong outreach to men. Imagery of fatherhood remained strong, showing the many forms that fatherhood took and recognising men who assumed fatherhood.

At about the same time, Robert Morrell drew on his research on masculinity to suggest that fatherhood was an important feature in the identities of many men. He wondered if fatherhood could be promoted by gender activists to contribute to gender equality with the outcome of happier, more engaged and fulfilled men; new representations of masculinity that emphasised the contribution that men made; and more harmonious gender relations between men, women and children. Bringing these two perspectives to-

gether, we edited a book, "Baba: Men and fatherhood in South Africa", which was published by the HSRC Press in 2006.

Activists involved in the Fatherhood Project, like Mbuyiselo Botha, Desmond Lesejane, Wessel van den Berg and others, extended their work, linking with other concerned men, and with international organisations to consolidate a focus on fatherhood in South Africa.

Since then, a lot has happened. Research on the topic has deepened and expanded, with several centres of concentrated work. In law the rights and involvement of fathers have steadily been reinforced, for example, with respect to the Child Support Grant and, recently, the landmark decision to extend the general family responsibility leave provision (of three days) to a proposed law for 10 days of paternity leave, inclusive of same-sex and other types of parents. We have also seen the growth of a concerted, energetic, politically savvy campaign by non-governmental organisations to promote fatherhood and father involvement.

This volume builds on earlier foundations and changes over the last decade, and adds to their momentum. Although gender-based violence and HIV infections remain critically important issues, the terrain has changed. South Africa remains a troubled and violent country, but with commitments to gender equality, of which we are all proud. Making commitments real is hard, but active citizens and organisations bite determinedly at the heels of a foot-dragging government and Gender Commission. We must keep at it.

The potential of fathers, in all forms, to contribute to the future of South Africa is being recognised, as this collection shows. Only a small proportion of men, mostly those who are better off, live with their children. Men living apart from their children is the result of many fac-

tors, most of which are socio-economic vestiges of our shameful political past, and the painful challenges of couples remaining attached under social and other pressures. It does not necessarily indicate that men don't care, don't want to see their children or do not support them. And it does not necessarily result in children being without loving father figures in their lives.

Nonetheless, it is not good enough. As Graham Lindegger pointed out in his chapter ("The father in the mind") in "Baba: Men and fatherhood in South Africa", "a father" is a powerful and deep archetype in our cultural history. All of us long for a father who is loving and constant. As a corollary, men who participate in the pregnancy, birth and early years of their children's lives are often transformed by their experience, with deep and enduring emotional attachment to their children.

We salute the researchers, policymakers and activists who have brought a fuller understanding of fatherhood to the attention of our country and the world, including through this report.

Men who participate in the pregnancy, birth and early years of their children's lives are often transformed by their experience, with deep and enduring emotional attachment to their children



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KEY TERMS USED IN THIS REPORT

ABSENT FATHERS

This term is used to refer to a father that is neither physically living in the same household as his child, nor involved in the child's life. While it is often used in writings about fatherhood to refer to the absence of a biological father in the household where the child lives, it can also refer to a non-biological or social father being absent.

RESIDENCY

Residency status of fathers refers to whether the child and father live in the same household, or not.

CO-RESIDENT FATHERS

Statistics South Africa regards a father as co-resident when he sleeps in the same household for four or more days per week. This definition is used to estimate co-residency of a biological father with his child.

NON-RESIDENT FATHERS

Non-resident fathers are considered by Statistics South Africa to be those who are away from home for four or more days per week. Non-resident fathers may still be involved in a child's life.

SOCIAL FATHERHOOD

A social father is a person that takes on the responsibility and role of being a father to a child, but who is not the biological male parent of the child. The status of fatherhood is therefore a social status rather than a biological one, and may be actively sought by and/or ascribed to the person by their family or community. One person could be a biological father to one child and a social father to another.

FATHER INVOLVEMENT

Involvement is used as an overarching term for several categories of interaction between fathers and children that include – but are not limited to – emotional support, communication, financial support and caregiving.

These and other terms in the glossary (page 74) are highlighted at first use in each chapter

PROVIDER

Being a provider includes the important provision of financial support for a child's wellbeing and health such as providing for food, clothing, housing and education. This notion of 'being a provider' also extends further to include other resources such as attentive time together, care work, educational support, and emotional support.

CARE

The word 'care' is used in several ways in this report: 'caring about' refers to paying attention to feelings of affection and concern about another, 'caring for' refers to taking responsibility for the wellbeing of another, and 'caregiving' refers to the competent engagement in physical care work such as feeding or washing.

ABOUT THE CHILDREN'S VOICES IN THIS REPORT

Fathers in Africa is a non-profit company championing the role of responsible fatherhood and challenging the traditional "man box" approach to socialising young boys.

Much of the research on fatherhood in South Africa has excluded the voices of children, but Fathers in Africa's national essay contest, held annually since 2013, aims to hear those important voices.

The essay subject – "What my father means to me" – evokes an emotional response in every child, regardless of their circumstances. Every year the cries from the hearts of 1,000s of children are heard as they verbalise (through written word) their feelings, sometimes very articulately, and most times with absolute raw honesty. Some of these essays are published in this report. For more information, see www.fathers.co.za.

Introduction

Wessel van den Berg, Sonke Gender Justice

& Tawanda Makusha, Human Sciences Research Council

There is no typical father in South Africa. There are many types of fathers and many types of fatherhood in the country. There are biological fathers, social fathers, gay fathers, straight fathers, young fathers, older fathers. We have self-identified fatherhood, ascribed fatherhood, long-distance fatherhood and proximal fatherhood, to name only a few. The texture is rich by age, raceⁱ, class, geo-type, ethnicity or family type. Mothers, fathers and children experience a wide canvas of fatherhood portrayals. Such a richly textured canvas requires sensitivity that moves beyond simplistic interpretations.

This report introduces the history of fatherhood research in South Africa, and of key moments about fatherhood in the country to date; it provides a description of the state of fathers in South Africa in the overview, and then examines fatherhood in the first 1,000 days of a child's life. The report explicitly uses an appreciative approach to document the importance of fatherhood for children, families and society by focusing on positive examples, and gives an opportunity for new voices to join the community of researchers, activists and others working on fatherhood.

The report is produced as a contribution to the national literature in South Africa, but also falls within the series of the "State of the World's Fathers" (SOWF) reports for 2015 and 2017¹, which were published as part of the MenCare Global Fatherhood campaign. The report draws on the context provided by the SOWF reports, and will contribute to future iterations of the global report. The SOWF reports, in turn, join the "State of the World's Children" and the "State of the World's Mothers" reports produced by UNICEF and Save the Children International respectively.

Conceptually, this inaugural edition of the "State of South Africa's Fathers" report critiques the overemphasis of social research on the absence or presence of biological fathers in house-

holds. The report hopes to provoke a broader landscape for research on fatherhood in South Africa. We reflect on the implications of the latest data on children's co-residence with biological fathers; and describe the limitations of this data in terms of representing fatherhood in South Africa, and the limitations of this overemphasis on co-residence. Throughout the chapters and cases, the report revisits this theme, and the accompanying theme of fathers as financial providers.

The report showcases examples that tell the story of other dimensions of fatherhood that have been underdeveloped, especially describing social fathers and fathering, father involvement, and caregiving. The report is a unique combination of learnings from researchers and advocates who are working together, and looks ahead to what needs to be done about fatherhood in South Africa. Building on this conceptual base we provide directions for researchers to explore towards a more comprehensive spectrum of knowledge on fatherhood in South Africa.

The vision of this report

The "State of South Africa's Fathers" report has been developed as an *advocacy tool* to influence policy and law reform and monitor implementation of current policies and laws related to

ⁱ Here, and elsewhere in this report, the four racial categories (Black, Coloured, Indian and White) are used to refer to the Statistics South Africa categories of African/Coloured/Indian and White. We use the term 'Black' to refer to Black African people, and we have replaced 'African' with 'Black' where we report on statistics. This is in acknowledgement that categories other than Black African people may identify as African. It is, however, a compromised position, given that the same applies where Coloured or Indian people may also identify as Black. We acknowledge the compromise, and are open to utilising different categorisation in future editions.

NEW PARENTAL LEAVE PROVISIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Parliament's National Assembly in late 2017 approved a bill that will initiate new parental leave provisions that allow fathers to qualify for 10 days of paid leave.² Ten days may not seem much for a new father, but the bill is a landmark achievement for various reasons: it establishes a few important principles in the South African labour law framework, including gender-neutral language for parental leave, dedicated leave for adoptive parents and commissioning parents in a surrogacy agreement, and allows for same-sex couples to qualify for parental leave.

Background

The bill has been the result of consistent advocacy by various groups and individuals from civil society. Due in part to pressure from Sonke Gender Justice in 2013, the White Paper on Families mandated government to investigate the feasibility of paternity leave in South Africa. In 2014, a father of two, Hendri Terblanche, lodged a petition to Parliament that called for 10 days of paternity leave, which drew substantial media exposure, with support from Sonke. Based on a first draft by Terblanche, an African Christian Democratic Party Member of Parliament, Cheryllyn Dudley, presented a Private Members' Bill to Parliament in 2016, which was passed by the National Assembly in 2017.

What the new provisions say

The amendments increase the maximum amount paid for the existing maternity leave provision to 66%. It also introduces paid parental leave of 10 days for parents that do not qualify for maternity leave. Fathers make up the largest group of such parents, so in effect paternity leave will be available. However, it is important to note that the bill does not define it as paternity leave as it allows for all genders and sexual orientations. This progressive bill also introduces adoption leave of 10 weeks for surrogacy commissioning and adoptive parents from the day of placement in the case of adoption.

Due to parenting leave only being available to employed people, the leave will not offer support to parents who are not in employment; but it is nevertheless an important development for greater gender equality between parents.

fatherhood; and as a *catalyst* to influence the narratives in research, media and public discourses about fathers towards more specific and critical interpretations than the language currently used in talking about fatherhood.

Influencing law reform

As an advocacy tool, the report provides information for policymakers to develop laws and policies based on evidence about the contribution that fathers can make to society. A key example is the Labour Laws Amendment Bill³ (see the discussion box on this page). The bill is expected to be passed by the National Council of Provinces, and signed off by the President, in 2018. The "State of South Africa's Fathers" report is being launched now to track and document over time if and how fathers engage with opportunities such as parental leave. A frequent question about parental leave for fathers is whether fathers will use the leave to provide caregiving, or to take a paid holiday. The report can document this information and, in this way, monitor how fathers utilise parental leave, which can inform future law, policies and programmes in this regard.

Encouraging emerging narratives

In its endeavour as a *catalyst* to new or emerging narratives about fatherhood in South Africa, the report weaves a specific, and appreciative narrative, with more nuance and focus on fatherhood than the frequently used terms 'absence' or 'absent fathers' in the discourse about fathers in South Africa. While the term 'absence' did provide an initial impetus for focusing on the lack of involvement of fathers with children, it is often problematically used as a synonym for 'non-involvement', or conflated with all biological fathers who do not live with their children, based on household data about co-residence.

The report also acknowledges the various ways that knowledge and narratives develop, which go beyond the definition of 'research' but include literature, stories, images, radio, film and other creative expressions. This may be called the broader *cultural work* of writing the story of fatherhood in South Africa. As the hosts of a radio talk show on fatherhood⁴ said: "We are writing

the book on fatherhood in South Africa.”

The report aims to illustrate that some fathers who live elsewhere, regarded as non-resident fathers, are often very involved, be it financially or emotionally, in childcare, and therefore are different from absent fathers.⁵ On the other hand, some co-resident fathers may not be involved in children's lives or their care, and may be emotionally absent. Further, in many households the role of father is not ascribed to a biological father, but to an uncle, brother, grandfather or other adult male. To augment the concept of 'absence' with concepts such as 'co-residency', 'involvement' and 'social fathering' allows for more specific and valid ways to describe a father's relationship with a child. The report therefore problematises an overemphasis of the term 'absent fathers' and encourages a pathway for future understandings that utilise more specific interpretations of the complex reality of fatherhood.

We provide such examples of fatherhood by sharing new research findings on, for example, fathers' use of the Child Support Grant, the role of *bomalome* (maternal uncles) in childcare, and contemporary fatherhood in the context of customary law.

The report highlights the importance of relationships between different levels of father involvement and economic investment in chil-

dren's development, such as a father's involvement in the first 1,000 days of a child's life. In a context where popular perceptions and the media emphasise the negative aspects of men in South Africa as uninvolved in children's lives, and generally uncaring and disengaged⁶, the report shows evidence of fathers who are indeed involved in caregiving, and unpacks what such caregiving looks like. The main areas that the report explores in addition to the co-residence of biological fathers are: social fatherhood, involvement, caregiving, and non-resident fathers.

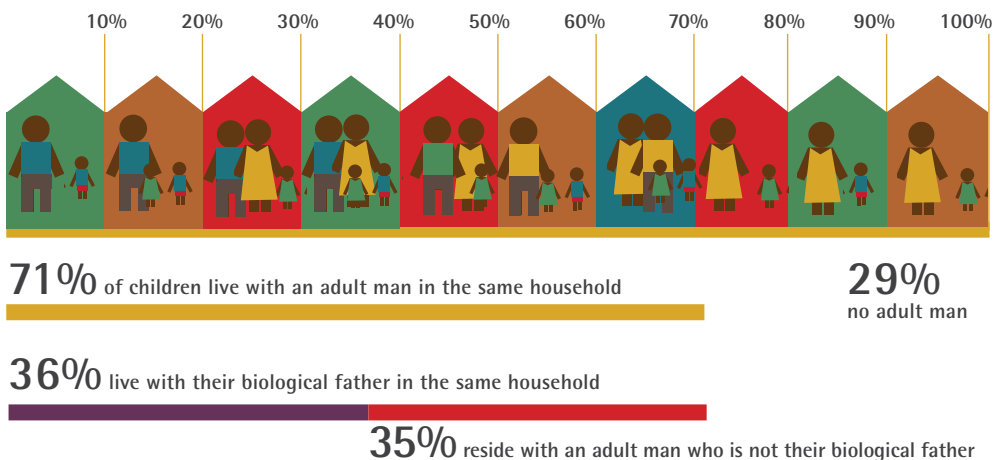
Social fatherhood

Social fatherhood refers in general to fatherhood provided by people who are not a child's biological parent (see the expanded description on page 4). This report begins to show the different ways in which social fathering occurs. The General Household Survey⁷ (GHS) 2016 shows that:

- 71% of children (0 – 17 years) live with an adult man in the same household;
- of these, 36% live with their biological father in the same household;
- and the other 35% reside with an adult man who is not their biological father.

In addition to social fatherhood provided by men who do not live with children, the set of relationships represented by the difference, of 33% of

Fig.1 Social fathering: children's co-residence with biological fathers and other adult man



Source: Statistics South Africa (2017) General Household Survey 2016. Pretoria: Stats. SA. [Analysis by Debbie Budlender]

HOW MANY MEN ARE FATHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA?

There are no direct estimates available on the number of men in South Africa who are fathers. This question was explored by Posel and Devey⁸, who arrived at 47% of men as fathers for 1998, with a combination of population and household level statistics. Weⁱⁱ revisited the question based on data from the General Household Survey 2016:

We assume that the numbers of mothers and fathers are about the same, and that the fact that the median number of children per household with children (two) permits the assumption that women with children have an average of about two children.

The estimated 18,565,190 children in South Africa in 2016 would, between them, have 9,282,595 mothers and 9,282,595 fathers. This is about 53% of the total adult male population aged 18 – 59 years (17,527,315). Therefore, from this calculation, just over half of the number of adult men in the country are likely to be biological fathers.

The fact that fathers may have procreated children with several mothers, and that mothers may have borne children fathered by more than one man, make even the first assumption a rough one. However, while the biological relationship between a mother and a child is usually relatively easily established, this is not the case for men who are fathers. The latter may not know of their status as parents, or may not be willing to report on their fatherhood even if they do know.

ⁱⁱ The arithmetic emerged from correspondence between specialist researcher Debbie Budlender and the editors. The researcher was clear that this is by no means accurate and based on some heroic assumptions. We are very grateful for the work, and publish it in the spirit of inspiring researchers to tackle this question.

children who do not live with their biological fathers but with another adult man, could be one way to explore whether social fatherhood occurs between children and co-resident men who are not their biological fathers. The GHS numbers do not tell us about involvement, or quality or type of caregiving. From these statistics, we do not know if the adult men are involved or act as caregivers, whether they are biological fathers or not. It does highlight however the potential for caregiving, or for social fatherhood, by men who live with children. Household survey data do not provide the granular detail to tease out how much of the caregiving men are doing. Some recent studies have analysed more specific data to begin to answer the question of how involved men are in caregiving.

Involvement and caregiving

From the research and cultural work (as discussed earlier) on fatherhood to date, it could be inferred that men are not involved sufficiently in childcare in South Africa, and that this lack of involvement poses several wide-ranging challenges for mothers, children and fathers. We also know that we do not know enough about this lack of involvement, or about the situations when men do contribute significantly.

In this report, we regard caregiving for children as a category of involvement. Involvement with a child may be positive or negative, and include activities other than care. Care may be considered broadly in terms of caring about, or caring for; however, this report refers to practical caregiving, where the caregiver is practically or actively providing care to the child.⁹

Men who live with children are unlikely to be the primary caregivers, and likely to do less childcare work than women. A recent study¹⁰, which used data from the National Income Dynamics Studyⁱⁱⁱ, found that only 11–12% of children received primary care from their fathers. This corroborates the Time Use Survey 2010, which showed that for every eight hours of unpaid care work done by a woman in South Africa, only one hour is done by a man.¹¹

Studies that found men involved in caregiving showed such involvement is associated with gender equitable attitudes, and that men are

likely to engage in childcare tasks such as washing their clothes, talking to them about personal matters, or helping with schoolwork.¹² Involvement of fathers stretches beyond co-resident fathers and can also refer to the involvement of non-resident fathers.

Non-resident fathers

Fathers who are involved in their children's lives but live in a different household to the child^{iv} can be distinguished from those who are 'absent' (i.e. complete non-involvement). This understanding is important to avoid confusing involved, non-resident fathers with absent fathers. Non-residence does not always equal non-involvement. This argument is illustrated by the case on page 36, which describes caregiving by non-resident fathers.¹³

Analysis of the first wave of NIDS data (2008)¹⁴ shows Black children had the largest percentage of absent fathers (40%) and 7% had a non-resident, involved father. Twenty-seven percent lived with both parents, and 45% with their biological mother only.

Non-resident fathers often make contributions to their children's lives, for example through financial support or moral guidance: NIDS data analysis shows that 13% of children received financial support for education from absent household members, compared to 46% who received support from non-resident household members.¹⁵

Expanding the lens

To conclude this introduction to the "State of South Africa's Fathers", we note that the emphasis on the concept of 'absent fathers' also may highlight a classist bias. The statistic of children's co-residence with biological fathers is only one measure of the relationship between fathers and children. It is an important measure when considering dual-income, heterosexual, nuclear families since it is likely that children in these families may not be exposed to other sources of fathering.

But applying this measure to all South African families not only overlooks the social fathering that happens, but presents a negative view of extended families, which are mostly Black.

The emphasis on the concept of 'absent fathers' also may highlight a classist bias

The neglected focus in our documentation of fathering, in addition to the emphasis on the presence or absence of co-resident biological fathers, may thus perpetuate the colonial tradition of White middle-class frames of reference being imposed on low-income Black families.

This is the first issue of an evolving report, planned for recurring publication every three years, that can be used in the development of policy and legislation for families, labour market regulations, educational curricula and other materials for training. It can be referenced as a source of expert information for advocacy and community groups, individual families, and legislative committees for policy development. It contains specific recommendations for shifting norms towards more gender-equitable parenting, and advocates for a normative shift to highlight men's caregiving as an institutional and social priority. Given the educational tools, institutional impetus, and expansion of the network of scholars and advocates invested in assessing and promoting the values of positive fatherhood, it is our hope that the report galvanises this shift in priorities towards a more nuanced approach and better support for families in South Africa.

ⁱⁱⁱ The National Income Dynamics Study data allows for a more detailed analysis than household survey data.

^{iv} Statistics South Africa defines a non-resident member as a person who has not lived in a household for at least four nights per week and has not done so for the six months before the survey.

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“He only wants us to have the equal to his two sons”

I’m 17 years old. I never knew my father, and Mother died when I was four years old. I was raised by my sister and her husband. What amazes me a lot is that their children are younger than me. I call them mother and father because they are my parents.

Father, he means a lot to me. He took me in his house when I had no home. He sends me to school and attends parental meetings as it requires. He reminds me to do my school work and to do well at school. When I’m sad he makes jokes just to see me happy. He washes our clothes and sometimes cooks for us.

He likes to talk to us (me and my younger sister) about life and the future. He always says he only wants us to have the equal to his two sons. He wants us to grow and be educated and responsible. One day he told me that he wants to see me graduating from the University of Pretoria.

He doesn’t have much but the little he has he shares with us and his children. There is no difference between us and his sons. He gets angry just like every parent when I misbehave and puts me back to my place as a child and the oldest in the house.

Sometimes I wonder what I have done to deserve a father like him. Most men of his age are still running around like boys in the streets but he chose to be the father of two orphans, me and my younger sister, who is very naughty at the age of 14. Even after these years that I’ve been silly and naughty he’s been there for me. He made me realise that it is not only your biological parent that can raise you, send you to school and love you unconditionally.

“I call him my father.”

Essay contestant, North West

KEY MOMENTS FROM RECENT POLICY AND LAW DEVELOPMENTS THAT AFFECT FAMILIES AND FATHERHOOD

1994	First democratic elections of South Africa
1996	Constitution of the Republic of South Africa
1998	Maintenance Act 99 of 1998
1997	Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 (maternity leave)
1998	Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 120 of 1998 Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998
2001	Draft National Policy Framework for Families
2005	Children's Act 38 of 2005
2006	Civil Union Act 17 of 2006 (legal recognition for same-sex couples)
2007	Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007
2012	White Paper on Families in South Africa
2015	National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy
2018	Labour Laws Amendment Bill (parental leave provisions)

A Historical Overview of Fatherhood in South Africa

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Fathers have been portrayed negatively in the South African media for decades.¹ The high number of absent biological fathers in households, which is discussed in this report, and horrific cases of domestic violence and child abuse fuel negative images of fathers. The view that fathers are not involved in their children's lives by being physically or emotionally absent has been labelled the deficit paradigm.² However, the deficit paradigm, together with statistical snapshots of biological fathers' living arrangements and harmful fatherhood practices, do not constitute the full picture of fatherhood. This report partly aims to draw a more comprehensive picture of fatherhood; and this chapter aims to help explain how certain practices, depictions and expectations of fatherhood became entrenched in South Africa.

Fatherhood as a research interest

Prior to the 21st century, fatherhood did not receive particular attention from social researchers although patriarchy and family practices are mentioned often. In the last 25 years, however, there has been considerable academic interest in fatherhood worldwide. This academic field has lagged behind somewhat in Africa but in South

Africa it has grown exponentially in the last 15 years. The Fatherhood Project of the Human Sciences Research Council, launched in 2003, aimed to, among other things, bring positive images of fatherhood to the fore. This project was also one of the first major collective efforts to focus specifically on fatherhood as a topic of discussion and research.

Thereafter, a number of noteworthy collective publications on fatherhood were published including "Baba: Men and fatherhood in South Africa"³, in 2006, which focused on an array of aspects related to fatherhood. This was followed by "Teenage tata: Voices of young fathers in South Africa"⁴ that expanded the scope of fatherhood studies to include younger men.

Additional information on young fathers saw the light, but this time by focusing on the experiences of young fathers and mothers, culminating in the 2012 publication, "Books and babies: Pregnancy and young parents in school"⁵. The South African Institute of Race Relations report, "First steps to healing the South African family"⁶, paid significant attention to fathers and fatherhood. In 2015, "Men's pathways to parenthood: Silence and heterosexual gendered norms"⁷ was the first book to explore the deci-

Fig.2 Key publications about fatherhood in South Africa



sions men make to have children, and specifically interrogate heteronormativity in this regard.

A broader interest in fatherhood in combination with family structures continued, in 2017, with "Young families: Gender, sexuality and care"⁸. Various journal articles and dissertations on different aspects of fatherhood also appeared, ensuring that fatherhood became a vibrant topic of research.

Fatherhood practices and family and kin structures

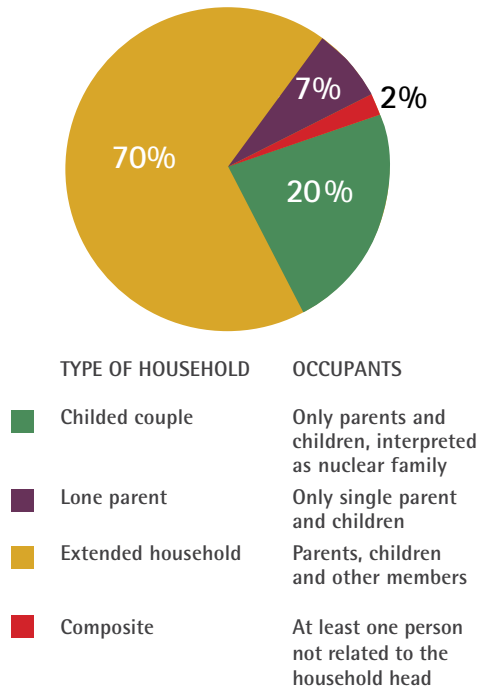
Fatherhood can be discussed as an abstract concept, but it is more important to understand it as experienced daily. Also, fatherhood is embedded within dynamic family structures and practices⁹, economic realities¹⁰, gendered and cultural expectations¹¹ and historical developments¹².

South Africa has a rich diversity of marital, family, kin and household practices. For example, it is the only country in the world where both polygamy (through the Customary Marriages Act¹³) and same-sex unions (through the Civil Union Act¹⁴) are given legal recognition. Within this rich variety, fatherhood also takes on many dimensions. A father living with his biological children on a daily basis should not be seen as a norm to which all families should aspire¹⁵ since it is simply not feasible or desirable in all cases. For example, the Living Conditions Survey of 2015/2016 found that approximately 16% of children's fathers were deceased.¹⁶

A family is defined in the White Paper on Families¹⁷ as a "societal group that is related by blood (kinship), adoption, foster care or the ties of marriage (civil, customary or religious), civil union or cohabitation, and go beyond a particular residence" (emphasis added). The latter is of particular importance since households (or residences) may be confused with families who may or may not live together. Censuses (and most large-scale surveys) provide snapshot pictures of households. From these snapshots, as depicted in figure 3, it is clear that fatherhood in South Africa cannot be understood as mainly flowing from a nuclear family household where a married, heterosexual couple live with their offspring.

The aim here is not 'to blame the father' or coerce fathers to conform to one model, but

Fig. 3 Children's residency in different household types, 2016



Source: Statistics South Africa (2017) General Household Survey 2016. Pretoria. Stats. SA. [Analysis by Debbie Budlender]

rather to understand how men play beneficial or harmful roles in the lives of their children. If it is understood why men make certain decisions with regard to their children, they can be better supported to play more active roles in the lives of their children – whether they live with them or not. Some of the historical trajectories in this regard are traced below.

History of fatherhood among different groupings

Current fatherhood practices developed from various groupings¹⁸ in South Africa and some of the origins of these practices give an indication of the complexity of South Africa's history.

The Dutch East India Company established a refreshment outpost in 1652 at the southern tip of Africa. In the first three decades, the European settlers were mainly single men from the Netherlands, but from 1688 to 1700, approximately 200

FATHERHOOD AND CUSTOMARY MARRIAGE DISSOLUTION

Several factors affect the rights of fathers in customary law under the Recognition of Customary Marriage Act¹⁹ (RCMA). In Black South African communities that live according to customary law, a father's right to his biological children is linked to *inhlawulo* or *lobola*.

If *lobola* was agreed (with either immediate or partial transfer, depending on the agreement), the child belongs to the father's family. If it was not, the child belongs to the mother's family. In customary law, a biological father has therefore no absolute right to the children he procreates.²⁰ He acquires parental rights by either paying an acknowledgement of paternity, or *lobola* for the mother of his child or children.

However, in the current economic and social context where levels of marriage are declining²¹, many men have biological children outside of a recognised union. Some research evidence suggests that until a child's father enacts *inhlawulo*, he may not be recognised as a legitimate father of a child, especially by the family of the child's mother, and he may be restricted from visiting and spending time with his child at the mother's family homestead.²² However, there is evidence from small-scale studies that fathers are taking responsibility and providing care for their children.²³ The living customary law on *inhlawulo* and the payment of *inhlawulo* are complex, and changing²⁴, and the limited evidence of the practice and its impact on paternal involvement is mixed.

Custody and dissolved registered customary marriage

The principles embedded in the RCMA have changed the ways in which care and guardianship are regulated after the dissolution of a customary marriage. This is however only true for couples who get a divorce and does not hold in the same way for couples who are not legally divorced.

A qualitative study²⁵ examining 28 custody orders following the dissolution of a customary marriage in a regional court found that custody was contested in nine cases and uncontested in 19 cases. Despite the low number of (customary marriage) divorce cases found in the courts, the findings reveal that some fathers seek involvement and contest custody so that their relationships with their children are safeguarded. Moreover, in 15 of the 19 uncontested cases, parents shared the care work and day-to-day living with the child(ren). All parents in this group held joint custody with specific detailed care plans.

In cases where only the mother was awarded custody, it was in the best interests of the child as the courts were protecting the child from abuse, and prioritising caring connections. In one case, for example, the court held that the father-child relationship was not strong and that joint custody was not appropriate: the father had only limited contact with

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Fig. 4 Contestations of custody orders after dissolutions of customary marriages



Source: Himonga, C., & Moore, E. (2015) *Reform of customary marriage, divorce and succession in South Africa: Living customary law and social realities*. Cape Town: Juta.

the four-year-old boy (twice in three years), and the parents were always in conflict.

Care arrangements following informal separation of a customary marriage

In a context where most couples do not legally divorce but informally separate in consultation with family members, a study with 21 parents revealed that the mother was the primary carer in 18 cases and, in most cases, the mother still encouraged father–child contact.²⁶ In three cases, the father (and paternal family) was the primary carer. The study revealed that there was considerable support from all actors (including mothers, fathers, and traditional leaders) for the best interests of the child.

Paying maintenance under customary law

Research on the living customary law of maintenance of children indicates there is widespread agreement and a normative expectation that a father should maintain a child, irrespective of marital status.²⁷ Courts have acquired the power to order and enforce maintenance payments under section 8(4) of the RCMA. However, in practice, maintenance is often not paid and the financial responsibility for children, in many cases, is left to mothers and maternal kin.²⁸ (See the case study on fathers and maintenance on page 39.)

In the past, once *inhlawulo* was paid, a father could not be held liable to back-pay maintenance under common law.²⁹ It is unclear how this defence is used by fathers in the current economic context.

Gaps and priorities for future research

There is insufficient evidence on how fathers care for children both during a customary marriage and following the dissolution of a customary marriage. For example, in 2016, more than one in three (42%) divorces concluded in South Africa were among Black couples³⁰, many of whom have their personal lives regulated according to customary laws. Research investigating fathering practices and involvement should pay closer attention to practices in customary law settings, particularly in relation to care, involvement and maintenance.

French nuclear families (*gesinne*) arrived.³¹ The nuclear family model was thus already imported with the early settlers and, although many men were single, the ideal was to get married and have children.

Similarly, when the White inhabitants from the Cape colony moved inland in what is known as the Great Trek, they mostly moved as patriarchal nuclear families. The early settlers were generally Christian Protestants who to a large extent believed that men's superior position in the family was ordained by God.³² Fathers were involved with their children but families had clear gender segregation, men being primarily protectors and women the caregivers.

Between 1860 and 1911, a total of 152,184 Indian people were brought to Natal as indentured labourers. With the abolition of slavery, the British lured them to the sugar plantations of Natal, often with false promises. The migrants came from different regions in India and hence they brought with them a diversity of cultures.³³ Although the Indian families were characterised by nuclear units, it was not unusual for three generations to share a household. Fathers' authority was observed in Indian families and they were regarded as breadwinners whilst women had to stay within the domestic sphere where they could be protected from danger and sexual advances outside of marital relationships.³⁴

People classified as 'Coloured' under apartheid had various ancestors including slaves brought to South Africa³⁵, European settlers, Asians, as well as local African and Khoisan people. There is thus great variation within this one category and research conducted between the 1960s and 1980s identified two distinct socio-economic categories. The first is "a higher socio-economic class with stable family relationships and with relative social and economic security."³⁶ The second is a lower socio-economic class that experienced apartheid legislation at its worse, including the devastating effects of forced removals.

The result is that many so-called Coloured people have "a marginal economic existence" that may have a destabilising effect on family life.³⁷ Although there might be a preference for nuclear families, more than two generations

often live together in one household as an economic survival strategy. Fathers are expected to fulfil the breadwinner role.³⁸

In pre-colonial and early colonial times, parenting and fatherhood took place within the larger context of African kin systems.³⁹ Extended families provide various forms of support to individuals all over the world but it is particularly evident in African societies⁴⁰ which certainly have clear historical roots. Various historical and anthropological accounts⁴¹ have detailed how the recognition of children by fathers' extended kin followed certain norms. For example, the marriage practice of lobola relates to fatherhood since it "gives the family of the husband rights to all children born to his wife; it serves the purpose of distribution of consumable and productive resources; and it marks the transition into adulthood".⁴² If the practice of lobola (which is widespread in southern Africa) is explained as such, it constitutes far more than just what is translated to English as "bride wealth".

The importance of marriage and the links between fatherhood and family can also be deduced from the Setswana expressions: "*ngwana ke wa dikgomo*" or "*o e gapa le namane*" which loosely translated would imply that marrying someone means that all children of one's partner would be part of the marital union. In cases where a child was born out of wedlock and the couple do not plan to get married, the paternal and maternal families would make specific arrangements which may include acknowledgement of the child by the paternal family⁴³ (*inhlawulo* – Nguni /*hlahollo* – Sesotho).

These arrangements and practices clearly show that not only biological parents but families too were involved in raising children (although women, especially mothers, did most of the care work). However, colonial and apartheid powers disrupted many family practices in complicated ways. Policies of racial separation restricted Black people to 'Bantustans' – or 'homelands' – which were remote, rural and impoverished.⁴⁴ This disempowerment led to men, who were only allowed to migrate to the 'White areas' as labourers, to leave their homes to work as annual labour contractors in mines, factories

and on commercial farms. The gold mining sector provides an example in this regard.

Removing Black men from their kinship systems

Towards the end of the 19th century, the discovery of minerals in various places (in what is now known as South Africa) "changed the face of the (South African) landscape and economy forever".⁴⁵ The main gold reef in the Witwatersrand (discovered in 1886) had low quality gold deposits and the only way to mine this profitably was by employing cheap labour. Initially, men came to work on the mines for short periods with clear financial goals in mind (such as obtaining cash to buy cattle for lobola); they were there on "business"⁴⁶. It was a growing industry: there were 30,000 migrant mineworkers in 1893 in Transvaal (today Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Limpopo and North West provinces) alone, but by 1977 this had increased to 600,000 migrant mineworkers.⁴⁷ The mining industry also required a more skilled labour force, giving rise to mineworkers working for increasingly longer contracts that were routinely renewed – they became "career miners"⁴⁸.

By the 1970s, migrancy was entrenched and mine labourers lived away from their families for the greater part of the year. Apartheid legislation (e.g. the Urban Areas Act) prevented the majority of Black labourers to live with their families and children often stayed behind in rural areas, living within larger kin structures. In a nutshell, large numbers of Black labourers became physically absent from their families due to direct state and market interference in the lives of Black families.

Although the practice of erecting single-sex hostels for Black labourers was widespread in different labour sectors, men did not always live alone. Relationships with urban women varied from casual sexual liaisons to long-term relationships where the urban partner may even replace the rural wife. Similarly, the relationships with children born from these liaisons varied from not knowing about them or not recognising them as one's children, to being close to them.⁴⁹ Many rural wives dreaded such urban liaisons not only because of the emotional implications, but also because the flow of financial resources for their rural homestead and children could be disrupted.⁵⁰

After all the apartheid laws and restrictions on where citizens may live were finally lifted in post-apartheid South Africa, many Black male labourers continued to work as migrants, visiting their rural homesteads intermittently. They were still faced with economic realities that included a shortage of affordable housing in urban areas and job insecurity (since growing mechanisation and the myriad of apartheid policies over the years resulted in an oversupply of labour). For many, the latter implied that a rural homestead was needed as a safety net. Moreover, many migrants have emotional and kin affiliations with specific rural areas that they do not want to give up. In short, male labour migrancy, and hence non-residential fathers, became an entrenched feature of many Black families in South Africa due to economic necessity, practical reasons and personal choices.

In recent years, the reliance of the mining sector in South Africa on unpaid care work was demonstrated with terminally ill mineworkers returning home to be cared for by their mothers, partners and children, usually women and girls. Due to poor health and safety standards in the mining industry, many mineworkers left their employment with terminal and incurable lung diseases like silicosis. In 2018, a settlement was reached between major mining companies and 30,000 mineworkers and their families who had conducted a class action suit.⁵¹

Based on this history and caregiving practices, as can be observed from the censuses and other surveys, non-resident fatherhood deserves as much attention from researchers as residential fatherhood. The next chapter discusses with whom children live in contemporary South Africa and some of the factors that influence residency with biological fathers.

From patriarchy to economic providers

In this report, co-residency, the biological father, economic provider and social fatherhood roles are distinguished from one another (see these key terms explained on page 4). These aspects of fatherhood can of course be embodied in one man, but the current absence of biological fa-

MATERNAL UNCLES' (*BOMALOME*) SIGNIFICANCE IN FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS WITH NON-RESIDENT FATHERS

While it is universally acknowledged that biological father–child involvement is very important, research on fatherhood should not be restricted to them only. Throughout Africa, there is recognition that the person fulfilling the role of father may not always be the child's biological father. The African context raises the relevance of the concept of a 'social father' – an ascribed, as opposed to an attained, status for maternal and paternal uncles, grandfathers, older brothers and mothers' partners who singly or collectively provide for children's livelihood and education, and give them paternal love and guidance.⁵²

This case presents the views of young people on the significance and role of *bomalome* ('maternal uncles' in Sesotho).⁵³ Household interviews were conducted with 30 participants comprising mothers (n=15) and their adult children (n=15) who grew up in maternal-headed households in Black families in Evaton township, south of Johannesburg.

Male relatives as extended fathers

In South Africa, a man may never reside with his biological children; yet he may be integrally involved in the lives of children who may regard him as a father while also supporting members of the extended family in different households. In this way, a man is providing father care and support for children who may not be his biological offspring.⁵⁴ The importance of other male relatives in children's lives in South Africa has been highlighted in a study⁵⁵ that noted that, in Zulu culture, some children and adults refer to the father's younger brother (*ubaba omncane*) or his older brother (*ubaba omkhulu*) as the child's junior or senior father. In this regard, it has been argued that the concept of a father in African societies is that of a man who fully engages in the responsibility of caring and protecting children.⁵⁶

Despite negative views of *bomalome* in many South African communities, maternal uncles play an important role in extended families, hold a position of authority, and are overseers with clearly ascribed responsibilities. In this case study *bomalome* were significant in the following ways:

Bomalome as guardians

Bomalome were significant in the lives of young people growing up without their biological fathers residing with them, and in female-headed households. Firstly, the significance was due to kinship ties that *bomalome* had with young people whose fathers were not living with them, or were absent or unknown. *Bomalome* were described as disciplinarians who were able to guide young people, and as defenders in situations where participants needed protection in the community. There

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I would say my uncle is the one person I can talk to and discuss important matters about us men you know; we are very close like that. Yaa, he is there in each and every encounter in my life. He is there when I am not okay in my life, he listens, and he is the person I can say I trust with my life. (Male participant)

My uncle talks to me in a courteous manner as if I am his child, if he invites me to his house he does not keep me waiting or never shows up. Also, he does not say hurtful things like my father, he keeps all the promises he makes. If he cannot afford to pay for my school trip, he tells me in advance and that he will do it next month if possible. He treats me like his own child not just like an outcast. I can feel that he is closing the gap of not having a father in my life.

(Female participant)

were dominant narratives of lasting relationships with *bomalome* and childhood experiences of growing up in maternal extended families.

Bomalome as nurturers

Bomalome were also portrayed as nurturers, providing care and 'being there'. This means that *bomalome* were present and involved in the lives of the children whose biological fathers were either non-resident or absent. There was warm affection for *bomalome* as these ties were established early in the lives of these young people.

Bomalome as links to family lineage

Bomalome were significant in providing a sense of belonging to children born out of wedlock and whose fathers were absent. In line with the traditional African values of embracing and assimilating children born out of wedlock into extended families⁵⁷, *bomalome* stood out as individuals who legitimised children of fathers who had not paid *inhlawulo* or lobola, and those of absent fathers. Young people in this study commonly used their mothers' surname, and so shared the same surname with their *bomalome*. This maternal surname and lineage guaranteed ancestral protection of children born out of wedlock. Consequently, there was a strong sense of belonging and being legitimised within the extended family.

Bomalome as more than financial providers

While there were *bomalome* who were providing economically for young people whose fathers were absent, it is noteworthy that young people did not only value the provider role of *bomalome*. They also valued the ties and connections that these relationships provided. These ties were of utmost significance in the lives of young people. Therefore, the role played by *bomalome* was more than material provision, but also emotional connection and significant presence in the lives of participants.

Valuing and promoting social fathers

While the role of *bomalome* and other social fathers has been slowly eroding in contemporary South Africa due to spatial separation, living arrangements and challenging economic conditions characterised by high levels of poverty and unemployment, there is a need to recognise different ways in which social fathers can be involved in the lives of children. The role and involvement of men in the 'caring work' of child-rearing in general must be promoted and valued. There is a need to raise awareness about societal and cultural notions of fatherhood that do not only focus on the financial provider role but expand and include notions of providing care and support.

While the provider role is significant in the context of high poverty levels; there is a need to re-evaluate the norm that reduces the role of men to financial providers and undermines other roles that men can play meaningfully. Most importantly, the significant role that *bomalome* and other social fathers have traditionally played through deep connections of care, ritual performances, financial and practical support must be recognised and promoted.

thers in many family households in South Africa suggests that these aspects of fatherhood are often fulfilled by different men. Here it is argued that for South Africa, the reliance on Black labour migration was the way in which the capitalist system influenced the 'father as breadwinner' role to become more dominant than other roles.

Much has been written about patriarchy, not only from Western scholars but also in the African context. Often patriarchy is associated with the domination of men over women. Patriarchy can be defined as the rule of men over women and children where power, such as access to economic resources and major family decisions, rests in the hands of senior (in age and societal status) men.

Many forms of patriarchy exist though. A distinction can be made between private and public patriarchy where the former refers to the domestic sphere (usually control by the father) and the latter to the public realm. Here legislation and embedded structures deny women certain rights and thus discriminate against them collectively.⁵⁸ In colonised countries, the term "dual patriarchy" was developed to highlight the combined power of colonial administrators and husbands/fathers over women.⁵⁹ It should be noted that motherhood in itself was a source of power, especially in pre-colonial periods, but dual patriarchy lessened this power with time.⁶⁰

However, even though patriarchs and patriarchy tend to be viewed negatively today, there are interpretations of earlier patriarchy that are more favourable: "The father as patriarch has long been a respected figure in southern African society. Over the years, socio-cultural and, later, political changes have undermined the authority of African men and their status within the family."⁶¹ Fatherhood was a position that was connected to, and dependent on, other kin members, and not a position that an individual would usurp through use of power.⁶²

Moreover, older African men passed on *collective* understandings of masculine identities to younger men informally and in rituals (for example initiation schools) during pre-industrial periods. Since large numbers of young men relocated to take up employment in the mining

Fatherhood was a position that was connected to, and dependent on, other kin members, and not a position that an individual would usurp through use of power

sector, the mining premises became a new environment where different masculine identities were formed.⁶³ Over time, many young men lost their ties with their fathers, as well as other adult male members of their families.⁶⁴ Such erosion of contact between different generations meant that older men could not play a guiding and caring role any longer and, if they also could not be financial providers, they had very little left to link them with their families.

In South Africa, it was shown how patriarchies, instead of a singular form of patriarchy, played out.⁶⁵ Race was a dominant factor in establishing different trajectories of fatherhood; for example, White male labourers earned much higher wages than Black labourers since it was argued (for instance by mine management structures) that it was beneficial for a man to settle with his wife and children near his workplace and hence more cash was needed for their upkeep. However, since the inception of industry (the mining industry for example) it was argued that Black labourers should work without accompanying family members and the scene for the oscillating migration of Black male labourers was set. Members of the Chamber of Mines had a discussion on changing these discriminatory practices in the 1950s, but it was rejected.⁶⁶ This migration pattern removed Black men physically from their families and kin for the greater part of the year and contributed to the understanding of fatherhood being narrowed down to a non-

resident breadwinner for his family.

There is also a flipside to patriarchy that demonstrates its close links with class and race as the following quote suggests: "In an affluent, upper class, first world situation, the patriarch functions as a provider and liberator from hard work, and beyond that a contributor of luxuries and pleasure. In South Africa upper class black women and white women almost as a generality experience patriarchy in this context, rather than in the context of oppression."⁶⁷ If this view is accepted, it helps to explain why some women actively support patriarchy, even today.

There has been a general shift in dominant fatherhood practices and expectations during the 20th century in South Africa, where fatherhood is primarily associated with the reduced role of being a material provider.⁶⁸ Since many men have precarious job prospects and no other means of financial support, they have no access to economic means.⁶⁹ Due to unemployment, and more women entering the labour market, many men are no longer the sole providers for their children. Men who are not able to live up to the expectations of being a financial provider may break the bonds with families rather than face the shame of feeling inadequate.

Involved fathers and caregiving

In pre-colonial periods, kinship systems usually had clear guidelines on care responsibilities and hence there was a degree of predictability. Major events such as "colonialism, war, drought and wage labour"⁷⁰ disrupted these guidelines but caregiving remained decidedly gendered as "mothers, wives, daughters, sisters and aunts are expected to be willing and ready to provide routine care"⁷¹.

Moreover, in many South African households, especially in the more prosperous ones, paid caregiving is part of raising children. Out of necessity, especially Coloured and Black women are domestic workers or nannies working for low wages, making it possible for many middle-class and working-class families to afford their services.⁷² When looking closer at families with paid care support, the female paid worker may exempt fathers from taking an active role in the

physical care, especially of their young children. In families of all socio-economic backgrounds, men are thus generally less involved in caring for children.

When thinking about care, the focus should not only be on physical care, such as grooming and feeding, but also on the emotional work of care. Although women take on the bulk of all childcare in families, it does not mean that men are not involved in caretaking at all. Towards the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries, South African studies revealed that men are increasingly involved in childcare. Although men's involvement in the lives of their children may not be to the same degree as women, they are in general far more involved in childcare compared to their own fathers.⁷³ Bargaining for paternity rights⁷⁴ and paternal custody cases⁷⁵ in South Africa supports the view that many men are eager to be involved in the lives of their children from birth onwards. It has also been shown that involved fathers enhance gender equality; for example, women who had involved fathers are better able to negotiate equal sexual relationships.⁷⁶

The issue of heteronormativity is increasingly given attention in family studies, in other words, the expectation that all families are heterosexual in nature is challenged. In South Africa, same-sex unions have been legalised since 2006 and, since adoption rights are also recognised, gay fathers have been receiving attention in research. Gay men may be fathers due to having children in previous heterosexual relationships, engaging surrogate mothers, adopting children, kinship ties with siblings' children like *bomalome* (as discussed in the case on page 19) and socially ascribed fatherhood. Either way, gay fathers challenge the way in which many people regard fatherhood and families.

Gay fathers are often found to raise children in an egalitarian and nurturing environment.⁷⁷ Despite the legality of same-sex relationships in South Africa, same-sex couples often experience structural challenges and hostility in their daily lives. In recent years, several male couples who adopted children took recourse via the legal system to access parenting leave under the existing maternity leave framework. The new parental

leave provisions, due to be enacted in 2018, now also provide for such couples. (This legislative development is discussed on page 6.)

Although there are thus positive developments in recent times with many fathers increasingly wanting to be involved in their children's lives, use of violence by fathers against children and partners is also seemingly on the increase.

Violent fathers

Before "the democratic elections of 1994, the South African state committed systematic violence against the institution of the family among Africans".⁷⁸ Since brutal force was regularly used by an oppressive government in many communities, physical violence became normalised and it spilled over into interpersonal violence.⁷⁹

Research has shown that other aspects, which are also found globally, contribute to domestic violence in South Africa as well. In 1998, a cross-sectional study in South Africa found risk factors associated with domestic violence include: experiencing violence as a child, low levels of education, women having "liberal ideas on women's roles", alcohol consumption and conflict over the male partner's drinking, having another partner, the male partner preferring to have a son, frequent interpersonal conflict and one partner supporting the household financially.⁸⁰

A closer look at these aspects reveal that power dynamics are often central in the abuse where men feel threatened when women become more empowered.⁸¹ Once the power balance in gendered relations shifts, those who hold more power (in this case men) often react violently to cling to that power. Since the use of violence has become commonplace in communities, men easily resort to violence towards their partners and children. Family and community members sometimes encourage women to stay in abusive relationships, even when women are financially independent.⁸² This should be understood within gender constructions where men are portrayed as aggressors and women as peacemakers.⁸³

Yet, the belief that men are inherently violent or set in their ways has been disproven and

their ability to care for others is undeniable.⁸⁴ In order to "move towards a gender-equal society one requires men and boys to think and act in new ways, to reconsider traditional images of manhood, and to reshape their relationships with women and girls".⁸⁵ In their roles as fathers, men should thus be supported to become involved in care and fulfil various other forms of engagement with children.

Conclusion

Various historical trajectories of fatherhood have shaped current fathering practices in South Africa. Childcare work, which has historically been in the hands of women, still remains largely understood as women's work. But many men are involved in childcare and men increasingly want to be more involved. The history of fatherhood shows that men have historically played an important role in parenting but often as a lesser partner to wives, mothers, aunts, and domestic workers.

With changes in the South African gender order, more women are in paid employment and more men are involved in the (largely unpaid) work of childcare. This has impacted on conceptions of masculinity so that fatherhood is now becoming a component of hegemonic masculinity and engaged fatherhood is valued. On the other hand, structural inequality and low levels of employment continue to be a barrier for many men to embrace fatherhood and to become central in the lives of their children.

Many men are under enormous pressure to live up to ideals of being economic providers, yet taking up responsibility for the financial wellbeing of their children is unattainable for many, especially young, unskilled or semi-skilled men. A renewed focus in understanding the variety of roles that biological and social fathers do, and could, play are of extreme importance.

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"Dad, I wish I could experience you on my own"

Sunday past was fathers' day and this year I missed you more than ever. I try my best not to miss you too much, but as I grow older I feel hurt and lost that you were taken too soon. We were not even two years old when you decided to leave us and, yes death has never been a choice but I was hoping you'd find a reason to fight to live for us. Your death was brutal and cruel; that's what mom says all the time; she still cries herself to sleep you know, I don't even know grandma properly – maybe it's because my face mirrors yours or maybe we're just another reminder of your death.

I sometimes wonder if your killers ever feel guilty; if they ever consider the people that you had to leave. Dad I miss you, it sounds crazy because I've been told you can't miss something you've never had, right?

Growing up I've been taught having yourself is suffice for anything else, but there are times when I need you, I don't even know what I need you for, but I feel lost.

There are times when things are so tough at home, money's too little, the smiles are ending and I wonder, if maybe, just maybe things would be better or maybe they'd just be worst, I can't really say because I was never given the chance to get to know you and, although I've been told about you, I wish I could experience you on my own.

Essay contestant, Western Cape



Leading by Example

Grandmother Alice Mdaka and her son are sharing the unpaid care work. She supports the 10 people living in her small three-bedroom house in Khayelitsha.

An Overview of Fatherhood in South Africa

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"The real 'masculinity crisis' today is not too many Marlboro Men, but too few fathers", David Popenoe¹ said 20 years ago about the United States of America. Can we speak of a similar crisis of fathers and fatherhood in South Africa, and how useful is it to do so?

A major point in this chapter is that the crisis – if indeed there is a crisis – of fathers and fatherhood is tied to the socio-economic legacy of apartheid and, over a longer period of time, slavery and colonialism. In addition, racially differentiated levels of poverty, rates of unemployment and marriage rates in contemporary society have an effect on the state of fathers and fatherhood, particularly where a 'fatherhood crisis' or lack thereof is measured by father absence.

These historical and contemporary social and economic forces have had the effect of destabilising mainly Black and Coloured masculinities, families, lives, relationships, identities and communities, sometimes utterly. As we show below, the hangover of these socio-economic histories and developments is very much evident in the data on households and families today.

The concern about fathers and fatherhood

The usefulness of casting the state of fathers and fatherhood in South Africa as *in crisis* is, however, debatable, even though the *concern* about biological fathers and fatherhood appears to be warranted. The disquiet is characterised by the physical absence of men from the households where their biological children live – which is to say, consistent co-residency.² Compared to

women, many men are not physically present in the day-to-day lives of their biological children. Physical absence is often coupled with, but not always adequately distinguished from, men's lack of emotional involvement in their children's lives. The inference is that physically absent fathers are emotionally and psychologically absent from their children's lives and do not always take economic responsibility for their children.³

The anxiety over the physical absence of biological fathers from their children's lives, which is not always distinguished from lack of involvement, is evident in a number of policy-related publications. For example, the Green Paper on Families⁴, the White Paper on Families⁵, the "First Steps to Healing the South African Family" report⁶ by the South African Institute of Race Relations, and other research reports have noted the unfavourable impact of father absence and non-involvement in children's lives. Contrastingly, studies have observed the positive impact of the presence and active involvement of a father in a child's life with respect to improved academic performance, healthy sexual socialisation, as well as favourable social, emotional and cognitive functioning.⁷

In the Green Paper, father absence is indicated as one of a myriad of societal forces seen to threaten the ability of the family "to play its critical roles of socialisation, nurturing, care and protection effectively".⁸ Whilst noting the negative impact of poverty and unemployment on the likelihood of biological fathers to be physically present consistently and to take responsibility for their children's lives, the White Paper notes that absence is "a cause for concern given the significant body of evidence showing the positive

It is critical that single mothers, whether because of choice or unplanned pregnancy, are not blamed for unfavourable child outcomes

effect of the presence and active involvement of a father in a child's life chances".⁹

The South African Institute of Race Relations report states that "children growing up without fathers are more likely to experience emotional disturbances and depression. Girls who grow up with their fathers are more likely to have higher self-esteem, lower levels of risky sexual behaviour, and fewer difficulties in forming and maintaining romantic relationships later in life. They have less likelihood of having an early pregnancy, bearing children outside marriage, marrying early, or getting divorced. Boys growing up in absent father households are more likely to display 'hypermasculine' behaviour, including aggression".¹⁰

The problem with the nuclear family "norm"

Qualitative research has reported on the yearning for the presence of a father by children and young people who do not know their fathers or consider their fathers to be absent.¹¹

Researchers have also pointed out that while single motherhood may not necessarily be a choice by some women, co-residency with biological fathers is not always the sought outcome. However, for women who are not in a stable, marriage-like relationship with the biological father of their child, acknowledgement of pregnancy, consistent emotional presence and involvement in the child's life are a desired state of co-parenting.¹²

It is critical that single mothers, whether because of choice or unplanned pregnancy, are not blamed for unfavourable child outcomes. As indicated in the previous chapters, this report should not be read as advocating for the return to a heteropatriarchal nuclear family in which a biological father is the head of the family and lives with his wife and biological children on a daily basis. Here is why:

The second Living Conditions Survey¹³ shows that approximately 22% of households were single-member households, which may or may not have children in them, and among which around 25% were headed by men and 18% were headed by women. Just under four in every 10 households were reported to be nuclear or extended (39% and 36%) households. While statistically

Fig. 5 Sex of household head, by type of household in South Africa, 2015

Type of household	Total (%)	Male household head (%)	Female household head (%)
Single	22.1	24.7	18.4
Nuclear	39.0	<u>46.3</u>	28.6
Extended	36.0	26.2	<u>49.9</u>
Complex	2.9	2.9	3.0
Total	100	100	100

Source: Statistics South Africa. (2018). *Men, women and children. Findings of the Living Conditions Survey*. Pretoria: Stats SA. P. 9.

the percentage of nuclear family households headed by males (around 46%, compared to about 29% female-headed nuclear households) is slightly more than extended family households, and significantly more than single parent households, the nuclear family as a naturally caring unit is a fantasy.

Given the levels of violence against children, and domestic and intimate partner violence, the fantasy of the loving nuclear family where the father plays a caring role 'equal' or complementary to that of the mother is something South Africa needs to be disabused of. It is possible that life in nuclear families with a father present can be as uncaring and violent, or as loving and supportive, as in other forms of family. The nuclear family should not be seen as a norm to which all families should aspire since it is simply not feasible or desirable in all cases.

What is needed is a variety of studies – cross-sectional, longitudinal, experimental, and in-depth – on the social, health and educational consequences of responsive parenting by single mothers and fathers compared to nuclear, extended, complex or other types of families with co-residential fathers – whether they be responsive, harsh or violent fathers. Only then will we understand under what conditions single parenting is in the best interests of children and when it is not.

We also do not have research comparing responsive single mothers to absent but caring fathers. It is necessary, therefore, to support and undertake different types of studies on the effects of different fathers' absences and presences

and different types of fathers (physically present and emotionally caring; physically present but emotionally neglectful; to those who are physically present but harsh or violent parents; and those who are physically and emotionally absent) to inform future policies, programmes and advocacy on fatherhood.

The lack of extensive research notwithstanding, from the perspective of positive parenting, the absence of a biological father is preferable to violent present fathering for child outcomes.

The physical absence of fathers

The physical absence of biological fathers from the household in which their biological children live is a key concern for policymakers and researchers of fathers and fatherhood. At the same time it is vital to underline that a deeply concerning feature of the lives of South African children is the high number who do not consistently live in the same household with either biological parents.

Physical absence is measured by asking whether or not children *consistently* co-reside with their biological parents in the same household. When physical absence is used as an indicator, a significant number of children are reported to not co-reside with their biological parents. In this section, when an indicator refers to "living with ... only" it means that this is *the only biological parent* present in the household. Many children in South Africa live in extended households with adults other than their parents and therefore the "only" should *not* be read as "the only other adult person in the household".

ABSENCE AND RACE

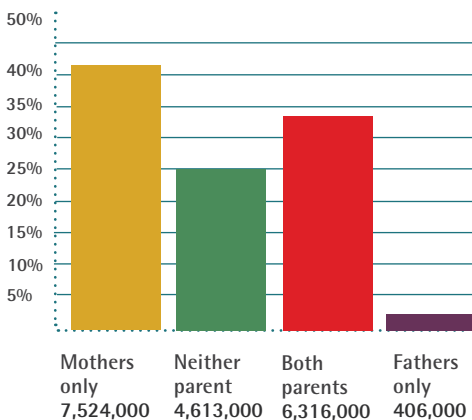
The physical absence of fathers differs according to race. The General Household Survey 2016¹⁴ data for children 0 – 7 shows that Black children are the most likely to not live with their biological parents: around 3,895,000 children, which translates to about one in every four, did not live with either of their biological parents. Over 6,780,000 (43%) lived with their mother only. Just under half a million (3%) lived with their father only; and approximately three in 10 children in this racial group (29.5%, or approximately 4,629,000) lived with both parents.

The most telling point about the lives of South Africa's children is the significant number who live with neither of their parents. While Black children are the worst affected, even more staggering is that two in every three Black children do not live with their biological fathers. Intensive research, research-led policymaking and evidence-based interventions that address the separation of children from their parents, and in particular fathers, are required.

It is critical to underline that it is most likely a combination of a person's access to economic resources (money or well-paid job), social capital

ⁱ We are grateful to Robert Morrell for urging us to underline this point, as well as the one about the effect of apartheid and colonialism on White fathers.

Fig. 6 Children's co-residence with parents, 2016

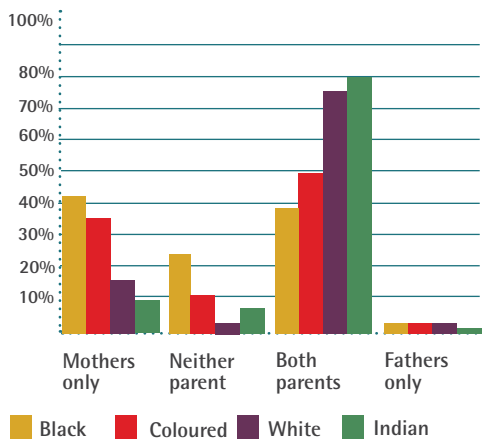


Source: Statistics South Africa (2017) General Household Survey 2016. Pretoria: Stats SA. [Analysis by Debbie Budlender]

(the social networks and support to which a person has access), as well as cultural norms (which are influenced by history), and *not* of one's racial identity that best explains the relationship of physical absence to a racial group.ⁱ A fundamental feature of apartheid, and of colonial rule, was to methodically link the laws and policies on racial identification (for example, being categorised as White) and socio-economic laws and policies (such as better educational facilities and reserving well-paying jobs for those classified as White). The main consequence of these linked laws and policies has been, on the one hand, to concentrate wealth, high levels of education, and low rates of unemployment among Whites, and, on the other, poverty, lower levels of education, and high rates of unemployment among Black people.

As the apartheid era recedes and the economic fortunes of the people of South Africa diverge away from apartheid-determined patterns, Blackness (as well as Colouredness) may come to be decreasingly equated with poverty, low levels of education, and unemployment. The emergence of a growing Black and Coloured middle-class is a key factor in a future where race is increasingly sundered from economic class. However, this delinking of race from economic class depends to a large extent on not only more just socio-economic laws and policies having the desired effect, but also the correction of the structure of the South African economy.

Fig. 7 Children's co-residence by race, 2016



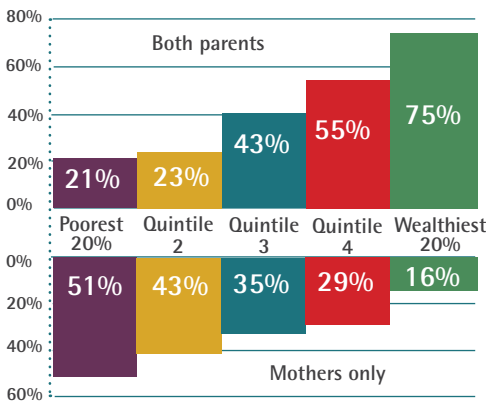
Source: Statistics South Africa (2017) General Household Survey 2016. Pretoria: Stats SA. [Analysis by Debbie Budlender]

After Black children, Coloured children are most likely to not live with their biological parents. (The same point about race and absence applies here and in all of this section). Half (50%) of Coloured children (approximately 780,000) lived with both parents; one in 10 (12%, or about 192,000) lived with neither parent; 35% (approximately 538,000) lived with their mother only; and under 3% (around 46,900) lived with their father only.¹⁵ While not as striking as the picture for Black children, the share of Coloured children who live without their fathers in the home is cause for concern and calls for careful consideration.

In contrast to Black and Coloured children, Indian/Asian and White children are most likely to live with their biological parents. Of every four White children, approximately three (76%, or approximately 748,000) lived with both parents. Nearly 4% (about 36,000) of White children lived with neither parent. Around 17% (approximately 169,000) lived with their mother only, and, about 28,500 (3%) lived with their father only.¹⁶

Indians/Asians had the highest co-residency. Four in every five Indian children (or approximately 289,000) were living with both parents. Around 7% (an estimated 24,000) lived with neither parent. About 10% (approximately 37,000) lived with their mother only, and 1% (which numbered around 4,000) of Indian/Asian children lived with their father only.¹⁷

Fig. 8 Children's co-residence by income, 2016



Source: Statistics South Africa (2017) General Household Survey 2016. Pretoria: Stats SA. [Analysis by Debbie Budlender]

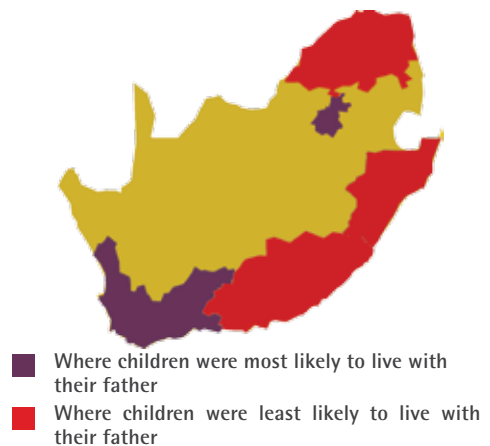
ABSENCE AND INCOME

Income is associated with co-residency. Figure 8 shows that children in the poorest 20% of households (quintile 1) were least likely and children in the wealthiest 20% of households (quintile 5) were most likely to live with both biological parents.ⁱⁱ Of children in the poorest families, 21% had both parents living with them, compared to 75% of the children in the richest families.¹⁸ It seems that income and social class are much stronger determinants of father-child residence than race. Eg, 68% of Black children in the wealthiest quintile co-reside with their biological fathers. However, for both groups of children the percentage of children co-residing with both parents has gone down since 2002, when around 26% of children in the poorest households and 81% of the children in the wealthiest households lived with both biological parents.¹⁹ In 2016, approximately half of the children in the poorest 40% of households (about 1.5 million) lived with neither parent and 43% (2.1 million) lived with their mother only.²⁰

Children living with neither parent are most likely to live with their grandmother. In 2016, between 6% (123,000) of children in the wealthiest 40% of households (quintiles 4 and 5) lived with neither parent while one in five (16%, or 308,000)

ⁱⁱ A quintile is a statistical value of a dataset that represents 20% of a population group. Quintile 1 represents the poorest households and quintile 5 the richest.

Fig. 9 Children's co-residence by province, 2016



Source: Statistics South Africa (2017) General Household Survey 2016. Pretoria: Stats SA. [Analysis by Debbie Budlender]

lived with their mother only. The percentage of children who lived with their biological father only for all income groups was under 5%.²¹ When looking at the association of income to parental absence it is interesting that, while the overall share of children who live with both parents has declined, there was an increase in the percentage of children living with both parents for quintiles 3 and 4 (mid-point and second wealthiest households).

ABSENCE AND AGE

In 2016, around 3% (or approximately 556,000) of South Africa's children lived with their biological fathers only; more than 41% (approximately 7,524,000) lived with their biological mothers only; 34% (6,316,000) lived with both their biological parents; and almost one in five (22%, or 4,148,000) lived with neither biological parents.²²

Given the importance of father involvement in the earliest period of children's lives – the first 1,000 days – the absence of fathers in the lives of infants is troubling. Statistics South Africa²³ provides figures for younger children (ages 0 – 4) which show that, in 2016, two in every 100 children of this age group lived with their biological fathers only; 48% lived with their biological mother only; more than 37% lived with both their biological parents; and 13% lived with neither biological parent.²⁴

The next chapter discusses the significance of the first 1,000 days of children's lives and the crucial role that father care plays during this period.

ABSENCE ACROSS PROVINCES

In 2016, the three provinces where children were least likely to live with their fathers in the household were Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo; while the two provinces where children were most likely to live with both parents were Western Cape and Gauteng. The number of children who lived with their father only did not exceed 4% in any province. The differences in children who lived without both parents between more ruralⁱⁱⁱ and economically deprived provinces on the one hand, and the two most economically developed and urban provinces on the other, suggest that migration of parents (or in some cases children) from rural to urban areas could be contributing to the separation of parents from their children.

A need to understand the context of absence

The concern with absent biological fathers has been viewed in relation to the disturbingly high number of children in South Africa who do not co-reside with their biological parents. Both these facts have been placed in the context of high unemployment and poverty²⁵ as well as elevated mortality rates.

While the impact of poverty is apparent from the data on co-residency, surveys among men who are biological fathers are needed to fully understand the inhibitive effect of unemployment and poverty on father presence. In-depth qualitative studies to understand men's narratives of absence and presence are also required. The HIV and AIDS epidemic²⁶ has also had an impact on the mortality of fathers. However, the extent of the absence of fathers due to AIDS-related death needs further investigation.

Different social and other forces that have affected ideas about masculinity and men's relations with women, other men and other genders (such as trans, genderqueer, and non-binary persons) also play a role in prevailing discourses on fathers and fatherhood. These include social and legislative changes (the rate of divorce, for example, and laws such as the Customary Marriages Act and Civil Union Act), and cultural (in particular lobola and *inhlawulo*) and economic developments – poverty and unemployment being the most pressing.

As pointed out in the introduction, the most significant social force to which the contemporary state of father and fatherhood, especially among Black and Coloured men, has to be connected in our understanding and work is the brutal political and economic history that has shaped men and masculinity.²⁷ The forced displacement of Black, Coloured, Indian and Asian communities, and the linked impact of the assault on the masculinity of the men in these communities by White racist and patriarchal economic structures, affected in diverse ways the families, childhood, motherhood, and fatherhood

ⁱⁱⁱ KwaZulu-Natal is regarded as having more of a balance between urban and rural households within the same province than Limpopo and Eastern Cape.

NON-RESIDENTIAL FATHERS' CUSTODY ARRANGEMENTS AND FATHER-CHILD CONTACT

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Once parents of a child have separated as a couple, fathers without custody over the children usually do not reside with the children.²⁸ As non-residential fathers do not have daily contact with their children, they have to negotiate with the mother to gain access to their children.

In light of the extensive absence of fathers in the lives of South African children (as discussed on the previous pages), it is important to explore the ways in which non-residential fathers engage in childcare.²⁹ In illustration of non-residential fathers' engagement in childcare, examples are drawn from a current qualitative study³⁰ exploring men's involvement in children's lives after their relationship with the mother of the child has ended.

Fathers were recruited to participate in the study through community-based counselling facilities, social welfare organisations and participant referral. This study involved 10 heterosexual non-residential fathers aged between 28 and 54 years – six Black fathers, one Coloured father, one Indian father and two White fathers – all living in Johannesburg. Seven fathers live in urban informal settlements, typically characterised by high levels of unemployment, poverty, social instability and poor access to educational and public health facilities.³¹

They have varied levels of education, ranging from grade 4 to tertiary qualifications. Four fathers earn a monthly salary and six are unemployed and rely on intermittent income. All have been separated from the mothers of their children for between two to 11 years, and three fathers have re-partnered, whilst seven have remained single. One of these fathers lives with a child from another relationship while the rest have no other children. These fathers' accounts highlight their need for paternal involvement in children's lives.

Non-custodial fathers are not disinterested fathers

In spite of their non-residential status, some non-custodial fathers in South Africa are reported to desire active involvement in the daily care of their children.³² The fathers in this study avidly express their desire for paternal engagement, too: "I enjoy each and every moment that I am with him" and "I have to be there, no matter what".

A limited focus on financial provider role

Normative gender stereotypes are closely related to expectations that men provide financially for their offspring. The ability of South Africa's fathers to provide for their children, however, is related to complex socio-economic and political contexts.³³ A focus on the role of the father as financial provider limits acknowledgement of other ways in which they meet the physical as well as emotional needs of their children,

particularly poor and unemployed fathers.³⁴ This discourse predominantly affects Black fathers' ability to provide as most of them often rely on irregular sources of income.

In the current study, six Black fathers and one Coloured father speak of their ability to provide in the context of the socio-economic realities of poverty and intermittent employment. As a self-employed carpenter, one father talks of being unable to consistently provide for his child: "At times you would sit for six months without getting any job. It becomes hard. Although I don't work full time, at least [when] I get some money, I buy him some things."

In many cases, fathers' inability to provide financial support towards childcare contributes to parental conflict and maternal perceptions of non-residential fathers as lacking commitment to the welfare of their children. Defaulting on child maintenance has been found to result in mothers preventing father-child contact.³⁵ One of five such fathers explains: "I cannot pay the money, so the mother will not let me see him." Another father's account reflects how conversely maintenance represents transactional power in negotiating control of paternal presence: "I could not see him so I stopped paying for a couple of years. I then started paying again and was allowed to see him."

Not all fathers are unable to meet the financial needs of their children: two fathers speak of contributing to school fees but are unwilling to pay maintenance despite their ability to do so.

The importance of other forms of paternal care

Research on fatherhood in South Africa highlights problematic father presence that is often associated with disciplinary roles and violent behaviour.³⁶ The importance of nurturing paternal care beyond financial maintenance, therefore, has become increasingly visible and valued.³⁷ As was illustrated in other studies³⁸ these fathers describe their roles to their children as advisors: "I want to guide him"; as protectors: "I am protecting her"; and also as disciplinary authority and non-violent role models.

Young fathers are reported to challenge ideas of fatherhood as disengaged provision by sharing in household chores and participating in the daily care of children.³⁹ This was echoed by a 28-year-old father who works as a freelance artist: "When he is with me I take care of him, I wash him, I feed him, you know, that is what a parent does." This illustrates that the nurturance of children is not confined to the domains of motherhood alone⁴⁰ and so challenges normative stereotypes of parenting and fatherhood.

Non-resident father involvement is often linked to kin support to engage with the child.⁴¹ A non-residential father living in the informal settlement of Kwa-Thema in eastern Johannesburg explains: "Her family they understand the situation. They will call me and I'll go. That's what I do."

One father has secured regular contact with the child through a court order. Others rely on school teachers to stay informed and involved in the educational development of their children. They report that they value the mother's provision of school reports and their, the fathers', inclusion in sport-related extracurricular activities. Cooperative co-parenting is strongly associated with the engaged presence of non-residential fathers in their children's lives, and positive developmental outcomes for children.⁴²

Supporting non-residential fathers benefits the child

Non-residential fathers' way of adapting to living without their children is important for their involvement in childcare. Depression associated with exclusion from childcare highlights the need to support fathers in active and positive involvement in the lives of their children.⁴³

In this study, fathers speak of not living with their children as undesirable and emotionally distressing: "It pains me when every time I think of him. Some of us are absent. Not by choice. Whether you are present, or you are absent, the fact remains you are a father."

of the same communities. The forced migration of Black men under past economic and labour policies of oppressive governments meant that Black men had to leave their home to work in the mines and towns and cities under economic colonialism and apartheid.

A consequence of these social and economic forces has been the almost irreparable weakening and often total breakdown of Coloured and Black families and communities as well as men's identities and relationship to women and children. The legacy of these socio-economic histories is still evident in the data on households and families today. Policy instruments on fatherhood should take these into account. Advocacy for fathers should consider these historical socio-economic forces in the messaging on fatherhood.

It is necessary to note that White and Indian/Asian families and men's journey into fatherhood may also have been affected by apartheid and colonialism. The legacy of apartheid and colonialism has affected all men, women and children. It may be a mistake to consider history as having been only positive for White men and families. But the picture of fathers and fatherhood practices is at present not very clear and we do not have a firm grasp of the effects of history and contemporary socio-economic systems on father involvement and caregiving among White males who have been privileged by colonialism and apartheid. The deleterious effect, such as child abuse and violence against women on White people, as a result of these authoritarian and dehumanising historical systems on White families and fathers is worthy of in-depth investigation. One example is the entrenchment of corporal punishment – which was connected to Christian national education and its precursors – in White families.

We understand even less about the causes and dynamics of why Indian/Asian males have such high levels of co-residency with their biological children, as well as whether and how Indian/Asian co-residency is associated to increased caregiving. The way Indian/Asian males as fathers differ from White, Black and Coloured fathers, and the ways in which caregiving across the groups is understood and performed must be an informative line for research.

Teenage, unplanned, unwanted and out-of-wedlock pregnancy

The age at which individuals become parents is important in considering the state of fatherhood. Research suggests that teenage, unplanned, unwanted or out-of-wedlock pregnancy has some impact on paternal preparedness, responsibility and involvement. Teenage, unplanned or unwanted pregnancy is associated with several other variables, including the need for support from extended family and the lack of financial support of the child by the father.

A number of reports give information about teenage pregnancy, taken as one category of early, unplanned, unwanted or out-of-wedlock pregnancy.⁴⁴ The General Household Survey 2016⁴⁵ indicates that just over 5% of females aged 14 to 19 years were pregnant during the 12 months before the survey and the prevalence of pregnancies increased with age, rising from under 1% for females aged 14 years to just over 10% for 19-year-old females.

Pregnancy at schools, which mainly occurs among teenagers (although small numbers of pre-teen pregnancies are also seen in the data), is a type of early or unplanned pregnancies that has received relatively more empirical attention. In 2015, 3.3% of schoolgirls (or 85,349 in absolute numbers) aged 14 years and older reported being pregnant.⁴⁶ This is a reduction in the number of reported pregnancies among schoolgirls from 2010 (3.6%, or 92,199).

The Basic Education Department has observed that pregnancy among learners is a barrier for girls to attending educational institutions. It notes that information on pregnancy among schoolgirls helps in developing interventions and strategies to address pregnancy in schools, as well as knowing the prevalence of pregnancy in the schooling system. However the effects of schoolgirl pregnancy have repercussions for children of these young mothers as such pregnancy is more likely unplanned or unwanted. Biological fathers are more likely not to live in the household of their children in cases of unplanned pregnancies.

Whilst the government policy encourages students who fall pregnant to continue with edu-

cation, it is the pregnant schoolgirl who tends to be stigmatised. As data on the partners of the learners or fathers of the children born to schoolgirls are not always available, men may be out-of-school peers or older males. Schoolgirl pregnancy could therefore be the result of statutory rape or coerced sex where older men are involved. Where the father is a schoolboy older than 16 and the sex was consensual with a girl not younger than 14 or older than 18, the boy is seemingly allowed to continue with his schooling as usual.

Lack of attention on schoolboy fathers and fathers of children of schoolgirls, coupled with stigmatisation of schoolgirl pregnancy, inhibits our understanding of early fatherhood. Whilst some schoolboys want to and do take responsibility for the pregnancy, and child once born, much needs to be done to encourage young men so that they consistently take responsibility for their sexuality and offspring.

Since many young fathers tend to be unemployed, they may not be able to provide for their children and thus hindered from being involved in their children's lives (illustrated in the case on non-residential fathers and father-child contact on page 35). Such young fathers need their own parents to support them and to be involved in their children's lives; they need parenting-related support, skills, knowledge and education.⁴⁷ Research and interventions that focus on understanding schoolboy fathers and fathers of children of schoolgirls are needed. An encouraging example is the Mmoho campaign^{iv} that speaks to adolescent girls and boys about sexual and reproductive health and rights, including teenage pregnancy.

Although there is a worry about teenage pregnancies, it is striking that the average age at which males are reported to become fathers is

^{iv} Mmoho is a teen pregnancy prevention campaign that was developed to change the national discourse on unintended teen pregnancy and advocate for comprehensive and accessible sexual and reproductive health and rights services and information for teens and adolescents. The campaign was developed by the National Teenage Pregnancy Partnership (a coalition of experts from the government, civil society and academic sectors) to share strategies to catalyse new approaches to understand and address unintended teen pregnancy better. (See www.mmoho.co.za.)

well beyond the teenage years, at approximately 28 years of age.⁴⁸ In contrast, the average transition to motherhood is at a younger age at approximately 21 years. For both men and women, the age of transition to parenthood has been fairly stable since the 1970s. It is also worth adding that analyses of longitudinal data indicate that teen child-bearing has shown a downward trend in the past decades.⁴⁹

Inhlawulo

Fatherhood can involve complex negotiations of acknowledgement and access. Cultural processes, ideas and rules are sometimes the main bridge to be crossed by fathers and the paternal family to gain access to their biological offspring. *Inhlawulo* (Nguni) (or *hlahollo* in Sesotho) is a cultural process through which many Black communities have regulated and mediated a father's involvement in a child's life⁵⁰. *Inhlawulo*, usually offered in the form of cattle or money, is tendered by the father to the girl's or woman's family for impregnating her outside of marriage.

Inhlawulo is essentially about acknowledging paternity as much as granting permission to a man to be involved in his child's life. *Inhlawulo* can be a barrier to men's involvement in their children's lives, but it has been observed that some maternal families may allow a father full access even when *inhlawulo* has not been made.⁵¹

Maintenance

As the case on the opposite page illustrates, maintenance is a key legal mechanism in paternity and a major influence on father involvement. Alongside – and sometimes contradicting cultural process – the maintenance system is also an important consideration in negotiation of parental access. Whilst the maintenance law is gender neutral, the lived reality is of children who don't live with their biological fathers, and thus most alimony defaulters are fathers. Although intended to facilitate support by biological fathers, the maintenance system is divorced from the broader imperatives embedded in the cultural process of *inhlawulo* which were meant to facilitate recognition, belonging, access and custody in the broader context of both the maternal and paternal families and their shared provision.

FATHERS AND CHILD MAINTENANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Child support and provision are significant in how fathers think about their involvement in children's lives.⁵² This continues to be so in contemporary South Africa even though men, including fathers, are experiencing increasing unemployment. At the same time, a public discourse of encouraging more care-related forms of fatherhood is emerging.

The state, through the Child Support Grant, provides economic relief for children affected by poverty and unemployment generally (see the case study on fathers accessing this grant, on page 57). This social security provision is assumed, however, in a context where the economic provision by fathers is not only encouraged but also used to sustain the economic definition of fatherhood – and so maintains the notion of a financial provider masculinity.⁵³ The responsibility to provide child support is upheld through the maintenance system, which is operationalised through the Maintenance Act.⁵⁴

Maintenance cases are heard in magistrates' courts. The judicial maintenance system is based on the legal duty to provide for one's dependents and it rightfully intends to hold parents accountable. The system, however, fails to provide sufficiently for the rights of some fathers as its processes are disconnected from questions of access and custody that play an important role in facilitating father involvement.

Uncritical conceptions of fatherhood

The first contestation of the maintenance system results from how fathers are stereotyped, and homogenised. The maintenance system is implemented in ways that reinforce the stereotype of fathers as financial providers only⁵⁵ and this conception centres on traditional patriarchal and capitalistic models of fatherhood which have monetised provision. What this narrow definition excludes is the fact that fatherhood is dynamic and multilayered in terms of race, class, ethnicity, and culture.

The gap between fathers' responsibilities and their rights artificially separates financial provision from other important involvement aspects of fatherhood – and thus creates an unintended consequence where defaulting fathers who are able to support children in other ways are easily excluded from their children's lives. Such fathers are usually poor, unemployed and cannot afford to pay maintenance.⁵⁶

The Maintenance Act does not provide for socio-emotional maintenance as it is silent on involvement; yet monetary provision prioritised over emotional and psychosocial support, engagement and availability limits how we think about fathers and their role in their children's lives. Although monetary provision is important, it needs to be complemented with other ways of being a father.

The limited conception of fatherhood in terms of financial provision undermines men's involvement in families, both practically

and psychologically.⁵⁷ Poor men may try to avoid criticism by distancing themselves from their children.⁵⁸ On the other hand, the Maintenance Act also does not consider the power of the extended family in terms of support, either during a period when the biological father may not be able to provide financially for his child(ren) or when he has absconded from the responsibility. In this case, usually other family members, including paternal and maternal uncles (see the case study on *bomalome*, on page 19), step in to give the needed support so that the children can grow up in a healthy environment.

Maintenance defaulting

The contestation that arises due to limited conceptions of fatherhood in the maintenance system is illustrated in the growing challenge of defaulting. The 2011 Census indicates that 90% of people who default are fathers.⁵⁹ Defaulting is deliberate in many cases. This is a challenge given the patriarchal privilege that men accrue in terms of access to better pay; opportunities in consistent, secure and mostly better paying work; and more possibilities for promotion. Deliberate defaulting has negative consequences for women and children⁶⁰ and sustains gender inequality.

Fathers who default are often portrayed as uninterested or dead-beat in an attempt to shame them into paying maintenance.⁶¹ However, whilst some fathers who are able to support their children do not want to do so, not all fathers default because they do not want to – many unemployed, poor fathers are unable to provide financial support to their children and families. The point raised here is that a high rate of defaulting illustrates misalignment between how fathers define themselves and how the state defines them.⁶² In such cases, fathers default in an attempt to challenge the system; however, defaulting means that mothers are forced to frequent the courts many times, which affects their use of time for other responsibilities. Defaulting also has a negative consequence for children who need financial resources.

Another challenge with high rates of defaulting is that the state attempts to resolve the non-payment of maintenance in punitive ways. Before the Maintenance Act amendment in 2015⁶³, the measures used to deal with defaulting fathers failed largely due to administrative issues such as delays in capturing maintenance forms, and lost maintenance application forms at magistrates' courts. These administrative failures had resulted in men who can afford to pay maintenance escaping this responsibility. The administrative challenges in the system reflect the state's failure to fully protect the welfare of children.

The amended Act now provides that maintenance defaulters will be blacklisted and not afforded financial credit until they have settled money owed for maintenance. Although this amendment might work in forcing deliberately defaulting fathers to pay, research shows that such policing is punitive and shaming and contributes to animosity between fathers, their partners or ex-partners, extended family (*borakgadi* – paternal or maternal aunts [Sepedi]; *borrangwane* –

paternal uncles [Setswana] and *bogogo* – grandfathers [Swati]) and children, and may lead to low father involvement.⁶⁴

A disconnection between rights and responsibilities

Issues of custody and access are not accommodated in the provisions of maintenance, which results in little attention being paid to other forms of father involvement in the lives of children. Provision and care, therefore, are disconnected and unlinked. Administrative processes for child maintenance, access and custody for unmarried and poor fathers are limited by this disconnection. Analyses of court cases for custody and access illustrate that most fathers who use court processes to access their rights as fathers are fathers who are able to pay maintenance.⁶⁵

One father who had gone through this process argued that, “although changes to the [amended Children’s] Act [of 2007] have made it easier to be recognized as a father and have rights, in practice it is still a time-consuming, emotional and financially draining experience”.⁶⁶ Cases for fathers’ rights to access and custody are not open for discussion in the maintenance courts; they are usually heard mainly in the high courts, which is expensive. The administrative separation between maintenance and the rights of fathers to access and custody violently disconnects the identity that they get from providing as men and fathers. These disconnections lead to further contestation of the maintenance system and to the gendering of parenting.

Conclusion

What is problematic in the implementation of the Maintenance Act – other than its failure to facilitate amicable parenting processes – is the effect of the state’s gendered discourse that assumes that men are unable to take on the caring role and thus ascribes it solely to women. This stance undermines gender equality and fails to acknowledge the caring roles of men, the interdependence in parenting and the links between maintenance, access and custody.

What is also clearly missing in discourse in the maintenance system is what is clearly visible in research findings: that many men want to father in more ways than allowed for by the current focus on financial provision; and they still desire to provide – even in situations where they cannot afford to do so financially.

In the context of *inhlawulo*, the challenge with the maintenance system is not that provision is not an important aspect of fatherhood among some cultural groups. The problem is that the maintenance system limits fatherhood to provision only when research clearly indicates that recognition, acknowledged biological fatherhood and paternal involvement are as important⁶⁷

Counting fathers

An unfortunate omission in national surveys on reproductive health, children, families and the general population is the relative lack of data on fathers. Some surveys and reports provide a useful picture in including some characteristics of fathers.⁶⁸ However, most lack data on fathers. An explanation of this missing data could be that the fathers were unavailable during the survey or information on the fathers was not available.

It is necessary for government departments and other parastatal agencies such as Statistics South Africa to routinely include questions about men and fathers with a view to informing labour, education, child, and family related policies, socio-economic programmes, and services.

Responsive policymaking on fathers and fatherhood

The narrative of father absence and non-involvement needs to be treated with care. The physical absence of biological fathers from the lives of their children is less concerning than their emotional, psychological and cultural availability, as well as the economic responsibility they are required to bear. Distinguishing between biological, social and economic views of fatherhood is necessary. Instead of a dominant narrative of fatherhood as limited to biology, it is imperative in reflecting on father non-involvement and the need to bolster nurturing fatherhood to inculcate the message that fatherhood is a social practice.

A positively involved father is someone who thinks about, cares and does the work of parenting as they go along with their everyday lives, whether they are physically present in the same household as their children or live away from them. Where biological fathers are not in the picture, the social practice of fatherhood is often

by other men in children's lives, including *bomalome* and *borrangwane* (maternal and paternal uncles), grandparents, older brothers, and friends of the mothers, teachers, stepfathers, and other kinds of fathers and father figures. This reality needs emphatic acknowledgment.

The concern about fathers and fatherhood is seemingly because of the lack of consistent, positive presence and involvement of men in their biological children's lives. Father absence is best not taken as physical absence of biological fathers from the same household in which their children live, but more crucially the lack of consistent affective, psychological and financial involvement with their children. At the same time, the impact of poverty as the major challenge to the financial involvement of some men in the lives of their children should not be ignored.

A study⁶⁹ found that men were positively involved with their families in a wide range of often unacknowledged ways by men themselves and others. The research shows that there is a "significant difference between how men's activities are talked about and what some men were observed to be doing for their own or other households. ... The prevailing social norms did not anticipate men engaging in activities such as caring for children, domestic chores or emotional support and thus, although men were clearly observed performing these roles, both men and women tended to either neglect reporting these observations or to dismiss them as aberrant".⁷⁰ It is vital therefore not to overlook or minimise the positive involvement of men in children's lives where this is evident, as highlighting such involvement contributes positively toward shaping discourses of men as fathers and fatherhood.

Survey data show that the number and proportion of children who co-resided with their biological fathers between 2002 and 2015 have gone down⁷¹, although not significantly. However, it is not only the physical absence of men in the lives of their biological children that should be of concern. Instead, it is positive, meaningful presence of men in their children's lives that we should care about.

South Africa needs good research, evidence-

based policymaking, and informed interventions to understand what living arrangements, including father absence and father involvement, mean across income, race, province, and age. There is a need for more targeted surveys, experimental research, and randomised controlled trials among fathers, mothers and children. Comprehensive targeted surveys can help in understanding what contributes to the observed differences in the presence of Indian/Asian, Black, Coloured and White fathers in the same household as their biological children. There is also a need for a firmer grasp of the ways in which caregiving is performed across the different families and groups of fathers according to race and economic class.

The question of what type of caregiving is most likely to lead to positive child, mother and father-related outcomes needs controlled trials. There is also a need for varied studies that methodically compare outcomes for children in different households. For instance, there is a need for examining differences between households where the biological father is physically absent, psychologically uninvolved, and does not provide for the children with households where the biological father is physically absent, psychologically uninvolved, but does provide for his children. There is a need for studies comparing the former with households where the biological father is physically absent, psychologically involved yet takes economic responsibility for his children. And there is a need for research on children where the biological father co-resides, takes economic responsibility, but is punitive, harsh or violent towards the mother or children compared to children where the biological father co-resides, takes economic responsibility, and gives care in various ways.

A need also exists for life histories, in-depth interviews, phenomenological, narrative and discourse analytic studies into father absence and presence. In addition to economic, health and social welfare associated interventions, a powerful form of intervention that needs to animate responsive policymaking is cultural and creative work, such as online resources, television programmes, films, novels and plays, for example.

Socio-economic forces caused the almost irreparable weakening and often total breakdown of Coloured and Black families, and of men's identities and relationship to women and children

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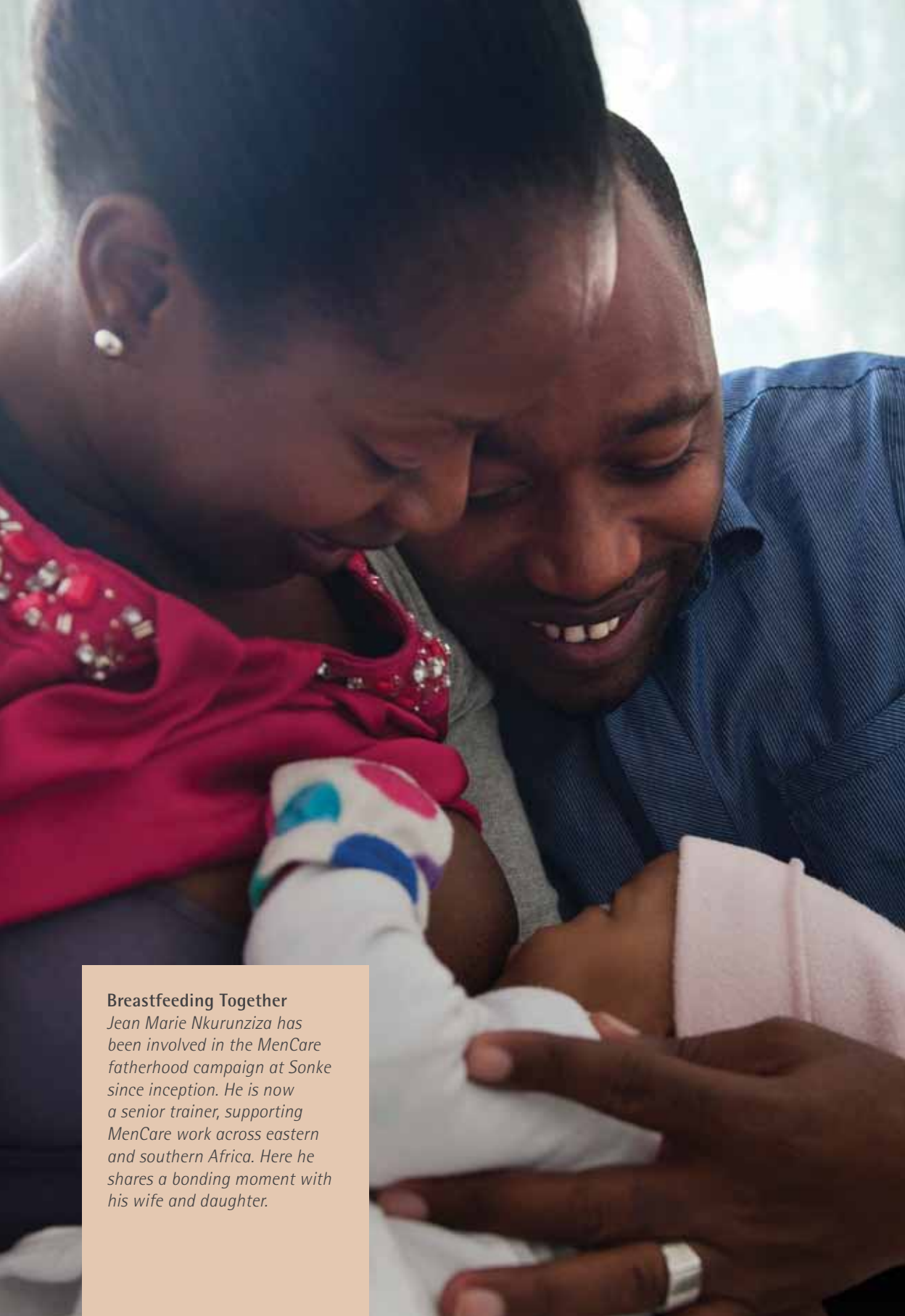
"I see him as my father and not my grandfather"

My father, I wouldn't know what he would have meant to me because I lost him at a very young age, though in his place I had my grandfather to play the role of my father.

He filled that empty space as I grew up; and knowing he is my biological father I had no reason to doubt him, he was and still is always there when I need him. I remember growing up he used to fix his car and I would pass him the tools he needed. As I reminisce about the old times I came to realise that is how we bonded. I recently discovered my real father's family and I tried to build a relationship with them, but my father would refuse to let me go and visit them. I decided to ask him why he was refusing – he replied he was afraid of losing me.

Knowing how much I meant to my father – that really touched me. I told him no matter what happens, I will never forget where I come from as I know how valuable he is to me. I admire the fact that he took me in when I was about six months old; honestly, I never really felt a gap in my life to question my father's death. My grandfather is my hero and one day I would like to build him a big house to show him my appreciation. My father really rocks my world. He motivates me to be a confident young woman. I thank him for giving me a warm, loving home to go to like everyone else. I know that he did what he did out of love and I owe him that much. My father means the world to me – I see him as my father and not my grandfather.

Essay contestant, Free State



Breastfeeding Together

Jean Marie Nkurunziza has been involved in the MenCare fatherhood campaign at Sonke since inception. He is now a senior trainer, supporting MenCare work across eastern and southern Africa. Here he shares a bonding moment with his wife and daughter.

Father Involvement in the First 1,000 Days

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& Linda Richter, DST-NRF Centre of Excellence for Human Development,
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg*

The first 1,000 days of a child's life refer to the period from conception (270 days of pregnancy) and the first two years after birth (365+365 days), depending on children's individual differences. Scientific evidence from a variety of sources confirms that this is the period of most rapid brain growth, and that the child develops in response to the environment, particularly in the context of affectionate and responsive interactions with adults. The receptivity or plasticity declines with age, making this period of life most amenable to positive experiences and most vulnerable to stress and adversity.¹

Over the past two decades, the South African government has demonstrated commitment to promoting the development of young children, including a compulsory pre-school year²; improving maternal, newborn and child health³; and adopting the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (ECD policy)⁴. In health, the government has adopted a number of high-priority, cost-effective, evidence-based maternal, newborn and child health strategies and approaches.⁵ These include scaling up antiretroviral therapy and initiating HIV-positive women and on ART, which have resulted in a massive reduction in the national rate of mother-to-child transmission of the virus⁶; the promotion of maternal nutrition during pregnancy and after birth; and child breastfeeding and complementary feeding⁷.

The National Development Plan recognises that the protection and promotion of the development of children, including during pregnancy, must be part of South Africa's vision for a more equitable and prosperous society.⁸ The adoption of the ECD Policy in 2015 expressed enthusiasm

and commitment in South Africa for broad integrated approaches to giving all children a better chance to start well, especially those who are likely to face challenges along their way.⁹ Despite these achievements and others, a lot still needs to be done in recognising and promoting father involvement with mothers and children in the first 1,000 days in South Africa – for example, the Western Cape provincial government acknowledges that the role of fathers is neglected¹⁰.


This chapter focuses on father involvement in the first 1,000 days. It documents the importance of fathers during this critical developmental period, identifies barriers to biological father involvement, and makes recommendations to promote father involvement in the first 1,000 days.


“Early moments matter”¹¹


Early development is a sensitive and unique time when the foundations for optimum health, development, learning, productivity, and harmonious relationships with others across the life course are established. It is also a sensitive time for parenting. While the emotional and physical changes in women during pregnancy are well known, men also undergo hormonal and other changes if they have the opportunity of being involved with the pregnancy. Their testosterone levels decline and synchronise with the hormonal levels of the mother. These hormonal changes are thought to underlie the father's dedication to the mother and the partnership during pregnancy.¹² The grief and loss of identity that men experience when the couple has


Fig. 10 The benefits of fathers' involvement in the first 1,000 days


- 1**
Healthy pregnancy



- 2**
Maternal mental health and wellbeing

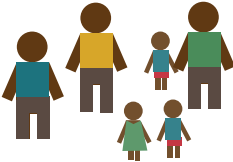

- 3**
Infant care and wellbeing



- 4**
Father and child bonding


- 5**
Better relationship between mother and father


- 6**
Mothers access health services more


- 7**
Fathers are healthier and more connected socially


- 8**
Long term involvement between father and child



a still birth has been recognised only recently.¹³

Fathers have an important role to play in decisions about family planning and can influence contraception use. Their involvement in reproductive health planning is crucial to reducing unintended pregnancies, promoting birth preparedness¹⁴, increasing use of birth control to influence birth spacing positively, and protect from sexually transmitted infections that can impact pregnancy outcomes when contracted by the mother¹⁵.

Fathers' health and preconception risk behaviours have a direct impact on foetal and infant health. Paternal abuse of alcohol, smoking cigarettes and/or marijuana, his diet and environmental exposure, among others, have been shown to modify genetic make-up passed on through the sperm at conception which, in turn, can influence the health of the child at birth as well as future illnesses in adulthood.¹⁶

After conception, fathers play important roles in providing practical and emotional support; promoting positive maternal wellbeing and health behaviours that indirectly impact foetal development, birth weight, and preterm birth; and moderating stress levels and harmful behaviours during pregnancy. Father involvement during pregnancy can encourage mothers to seek prenatal care earlier, eat healthier, exercise more and avoid harmful behaviours such as using alcohol, drugs and cigarettes, which have a dose-dependent relationship with childhood obesity. Also, studies on infant-father attachment indicate that it is important for fathers to begin the bonding process during the prenatal period by listening to the baby's heartbeat, reading to the baby in utero, and being present at the delivery.

Early paternal attachment has been associated with reduced risk of future child abuse by the father.¹⁷ Another key argument in promoting fathers' involvement in the first 1,000 days and more broadly is that it is a pathway to greater gender equality.¹⁸ Active father involvement is argued to counter forms of masculinity that emphasise male control, lack of emotional availability and limited involvement in the family and domestic sphere.¹⁹

After the child is born, fathers play a vital role in influencing important decisions such as

early birth registration, breastfeeding and the duration of breastfeeding.²⁰ Involved fatherhood also has practical and emotional benefits for the mother after delivery as men provide support to both the mother and the child. This practical and emotional support has huge potential to mitigate against postnatal depression. Women who do not have positive relationships with their children's fathers due to lack of emotional and practical support, or fathers' negative attitudes towards their childrearing style or choices, coupled with domestic violence, are most likely to suffer from maternal depression.²¹

On the other hand, women who are supported in stable partnerships with men experience lower levels of family stress, are less likely to suffer mental health problems and derive greater satisfaction from their roles as mothers.²² Importantly, supportive men not only contribute to women's wellbeing and happiness, but men's investment in the family has been found to buffer against the effects of harsh parenting by a distant, demoralised or overburdened mother.²³

Father presence and engagement contribute significantly to the physical and psychological wellbeing of pregnant women and women with young children. A recent systematic review²⁴ found that men's engagement during and after pregnancy in low- and middle-income countries significantly improve women's use of healthcare during pregnancy and after the child is born, and significantly reduce the odds of postpartum depression. Mothers, especially young mothers, consistently report greater satisfaction in their maternal role when the father of the young child is engaged²⁵, and father attitudes and support are significant determinants of breastfeeding initiation and continuation²⁶.

The early years are a vulnerable time for father-child ties. Involved, engaged, and caring fathers are important in the lives of children. The early recognition and acknowledgement of paternity and involvement in a young child's life solidify fathers' ties to their children. Involving fathers in their children's lives during the first 1,000 days of life enables fathers to participate positively in the decisions to have children; support women during pregnancy and birth; come to know, care for and protect the children, and

Fig. 11 The barriers to fathers' involvement in the first 1,000 days



Early development is a unique time when the foundations for optimum health, development, learning, productivity, and harmonious relationships with others are established

stay involved with their children over the course of their development. Men's own health and social connectivity also improve with involvement in infant care.²⁷

Barriers to early involvement of biological fathers

A number of barriers prevent father involvement in the first 1,000 days at an individual, family, societal, institutional and policy level. One of the biggest barriers to father involvement in South Africa is the high rate of biological fathers who do not live with their children. Biological father non-residency in South Africa has strong implications for the health, safety and welfare of children and families. Biological fathers in South Africa are non-resident in almost half of homes in which children aged 0 – 4 years live.²⁸ (Children's co-residency with their biological parents and other adults are discussed extensively on pages 33 – 35.)

A number of factors attribute to biological fathers not living with their children. These include migration²⁹; poverty, unemployment, past and present incarceration; family factors such as separation, divorce and re-partnering which might lead to multiple child support responsibilities, and related changes in social and residential arrangements; societal factors such as the high rate of male deaths due to violence and HIV; and costs related to cultural practices such as payment of *inhlawulo* and *lobola* – these all can prevent poor fathers who want to be involved in their

children's lives from doing so.³⁰ Whereas marriage is a basis for entry into fatherhood in a number of societies, the marriage rate among Black people in South Africa is low (around 36%) and is frequently delayed until men have produced one or more biological children, potentially by different women³¹.

Due to economic constraints, poor and young men face many challenges in taking up fatherhood roles and responsibilities. They do not live with their children, are not in a socially recognised relationship with the child's mother, and are not economically capable of providing for children. The family of the young mother will often not support the involvement in their family of a young man whom they may perceive as being 'irresponsible'. His own family may consider him neither old enough nor prepared for such a role. Thus, even where the young man himself would like to act as a father to his child, he may have little ability – financial, social or legal – to press for access to his child.³² For young and new fathers, their inexperience, lack of knowledge of how to be a good father, and their lack of positive role models may also impact their ability to be involved fathers. In the face of such hurdles, many young men become fathers biologically but never have an opportunity to be involved in their children's lives.

Negative perceptions of men in South Africa

There are various stereotypes of men and masculinity active in South Africa, and these are further compacted by additional stereotypes specifically about fatherhood and the reality that men's use of violence in South Africa is very prevalent. The stereotypes are often maintained through popular opinion, based on the behaviour of some men. Stereotypes like absent, strong, unfeeling, uninvolved, violent, disengaged, uncaring and 'macho' men, or 'ATM fathers' are often related to South Africa's fathers.³³ In this context, children live in families where men (not necessarily their fathers) are generally unacknowledged sources of support for children. Reproductive healthcare messages, especially for pregnancy and early childhood development, are therefore often targeted to women who are considered the primary caregivers of children.

FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT IN MATERNAL HEALTH

Pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum are critical periods for the health of women and children. Male partners can be important sources of emotional, material and logistical support during these periods. Adversely, men can also be harmful by exposing their partners to unnecessary health risks, including abuse. This is often because of patriarchal gender attitudes and ignorance about women's health needs.³⁴ The goal, then, is to engage men as informed, active and caring participants in promoting maternal health.

For this case on fathers' involvement in maternal health, we have used data from a recent longitudinal cohort study that followed a convenience sample of 176 postpartum women, and their infants, from a single low-income peri-urban community near Cape Town between 2012 and 2013.³⁵ The infants' fathers were mostly isiXhosa-speaking Black men; their average age was 30 years old. They most commonly had an incomplete high school education. Most were employed. At the time of conception, 29% of fathers and mothers were married, 66% were in an exclusive, non-marital relationship and 5% were in a casual or non-exclusive relationship. Just over half (57%) were residing together.³⁶

Father involvement in clinic visits and presence at birth

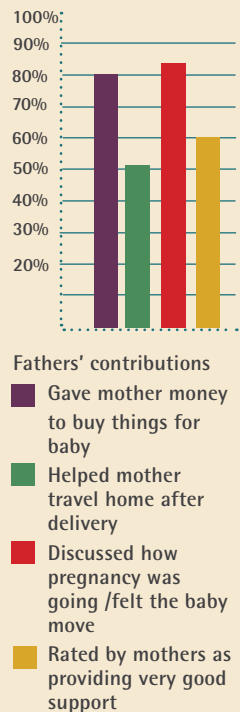
Mothers in this study reported that 42% of fathers attended one or more antenatal clinic visit and 47% were at the hospital during delivery. During informal group discussions at the end of the study, mothers and fathers described what they perceived to be the barriers to fathers' attendance at maternity and child health clinics. Some participants described clinics as "feminine spaces" that are not welcoming to men, echoing findings of previous research.³⁷ Attending health clinics was commonly viewed as being the mother's responsibility. In addition, some mothers felt that fathers lacked motivation to wait in long clinic queues, whereas some fathers cited work responsibilities as the reason for not being able to accompany the mother to clinics.³⁸

Other ways fathers support mothers during pregnancy

This study found that material, logistical and emotional support by fathers during pregnancy was more common than attendance at health clinics. The majority (80%) of fathers reportedly gave the mother money to buy things for the baby, and 51% helped the mother travel home from the hospital after delivery. Eighty-four percent of fathers discussed the pregnancy progress with the mother and the same percentage felt the baby move in the mother's belly. Fathers' encouragement and emotional support during the pregnancy was rated by 60% of mothers as "very good" or "excellent".

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Fig.12 Men's contributions to maternal health



Mercer, G. D. (2015). *Do fathers care? Measuring mothers' and fathers' perceptions of fathers' involvement in caring for young children in South Africa* (Thesis). University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. DOI:10.14288/1.0166376.

Fathers in this study who were present at the birth, and who supported the mother financially during pregnancy, were significantly more involved in caring for the infant during the first year of life.³⁹

Supporting fathers' involvement in maternal health

Policymakers and programme planners can help to promote fathers' attendance at maternity clinics by working with care providers to make these more welcoming spaces for men. Strategies might include encouraging female clients to bring their partners to health consultations, offering clinics outside of typical work hours, integrating services to address the specific health needs of male clients, and sensitising care providers to the potential benefits of greater paternal involvement in maternal and child health.⁴⁰

Wider strategies to involve men as partners in promoting maternal health could include implementing programmes like Stepping Stonesⁱ, which aim to transform harmful gender norms by teaching communication and relationship skills.⁴¹ Involving influential public figures as role models, and other social marketing strategies, could be used to shift the perception that maternal and child health is the responsibility of women, and start normalising men's involvement. Enacting labour laws to ensure access to paid paternity leave and personal days to care for sick children would help to reduce financial and workplace barriers to fathers' involvement.

Reunited with Dad

Knowledge is pictured here at the moment when he was reunited with his children. He was successful in a court case that found that his inability to pay lobola should not prevent him from having contact with his children. This image has also become iconic for the MenCare Fatherhood campaign.



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ⁱ Stepping Stones is a series of workshops designed to "help promote sexual health, improve psychological wellbeing and prevent HIV. The workshops address questions of gender, sexuality, HIV/AIDS, gender violence, communication and relationship skills". The original Stepping Stones manual – which was developed in Uganda – has been adapted by the Medical Research Council for use in South Africa, and the approach has been evaluated in a randomised controlled trial with young men and women in the rural Eastern Cape. (See www.mrc.ac.za.)

Restricting men's access to children

For various reasons, mothers may prevent fathers' access to children. Maternal, cultural and circumstantial 'gatekeeping' have been identified as some of the most important factors that may facilitate or prevent father involvement in both maternal and child health.⁴² It should be noted that father involvement is not regarded in this report as an a priori or automatic benefit to children. Fathers are often involved in problematic ways, for example when they behave violently. 'Gatekeeping', or preventing access to the child, is therefore often a legitimate and protective action taken by the mother.

A study in South Africa indicates that 'gatekeeping' takes different forms. Maternal gatekeeping among married couples occurs largely with respect to child-rearing, interaction, care and housework, with some women seemingly wishing to validate their traditional maternal identity.⁴³ As a method of protecting themselves and/or their children, some mothers may also exercise greater control and restrict father access and involvement because of fathers' use of violence. Other mothers may limit access because the child's father is failing to fulfil certain parental expectations. Higher non-violent father involvement with the children correlates with a more positive couple relationship.⁴⁴

Cultural and circumstantial 'gatekeeping' and the power of extended families in endorsing socially constructed patriarchal ideals that shape gender roles (women to provide childcare and do house chores, while men provide financially for their families) also prevent father involvement in the first 1,000 days.⁴⁵ However, overcoming any form of 'gatekeeping' to non-violent parental involvement for fathers may be extremely beneficial for the children as they gain from a positive parental couple or co-parenting relationship.

Institutional and policy barriers

At an institutional level, most maternal and child healthcare programmes that focus on preconception, prenatal, postnatal or inter-conception care are tailor-made to address only the needs of mothers and children⁴⁶, with little or no attention to the needs of fathers – therefore moving away from a potentially progressive family model for

early childhood care and development. Also, because most maternal and childcare programmes are mother- and child-centred, community healthcare workers and providers lack awareness of and training for involving of fathers in such programmes.

At a policy level, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act⁴⁷ provides for a modest three working days paid family responsibility leave (that fathers can use as paternity leave) provided that the person has worked for an employer for longer than four months and works at least four days a week. In trying to balance both father involvement and meeting the economic needs of families, the White Paper on Families in South Africa⁴⁸ selects the encouragement of father involvement in their children's upbringing as one of the strategic priorities in promoting healthy family life. The White Paper calls for the need to elaborate or revise current laws and social policies that restrict fathers from being involved in their children's lives and replace them with those that create an environment where fathers could care for, engage with, and support their children.

Promoting father involvement in the first 1,000 days

One of the most important steps in promoting father involvement is to define the target male population of fathers and understand that a one-size-fits-all approach to fatherhood in South Africa will not work. Different messages, intervention and delivery mechanisms would need to be designed for different groups of fathers: be it teenage fathers, first-time fathers, older fathers, social fathers (father figures), gay fathers, employed or unemployed fathers; all according to their needs. It is important that the heterogeneity of fathers in the country is appreciated and considered every time when deciding on programmes, interventions and policies for fathers.

South African institutions need to provide a conducive environment for promoting father involvement in the first 1,000 days, starting with healthcare facilities and workplace environments – including policies targeting male employees

Messages for fathers need to be tailor-made for them, particularly acknowledging their importance in child development and growth

to ensure that fathers are involved in their children's lives from conception. It is important that mechanisms and policies are put in place, including paternity and parental leave, to facilitate the balancing of work and family responsibilities and to promote equal parenting care and responsibility between fathers and mothers, and encourage gender equality in parenting.⁴⁹ Currently, the Labour Laws Amendment Bill⁵⁰, if passed, is set to amend the Basic Conditions of Employment Act⁵¹ so that an employee who is a parent of a child is entitled to at least 10 consecutive days' parental leave, and may commence parental leave on the day the employee's child is born or day that an adopted child is placed.

Healthcare, social development and education facilities need to be welcoming of fathers and their staff to be trained and experienced on how to engage with fathers – by matching mother- and child-friendly services with focused services for fathers in support of paternal, maternal and child health which will provide a holistic family health model for child development. The institution and policy environments need to display an attitude of willingness to learn from and listen to fathers, without any assumptions that they know best what fathers need to be involved positively in maternal, paternal and child health programmes. An encouragement of men to be employed in caring professions would also role model and popularise men's involvement in care work.

South Africa needs strategies for reaching out to fathers more effectively – like multilevel campaigns such as the MenCare Fatherhood

campaignⁱⁱ, and using father-friendly mobile applications, such as DadConnect⁵²; social media promotion; advertising of positive fatherhood messages on billboards; and taking fatherhood messages and services to places and events where fathers frequent, such as football matches, and car washes. Messages for fathers need to be tailor-made for them, particularly acknowledging their importance in child development and growth, and maternal health – including mental and emotional health.

Such messages should also centre on the positive impact of fatherhood on men themselves – through avoidance of harmful or risky behaviours such as binge drinking; engaging in risky sexual behaviours; drug abuse; and violent behaviour towards children, women and other men.

Mothers and communities also need to be engaged on the importance of father involvement in the first 1,000 days, with a common South African view that "it takes a village to raise a child". Providing a child with a healthy ecosystem – encompassing the individual, family, community, and the institutional environments – where most, if not all, of their needs are met – has positive and culturally sensitive outcomes for child wellbeing, health, care and development. The establishment of or the identification of community stakeholders and community resources for fathers (if already in place) needs to take centre stage in the promotion of father involvement in the first 1,000 days as these are crucial resources for fathers to get information, assistance and support.

Lastly, but equally important for promoting father involvement in South Africa, is a need for establishing a proper monitoring, evaluation and

ⁱⁱMenCare is a global campaign to promote men's and boys' involvement as equitable, non-violent caregivers. With activities in more than 45 countries, MenCare partners carry out joint advocacy initiatives, research and programming to engage men in positive parenting; in equitable caregiving; in violence prevention; and in maternal, newborn, and child health. The campaign is co-coordinated by Sonke Gender Justice and Promundo, with Save the Children, Plan International, Oxfam and MenEngage Alliance serving as steering committee members. For more information about the campaign and its partners, visit www.men-care.org.

MEN AND THE CHILD SUPPORT GRANT

South Africa's Child Support Grant (CSG) is one of the largest cash-transfer programmes to support the care of children in the developing world. South Africa is unusual in that the CSG is gender-neutral: whoever is responsible for the care of a child can receive the CSG provided they meet the means-test criteria. Nevertheless, over the past 20 years on average only 2% of the total number of CSG recipients were men.⁵³ Despite the gender-neutral targeting, very few men are taking this opportunity. Pervasive gender inequality – in time, income and opportunity – therefore remains a challenge.⁵⁴ Female targeting and the *de facto* gendered nature of the CSG also reinforce the idea that women's primary roles are as carers.⁵⁵

A policy goal aimed at reducing gender inequality could therefore be to increase male uptake of the grant. However, the cost of this to children – given the idea that men have more selfish preferences than women in the allocation of household resources (an argument backed by a small body of evidence⁵⁶) – remains unclear.

This case describes the first study⁵⁷, in South Africa, of menⁱⁱⁱ who are receiving the CSG. The first part of the study analysed National Income Dynamics Study data⁵⁸, a nationally representative panel of individuals from 2008 – 2014, to compare household spending patterns in CSG households by the gender of the caregiver who receives the CSG on behalf of the child. Then, prevalence rates of stunting (low height for age) were compared between children of male CSG caregivers and children of female CSG caregivers.

Men don't use the CSG any differently

The statistical analyses show that when men receive the CSG, their households are not more likely to spend money on alcohol, tobacco and gambling compared to households where women receive the CSG. In households where this spending occurs, levels of spending do not differ between the two groups either. The education level and emotional health of caregivers, as well as the province of residence, are more influential than the gender of the caregiver in determining household spending on these items.

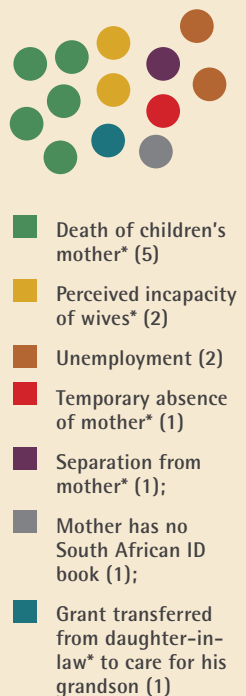
There is also no evidence to suggest that child stunting rates differ significantly between children of male and female caregivers who receive the CSG. Here, higher per capita household income and having an employed, more educated or older caregiver are particularly protective against stunting. These indicators show that the decision to make targeting gender-neutral was probably justified: giving the money to men does not appear to leave their children and households worse off.

The qualitative phase of the study used in-depth interviews with

ⁱⁱⁱ These are men who have caregiving responsibilities, and are not necessarily biological fathers (e.g. uncles, grandfathers).

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Fig.13 Men's reason for applying for the CSG



* Indicates that woman was former CSG recipient.

Source: Khan, Z. (forthcoming, 2018). *Men and the Child Support Grant: Gender, care and child well-being* (doctoral thesis). Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg.

13 male CSG recipients residing in Greater Johannesburg to understand how they construct their male and paternal identities, the extent to which this construction aligns with hegemonic masculinity in South Africa, and how this relates to their reported care work.^{ii,59}

The CSG as a women's grant

The fact that most men (10 out of 13) only found out about male eligibility after an event that made the former (female) recipient unable to continue as the primary caregiver (such as her death or apparent irresponsibility) points to the strength of the CSG's popular portrayal as a women's grant.

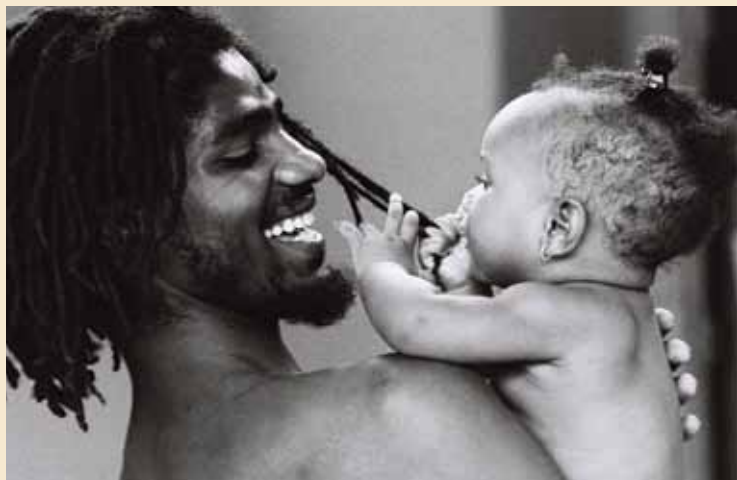
A man who explicitly mentioned unemployment as the reason for applying for the grant reflected a popular understanding articulated by the interviewees: that the CSG is for those who are not working. At the time of the interviews, the median wage in South Africa was roughly R3,500 per month⁶⁰, while the individual income threshold for caregivers was also R3,500⁶¹, implying that many working men could apply for the grant. The image of the CSG as a women's grant and as a grant for those who are not working or who have 'given up', is doubly damaging to efforts by men to present a 'normal' masculine image and, in turn, to greater rates of male CSG uptake.

Men as carers

Beyond the diversity in the ways in which these men conceive of themselves as men and fathers, almost all engaged in care and household work. This was either in a supporting role to a co-resident female partner, or they did all the work themselves. Roughly half regarded care and household work as primarily women's responsibility, but did it anyway because it needed to be done: their children's wellbeing was deemed to depend on their work. This practicality is also linked with the frequent idealisation of men as those who "take responsibility" – who "take the bull by the horns" and remain present and engaged. In this way, men reconcile doing 'feminine' work with their male and paternal identities.

For these men, being a good father is strongly associated with being able to provide. This accords with dominant norms and is understandable in a context where income insecurity is very high, and where this insecurity directly contributes to child malnourishment (discussed earlier). But, most men placed equal emphasis on being emotionally available: this was reflected in a deep awareness of their children's emotional needs and that the norm of male non-demonstrativeness – where men refrain from displays of affection and/or avoid being open with their children – is damaging.

Bongani and Sindiso
These two featured in the HSRC Fatherhood Project: between 2005 to 2007. This image was used in the promotion of the MenCare Global Fatherhood campaign. Sadly, after the photoshoot, Bongani separated from his family, and did not remain involved in fatherhood.



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Implications for positive fathering policies

While the findings cannot be generalised for the overall male population, they do have implications for other policies – such as paternal leave – that are intended to promote positive fathering. A recurring theme in the interviews is that other men 1. often find what CSG dads do (receiving a CSG; doing ‘feminine’ care work) to be degrading; and 2. if not disparaging of CSG dads, many men are simply curious about doing work like cooking and changing nappies themselves. This is probably because most men are not socialised into caregiving competence.

To ensure paternal leave – just like the CSG – is used for the intended purposes, taking time off to care for a child would need to be portrayed as a ‘masculine’ pursuit that is not an excuse to run away from paid work. Paternal leave (see page 6 for a discussion of the new policy development) would also need to be supplemented by fathering classes, run by knowledgeable men (such as the CSG dads interviewed for this study) as many men will simply not know what to do with small babies. But it should be noted that many of the CSG dads did not have previous caregiving experience, and learned how to care for their children as they went along.

This study did not find evidence that the CSG fathers viewed the grant as a new form of power to wield over women. These men also point to the possibilities of ‘doing’ masculinity and fatherhood in different ways – ways that are more sensitive to the needs of their families and that challenge different forms of father absence. Learning from and building on their experiences could go some way toward normalising this type of fatherhood and could improve the wellbeing of South Africa’s children – particularly maternal orphans. In addition, women’s care burdens could be reduced, and the power of the CSG to transform unequal gender relations could be realised.

learning component on fatherhood programmes, interventions and policies. There is need to establish how well these are serving the needs of families in terms of father involvement. Assessing fathers’ and mothers’ participation and satisfaction with established programmes and policies is critical and will measure success. Monitoring, evaluation and learning provide opportunities for continuous programme, intervention and/or policy improvements.

Take-home messages

South Africa has made huge progress in promoting maternal, newborn and child health. In this context, there is a wealth of evidence to show that fathers’ involvement in the first 1,000 days and beyond can lead to a number of benefits for families’ psychological wellbeing; maternal health behaviours; and children’s wellbeing, health, growth and development.

Yet, very little is happening at a policy and programme level to encourage father involvement in the first 1,000 days and across the life course. For father involvement to be a success and all-inclusive, practitioners and policymakers need to establish unity of purpose and design context-specific, culturally, age- and gender-sensitive programmes and policies for fathers that are evidence based.

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"To him I am just an asset"

I do not know my father. I know his name and I see him every day. But do not know him. I do not know what he likes or what he hates. I do not know what makes him happy or what makes him sad.

One would think that after 16 years of living with someone, you would know the person. But that is not the case with me and my father. My father never talks to me or even acknowledges me. To him I am just an asset. A daughter who will grow up and get married so that he gets a handsome dowry because she is educated and still a virgin. My father does not know the name of my school and he doesn't even know what I want to become after I'm done with my education. My father does not care if I'm struggling with a subject but he expects a perfect report at the end of each term.

My father never remembers my birthday. He never attends any of my sport practices. He is never there to support me at any competition and he is never present at any prize-giving ceremony. He does not reward me for my victories but he expects me to keep working hard.

Every morning, my father wakes up at four and he leaves the house by six. He does not get home until eight in the evening. He works two jobs and works overtime. Why does he do this? Because he wants to make sure that we are always fed. He makes sure that our school fees are paid for and we lack nothing. I might not know my father but I love him. I know that he cares for me and that he loves me too.

Essay contestant, Free State



Time to Care

Wessel is the father of two children. Here he is changing his son's first diaper of the day, while his daughter plays along. This picture was taken during the month of paid paternity leave that he took as an employee of Sonke.

Future Directions for Research, Advocacy, Policy and Implementation

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The purpose of this report is to provide a preliminary reading of the fatherhood research and programming landscape in South Africa. The aim is to provide a rough map of the strengths in existing research, advocacy and programme implementation and the current knowledge gaps in this regard. This chapter thus intends to work as a catalyst for future research, advocacy, programme implementation and policy formulation by understanding fatherhood in South Africa in more detail.

Studies of fatherhood in South Africa span fields such as religion and theology², masculinity³, families⁴, health⁵, and violence⁶. Some studies explore the concepts of 'being a father' and 'fathering' and how these are experientially and conceptually understood to relate to fatherhood.⁷ This and other reports allude to the fact that fathering is not a biologically evident condition such as pregnancy or lactation, which makes it difficult to understand the extent to which men father.⁸

Population-based surveys attempt to count the number of fathers by asking respondents to voluntarily report their experiences of being fathers or of being fathered. Whilst these statistics may suffer underreporting, and misattribution, they nonetheless remain useful sources of information. In 2013, the Department of Home Affairs introduced the unabridged birth certificate to increase the official recording of fathers.⁹ The success of the implementation of this policy is yet to be measured and its contribution understood. Even though the role of the biological father is central, both in real

and idealistic terms, the importance of social fathers is gaining traction – in both research and practice.¹⁰ However, studies of fatherhood do not always conceptualise various forms in which men give care.¹¹

The call for future research

This inaugural "State of South Africa's Fathers" report highlights important patterns that emerge in knowledge production in South Africa and suggests the need to undertake more research with nationally representative samples to understand the state of fathers in South Africa better. The overdominance of knowledge about absence in current research calls for studies that go beyond the indicator of co-residency of biological fathers with their children to enhance measuring the onset of fatherhood, and factors that affect fatherhood. How researchers, policymakers and programme implementers understand and study fatherhood varies in South Africa. For example, the concept of 'father' in collective Black cultures could refer to significant and related male figures who play the role of a father. (See the case study on maternal uncles – *bomalome* – on p. 19).

Therefore, the application of the concept 'father' needs to be further interrogated so that research findings, interventions and policies are not only globally comparable but also locally relevant and contextually meaningful. The lack of a common understanding of fathers and fatherhood contributes to the lack of information on men who are fathers.

Intersectional research on fatherhood

The contested understanding of fathers and fatherhood further indicates epistemological differences in how we study fatherhood, and ontological questions about the phenomenon of fatherhood. Although some research¹¹ on facets of African fathers begins to centre a broader context for understanding fatherhood in the South African context, there remains a knowledge gap in understanding the diversity that exists amongst South Africa's fathers by race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and other relevant factors. We need studies and implementation programmes to focus on questions such as:

- Does the rural or urban location of fathers matter?
- What are the experiences of adoptive fathers? Which fathers adopt?
- What are the experiences of fathers in polygamous relationships?
- Do fathers in interracial relationships experience being a father differently?
- What can we learn from the Khoi father?

Fatherhood can only be effectively understood by asking nuanced and compassionate questions that link the historical intersectionality of multiple identities (class, race, gender, sexuality, experiences of being parented) to the broader political agenda of a capitalist system. Father absence could therefore be unpacked from multiple contextual lenses including migration, death, the pursuit of the idea of father as provider, and emotional absence. For example, the South African prison population is one of the highest in the global South; yet there is very little research, advocacy and interventions on the patterns of absent fathers that are linked to men's incarceration. There is, however, some research that begins to include incarceration in definitions of absent fathers¹² and that highlights the effects of biological fathers' incarceration on adolescents¹³.

Qualitative research is needed to unpack and understand the quality of care provided by known fathers – whether biological or social. For example, to examine the involvement and care-

giving of men who co-reside with children and who are not the children's biological fathers (discussed on page 7). The gap in evidence on how fathers care for children both during a customary marriage and following the dissolution of a customary marriage also deserves further investigation, particularly in relation to care, involvement and maintenance.

To understand the heterogeneous experiences of fatherhood, it is important to undertake research on what different socio-economic and political factors contribute to fatherhood. In this report, and in fatherhood programming and research generally in South Africa, there tend to be more focus on fathers in the Black community¹⁴ compared to other racial groups such as Coloured, Indian and White¹⁵. This knowledge gap suggests a need to problematise what is assumed about fathers and fatherhood in the context of these groups, and to expand the research lens to include explicit questions about Coloured, Indian and White fathers. An example could be to explore why Indian men have such high levels of co-residency with their biological children, and whether this co-residency among Indian families is associated with increased caregiving.

Future work could include questions of religion and fatherhood; class and fatherhood; and how intersections between race, class, gender, sexuality and other factors shape experiences of fathers and those in their lives. This will allow for informed decisions on policies for families and fathering in general. Important questions to consider are:

- What factors facilitate particular ways of being a father differently in different contexts?
- What socio-economic continuities and discontinuities create different ways of fathering?
- Is thinking about racial differences helpful in the quest to understand fathers and fatherhood in South Africa?
- How do negative conceptions of absence silently suggest that presence of fathers should not be critically engaged with?
- What can we learn about involvement by looking critically at father presence?
- Which and whose positive fathering roles do we exclude by assuming that father presence equals active involvement?

Research on how maternal-headed households deal with father absence also will help us understand fatherhood and fathering in a more detailed way. Further, we need to understand non-residential fathers' active and positive engagement in the lives of their children better where it occurs. More evidence is needed on how social workers, counsellors, therapists, and community and social support networks like non-governmental organisations facilitate the involvement of non-resident fathers.

Such studies will have important implications for policies on fathering, welfare provision and other social services for children and families.

Moving beyond the father as financial provider

As noted throughout this report, financial provision for children by fathers is in itself important to children's wellbeing, and a beneficial role for fathers to take. The inadvertent or intentional harm that is caused through an overemphasis on this role is the exclusion of other fathering roles and activities.

As the historical overview chapter shows, the ability to provide materially, which is facilitated by wage work, has been centred historically in constructions of successful fatherhood in South Africa. This economic provider identity is illustrated in a number of studies.¹⁶ The economic provider identity is also demonstrated in studies on the state and conceptions of fatherhood, with evidence from outcomes of the implementation of the private maintenance system and in divorce proceedings proving that fathers are often mainly regarded in terms of their ability to provide financially.¹⁷

Although these studies have begun to illustrate how the state is complicit in this overemphasis on fathers as financial providers, more research, advocacy and intervention work needs to be undertaken to understand the state's role in gendering fathers, and in contributing to father absence due to structural violence. Such a broad understanding from the lens of the state will facilitate the development of policy interventions that will drive more humane and well-rounded conceptions of fatherhood. Notions of

fathers as financial providers in a context of high unemployment and poverty need to be explored further and new meanings of fatherhood beyond material provision need to be encouraged. Future research, advocacy and programming should enhance knowledge and understanding of notions and experiences of fathers as caregivers towards the normalisation of a diversity of ways of being a father.

Fathers, HIV and AIDS, and violence

South Africa reports dual epidemics that are linked to the state and role of fathers: the HIV and AIDS epidemic and the gender-based violence epidemic.¹⁸ Despite the huge advocacy and programme implementation drive to fight these epidemics, there are no evidence-based intervention studies yet in South Africa that focus on the relationship between fatherhood and gender-based violence as a key element.¹⁹ Despite the relevance of intersectional work in understanding the state and the role of fathers, there is very little research in South Africa that explores multiple variables and advanced modelling. Qualitatively, some of this work has begun and needs to be supported further.²⁰

Young fathers

On a similar note, the research, advocacy and programme implementation focus on young fatherhood is limited. Some studies²¹, however, raise important questions on what it means to be a young father. Although this work begins to highlight links between teenage pregnancy and the hopes and challenges of young fathers, more research needs to be undertaken to understand the challenges young fathers experience and how these challenge hegemonic and/or dominant notions of masculinity.

Importantly, we need to start probing the following:

- What can we learn about new ways of fathering from young fathers?
- Are young fathers dealing with unemployment, poverty and inequality differently (from older fathers) in terms of how they engage in fatherhood?

Also lacking are advanced quantitative study designs that would help unpack the complexities reported in descriptive population studies

Early parenthood and Africa's youth bulge afford researchers opportunities to undertake longitudinal studies of the protective role of fathers. The work on young fathers also raises important questions about the fathering of older children (adults). What are the experiences of the fathers of adults? This question is also important as it might begin to provide knowledge on grandfathers as well as on great-grandfathers.

Research approaches

The majority of studies on fatherhood coming from South Africa seem to be qualitative and adopt narrative study designs.²² Although these have been beneficial in unpacking the meanings attached to fatherhood and fathering, future research and programming could benefit from a variety of research designs such as grounded theory, community case studies, extended case method and ethnography to answer the complexity of research questions that are raised in this report.

Also lacking are advanced quantitative study designs that would help unpack the complexities reported in descriptive population studies. It would be useful if more quantitative survey questions on fatherhood could be included in the General Household Survey, and in future waves of the National Income Dynamics Study. A few examples of these could be on *bomalome*, social fathers, barriers to fatherhood and opportunities for active involvement. For example:

- Do you act as a father to any children who are not biologically related to you? If yes, do you live with them/they live elsewhere?

- Do you have a significant father figure in your life who is not biologically related to you?
- Are you a biological father of children who live elsewhere? If yes, how many are they?

Advanced analysis would aid in answering complex research questions on relationships and these would be useful for prediction, planning and for continued advocacy work on fathers.

Also, critical to future research is the acknowledgement that there are very few comparative studies in the southern African region despite evidence of similar patterns in experiences of fatherhood and fathering. Whilst it has been illustrated that migration plays a significant role in father absence²³, lack of comparative studies between southern African countries creates a gap in our knowledge on fathers and migration generally. Comparative studies in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region would add value to understanding the state of fathers in South Africa given the high levels of father absence in African families as a result of internal and regional migration.

An evidence base for policymaking

We conclude by emphasising the importance of policy relevant research on fathers. Tracking fathers' use of the Child Support Grant (CSG) and the new parental leave provisions (see the discussion on policy developments on page 6); and research on the implementation of the White Paper on Families and the National Fatherhood Strategy of the Department of Social Development are necessary. The current policy development process to define the right to know one's own biological origins is another important process to inform with empirical evidence about fatherhood.ⁱ

Such studies will be useful in continuing to help us understand how the state contributes to our understanding of fatherhood. Some examples are the continuation and expansion of the fathers and CSG research (such as the study described in the case on page 57); and studies of fathers and the private maintenance system, di-

ⁱThe Law Reform Commission began a process, in 2017, to develop a policy framework to guide children's right to know their biological origins.

voice, custody and access to health. These policy evaluation studies could focus on how the state can include and address the questions of fathers and fatherhood better. Such policy research should aim to be interdepartmental, and should focus more on the links between policy and implementation and how to improve interventions.

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“I wanted to know that I mattered”

I wrote a note to my father for fathers' day. I was six years old. “Daddy's happy. Daddy loves me.” It's what I told myself every day. It's what I believed.

I never knew my mother; she died a few months after I was born. And my dad, well, he left when I was four years old. All through my childhood and into adolescence I had this image of him being just too heartbroken, too grief-stricken to carry on. It seemed more acceptable than the truth, which was that he abandoned me. He never made any contact for almost 14 years. I, all the while, internally repeating, “Daddy's happy. Daddy loves me.”

I was excited to meet him, I had so many expectations. I wanted him to tell me how sorry he was, how beautiful I was, how he had missed out on a lifetime with me. I wanted him to bring out all the birthday and Christmas presents he had bought over the years, and had never had the opportunity to give me, no matter that I would long have outgrown them. I wanted to know that I mattered.

And when I met him, I wanted him to throw his arms around me, and stroke my hair whispering endearments that one does to a little child.

There he was, a grown man who it seemed had never grown up. He looked me over, as if somehow, I missed the mark. When he spoke, it wasn't endearments or apologies, or plans for our future. He gave me reasons and tried to justify why he wasn't there. To me, they were just excuses. My visions of him were my fantasy. I didn't show him the note. He wouldn't care anyway. I threw that note away today. *Essay contestant, Gauteng*

Conclusions

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This "State of South Africa's Fathers" report demonstrates that fathers and fatherhood are resources for children. Evidence from South Africa clearly indicates that children need their biological and social fathers to be proactive caregivers. In the context of low father involvement, and with most biological fathers not living with their children, steps must be taken to strengthen and promote fathers' involvement in their children's lives regardless of residential, marital, relationship or employment status.

If fathers cannot provide financially, they can still be involved emotionally and practically. In the same way that women who assume the role of the mother support children holistically by providing financial and emotional support and engagement, so must fathers, whoever they may be. And as the report shows, they may need policy, programmatic and public encouragement to do so.

Complexities in determining fatherhood

Critical to this agenda is the acknowledgement that determining father involvement in South Africa is complex due to the multidimensional family systems in the country which seldom leave financial support, caregiving, protection and socialisation to one or both biological parents. While most biological fathers live elsewhere, the involvement of extended family and broader kin network in the support and protection of children is also well known. The non-resident status of most biological fathers in South Africa has also resulted in a simplistic overemphasis in research and the media on concepts of physical presence and/or absence as the key signals of the state of fatherhood.

The previous chapter on future research explored key questions on the deeper meanings

of biological father presence and absence, and a parallel set of surrounding research questions. The exploration of these deeper, and broader, meanings of what constitutes fatherhood has the potential to shape and guide family policies in South Africa. The reasons for biological fathers living separately from their children are also vital to this discourse. Given the burden of the complex structural, familial, material and cultural forces that influence this separation, particular attention should be paid to these dynamics into policy and programmes to promote involved fatherhood for non-resident biological fathers.

The role of the state in promoting fatherhood

The role of the state is central to fatherhood in South Africa, particularly with regard to 1. parental leave for formally employed fathers; 2. access to the Child Support Grant (CSG) for poor, unemployed fathers and; 3. as a mediator between mothers and fathers who are navigating child maintenance and support, disagreements, separation and/or divorce. The Labour Laws Amendment Bill, which provides for 10 days of paid leave to employed fathers, is a move in a positive direction from the current modest three working days for paid family responsibility leave (often used as paternity leave).

While government has made a valiant effort to fight poverty and inequality through the introduction of cash-transfer programmes like the gender-neutral CSG, there is not enough awareness amongst parents of who is eligible to access the grant. Advocacy, awareness raising and information dissemination inclusive of poor, unemployed fathers are critical to ensuring that everyone is aware of what is required to access the CSG. Fathers need to be made aware that whoever is the primary caregiver of a child can

receive the CSG, provided they meet the means test criteria.

Imperative to encouraging fathers to apply for the CSG is the avoidance of painting all men – fathers included – with the same brush. While some fathers may be irresponsible and misuse economic resources meant for their children and families, most fathers (like most mothers) who sacrifice their time to prepare for the required documentation to apply for the CSG are responsible parents who are in need of the money to provide for their children and families.

Parenting, and fatherhood, are a child's right. During mediation between the parents, the state's role should always be in the best interests of the child and ensure that parents address their differences in amicable ways. However, the Maintenance Act of 1998 and consequent amendments have been criticised for defining involvement in financial terms only. It does not take into account the other forms of support fathers may be or need to be providing such as psychosocial and emotional support, being available, accessible and engaged. The Act also does not factor in the role of the paternal extended family in providing financially for a child at times when the biological father is incapable or unwilling to provide. If the legal system is to promote positive fatherhood in the context of high levels of poverty and unemployment, it should continue to focus on financial provision in its judgments, but also seek to promote other forms of involvement.

Cultural practices and customary laws sensitive to fatherhood

Along with state mechanisms, the roles of cultural practices and customary laws are very significant to fatherhood. However, while cultural norms are essential in maintaining family and societal values, they must also be flexible and accommodating to other factors such as socio-economic contexts. Cultural expectations such as the payment of inhlawulo and lobola should accommodate poor, unemployed, unmarried, non-resident fathers who want to be involved positively in their children's lives. Encouraging and supporting fatherhood in difficult circum-

stances enable fathers to be more involved in their children's lives which in turn ensures better life outcomes for children, mothers, fathers, communities and the country as a whole. On the other hand, it is important to advocate for and inspire biological fathers who do not live with their children to take active roles in their children's wellbeing. Men can be encouraged by the knowledge that children have expressed that fathers' love, care, presence, and affection are as important to them as financial support.

Concluding remarks

Fatherhood starts from conception and continues throughout the life course of the child and therefore goes beyond impregnation. In this complex context, fatherhood is a social practice which transcends biology. This understanding of fatherhood enables fathers – either biological or social – to be accorded opportunities structurally, socially and culturally to be involved in their children's lives from conception to adulthood.

Fathers, mothers, families, communities, civil society and the state must come together to promote father involvement. This should be done throughout the life course by advocating for policy changes; the reinforcement of positive cultural norms; and changes to maternal, newborn and child health services to support greater male involvement in caregiving and gender equality. Understanding the importance of this synergy and taking action on multiple levels is the only way of ensuring that children's right to the resource of fatherhood is realised

Parenting, and fatherhood, are a child's right



Morning Smoothie

Andre works to institutionalise MenCare within social work and social development institutions. A favourite weekend activity with his children is to start the day with making a smoothie together.

Glossary

Absent Fathers

The term 'absent father' is used in this report to refer to a father that is neither physically living in the same household as his child, nor involved in the child's life. While it is often used in writings about fatherhood to refer to the absence of a biological father from the household where the child lives, it can also refer to a non-biological or social father being absent.

Care

The word 'care' is used in several ways in this report: 'caring about' refers to paying attention to feelings affection and concern about another, 'caring for' refers to taking responsibility for the wellbeing of another, and 'caregiving' refers to the competent engagement in physical care work such as feeding or washing.¹

Child-rearing

The 'bringing up' of children by parents or caregivers. It includes the type of control over children, the extent of caregiving and the emotional tone of the home.³

Co-residency

Co-residency is acknowledged in household surveys by Statistics South Africa when a person sleeps in the same household for four or more days per week as the person/s they co-reside with.

Families

The definition of 'families', from the White Paper on Families 2012, refers in this report as: "a societal group that is related by blood (kinship), adoption, foster care or the ties of marriage (civil, customary or religious), civil union or cohabitation, and go beyond a particular physical residence".⁴

Father and Fatherhood

Generally, a man who is the biological parent and/ or caregiver of a child. Globally, the definition of a father is very much contested on conceptual, pragmatic and cultural grounds. Some North American and European scholarship on fatherhood tends to focus on individual and biological determinants, asserting that a man becomes a father when he has his first child. However, in South Africa, as in most African countries and some African-American com-

munities, being a father and fatherhood go beyond conception and extends to a network of other close social relationships between adult males and children who may or may not be biologically their own.

Fathering

In this report fathering refers to the care given by fathers to children. It has been used elsewhere to mean procreating children, as in 'the man has fathered several children' meaning that the man has 'produced several children'; but, in this report, the term is not used in this manner.⁵

Father Involvement

Refers to the practical, financial or emotional engagement of a father in the life of his children. Parents may be involved in positive ways such as providing care, or negative ways such as harsh parenting.

Heteronormativity

The expectation that all people and families are heterosexual in nature, and the enforcement of heterosexuality on non-conforming people and families.

Hegemonic masculinity

We use the term in the way Ratele describes as "as a shifting pattern of things men do as men that grants men dominance over women and some men over other men. Hegemonic masculinity is thus distinguished from other marginalized or subordinate masculinities in terms of cultural currency. As a ruling form of being a man or boy on a schoolyard, neighbourhood, workplace, or larger society, the culturally exalted masculinity will tend to silence, marginalize and oppress other ways of being a man or boy."⁶

Household

Statistics South Africa defines a household as a person or persons that stay in one or more housing unit and they may or may not be related, characterised by shared resources. Some Time Use Surveys consider people that are physically present for most of the time as a resident of the household if they stay for four nights per week within a four-week cycle.⁷

Inhlawulo

A cultural practice whereby payment, usually offered in the form of cattle or money, is tendered by the father to the girl's or woman's family for impregnating her outside of marriage. *Inhlawulo* is essentially about acknowledging paternity as much as granting permission to a man to be involved in his child's life. It is often referred to as payment of 'damages'.

Kinship Care

A form of alternative care that is family based, within the child's extended family or with close friends of the family known to the child. Kinship carers therefore may include relatives, members of their tribes or clans, godparents, stepparents, or any adult who has a kinship bond with a child. Kinship care may be formal or informal in nature.⁸

Lobola

Lobola, sometimes referred to as 'bride price' or 'bride wealth', is property in cash or kind, which a prospective husband or head of his family undertakes to give the head of the prospective wife's family in consideration of a customary marriage.

Non-resident Fathers

Non-residency is noted by Statistics South Africa when a parent is away from the home for four or more days per week. Non-resident fathers may still be involved in a child's life. Some authors distinguish between *non-resident fathers* by regarding them as active and contributing members to a household, but who do not live in the household, and *absent fathers* who are neither physically present nor emotionally or practically involved. In this report we focus on residency and involvement of fathers as the two key aspects to consider, and we do not attach the status of 'household member' to non-resident fathers.

Parenting

The promotion and support of the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. Parenting is an activity of raising a child rather than a biological relationship.⁹

Residency

Residency status of fathers refers to whether the child and father live in the same household or not.

Social Fatherhood

A social father is a person that takes on the responsibility and role of being a father to a child, but who is not the biological male parent of the child. The status of fatherhood is therefore a social status rather than a biological one, and may be actively sought by and/or ascribed to the person by their family or community. One person could be a biological father to one child and a social father to another. These include maternal and paternal uncles, grandfathers, older brothers and mothers' partners who singly or collectively provide for children's livelihood and education, and give them paternal love and guidance.¹⁰

Unpaid Care Work

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights defined unpaid care work as including "domestic work (meal preparation, cleaning, washing clothes, water and fuel collection) and direct care of persons (including children, older persons, persons with disabilities, as well as able-bodied adults) carried out in homes and communities".²

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This is the first issue of an evolving report, planned for publication every three years. It can be used in the development of policy and legislation for families, labour market regulations, educational curricula and other training materials. It can be referenced as a source of expert information for advocacy and community groups, individual families and legislative committees. It contains specific recommendations for shifting norms towards gender-equitable parenting, and highlights men's caregiving as an institutional and social priority. The report promotes a nuanced approach to fatherhood for improved support for families in South Africa.

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